

## Mahal Kaur : A Woman of Grit

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“The road of life twists and turns and no two directions are ever the same. Yet, our lessons come from the journey, not the destination”- Don Williams Jr.

Path of life is not smooth. Adversities in life call for acceptance, adjustments, and a fighting spirit to sail through. This is the story of a simple, rustic down to earth woman, virtually illiterate from a village in North India who can be a role model for many.

Mrs. Mahal Kaur was born in 1930s in a small village called Simli near Rohtak, Haryana. She never received any formal education as there were no schools in her village and sending her anywhere far for this purpose was not practical. She learnt to read and write her name at home. Her childhood was largely spent doing household chores, helping her mother fetching water from the well etc. Her moments of entertainment were visiting the annual fair in the nearby village or an occasional trip to the nearest town, Rohtak. That was probably how most girls spent time in rural India at that time!

A new chapter of her life began in her teens when she got married. Her husband was an army man nearly twice her age. She moved with her husband to places wherever he was posted. This was a major change for a girl who had hardly seen the

world beyond her village before marriage. Unfortunately, this change also brought quite a lot of turmoil in her life.



Her husband was more concerned about financial wellbeing of his side of the family. He passed on a major portion of his salary to his family leading to tensions in relationship especially when her family started growing with birth of children. Between 1950 and 1965 she had in all six children. After her husband retired, they settled in Rohtak where they built a house using whatever little savings they had.

Life was definitely better now. They married off their eldest daughter. But

destiny had other plans. Her husband expired after a brief illness in December 1972. It was a major setback and the future seemed dark. Only positive things in her life at that time were a roof on their head and her son, who had joined NDA. Otherwise, she was financially broke with five children ranging in age between 6-18 years. Now she had to manage her life with a meagre family pension and support payment that amounted to a total of rupees 140 a month. Any financial help from her husband's family was ruled out. Their advice to her was to remarry and to remove her two minor daughters from school and marry them off. She rejected multiple marriages as the solution and decided to tackle her tough situation with nothing else but sheer determination

Thus began her second life! Immediate concern was to find ways to augment her income so that her children could be fed and could continue their education. To this end, she bought a buffalo. She decided to get the cattle feed from the fields belonging to her parents some 6-7 km away. Because she could not afford the public transport, she bought a cycle on installments. Working on two fronts was obviously tough. In this venture, her middle 13 year old daughter extended her helping hand.

For many years to come, her routine was to get up early in the morning, milk the buffalo, and deliver milk to the houses in the neighborhood. After her children went to school, she left for the fields on

her cycle to bring the cattle feed. This was tough, traveling total 15 km to and fro, cutting cattle feed for some two hours, tying the big , heavy bundle on the carrier of her cycle whether it was chilling cold or blistering heat without fail. She had to be back before her children returned from school to serve them the lunch. Evening went again into milking, delivery of milk, and cooking for the family. It was tough indeed with no breathing space from sunrise to sunset. She worked like a human machine in her tight schedule switched on in the morning and off in the evening. Physically it was not easy, emotionally too it was drenching her.

Her spare time was mostly spent wondering what was in store for her family in future and what else she may have to face! Financially, she always felt insecure. Every penny had to be accounted for, well spent or saved for future. What was plentiful was determination to do her best, leaving no stone unturned, to look after her family, to educate her daughters and leave the rest to the Almighty.

In this struggle, mother's side of her family stood by her and provided what ever help they could afford. More than anything else, they gave her the much needed moral support. Her husband's family had already lost all interest in her and her children. Mahal knew all through that she is the one who has to take care of her family and always kept a promise made by her to herself that she would not let her children suffer.

Just as there is sunrise after every dark night, her plight eased when her son got commissioned as an officer in the Indian Army. This gave her a lot of emotional solace but her tough routine continued. Money front, though better now, remained tight.

As people came to know about her struggle and determination, she became talk of the town. She was admired for her simplicity, honesty and straightforwardness- calling spade a spade without caring for the repercussions. A good human being too, she always helped others in need whichever way she could.

Gradually things began to fall in place. Her hard work bore fruits when her

children, girls as well as boys completed their education and got good placements, got married and settled. All her hard work had finally paid off! In 2003, on Women's Day, a local newspaper wrote her story of struggle titled 'A Role Model for Many Within and Outside Family'

Today, she is almost 90 years old, having intermittent memory loss. She remembers her buffalo, bicycle, routine and the struggle she had to go through. She feels blessed today staying with her son in Delhi. Story of her life revolves around her determination, will power and focus that did not let her bow down to anyone or do anything immoral in her life. She did her best and still thanks God every day for His blessings.



Hats off to you, old lady.