



## Suman Baris, Mauchipada

Sumantai, 33, lives with her husband and 2 children in Mauchipada village, Dhule. Her husband works as a mason and also looks after their grocery shop in his free time. Sumantai is one of UTMT's most proactive Master Trainers. She is the Secretary of her 11 member Women Self Help Group – Sanjeevani. Sumantai was trained in December 2014. Before this, she confesses to being very afraid of bees. "I did not believe bees could be domesticated in boxes, when UTMT told us. I was thrilled when the bees sat on my hand during NCT... like a miracle".



Sumantai is very confident of spotting an *Apis cerana* colony and filling it into a box on her own. She is now the acknowledged NCT expert in her village. This was not the case earlier. When the NCT trainings were ongoing, Sumantai used to observe from afar. She saw one of the men get stung and realised that it was not so bad after all. Recognising her potential, UTMT selected her as a Master Trainer. Sumantai feels she has proved a point to male honey hunters, who used to tell her, "We smoke the hives. Still, we get stung and fear bees. How then will you fill boxes with bare hands?" By learning beekeeping, she has silenced them. When they comment, "What are you doing with bees everyday? What is so special about it?", she replies, "Why don't you also take training to find out?".

The local Bee Resource Centre (BRC) is in Sumantai's old home. Along with a few SHG members, she conducts beekeeping orientation for visitors, maintains records and manages beekeeping in Mauchipada. She has spoken before the Collector, NABARD DDM, visitors visiting through UTMT.

On her 1.5 acre farm, Sumantai cultivates Rice, Nagli, Wheat, Harbhara, Chana, Masoor, Garlic, Onion, Chillies, Methi, Brinjal, Tomato, Ladies finger, Valpapdi and Cucumber. **"I don't have much land, but at least I can increase the increased yields from it through beekeeping."** In 2015-16, she reported tremendous yield improvements in many crops, from the same cultivated area as before and with similar farming practices:

Crop	Before	After	Changes in quality	Increased economic value (Rs)
Mango	6 kg	12 kg	-	150
Guava	25 kg	40 kg	-	375
Tamarind	40 kg	60 kg	-	600
Chillies	10 kg	30 kg	Yes (weight, colour)	800
Tomato	6 kg	15 kg	No	90
Brinjal	10 kg	22 kg	Yes (weight, colour)	120
Ladies finger	12 kg	40 kg	Yes (weight, colour)	420
Soyabean	70 kg	200 kg	-	4,550
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>7,105</b>

Sumantai feels glad to be doing something that was earlier exclusive to men and feels that beekeeping is not too difficult to learn. Her dedication to the activity is exemplary.



### Omna Mauchi, Mauchipada

Omnatai, 39, also from Mauchipada, is another rising star from her batch of trainees. She was inducted in January 2015 as a Master Trainer, a year after her first beekeeping training,



Like her peers, Omnatai had never heard of beekeeping in boxes before UTMT arrived. However, what distinguished her from fellow trainees was her advanced familiarity with bees, she having practiced honey hunting of the wild *Apis florea* bee with her family from a young age. It is this inherent fearlessness that served her well when learning the Natural Colony Transfer (NCT) process of transferring indigenous *Apis cerana indica* bees from nature into a bee box. Soon after the first demo by UTMT’s staff, she independently began scouting for bees as well as successfully transferring them into bee boxes - a great achievement as both are specialised technical skills that usually take new trainees weeks to learn.

Omnatai has often shares notes with Vimaltai, a fellow trainee and friend equally skilled at NCTs. Together they make a formidable pair to whom villagers call on whenever a new colony of bees is found. Multitasking becomes necessary at such times. “My best experience is filling bees into bee boxes. If someone finds bees, I leave everything at home, even if I haven’t cooked, and rush there. My husband and children do not mind. Sometimes, I wake up at 4 am, to cook and keep things at home ready, before leaving. It is not too tough to manage housework, farm work and beekeeping.” Omnatai does not feel the activity is difficult; it just takes time and patience.

She perceives the increased yields of chillies, chickpea, mango on her humble 1.5 acre farm, to be the biggest benefit from beekeeping. With the supplementary income obtained from these, she hopes to spend for her children’s needs and for purchasing food. 2 bee boxes presently stand on her farm.

Crop	Before	After	Changes in quality	Increased economic value (Rs)
Mango	20 kg	50 kg	Colour and weight	750
Chillies	18 kg	20 kg	Yes	80
Brinjal	45 kg	50 kg	Yes	50
Red lentil	30 kg	50 kg	-	700
Chickpea	40 kg	50 kg	-	300
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>1,880</b>

Omnatai has had her fair share of sceptics. “Some people say ‘Bees sting, why do you want to

do this?.’ I tell them, ‘I am interested, that’s why.’” Omnatai hopes to expand her number of bee boxes, even willing to invest personal funds if needed.



