

Supportive workplaces allow mothers to create fresh identities

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Pune: With just a standard X certificate in hand, 37-year-old Shalini Kamble had never imagined that she would work in an office.

But when the Hadapsar resident's sons grew up, the family's meagre income from her husband's job as a peon started endangering the children's dreams of becoming an engineer and chartered accountant. Kamble hesitated, but approached Gits Food Products for work.

Within two years of landing a job in the Gits factory in Hadapsar, which has a workforce made up of almost 98% women, Kamble had moved up the ranks to handle one of the most crucial jobs as dispatch supervisor and water softener

plant supervisor. Her sons are both pursuing their dreams.

The Gits factory is not the only such example. Workplaces in the city are slowly warming up to policies that help women employees balance their work and families.

Though Kamble credits her turnaround to the company, emphasizing that the "women-majority workforce is more like a family", the company heads are clear about her capabilities. "We just identified what she was capable of and trained her to work in the right direction. She now commands respect even from the male workers and what she does today single-handedly is huge," says Samana Tejani, director of production in the company. Shalini looks after the smooth dispatch of 1,500-2,000 boxes, which contain up to 1.5 lakh



Gits Food Products has a workforce of almost 98% women

packets, every day.

Tejani is a third-generation leader of the company, mostly run by women. She and her sister, Aasiya (director of finance), share the story of how the factory now stands

apart from many manufacturing counterparts for its support to women and mothers working with them. "When a male worker threatened to quit to press his demands, we decided it was time for an overhaul

and thought of identifying women to do all jobs," says Samana.

Aasiya added that women were more than happy to step up and take responsibility. Their production line manager Sadhana has only studied till Std IV. But she volunteered to learn the work and now has a 100 people reporting to her in the company of 250 employees. Everyone talks about how the-

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ir colleague Suvarna Bhosale's son has landed a job in Texas after becoming an engineer and is now taking his mother to the US with him.

Almost all the women working here are the prime breadwinners in their families and

come from low-income groups. The workers here speak about the company heads and other seniors as counsellors, mentors and family. The firm has adopted innovative practices, such as handing out a lentil and vegetable combination at the end of every work day.

"We found that most of their earnings are spent on vegetables, lentils, oil, peanuts, sugar and jaggery. To ensure that their salaries go towards the well-being and education of their families, we give them these groceries on a daily basis," Samana says. Handing out books and stationary at the beginning of every school year and holding regular counselling sessions on the importance of educating girls is a regular feature too.

Across the town, at an all-women branch of Bajaj Alli-

anz General Insurance, the employees discuss their day's work. Single mother Krushangi Shah, who got divorced when her son (now 19) was just a child, feels she was able to create a niche for herself only because she was part of an all-woman team.

"I was running around trying to make ends meet, but was always scared of working in a corporate setting as it is dominated by men. But this is an entirely different experience and I am happy most of the time now and my health has improved," says Shah.

"In a span of two years, the all-woman branch initiative has enhanced the lives of 1,000 women agents in 30 branches across the country. Women can de-stress, share their troubles and work with flexible timings, thus also being able to

focus on their families and children," says Anamika Roy Rashtrawar, senior president of the company.

Anand Kolharkar, founder and evangelist of Opine Group, talks about their business intelligence and data warehousing course, which they have offered to numerous women. "More than 20 women who manage families came forward when we announced this course and they are now handling various business projects for our own firm. The ability to learn is great and even after 20 years, women want to and can come forward to learn," he added.

The courses, which help people learn how to read business data and manage businesses, are useful for women who wish to start businesses or manage business projects, he said.