

Igatpuri's Women farmers Unleash True 'Women Power'!

Breaking the shackles of poverty and overcoming severe financial setbacks, a group of tribal and working-class women from Ghoti Budruk in Nashik district's Igatpuri taluka have carved out a distinct identity for themselves. Operating under the banner of the **'Womens Power Farmer Producer Company'**, these women have transformed their struggles into a thriving business empire built on unity and mutual support. Refusing to yield to adversity or economic losses, they chose to lift each other up and forge ahead together. By successfully securing markets for their diverse products, the company has now clocked an annual turnover ranging between ₹30 lakh and ₹35 lakh, ushering in a new era of economic prosperity and financial stability for their households.

Mukund Pingale (Daily Agrowon - Sakal Media Group)



Photo 1: In a seamless blend of tradition and technology, the enterprise utilizes advanced, fully automated wooden churning machines to extract pure, cold-pressed oils.

A Crisis Brews an Opportunity

The journey to this pinnacle of success was anything but easy. It began around 2006 with **Mathura Tanaji Jadhav**, whose family lived in extreme penury. With her husband earning a meager salary as a Gram Panchayat employee and residing in a rented house, managing daily expenses was a tightrope walk.

Tragedy struck when their 13-year-old son required a major surgery costing ₹2.5 lakh. Deserted by relatives in their hour of need, the family fell deep into a debt trap. Refusing to yield to adversity, Mathura gathered courage and formed the *Annapurna Self-Help Group (SHG)*, starting with 10 women who contributed ₹100 each per month.

In 2008, the SHG secured a ₹2 lakh loan from the Nashik District Central Co-operative Bank. The women ventured into small businesses like buffalo and goat rearing, beauty parlors, and tailoring. Demonstrating strict financial discipline, they repaid every installment on time, earning a special felicitation from the bank and boosting their confidence.

The turning point came in 2009. While working at her sewing machine, Mathura met a tribal woman carrying a heavy bundle of firewood on her head in the scorching afternoon heat. Listening to her plight, Mathura, knowing that the Igatpuri region was famous for its hand-pound rice (*hatsadi* rice), envisioned a plan to unite such women and provide a market for their unique produce.

Living Up to the Name 'Annapurna'

Turning her vision into reality, Mathura mobilized tribal women to produce hand-pound rice using traditional mortars and pestles, which quickly found buyers. The group then expanded by leasing 1.5 acres of land in Pimpalgaon Dukra for organic sugarcane cultivation and jaggery production.

By 2011-12, they launched a range of authentic rural products, including a multi-grain *thalipeeth bhajani* (made from 17 grains) and a

signature green chili spice mix. Their direct-to-consumer sales model eliminated middlemen and strengthened their financial standing. During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020-21, when millions lost their livelihoods, this group provided employment to 15–20 local women. Operating from their homes under strict lockdown guidelines, they manufactured traditional food items like Kurdayas (Traditional Indian string fries made from fermented wheat extract), Papad / Papadyas (Thin, crispy disc-shaped crackers typically made from rice flour, sago, or lentils) Vadas (Savory, deep-fried snacks or fritters made from lentils, spices, or grains). True to their name 'Annapurna' (the goddess of food), they also provided two square meals a day to 200 needy people for 45 consecutive days.



Photo 2: The signature Bhajani Thalipeeth (multigrain flour) is meticulously crafted from 17 select grains, traditionally stone-ground to preserve its authentic flavor and high nutritional value.

The Birth of a Farmer Producer Company

In 2021, leveraging the Government of Maharashtra's State of Maharashtra Agribusiness and Rural Transformation -“SMART” Livelihood Project for Rural Maharashtra, the women officially registered the '**Womens Power Farmer Producer Company**' with an initial share capital of ₹1,000 per member. Recognizing market trends, they decided to manufacture wood-pressed (cold-pressed) edible oil.

A sophisticated facility spread across 1,000 square yards was set up at Omanandnagar in Ghoti Budruk with an investment of ₹72.25 lakh, and was inaugurated on International Women's Day in 2024.

