

Driving Change: Rani's Journey to Empowerment through E-Rickshaws



***“To achieve success, we must first believe we can.
One only gets to the destination if their dreams have life and courage”***

- Rani Khan

Taking the road less travelled is a courageous act, however, it is this road that leads us to unexpected and glorious destinations. One must start and then miraculously, one day, they will find themselves at a crossroads with their older selves and smile at how far they have come. Rani Khan was a daily-wage stonemason and labourer. She used to spend long days toiling at construction sites- breaking stones, mixing cement, laying bricks, and still managing to scrape a meagre income of Rs 200. In the fast-paced world we live in, Rs 200 was direly insufficient to feed the four mouths that depended on her. Her husband instead of providing support frivolously spent her hard-earned money, adding to her woes. As the sole breadwinner, She was terrified of leaving the comfort of her current job to seek better opportunities, and she had grown discontented with the inadequacy of her life. Looking back, Rani remembers the moment in which her life changed.

Rani met Pragya Devi in January 2023. She is the first woman e-Rickshaw entrepreneur in Mirzapur. Pragya Devi introduced her to the Work4Progress program- a joint initiative of Development Alternatives and La Caixa Foundation. The program aims to create dignified and meaningful livelihood opportunities for marginalised women and youth from rural India. Rani was connected to Changur Sonkar, an e-Rickshaw manufacturer, who had also received support from the Work4Progress team while setting up his enterprise. She got government grants and additional support from Social Impact Investment, an initiative of Work4Progress that supports entrepreneurs in rural areas. Like Sonkar, Rani received Rs. 1,20,000 from the Social Impact Investment Fund to buy a refurbished e-Rickshaw from him. Thus started Rani's journey on her e-Rickshaw to a better future.

It is said, that despite the whole world shunning you if you have that one trustworthy person backing you, it is enough. For Rani, her pillar of support was her father-in-law. He appreciated her efforts and readily took up more responsibilities around the house to relieve Rani from additional stress. He motivated her while she learned how to ride an e-Rickshaw and acted as her cheerleader while she set out to work. This new venture helped Rani more than double her earlier daily income to Rs. 500 which allowed her to balance her expenses, pay loans, and even make avails for savings. She dedicated her heart and soul to her work, staying out late during Ramadan (the festive month of fasting for Muslims) to earn extra money for buying gifts for her children on Eid. As an effort to pay back to the community, Rani is mentoring five other women to become e-Rickshaw entrepreneurs to secure financial independence. Rani's story exemplifies that Programs like Work4Progress are indispensable and highly effective for thousands of people who wish for a better life. They are instrumental in providing the kind of monetary, technical, and moral support that can transform the lives of women and youth who dream to become dignified and self-sufficient entrepreneurs.