

Success Story of Mrs. Ram Bai Nayak:

A Journey of Transformation from Sankal Village, Narohna Sankal Panchayat (Under the Leadership of Dr. Brijesh Sharma, President, SEC)

The journey of **Mrs. Ram Bai Nayak**, a resident of Sankal village under the Narohna Sankal Panchayat, stands as a shining example of how innovative livelihood models and community-based empowerment can transform the lives of rural women. Implemented by the Society for Environmental Conservation (SEC) Bhopal in partnership with Barkatullah University, the **Ajnal River Pen Culture Initiative** not only created livelihood opportunities but also ignited confidence and entrepreneurship among women. Ram Bai's remarkable transformation from economic hardship to becoming an empowered entrepreneur is one of the project's most inspiring outcomes.

1. The Beginning: From Vulnerability to Hope

Coming from an economically vulnerable family with very limited livelihood options, Ram Bai's daily life was defined by financial struggles and uncertainty. Traditional occupations offered little scope for income enhancement, and the high investment required for conventional aquaculture made fish farming seem like an impossible dream.

Her path began to change when she joined the **Tulsi Self-Help Group (SHG)** formed under the project. The SHG not only became a platform for collective learning and savings but also a gateway for her to access new livelihood opportunities. Through this network, she was introduced to the project's **low-cost, innovative river pen culture** technique implemented in the Ajnal Dam a method that eliminated the need for large ponds or heavy capital investments.

For the first time, Ram Bai saw a livelihood option that was *accessible, sustainable, and economically promising*.

2. Embracing Sustainable Innovation

The introduction of **low-cost river pen culture** technology was revolutionary for Ram Bai and other women. Unlike traditional aquaculture requiring ponds, land, and high capital, the pen culture model used the natural flow of the Ajnal Dam waters, drastically reducing investment.

What truly transformed her approach, however, was the **training in eco-friendly feeding practices**:

Use of Periphyton & Azolla

SEC's experts trained her in producing and using:

- **Periphyton** – naturally occurring microorganisms that serve as rich feed
- **Azolla**, an aquatic fern that grows easily and is rich in nutrients

These practices allowed her to **completely bypass costly commercial fish feed**, previously considered a barrier.

In her own words:

“Before the training, pen fish farming seemed too complex and expensive because of the commercial feed costs. Learning to use natural feed like Azolla was a game-changer. It felt like we were using the river's own strength to grow our fish”.

Her thorough follow-through on technical guidance, regular monitoring, feeding and maintenance ensured healthy fish growth while maintaining environmental balance demonstrating the success of sustainable training.

3. The Breakthrough Harvest

With dedication and support, Ram Bai experienced a **bumper harvest** in her very first cycle. The fish reared using sustainable and natural inputs were:

- Healthy
- Fast-growing
- High in demand in local markets

Because her input costs were minimal, **her profit margins were significantly higher** compared to conventional fish farmers. This became a milestone not only for her but also for the entire Panchayat.

4. Economic Transformation and Reinvestment

The income from the first harvest enabled her to make meaningful improvements in her family's well-being. She used her earnings in ways that reflected both foresight and responsibility:

- **Improved family nutrition**, particularly through increased intake of protein-rich foods
- **Investment in her children's education**, securing long-term opportunities
- **Savings for emergencies**, building a safety net she never had before
- **Reinvestment into fish culture**, demonstrating entrepreneurial maturity

Her financial decisions illustrated the impact that empowered women have on household stability and development.

5. Social Empowerment and Community Leadership

Economic success translated into **greater respect and recognition** within her family and community. Where earlier she had little decision-making authority, she is now:

- Seen as a **role model** by other SHG members
- Consulted on pen culture management
- Encouraged to take part in community-level discussions

- Viewed as a **successful entrepreneur** rather than merely a beneficiary

Her story is inspiring more women from the region to join SHGs and adopt pen culture.

6. Expanding Skills Through Value-Addition Training

As part of the project's livelihood diversification strategy, Ram Bai also participated in the **two-day Value-Added Fish Products Training Programme** held from 8–9 June 2025.

She learned to prepare:

- Fish cutlets
- Fish balls
- Fish fillets
- Fish sausages
- Fish cakes
- Smoked fish
- Fish fingers
- Fish soup

This training equipped her with the ability to **convert low-value fish into high-value products**, significantly expanding her income potential. It also opened avenues for micro-enterprise development in the village.



Under the Leadership of Dr. Brijesh Sharma, President, SEC: Value-Added Fish Product Making Programme.



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7. A Symbol of Sustainable Development

Today, **Mrs. Ram Bai Nayak** is celebrated as the leading success story of the **Ajnal River Pen Culture Project**. Her journey reflects:

- The power of sustainable technology
- The effectiveness of women-led SHGs
- The impact of skill development and innovation
- The transformation possible when institutions support rural women

Her success proves that when women are equipped with the right knowledge, low-cost technology, and community support, they become powerful drivers of local economic growth.

A Story of Strength, Innovation and Empowerment:

The transformative journey of **Mrs. Ram Bai Nayak** is not just her personal achievement it is a testament to the vision of the Ajnal River Pen Culture Initiative. Her story demonstrates how sustainable aquaculture can uplift rural women, improve household nutrition, livelihood generation, generate income and strengthen community resilience. Ram Bai has become a beacon of empowerment in Narohna Sankal Panchayat showing that real change begins when opportunity meets determination.