Striding towards a happy ending

In Haridwar district of Uttarakhand, a lady of strong build wearing the ASHA's (Accredited Social Health Activist) uniform is busy convincing the menfolk about the importance of COVID-19 vaccination. She exudes confidence as she refutes myths and builds up her arguments for convincing the menfolk. It’s indeed a sight to behold.

Munawwar, a 42 year old ASHA, hails from a Muslim family living amidst her area of work, village Bhaneda, one of the Muslim villages of the Naarsan block. She has four daughters and four sons. Husband works as an agricultural labourer. Prior to becoming an ASHA, she used to assist a private doctor as a birth attendant. She also assisted the ASHA of her village in carrying out scheduled health activities in the village. By virtue of this engagement, she became well versed with the ASHA’s role. In the year 2012, the village head Mr. Salim recommended Munawwar for the position of ASHA in spite of not being highly literate. It was not a cakewalk for Munawwar also. Her limited exposure to formal education was a barrier in maintaining records and reporting work. Again her co-workers helped her to deal with it. In return, Munawwar help her coworkers by accompanying them for the home visits especially for counselling there lucant and adamant Muslim families.

Her supervisors mention that she scored far better than her colleagues in counseling pregnant women for institutional delivery, immunization of mother and children and also adoption of Family Planning methods. She religiously carries out home visits and ensures all the necessary support to the target groups especially under the RMNCH services. The faith she has gained over the years, including saving the lives of mother and child in complicated delivery cases twice by guiding them to the appropriate health facility and donating blood to them, has cemented her position as influencer. Munawwar keeps track of all the delivery cases very confidently and is happily open to midnight calls.

The ASHA Facilitator, Smt. Kusum maintained that “Munawwar is one of the least formally educated but the most aware and motivated ASHAs and has the best records in the entire block for institutional delivery and immunization. She caters to a population of about 1400 and has been performing extremely well in her area.”

She receives complete support from her family members in her endeavours. On asking whether she is seen as a role model by other families in the village, she says that it’s possible but it’s not easy to break the mould and challenge the system. She attributes her success to her strong desire to work, support of her family members and also being from the same village and from the same community. She also emphasised on the support she receives from her team members including ASHA Facilitator. Munawwar is yet to pick up on skills in operating the smartphone. Fellow ASHAs help her in learning it.

Munawwar was excited to talk about the Samvad videos and shared that the videos are boon for the ASHAs as they reinforce the health messages in an interesting way. She particularly liked the video on ANC. She warmly acknowledged that the videos have helped her refine her knowledge of RMNCH (Reproductive Maternal Newborn Child Health) issues and services. She also pointed out that often during the home visits, the videos are referred to for reiterating the key messages on ANC, Institutional delivery and Immunization. As she is grappling with using the smartphone smartly, she asserted that she will soon learn to show the videos to those families who are reluctant to change their ways. The confidence with which she asserts that soon she will be making the best use of the Samvad videos.

Her dedication towards her work is bearing results however slow but Munawwar is out there to fight and make Tanda Bhaneda village a better place for the mothers and their children for the times to come. Munaww is pitomizes the saying by Maya Angelou, “Each time a woman stands up for herself, she stands up for all women.” Or maybe more, she will stand up for the entire village.