

STARTUPS TAP INTO FEMALE WORKFORCE IN SMALL TOWNS

Women in non-metros are finding well-paying, flexi-hour job options online

Sovon.Manna@timesgroup.com

Anumita Mukherjee, a Durgapur-based media professional, was looking for freelance opportunities following a year-long break. A job with a good salary and flexible hours wasn't easy to find through usual channels. Finally, a friend pointed her to a website that helps women like her find jobs.

From Chandigarh and Kochi to Ahmedabad and Durgapur, women in smaller towns are going online to find work, especially if they've taken a break. Startups such as Sheroes, HerSecondInnings, JobsForHer, ElasticJobs and Avtar I-Win are helping women in small towns find jobs with flexible hours and salaries commensurate with their skills and qualifications.

A lot of the jobs on offer, such as technical writing, coding and testing, and design, allow remote working, so a woman in Siliguri can work for a company in Mumbai quite easily. Companies too are open to such arrangements as it solves their resource crunch problem and reduces establishment cost.

"Women are often forced to give up their careers due to various obligations and commitments," says Mukherjee. "Wom-



Shinod Akkaraparambil

en like me, who live in non-metros, have very few options. But we want to earn a living and feel a sense of fulfilment just as much as anyone else," she says.

That's the kind of sentiment that pushed Neha Bagaria to start her company JobsForHer in Bengaluru in 2015. The Wharton graduate had taken a

break to raise her two children, and realized that a lot of mothers like her wanted to get back to work but didn't know how. "We connect women on a career break with job opportunities ranging from full-time, part-time, work-from-home to freelance," says Bagaria. The startup charges companies for promoting jobs on its website.

Women in tier two and three cities are also looking online for better opportunities and pay. Priti Sharma, a designer based in Ranikhet in Uttarakhand, found that most companies offered her less pay than her counterparts in metros. She signed up with a startup and got a job that paid according to her qualifications.

According to industry estimates, there are over 300 million women looking to enter workforce across the country. Technology has played a vital role in enabling women in small towns to gain an equal footing in the Indian workforce. "Now any educated and qualified woman, who was previ-

ously constrained by geography, has the ability to become gainfully employed while working from home," says Bagaria.

Working from home is catching on in tier two and three cities and the demand for jobs is higher in northern, western and southern India. Women — especially between 24 and 40 years — are able to earn Rs 3 lakh to Rs 4 lakh per annum working from home. For highly skilled software jobs, the income is higher. "They can earn Rs10,000 to Rs1,00,000 per assignment or per month, depending on their capability," says Manjula Dharmalingam, director, HerSecondInnings, a job portal for women, based in Bengaluru.

Sheroes founder and CEO Sairee Chahal says, "At our helpline, most queries revolve around work from home options. In small towns, where people have fewer career options, working from home provides them with possibilities that help them stay connected with the corporate world or start something new." Sheroes gets applications from cities ranging from Port Blair in the Andamans to Ludhiana in Punjab.

Employers pay women either on a job basis (payment is made on completion of a job) or give them a retainer (one gets a small, fixed amount every month and more if there is a job). Basic services are free for both job providers and job seekers, and the portals screen jobs before posting them.

"Only jobs those that pass our screening are allowed on ElasticJobs. We filter out all junk and present our users good, quality jobs," says Abhishek Bagaria, CEO, ElasticJobs, based in Kolkata. "We also hold counselling sessions to understand skills, interest areas and constraints of the candidates. Based on this, we suggest job options or training, if needed," he says.

Flexi-work may not seem, on the face of it, to be a long-term option, but women have found it to be a stable and sustainable source of income. "Flexi-work opens the door for women to explore multiple avenues to earn money as well as to realise their passion and explore their career journey," Dharmalingam says.

JOBS AT HOME

Online teaching, content and technical writing, graphic and website design, transcription and translation, market research, software development, digital marketing, HR, tele-calling, data entry, coding and testing are offered to women looking to work from home



NEHA BAGARIA
JobsForHer

Founded: 2015

Headquarters: Bengaluru

Bagaria re-started her career after a break to have children by starting the portal for women like herself



MANJULA DHARMALINGAM
HerSecondInnings

Founded: 2014

Worked with: 5,000+ women

A national network of women professionals to help women be financially independent



SAIREE CHAHAL
Sheroes

Founded: 2014

Women served: 10 lakh

Curates corporate jobs as well as flexible and work-from-home options for women who've taken a break