



SHUKHAR FOUNDATION
OUR JOURNEY

Brave Ladies Of Malia Hatina Hostel!

The focus of this Newsletter is to highlight an unexpected but life-altering dimension of Malia Hatina Hostel. Over the last 17 years, The Gujarat Project has brought young girls and boys to Girnar School, staying at Malia Hatina Hostel. They come from impoverished and marginalized families in Gujarat. Under the Students Sponsorship Program, it has been possible for them to acquire an English Medium Education, which gives them hope and aspiration to improve their prospects for better job opportunities, thereby improving the quality of their lives and their families.

The Hostel has become a sanctuary of last resort for some of the mothers of these students. Many women suffer the brunt of family turmoil due to divorce, mental and physical abuse, and death of the partner, wife of a substance abuser and extended family and cultural dynamics. Due to a lack of proper safety nets, many of these ladies fall through the cracks and face dire consequences.

We are made aware of their circumstances from various sources, namely social workers, leaders of the Jamat, teachers and even their own children. On further inquiry, it becomes apparent that our intervention is warranted to stop them from becoming prey to unsavory individuals and bad choices.

Below are the stories of a few of the ladies who now reside at the Hostel.

(1) Rashida Ben



Rashidaben has been working in the Hostel for the past 7 years. She used to live in a village with her husband and two children, Afsana and Rahul. At that time, Rahul was studying in Mumbai. Afsana has been in our Students Sponsorship Program since the age of 5.

Periodically we used to visit them in Bhayavadar, and we always advised the family that they should move out of the red district. The red district here means a place where there are only one or two Ismaili families.

Unfortunately, Tajdinbhai suffered a massive heart attack and passed away before the family could move out of Bhayavadar. Rashidaben decided to take Rahul and stay with her brother's family. Rahul got a job at the brother's store. After a few months, their relationship with the sister-in-law soured, and they decided to join Afsana at the Hostel. The Hostel employed Rahul as a peon, and Rashidaben did the kitchen work. They were also provided with a room to stay in the Hostel.

When Afsana was 13, she was diagnosed with a skin disease. Unfortunately, the medication prescribed to her caused severe kidney damage, and she passed away as a result.

Two years ago, a generous donor made it possible for the family to move into a unit in a housing complex near the Hostel. The Gujarat Team facilitated their move. Rashidaben and Rahul have continued with their jobs with the Hostel.

(2) Ismat Ben



Ismatben, a 25-year-old mother of 3, came to us in February 2016. Ismat's father, who had 5 daughters and is now deceased, was an alcoholic and wasted almost all his earning on his addiction and contributed very little towards the upkeep of the home.

Ismat's father was adamant that she marry his older daughter's brother-in-law. At that time, Ismat was 13

years old, and her husband was only 15. Our local Jamati institutions refused to sanction the marriage and recommended that Ismat wait until she was older. As a result, Ismat was sent to her sister, and she started cohabiting with her sister's brother-in-law on a common-law basis.

Ismat's husband was an alcoholic too and had his leg amputated when he was very young. Before her husband died of liver cirrhosis, Ismat had become the mother of three children, the first one born when she was only 14 years old.

Ismat's in-laws did not treat her and her three children well. They took away her widow's pension of Rs20,000 and asked her to look for a job.

Ismat decided to seek refuge at the Malia Hatina Hostel, where her son Sajid, now 10 years old, was a boarder under the Students Sponsorship Program. She started working at the Hostel, and her two daughters Muskan and Alisha, now eight and ten years old, are also being sponsored.

Presently Ismat has gone back to her sister's place and is under pressure to remarry. All three of her children are still studying at Malia Hatina.

(3) Bilqis Ben



After her first husband died, Bilqisben remarried, but the second husband wanted nothing to do with her son Arman from her first marriage. At her husband's insistence, Arman was placed in the Mundra Hostel

by the Gujarat Journey. Soon the school complained about Arman's behavioural issues and suggested returning to his mother's care. Arman also has another brother, Aryan, from her second marriage. Aryan is a brilliant student.

Bilqis decided to leave her second husband because he was cheating on her.

Bilqis approached Malia Hatina for a job. She worked at the Hostel, and both Arman and Aryan boarded at the Hostel and attended Girnar School.

Unfortunately, Bilqis had to give up her job due to health reasons. However, her two sons have continued their education at Malia Hatina, and both are under the Students Sponsorship Program.

(4) Mumtaz Ben



Mumtazben and her husband have been working in the Hostel for the last 12 years. She is from a marginalized family. They both work with the boarders and are very well-liked by everyone.

Even though both her knees started to bother her, she continued working at the Hostel as she really needed the job. The Gujarat Project decided to look after the cost (\$ 3,000) of her surgeries on both knees. She was treated and has responded well to the operations and is almost pain-free now.

(5) Farzana Ben



Farzana and her two boys are from Nasik and were referred to us by Social Welfare Board. While at the Hostel, both the boys contracted the Covid virus. As per the local Health Authorities guidelines, they had to leave the Hostel and return to Nasik. Both Farzana and her husband were unemployed and were in no financial position to pick them up from the Hostel. The Gujarat Team arranged for their transportation and got them back home.

Farzana is not an Ismaili and married her Ismaili husband under the “buy a bride” scheme. We have discussed this issue at great length in one of our previous Newsletters. Unfortunately, her husband left her and their children under the pretense that he would look for job opportunities but has not been seen since.

The Malia Hatina Hostel now employs her. She is happy as this allows her to be close to her two sons.

(6) Sultana Ben



Sultanaben and her children are a recent arrival at Malia Hatina Hostel.

Hers is a familiar story!

She is a non-Ismaili Muslim and was married to Anwerali through the “Buy the Bride” scheme. In many cases, the woman’s parents are more interested in getting the daughter married and receiving money or payment. Most of the time, this is done without any actual background check or due diligence. Anwerbhai was an alcoholic and passed away at an early age due to liver cirrhosis. Sultanaben became a single parent of three children, two daughters, ten and six and half years old, and a four and a half-year-old son.

She worked in other peoples’ homes and earned about Rs 4000 to 5000 per month. However, she was heartbroken as she had to leave the three children alone in a locked home while she went to work.

She approached family and friends to help her get the children into a boarding school, but with no luck. As a last resort, she reached out to the Jamati Social Welfare Board for help and guidance. By this time, she had decided that if no viable support materialized, she would go back to her family and enroll her children in the Madrassa schools. Unfortunately, this would have meant that the children would cease to practice the Ismaili faith.

The Social Welfare Board reached out to Malia Hatina Hostel for help, which in return approached the Gujarat Team to consider taking the three children into the Students Sponsorship program. As a result, the Gujarat team found sponsors for the children and requested the hostel offer Sultanaben a job.

We are happy to report that all three children are boarders at the Hostel and attend Girnar School. In addition, Sultanaben is gainfully employed at the Hostel.

Malia Hatina Hostel is unique because besides being a boarding institution, it has also evolved into a refuge for battered women and women facing daunting challenges to survive the lives of poverty and extreme hardships.