

Ruchika Mahadik – A Profile of an Aspirational Indian Girl

I saw Ruchika Mahadik at my friend Bhargavi Menon a Retired Lecturer's place . The girls about 20 years old , slightly plumpish , with short hair ,boyish in her demeanor, strode in , her head held high , her eyes bright and intelligent , with two mugs of tea .

“I have kept some for myself .Will be taking it now .So don't keep calling me, for a few minutes .”She told Bhargavi

I looked up surprised as she strode back : “Who is she? I had thought she was your maid .She sounds quite arrogant .”

“She is Bhavana's younger sister . Bhavna has been working in my house ever since her mother fell sick and went through angioplasty a year and a half back . She is also asthmatic, so the girls have been coming for about a couple of years Bhavna regularly and Ruchika ,Nanne as she is called , comes to help sometimes , usually on those days she doesn't have to go to college early .

“She is in college ? What is she studying ?”

“She is doing her final BA in Arts in KT Somaiya College . She plans to study further ,do her Masters and then BEd .Plans to be a teacher .But in my opinion , she should do a course in computers .She is a wizard at it .Should see her downloading Apps and operating it .”

I am impressed ,She is the true representative of the PM's new digital India initiative . As for her dream for becoming a teacher ,she may be inspired by you “. Bhargavi just responded with a laugh .

I look up with a new respect as Ruchika as she walked in a few minutes later to check whether we had finished our tea .We hadn't . As she was turning back ,I asked Bhargavi :

“Can I talk to her about her future plans ?She seems quite a go getter .”

“She is . Assisting her sister as Domestic help is not the only work she does .She earns commission from preparing packets of different snacks and supplying to different outlets , They make considerable money and that's how they managed to pay off the loan which they got for their mother's operation .’Then turning to Ruchika , Bhargavi told her that I wanted to interview her for an article on women empowerment .I saw her perk up , but only for a second and then the old look of nonchalance returned , as if being interviewed was old hat .

“I am very busy now .Perhaps in the evening between 9pm and 9.30 , you can contact me .”she said .Both of us looked quite taken back at her haughtiness . I felt my anger rise but didn’t show it and calmly replied “Yes .I will ring up .”

After she left ,Bhargavi said :”She is feeling very important . .”

“It’s Ok “ I said .”She is very young .What about her two sisters ? What do they do ?

“The eldest is Bhavna ,she has passed 10th std and is about 22 .She works with me .Sonu a year younger to her has completed her 12th std and works in a Dental clinic .She hasn’t been well .She was diagnosed with TB in her brain and is under treatment . Unlike this Nanne , both girls are fair and pretty and quite docile . Physicaally , I mean complexion wise she takes after her mother , but her mother has nice features .Shemust have been attractive in her youth .It was an inter-caste marriage .She is from the schedule caste and her husband was a Maratha .”

“So that’s another barrier she has crossed .She hasn’t allowed caste to bind her . She has a lot of chutzpah . She must be more intelligent than her sisters?

“Yes .Definitely .It is she who is the man in the family .”

“She seems very free with you .Doesn’t behave like a servant –more of an equal .”

“I treated all the three girls like my children .The other show deference but this one, by nature has more gall .Probably learnt to fend for herself at an early age .She was only 11 years old when her father died.”

“What did her father do ?”

“ According to her mother ,he was a foreman in Bharat Petroleum .Earned a decent salary so she didn’t have to work .Then after his death everything changed ,and she took to washing and cleaning jobs .”

I took Ruchika’s mobile number from Bhargavi .But getting through to her was a difficult task .I had to call her three times before I could converse with her .And when she did she was cagey “I had this impression she was putting up a façade , of being well off , of being in full control of her life .

When I asked her , why her mother had stopped working , so as to find out more about her mother’s health , she replied a little irritated: “ Why should she work ,when three of us are working.”

She didn’t even divulge that her sister Soni was ill or they had any financial difficulties in meeting the expenditure .”She is a receptionist and gets a good salary .”She replied off handedly.

When I asked how much she earned from making packets of various snacks for the small shops in Dadar and Parel she informed me that on an average it was Rs200 per day . Bhargavi was under the impression that she earned more Further when I asked her about her residence she didn't want me to know that their old residence in Adarsh nagar was demolished residence and they were now staying in a tenement in Chembur .She persisted with the old address -Shell colony AdarshNagar Kurla .Perhaps the reason for concealing the information was that she did not want my sympathy –pity specially from a person of the privileged class –it detracted from the equal status that she had forged with Bhargavi . She wanted her space in the Sun on merit and she didn't wish for doles or pity .She was the new face of the Indian girl : not cowed down by class , caste and gender divide . I was certain she would be an inspirational teacher .