



Mrs. Mani Thakur attending telephone calls at Asaf Ali Rd. office in Delhi\*

This Women's Day as the media celebrates the Kiran Mazumdar Shaws, Indra Nooyis and Kalpana Chawlas of the country, we at Godrej Archives decided to introspect on the role played by women in the company. Our research lead us to Mrs. Mani Thakur née Sorabji of Delhi branch who we had the good fortune of meeting in 2008. Mrs. Thakur not only holds the title of first lady employee but also the first lady salesperson of the branch (We are not so sure of her ranking w.r.t other branches and HO)

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

Being the first and only female 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 Mani, now Mrs. Thakur, was expecting her first child. Much to her embarrassment, 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 luck would have it, no one had a clue! What followed

was a series of lengthy visits made to the Delhi Labour Court to understand rules regarding Maternity Benefits!

As the years went by, gradually more and more women were employed. Under Branch Manager Ramesh Mukherjee, Delhi branch saw many female stenographers and receptionists. But Mrs. Thakur once again surprised one and all when she opted for a sales profile in the late 1960s.

Around this time Godrej Bhavan (Delhi) - the massive new office in Okhla - was ready and all functions, except the showroom, shifted out of the old office at Aruna Asaf Ali Rd. to Okhla. Unwilling to travel to far away Okhla, Mrs. Thakur decided to take the plunge into Sales and assisting Showroom in-charge Mr. Beri.

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

Dr. Hathi, a very strict manager, believed that a receptionist/ telephone operator should have complete product knowledge to tackle both curious and irate customers. He often caught Mrs. Thakur completely off-guard by quizzing her at random about different products or their features. This thorough training under Dr. Hathi prepared her for her future role as Store-in-chief, a responsibility she carried out with élan till her retirement in 1991.

Godrej Archives takes this opportunity to honour Mrs. Mani Thakur and every woman like her who has played a role in the Godrej history. Happy Women's Day!!!

\* Asaf Ali Rd. office at that time housed the offices of both G&B and erstwhile Godrej Soaps Ltd.'