### Vimal Vadvi, Mauchipada

Vimaltai is another beekeeper highly competent at transferring bees single-handedly from the wild into beehives. It is this unique ability that catapulted her into the league of Junior Master Trainers just 2 months after undergoing training in February 2015.

Like Omnatai, Vimaltai's self-confidence has origins in her childhood. She belongs to a family of traditional honey hunters, and as a child often accompanied her parents on trips to harvest wild honey from forest beehives.



Vimaltai's love for bees becomes apparent as soon as she starts speaking. "The past one week has been all about bees, many colonies were found nearby. People in the village now know that 3 other women and I are good at filling bees in boxes. When they spot a colony, they promptly inform us." She tries to keep fellow trainees involved by encouraging them to accompany her on NCTs, as some are reluctant to venture out on their own while others have yet to overcome their fear. Her family often pulls her leg, "Don't you have any other work to do, other than going after bees?"

It takes her 1 to 2 hours to conduct an NCT. Thereafter, maintaining the beehive takes 15 minutes weekly, and is usually done in a group of 3-4 people so that all can see and learn. Vimaltai has 4 beehives in her 15 tree guava orchard. **Every year, despite using pesticides, pest infestations would render majority of the guava fruit unfit for sale. The small proportion of remaining guavas used to earn Vimaltai around Rs.10,000. In 2016, she did not use pesticide. Yet there were no pest attacks, and the entire guava crop fetched her Rs 77,000!**

Crop	Before	After	Changes in quality	Increased economic value (Rs)
Guava	7000 kg	11000 kg	Yes (size, weight)	28,000
Chilly	No harvest	100 kg	Yes (weight, colour)	NA
Harbhara	40 kg	70 kg	-	900
Finger millet	80 kg	100 kg	-	600
Corn	100 kg	150 kg	-	600
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>30,100</b>



### Sharda Pimpalse, Sukhapur

Sharda Pimpalse, 42, from Sukhapur village, was trained in February 2014. Shardatai had never heard of bees being kept in boxes before UTMT arrived. Like many trainees, she too feared bees. After attending UTMT's basic 2-day theory-cum-practical training in the village, her initial skepticism vanished. She realized it could bring great benefits in terms of both agricultural yields and honey, in the long term. It took Shardatai a few months to master the first step: the art of transferring bees from the environment into a beehive.



Recognizing her potential, UTMT selected her to be a junior Master Trainer, entrusted with maintaining the 11 full beehives in her village. This is one more feather added to Shardatai's entrepreneurial cap. She is the President of her 13 year old SHG (Preeti Mahila Bachat Gat), she is involved with another livelihoods NGO active in the village, and takes tailoring orders. Her active involvement in community development makes her the first point of contact for anyone visiting Sukhapur. What is truly inspirational is that Shardatai handles it all without having had a formal education, and in addition to managing farming and household chores!

In her typical humble demeanor, she credits her supportive family for her multitasking abilities. "My husband is immensely supportive, and that's why I have been able to do so much in life. He has been asking me to teach him beekeeping, so that he can take over when I am occupied with other work."

Shardatai is thrilled to see the agricultural improvements in her crops after keeping bees, mainly bajra and soyabean. She wishes she had a *wadi* so that she could see benefit from mango production, which some of her fellow beekeepers have seen.

Crop	Before	After	Increased economic value (Rs)
Bajra	200 kg	300 kg	1,500
Soyabean	500 kg	1000 kg	17,500
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>19,000</b>



### **Swarm bag, bee veil tailoring SHG, Dhaskelpada**

In July 2015, 22 women of an SHG in Dhaskelpada village attended the swarm bag/ bee veil tailoring training held by UTMT in the village. Practicals were taught on raw material measurement, cutting & stitching, and theory of entrepreneurship skills & processes. Most women were active participants, learning the new skill of tailoring for the first time.

Within two months, they began executing the first order of swarm bags and bee veils given by UTMT, which was found to be of good quality and workmanship. 11 members were more active than others. By February 2016, the group had **earned Rs. 17,000, having completed stitching 100 swarm bags and 85 bee veils**. The inputs procured were then supplied to beekeepers in Dhule.

The SHG is happy to have learned a new life skill. Savita Desai, the leader, says they are now keen on expanding to tailoring of more items, like caps. She hopes the SHG will continue to earn an income through tailoring in future.



**NABARD DDM Mr Arvind Borse, with the tailoring SHG, Dhaskelpada**