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### Fish with the Can-Do women

PRIYADERSHINI S.



From left, Selveena, Saneera, Jessie and Mymoona in Fort Kochi. Photo: Thulasi Kakkat

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#### ***A group of women, inspired by a movie, has launched a venture of supplying chemical-free fish directly to homes***

The unsure Nirupama Rajeev, an inspiring, Can Do woman, in the popular film *How Old Are You* rises once again to motivate a group of women into proving their mettle. Nirupama, slighted and sidelined by a society that takes homemakers for granted, discovers the strength of a woman approaching her forties and goes on to set up an ecologically friendly enterprise that draws government attention and her efforts get recognition from the President of India. Nirupama is the heroine for a group of women headed by 41-year-old Saneera Rahim, who after watching the film began a fresh fish cleaning, cutting, and delivery unit that has in a matter of three weeks established a wide network in the city.

“Our main aim is to deliver fresh catch – chemical-free fish - to homes,” says Saneera, laying stress on eating organic food and right eating habits. “Nirupama cultivated an organic terrace garden in the film,” points out Saneera excitedly. *Pacha Meen-* Just a Phone Call away, says the flyer that Saneera and her group distributed through newspapers and pasted on walls and hung at notice boards in apartments across the city. Soon, they began getting orders, “especially from apartments” as fish cleaning is messy and leaves an odour.

Saneera’s cousin, a ‘fish’ agent, helps the group procure its order right off the boats in the morning. By seven the women are busy cleaning the catch and packing them into small and big packets ready for delivery. An autorickshaw stands by for the delivery service. By ten in the morning the women wind up their work, their pockets clinking with cash, to catch the rest of the day. “It’s Rs. 12 for cleaning a kilo of *chala* (sardines) and goes up to Rs.20 for other fish.

“We work in clusters from three places- Palluruthy, Kochangaadi and Fort Kochi- and deliver in four areas - Kaloor, Thevara, Kakkanad and Kadavanthra,” says Saneera. On an average they get orders for 40 kilos of fish to clean and

deliver and they take last orders till 10 p.m. in the evening.

The venture has garnered a good response and the women are upbeat. “A police officer on SRM Road asked us to supply organic vegetables from farms in and around the city. For that I need to do more leg work,” says Saneera happy with the suggestions and comments coming her way.

Business is not new to her. For the last four years she has been successfully running Azeza Food Products in Chandiroor that makes chappatti, patthiri, appam and idiyappam supplying on an average 7,000 pieces a day to hotels, hospitals, hostels and canteens. The unit has shifted to Chullickal two months ago.

Saneera forayed into business because of her inherent nature of engaging with people. She shut a small tailoring outfit in Palluruthy, from where she hails, and began looking after her sick mother. That brought her in touch with the sick and the weak. Saneera realised that money was a pre-requisite for social service. “It’s the only way one can help others,” and so after her mother’s demise she set up the unit in her free time, going as far as Coimbatore and Kalamassery to pick up a chappatti making machine. She roped in hands and began work, which came in plenty. Saneera recalls a time when she had a huge order and three of her staff, all migrants, left suddenly. She completed the order bracing up to problems but networked with workers and finally had one flown down from Kolkata. “He protested saying that he did not have a passport to come to Kochi but I reassured him and did not mind sending a flight ticket to complete orders worth a lot of money,” she says. Saneera has even enrolled staff right at the railway station as “soon as the Guwhati Express arrives,” as she believes in being resourceful. To keep up with the changes she has upgraded the machinery to match the demand. To keep an eye on the proceedings at her unit she has installed CCTVs.

Her four children, the youngest being in Class II, are all proud of their mother’s hard work and enterprising spirit. Her spouse, Rahim who runs a chain of tuition centres, has been extremely supportive, she says. An accountant helps her with money matters. Saneera loves to put up temporary food and fresh juice stalls at most fairs and festivals in and around the city and recruits temporary staff.

Behind all this lies her quiet work with the destitute and drug addicts. Saneera works with people with such afflictions. She proudly discloses that she has rehabilitated two of her staff who were drug addicts. “They are super workers now,” she says.

In this new venture, her friend Mymoona is a partner. Women from around her home and at the different cleaning centres come in the morning to chip in. “Of late most homemakers plonk themselves in front of the television and watch serials, from six to ten in the evening. This has led to an obesity epidemic.

Women need to be physically active, and hence they need to work,” says Saneera pointing to her children who she says are trained to be self-sufficient “They can cook, clean, feed and manage things by themselves; self-sufficiency is very important for each one of us,” says Saneera who, like Nirupama, is encouraging women find their inner strength.

**Saneera can be contacted at :9995915665**

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