

Dare to Dream “Life is not just working; it’s much more than that.”



Picture this! A man perched on a makeshift bench that is suspended mid-air with the help of only a rope and a fragile wooden plank. An ordinary person would balk at this but it’s no heroic deed for Rajesh Kumar Natin. This 35-year-old billboard painter from the town of Niwari, in Tikamgarh district, has familiarised himself with the trapeze, despite being born into a family of barbers. The barber’s profession had always seemed mundane to Rajesh who had dreamt of bigger things.

Fortunate enough to receive good education, Rajesh became a school teacher in his twenties. His routine involved six hours in school, followed by private tuitions in the evenings and on weekends. His hard work fetched him a little over Rs 2000 a month, a decent income in these parts.

However, Rajesh was dissatisfied as his teaching jobs left him no time. It was near to impossible for him to get leave during school term and he could not afford to lose the extra wages he earned from tuitions. This resulted in Rajesh giving a miss to family functions and religious ceremonies. He also found it difficult to fulfill his errands and time for himself was a rare luxury.

Nevertheless, he continued with his job to support his wife and two young sons. Then one day, opportunity knocked on his door.

Rajesh recalls having heard about self-help groups from a friend and decided to capitalise on the opportunity to pave way for his own venture.

He and three more members of the group put together the initial capital needed for Rajesh to quit his teaching and take up a profession he longed for. Thus was born Niwari’s resident billboard painter.

A self-taught artist and a confident, content man today, Rajesh earns an average of Rs 5,000 a month for doing the work he loves. He purchases all the raw materials like cloth for banners, oil paints, radium and wood on his own from Jhansi. As long as he meets his clients’ deadlines, Rajesh can set his own timetable. He is grateful for his independence that allows him to give time to work, his family and most importantly himself. His business is now booming with orders from the government, locals and nearby villages. A soft-spoken and shy man from Bundelkhand, Rajesh gives full credit to DA for his achievement as a painter, without which his progress would have been ‘much slower’. Moreover, his neighbours feel he is savvier than them because of his DA links. And when they ask him for advice on how to form a self-help group (SHG), this confident SHG member uses his erstwhile teaching skills to pass on the lessons he has learnt.