Epitome of longevity and liveliness

"Paushtik aahar thi dirghayu thavay chhe, nahi ke dawaon thi"
"Nutritious diet leads to long life, not the medicines"

Samuben Badarji Thakor has lived 105 years of her life to the fullest. This remarkable great great grandmother has seen the shifts in agriculture, climate, food and culture for over a century.

Samuben is a native of Sanganpur, a small village in the district of Mehsana (Gujarat). She was born and raised in the village Nugar, which for long, had been linked to the outside world only by a rutted dirt track. Samuben got married at a very early age. She has a family comprising 10 children, 33 grandchildren, 46 great-grand-children, and six great-great-grandchildren. Her parents had also lived long.

She wakes up at 6am to milk her buffaloes. She tidies her surroundings and feeds cattle. Then, at 9 pm sharp, she goes to bed! Her eyes have turned dim, and her hearing is slightly affected, otherwise she is healthy; eats, drinks and sleeps well, repeats her inculcations to her grandchildren and bears only little signs of her age.

Diet may be the most telling factor in Samuben’s long life. She loves eating apple. On being asked about the secret of her long life, she said, “I am not a woman of moderate appetite.” Each day she consumes, by her own admission, biscuits, tea, rotlo (pancake) of millets complemented with a glass of buttermilk, millet flatbread with curry in lunch and ends the day with khichdi, ghee and milk in dinner.

Recalling her early days, she talked about many hardships in her childhood. They lived in a simple clay-floored hut. Her father practised farming and didn’t earn enough, leading the family to face the financial crisis often. Being eldest among the five children, she not only raised her younger siblings but also performed household chores and helped her father take care of the family by carrying a heavy basket of fruits to sell door-to-door. She sighed deeply and added, “Often there was little food to eat, but we were happy and contented”.

She has always been known for her benevolent and humanitarian spirit in the village. She recalls an incident during the Gujarat riots when a Muslim man was coming to meet Samuben and a few Hindus surrounded him. Before they could have attacked him, he howled, “I am a close acquaintance of Samuben, I am just going to meet her, please leave me.” It was all just because of the stature of Samuben that the attackers left after hearing her name.

She is affectionate towards nature. She sleeps under an almond tree in the fields, feeds the birds before taking her meals and dotes on her buffaloes. She has an organic lifestyle enriched with peace, generosity and compassion. Her determination to serve the poor and needy fetched her numerous well-wishers. Chelaji, her eldest son told how generously she gave food and money to poor who came to her door. Her good work has, thus, been recognised and acclaimed throughout the community.

There was a great rejoicing in her humble voice, when she delightedly told us about her religious devotion, “I have been to many pilgrimages like Dwarka, Chotila, Ambaji, Abu, Satadhar, Sayla, Gimar, Dakor…” and she tried to recollect many more places. She enjoyed the garbas, rhymes and several other recreational and social activities.

When asked, “Are you tired of life?”, “No, not at all” replied this hale and hearty centenarian. “I don’t want to leave yet. I want to go after seeing my youngest grandson’s marriage and when the end comes, I would like to get cremated at Shirpur.”

Despite memories of numerous struggles, she carried herself lightly. She did not get the opportunity to study but she was aware enough to make her sons educated. When asked about the teachings she has given to her children she replied, “No backbiting; no short changing, at least not of the salt (implying no betrayals).”

Emphasising upon the need for nourishment of youngsters, she said, “Nutritious diet leads to long life, not the medicines.” She felt her regular physical activity, healthy diet and no-stress were the key to longevity.

How life respects you when you respect your life is brought out vividly in this story.

Have you ever tried to listen to the wisdom of your grandparents? If so, share with us something inspiring, interesting and intriguing. Selected insights will be published along with the photographs of your grandparents. Other ideas are also welcome.