



“ My current salary is INR 16,000 with overtime and I’ve been promised a raise once I pick up better customer interaction skills. Being in this environment, I am motivated to push myself and build a better future. ”

Tatha Apari is a cheerful 22-year-old girl living in Kolkata city. She enrolled in the sales and marketing training run under the aegis of the “Youth for Adolescent Empowerment (Y4E) programme” of the Government of West Bengal. This was supported by UNICEF and implemented by Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), India’s largest youth organisation.

She made many friends here and learnt about other youth related activities. During the time spent with trainers and faculty, she realised that she had strong sales skills. She was convinced that though she liked the idea of being a sales person, she lacked the ability to convince people to buy and negotiate a good price. However, the course through its practical demonstrations and teaching aids brought out the “**gently persuasive dormant saleswoman in me**”. When placements began she found her name on two interviews. She landed both jobs and decided to join Giani’s ice cream parlour as a Sales Assistant at a starting salary of INR 15,000.

She realises she is one of the lucky ones in her community who could leverage the timely information she received on the course, complete her training and find a job she loved. According to her, finding jobs is hard and harder is finding a reliable guide who can show young people the ropes and the way forward. Many get misled or cheated as job touts promise lucrative careers, enticing them to join courses that are commercial. These neither teach relevant skills nor fetch jobs but only push families into debt. “**Can you then blame us for being wary of anyone who makes hollow promises of giving us a flourishing career**”, she asks.

In her case, she was advised to do the course by a former school teacher. She then went around the neighbourhood talking to people and found that several girls were doing one or the other course and their overall feedback was positive. A host of skill development courses were on offer ranging from painting, mobile repairing, photography and automobile engineering to beautician training, sales and marketing and soft skills. She liked the fact that young people were being encouraged to first identify their interest and then see which course appealed most to them. Another important aspect of the initiative was in helping students who finished the course, to find jobs. Most of the companies on the panel were reliable. Many provided on-the-job training and steered those with potential towards better roles and salaries.

Constant innovation is being undertaken in the programme based on feedback of both students and employers who are on the panel. This is helping refine the courses further. For instance, the Udyog portal set up under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports provides career counselling, skill training and job opportunities at the click of a button. After uploading their CVs, applicants can choose from six domains and get connected to corporates, government and others for jobs. They are even provided with accommodation support. Those who want to start their own businesses are considered for zero finance loans if their proposals are strong. To facilitate their funding, they are linked to organisations like NABARD. “**These are confidence boosting measures which generate goodwill, optimism and hard work**” are Tatha’s parting words.