



# FROM WIDOWHOOD TO LEADERSHIP: A INSPIRING JOURNEY OF BASANTI NAHAKA

**Successful Entrepreneur and Community Leader**

---

**Presented by: Mamali Sahoo**  
**Research & Documentation team**



## ABSTRACT

This study explores the remarkable journey of a woman who, amidst the challenges of widowhood, emerged as a symbol of empowerment and resilience in her rural community. Through a lens of self-assessment and belief in oneself, her narrative illustrates the transformative power of individual agency and community support in achieving sustainable livelihoods. Her ventures not only sustained her family but also uplifted her community, and developed economic growth and prosperity. Her story highlights the importance of mental resilience and empowerment. She refused to be defined by her circumstances, instead viewing challenges as opportunities for growth. Her journey serves as a testament to the transformative potential of self-belief and perseverance. As a community leader, she inspires others to pursue their dreams and overcome obstacles. Her journey delivers a powerful message to society, emphasizing the importance of self-assessment, belief, and community support in fostering sustainable livelihoods and creating a brighter future for all. Her determination and resilience have not only improved her own life but also served as an inspiring example for others in her village.

---



## INTRODUCTION

The village of Gabarmunda settled in the calm landscapes of the Angul district, there lived a spirited young girl named Basanti Nahaka who belonged to a poor family. At the early age of 17, Basanti boarded on a new chapter of her life when she tied the knot with Mr. Plusti Nahaka in the year 2001. Their journey together led them to Regdakhhol village in the Deogarh district, where they built their home and dreams hand in hand. Both Basanti and Plusti found work as daily wage laborers, crossing the lush forests to collect minor forest products (MFPs) that would later find their way to market stalls. In addition to their work in the forests, the couple developed a spark of entrepreneurship within them. They decided to open a small grocery shop in their village, a modest one born out of their shared aspirations for a better future. With determination and tireless effort, Basanti and Plusti nurtured their shop, which soon became a vital source of sustenance for their growing family. They had three children—two daughters and a son. However, fate distributed a cruel blow to Basanti's world twelve years ago, in the year 2012, when tragedy struck with the sudden demise of Plusti.

The loss of her beloved husband shattered Basanti's world, leaving her to grapple with the weight of grief and the scary prospect of shouldering the family's responsibilities all alone. Yet, the road ahead was fraught with challenges. Without Plusti by her side, Basanti found herself struggling to keep their grocery shop afloat amidst mounting debts and dwindling resources.

## INTERVENTION OF VASUNDHARA

In November 2003, a transformative initiative began in the Deogarh district, led by Vasundhara, aimed at enhancing awareness and boosting the local economy through the utilization of Minor Forest Produce (MFPs). Recognizing the untapped potential of these natural resources, Vasundhara embarked on a mission to empower the women of the region and cultivate a sustainable platform for livelihood enhancement. With solid determination, Vasundhara set out to engage and educate the women of Gabarmunda village, laying the groundwork for a journey towards empowerment and self-reliance it was possible to create a foundation for long-term economic stability.

On March 12, 2004, through open dialogue and inclusive discussions, they aimed to communicate the potential benefits of collective action and the formation of a Producer Group (PG) focused on MFP utilization at Regdakhhol village. As a result, they established a PG group named "Banani Mahila Sangha", with collaborative efforts and shared determination, Vasundhara and the villagers of Gabarmunda succeeded in establishing the PG group, marking a significant milestone in their journey towards economic empowerment. The creation of the PG group symbolized more than just economic empowerment; it represented a triumph of community solidarity and the transformative power of collective action.

# JOINING BANANI MAHILA SANGHA

05

Within the trials of her circumstances, Basanti Nahaka found support and opportunity through her membership in the Banani Mahila Sangha Producer Group in 2016. Before joining, Basanti's financial prospects were limited by her reliance on selling Minor Forest Produce (MFPs) to middlemen at undervalued prices. However, her decision to become part of the PG marked a turning point in her economic journey. Through the collective efforts of the group and the guidance they provided, Basanti underwent a significant transformation in her approach to selling MFPs. Armed with fresh knowledge and strategies, she learned how to effectively market her products, bypassing middlemen to access fair market prices directly. In her search for economic independence, Basanti Nahaka diversified her income streams by venturing into various entrepreneurial sections. liters of high-quality mustard oil.



Basanti's ability to leverage collective action for mutual benefit exemplifies the transformative power of collaboration in powerful economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods. With the freshly extracted mustard oil in hand, Basanti boarded on a dual marketing strategy. She sold a portion of the oil within her village, catering to the local demand for cooking essentials. Simultaneously, she ventured beyond the village confines, tapping into external markets to broaden her customer base and increase her sales revenue.



“I have at least 1000 rupees left at the end of the month. I use it for emergencies and future needs, and now I am self-sufficient. I no longer need to borrow money at interest”

Her entrepreneurial insight and innovative approach to business exemplify the potential for grassroots initiatives for economic growth and empower individuals within rural communities. This shift not only increased her income but also empowered her to take greater control over her financial future.

By leveraging the resources and support provided by the PG, Basanti was able to transcend the limitations of her circumstances and grab control of her economic destiny, paving the way for a brighter future for herself and her family.

## ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT

With the support and knowledge gained from the Producer Group (PG), Basanti Nahaka underwent a remarkable transformation from a struggling widow to a stable income earner. After acquiring new skills and resources, Basanti was able to effectively reduce the financial burden on her shoulders and significantly ease her family responsibilities. Her grocery shop, which was once struggling, began to thrive under her diligent management, generating increased profits and contributing to her newfound financial stability.



This newfound stability enabled Basanti to prioritize her children's education, a dream she had long cherished. With unwavering determination, Basanti ensured that her children received quality education despite the challenges they faced. One daughter completed her 10th grade, while another daughter excelled and passed her 12th grade examinations. Meanwhile, her son is currently pursuing his studies in the 10th grade, with Basanti's solid support pushing him forward. Basanti's improved financial status empowered her to fulfill her responsibilities as a mother by arranging marriages for her two daughters. Basanti shares with a sense of pride. Drawing upon the resources and support provided by the PG.

Today, Basanti resides with her son, continuing to support him in his educational pursuits while managing her flourishing grocery shop. The financial stability she has achieved through her hard work and the support of the PG has also allowed her to save money for emergencies, providing a safety net for herself and her family in times of need. Basanti's journey from adversity to success serves as a testament to the transformative power of empowerment and community support. Her voice reflects both relief and determination as she highlights her newfound financial independence and the security it brings.



# CONCLUSION

Today, Basanti Nahaka stands as an ideal of inspiration in the heart of Regdakhol village. She is a testament to the power of perseverance and the victory of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Though the scars of loss may remain, they serve as a reminder of the resilience that lies within each of us, waiting to be unchecked in times of greatest need. A story from a small village in Deogarh that inspires many people in their lives.

