“Jivan me svavlamban hona chahiye, doosron ke upar aadhar rakhna nahi chahiye. Aisi jindagi jiyo ki logo ko prema mile. Mare mare se jina koi jindagi nahi hai. Jivan main aagey badhney ka dhyey rakho, use pura karne ki koshish karo. Jivan ko sahaj saral tarike se jio”

(Self respect and self reliance are important for life. One’s deeds should set examples for others to emulate. We must always strive to aim higher and move ahead. Live a life of simplicity and spontaneity.) - Late Meyben

A gritty lady who had lived for more than 120 years with lots of ups and downs is what Meyben’s story is all about. Her fifth generation still recalls her with fond memories. Her life is a living library and a great ‘institution’.

Early days

Late Meyben Devanandbhai Ram got married to Late Kalabhai Chedera, when she was 16. She moved with her in-laws to Morvad1 when she turned 21. Meyben was blessed with four children; two boys and two girls. All of them practised farming and cattle rearing. Meyma had a happy, fulfilled married life.

The big drought and the survival

About a hundred years ago, there was a severe drought in the region. Her family would go without food for several days. They would somehow manage to feed their children and put them to sleep. Many people died without food or water during the drought. Barely had they finished their childhood except the juice prepared from ‘Neem’ tree’s roots.

After the onset of the monsoon, people restarted working in their fields. The earth had been revived after fallowing and therefore became very fertile. Meyben recalls that the yield was much more than before. They had enough milk and ghee as the cattle got enough to eat and thus grew in numbers, just like in the earlier days.

Granny talks of grains

The grains (kang, corn, bajri, millets, etc.) were stored safely in ‘kotlas’. People earlier were healthier as organic agriculture was practised and food was cooked in earthen vessels. Kodaya variety of cotton was grown, which was disease resistant. Moreover, feeding its seeds to animals increased their milk production.

Healing the sick

When people fell sick, they would use a commonly available creeper called ‘Kukadvela’ (Luffa echinata Roxb.). The herb was ground and mixed with cow dung and water in a ‘deg’ (a special vessel for boiling water). The mixture was then boiled and the steam was inhaled. This cured the fever immediately. Drinking the juice of aavan/aaval (Cassia auriculata L.) tree bark, every morning could cure stomach aches. Fever could also be cured by drinking the juice prepared from neem roots. Meyben had told the HB team, “If I had fever, I would drink some buttermilk and the fever would be cured.”

Secret of Longevity

“The secret to my long life is traditional food and food habits. We used to eat handmade rotlo (pancakes) of bajro and millets. In those times, we did not have palm olein oil. Instead we would use sesame or groundnut oil”

-Ghee and milk were also used extensively. At the same time, she told us, “But mind you, I would also work as much as I ate. But the main reason behind my long life is my inner strength and self-confidence. I had learnt to survive in any condition. Even today, at this age, I have no trouble in walking though my eyesight is a little weak.” She also added in Hindi “ab meri kaya nahi chalti, mai ne jindagi me bahut kam kiya, ab aap logo ko kam kare ka mehnat karoge to bhukhe maroge. khub mehnat karo aur kho pi keh ush raho.” Her advice to this generation was to work hard like she did, else face starvation. One could metaphorically compare starvation with spiritual or intellectual deprivation.

Others around her still fondly remember Meyben and say, “Apna kam sahi tarke se, samar par karna agar kisiko sikhna hai to vo Meyben se sikhe”. (If someone needs to know how to do things right and on time there is no better role model than Meyben)

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