

EMPOWERING WOMEN

CRHP and the Mayor of
Jawalka



The Comprehensive Rural Health Project has worked to alleviate poverty in rural India for 38 years. CRHP promotes a “total” approach, helping residents in the areas of healthcare, nutrition, hygiene, agriculture, family care and micro-finance. The work of CRHP also receives generous funding from JELA. Following is one of CRHP’s many success stories – the account of an outcaste woman who, through her CRHP experience, rose to become mayor of her community.

Born into the lowest caste and never taught to read, Babai Sathe was sent off in marriage when she was 10 years old. Her husband's family was as poor as her own, but they treated the new bride like an animal. Babai's daily task was to collect cow dung for burning beneath the family stove. She ate only the leftover food from other's plates and for clothing had but one torn sari -- a sari stitched from two others. When her husband returned home, often drunk, he beat her like a beast.

At 15, she was kicked out and returned home to her parents in the village of Javalka. The neighbors mocked her parents, wondering why they would keep a deserted, childless girl. "What's wrong with her?" they asked.

She had no self-esteem and she feared men, viewing even a pair of pants as a symbol of brutal authority.

Eventually she joined a women's club and from there proceeded to become a Village Health Worker. In this program, CRHP trained women go on to serve the primary healthcare needs of their villages.

The CRHP message that touched Babai the most was that of Christian forgiveness. As a Village Health Worker she would have to enter the homes of the very people who taunted her. She would be on call 24-hours a day for any illness or injury. Such duty would not be easy for her, but she focused on the message of forgiveness and resolved to do her best.

Through her actions, the people of her village came to know the real Babai. She delivered hundreds of babies and patiently instructed mothers on post-natal care. Outside, she entered the village ditches herself to clean them of garbage in order to upgrade area hygiene. All village children she treated as her own. In time, she won the hearts of the entire community.

Meanwhile, she received micro-financing from CRHP to start her own business, the buying and resale of poultry and spice. She gained self-confidence.

"I can do this!" she pronounced. "I can live as a human being!"

She next went to a bank -- on her own, an illiterate woman -- to secure a larger loan and



n o w operates a shop selling stationery and ready-made clothing. She then bought her own land and built her own home. From a young, battered and deserted housewife she became the perfect example of what a

woman might do when given opportunity. Yet Babai Sathe was not finished

Her village of 2,000 people asked her to run for mayor. She ran without spending a single rupee on her campaign, saying if the people wanted her, she would be elected. She won in a landslide and has now been mayor of Jawalka for five years.

Once mayor, she first did away with the graft

of the previous administrator. Next she brought in fluorescent lighting so the village paths would not be dark at night. She installed water pipes in the homes of the lower castes and dug a tube well at a popular temple outside the village, drawing water from a hand-pump supplied by CRHP.

She speaks with the grace and poise of natural leadership.

“God has given me a chance to serve, but I do not feel great. I myself have tasted poverty so I must do what I can to help.”

Her favorite story of her years of village work tells much about Babai’s sense of humility and service. One day as a Village Health Worker she learned of a young widower with two little boys. She heard the widower was ill and when she examined him, she saw at once the man had tuberculosis. She sent him to the CRHP hospital in Jamkhed, 20 kilometers from her village, and under the treatment of Dr. Mabelle Arole, the man recovered. He is working happily in the village even now.

That’s the story... except for those two boys. Babai knew if their father died, their lives would

dissolve in misery. They would have no one to take care of them and may have resorted to begging in order to live.

Today both boys are teachers and between them are touching thousands of lives. As Babai notes, one should never disregard the potential of one person saved.

Babai herself continues to crusade for others, helping deserted women and the oppressed, and building hope. Her next dream is to build a high school. In India, boys can go off to attend such schools, but conservative village folk are reluctant to let their girls travel. But if there was a school within her village, local girls would have a chance.

Constructing such a school involves many hurdles, but by now no one underestimates the determination of the once battered and rejected housewife, Babai Sathe, the mayor of Jawalka.



The Mayor meets with a group of friends at CRHP