

On 8th March, celebrated as International Women's Day, we at Godrej Archives decided to introspect on the role played by women in the company. Our research led us to Mrs. Mani Thakur nee Sorabji of Delhi branch who we had the good fortune of meeting in 2008. Mrs. Thakur not only holds the title of the first woman employee but also the first salesperson of the company.

Born in 1930, to a Parsi family settled in Delhi, Mani Sorabji joined the company in 1956 as a receptionist-cum-secretary to the then Branch Manager, Dr. K. R. Hathi. Her responsibilities included attending phone calls, filing, attending to visitors and managing Dr. Hathi's correspondence.

Being the first and only woman employee in the branch was not exactly a cake walk. For starters, the branch office had only one common washroom! But a far graver problem posed itself at the time when she was expecting her first child. She approached Dr. Hathi to enquire about maternity leave rules. A perplexed Dr. Hathi, sought clarification from General Manager, Mr. N. D. Sahukar, in Bombay via an urgent letter. But as the luck would have it, no one had a clue! What followed was a series of lengthy visits to the Delhi Labour Court to know about the maternity rules and benefits!

As the years went by, many more women were employed at Delhi branch especially under Branch Manager Ramesh Mukarji. Mostly these women were stenographers and receptionists.

Around this time Godrej Bhavan at Delhi - the massive new office in Okhla - was ready and all functions, except the showroom, were shifted to Okhla out of the old office at Aruna Asaf Ali Marg. Unwilling to travel so far, Mrs. Thakur decided to take the plunge into Sales and she opted for the role of a salesperson under Mr. Beri, the Showroom in-charge.

One wonders if Sales was tough for her – hitherto a receptionist. "No!" She clarifies - "I had sales experience on telephone... It (Sales) was a matter of how you talk. Besides, when I first joined Godrej, Dr. Hathi handed over

Mrs. Mani Thakur Honouring the First Woman Salesperson of Godrej



By **SANGHAMITRA SEN**, Godrej Archives



▲ The first woman employee, Mrs. Mani Thakur

a copy of every product catalogue and asked me to learn its features by heart."

Dr. Hathi believed that every receptionist/ telephone operator should have thorough product knowledge to reply to the queries of curious customers. He often inflicted a surprise quiz at her and tested her knowledge of various products and their features. It is this sound knowledge of products and features which stood her in good stead when she assumed the role of a showroom incharge. She performed well in this challenging task. She retired in 1991 and even today at the age of 80 odd years she remembers well the years spent in selling Godrej products.

Godrej Archives takes this opportunity to recognise and honour Mrs. Mani Thakur and every other woman employees like her who have contributed their bit in helping Godrej grow.

Here is wishing them Happy Women's Day.

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