Profile

Overcoming all odds

A single parent finds refuge in tasseling

Yangchen C Rinzin | Samdrupjonkgkhar



Tshodhen Dema tassels up to 10 kiras a day

After she got married to an alcoholic husband at the age of 16, life became difficult for Tshodhen Dema, now 38.

With her husband's meager salary, getting rations was never easy and whatever little money they had, her husband spent on alcohol.

But Tshodhen Dema, who is from Mongar, did not give up. She continued to battle through her daily struggles so that there would be food on the table for her two children.

Being illiterate, she turned to weaving in 2006 even though she was not good at it.

She made Nu 900 per kira, while her husband earned Nu 800 a month. After paying Nu 600 for the apartment they lived in, there were left with Nu 1,100 every month.

Tshodhen said that all she cared about was her children's education and future while her husband's priority was to feed his addiction.

She lived with her husband in Mongar, later moving to Trashigang before finally settling in Samdrupjongkhar.

In 2015, she finally decided to leave her husband and got a divorce. Life became harder and everyday was a struggle. With no job and two children to raise, making ends meet by weaving was no easy task. Whatever odd jobs that came along she did not refuse.

"It was a difficult decision but I knew if I continued to live with him, my children would never have a good future," she said. "I was also tired of the violence so I took the risk to come out of it and raise them myself," she added. "I didn't want to become dependent on anyone or look for another husband for support. I wanted to prove that a woman can be independent without a man."

Today, Tshodhen Dema has a stable job as a cloakroom in-charge at the Samdrupjongkhar bus station.

But Tshodhen Dema is known more in Samdrupjongkhar for her tasseling of the fringes of kiras and rachus.

She spends entire days tasseling. She tassels for three businessmen who sell bura kiras and rachus.

She earns Nu 100 for each rachu, Nu 600 for plain kiras and Nu 700 for patterned kiras. She tassels almost 10 kiras in a day and earns almost Nu 10,000 a month.

The first thing many women do after they buy a kira is drop it off at Tshodhen Dema's place for tasseling. Sometimes she gets 10 customers and has up to 15 kiras to tassel in a day.

"Before I used do it from home until I got the cloakroom in-charge job. Now I do it in the cloakroom because I get busy only when buses arrive," she said.

Tshodhen Dema is content today. "I have been living on this for so long that I succeeded in educating both my children and am even sending one of them to a private school."

She said she never thought that her tasseling would provide her with a steady income enough to survive independently and give her children an education.

"It is not easy. My eyes hurt. I get back aches. My fingers hurt. But I have to do it because I have to live and feed my two children and parents," she said. "I save most of the money that I get from tasseling in an earthen piggy bank which I break when I need the money," she added. "I am happy, I always manage to save at least Nu 15,000."

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"I want to continue this for as long as my fingers can because it involves skills to tassel," she said. "And because I want my children to go to college," she added. "That is my passion."

Tshodhen Dema said it is all about making the most of an opportunity and that it is not necessary to have to depend on others. However, she said, many women today still believe that having a man is necessary to survive.

It is 4pm. While she waits for the buses, she moves onto her third kira to tassel. There is still a large pile of kiras besides her that require tasselling.

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