By November 2024, the company secured a massive order for 1,000 liters of oil from a major firm. However, disaster struck when miscreants cut open the roof of the unit one night and vandalized the oil stock, causing a loss of ₹5 lakh. Undeterred, Mathura and her team bounced back, installed 12 CCTV cameras around the premises, and resumed operations.

Today, powered by relentless hard work, robust organization, mutual trust, and a shared vision of progress, the company is expanding rapidly. The income generated has enabled tribal families to upgrade their homes and achieve financial independence. The initiative has earned accolades from high-profile dignitaries, including Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Jaykumar Gore, and officials from the World Bank.

Womens Power' Company: At a Glance

- **Membership:** 265 members (including 40 men), all hailing from Igatpuri taluka.
- **Funding & Capital:** Government subsidy of ₹43.25 lakh, bank loan of ₹21.63 lakh, and a company equity share of ₹7.37 lakh.
- **Leadership:** Led by President Mathura Jadhav, the board of directors

includes Vimal Dukre, Deepali Sarode, Sulochana Bhusekar, Seema Kardak, Savitri Mhasane, Anita Pardeshi, Sadhana Bhagat, and Suman Ghode.

- **Inclusivity:** Leadership roles are proudly given to tribal women, landless laborers, widows, and specially-abled individuals who previously worked as brick kiln laborers.

Compliance & Standards: Holds FSSAI certification, GST registration, regular audits, and lab-tested product quality control.

- **Infrastructure:** Equipped with 10 modern automatic wood-pressed oil machines (*lakdi ghanas*), a machinery shed, and a 128-ton capacity warehouse.

- **Brand Identity:** Under the tagline "*The Taste of Tradition, Trusted for Generations*," their premium edible oil brand '**Nature Bliss**' is sold in attractive packaging. Varieties include peanut, sunflower, coconut, flaxseed, castor, sesame, niger seed, mustard, safflower, and almond oil.

- **Market Footprint:** Supplies products to Mumbai, Pune, Thane, and Nashik. Direct sales at exhibitions, like Mumbai's *Mahalaxmi Saras* (Mahalaxmi Saras is one of India's largest and most popular annual national exhibitions-cum-sales. It serves as a major marketing platform for rural artisans, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and women-led Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to showcase and sell their traditional handicrafts, handlooms, and authentic regional food products. fetch revenues ranging from ₹40,000 to ₹3 lakh per event.

- **Financial Performance:** Annual turnover ranges between **₹30 lakh and ₹35 lakh**.

Key Products:

-Annual sale of around 40 quintals of premium hand-pound rice at ₹140 per kg.

-Annual sale of 2 to 3 quintals of green chili spice mix.

-High demand for *thalipeeth* flour, traditionally ground on stone mills and roasted on clay stoves.



Photo 3: Premium Branding and Packaging: Under the elegant and eye-catching 'Nature Bliss' brand, the products are beautifully packaged to appeal to modern, health-conscious consumers.



Photo 4: Mechanized Hand-Pounded Rice Production:By leveraging modern mechanization, the venture has scaled up the production of traditional hand-pounded rice (Hatsadicha), keeping its rich dietary fiber and natural goodness intact.

Voices from the Ground:



"To survive in a highly competitive market, we have never compromised on quality. Our sole ultimate goal is to make every tribal sister financially self-reliant."

—**Mathura Jadhav**, *President, Womens Power Farmer Producer Company*(Mob: 9145709719)



"Earlier, I had to toil in the scorching heat at a brick kiln, mixing mud. We only got work for 7–8 months a year, earning a meager daily wage of ₹250. Today, this company has given us immense dignity. With a steady income, I am building my own house and dreaming of sending my children for higher education."

—**Savitri Mhasane**, *Director and Employee*



"I have been with the company since the days we sold hand-pound rice. Through proper training, I now handle the mechanization and maintenance of the factory. Despite studying only up to the 4th grade, this company has given me an independent identity. Prosperity has entered our home—we bought our own house, and my children are receiving a quality education."

— **Mohini Gurbude**, *Shareholder and Employee*