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Unleashing power

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Stree Shakti

Special Arrangement

“Stree Shakti” on Doordarshan National focuses on women-related issues

Considering the infinite problems and issues assailing the society, there is a definite need for television channels to address them apart from providing entertainment to its viewers. This has been the stated objective of India’s national broadcaster Doordarshan from the beginning. Another step in this direction comes in the form of a new talk show, *Stree Shakti* produced by Mona Khot, by bringing inspirational stories of women who have not only faced challenges but come a long way in creating a difference in the society. To be aired from this Saturday on Doordarshan’s National (DD-N) channel, each episode features an individual narrating her intimate and emotional journey. Deepa Chandra, Additional Director General DD-N, describes the show as “an initiative to feature women achievers who have emerged winners despite excruciating trials and tribulations.”

“During my travel to different towns and villages across the country I became aware of many touching women-related stories. These moved me and I decided to bring them to public,” says Mona, a documentary filmmaker. Moreover she feels that mere statistics on the women-related problems do not serve a wider purpose. “The show’s objective is not simply to highlight the issues but discuss and bring firsthand experience of those who have overcome them. It is bound to inspire viewers and others facing similar predicament.” Though some stories and women are already known to the public, she feels that “as there are several aspects and facets of the problem we hope to find answers to some of them through this show.” Being a woman, she could relate to the stories enabling her to convey the emotions adequately to her writers. “Every story made me cry and forced me to contemplate. It made me humble.”

Among those who are scheduled to feature in the show are Deepa Malik, a paraplegic who has won national and international medals in swimming, shotput and javelin, Sandeep Kaur, daughter of an attendant in a government office who has become an Indian Administrative Service officer, visually-impaired Sudha Patel, a village sarpanch working on inclusive education for the handicapped, Seeta Devi of Devasi community who is fighting for girls’ education, Jyoti Dhawle, an HIV positive person who counsels other patients, and Sapna Bhavnani a gang rape victim who is now an internationally famed hairstylist.

According to Laxmi, an acid attack victim who appears in the first episode, she was keen to appear on *Stree Shakti* once Mona briefed her. “Being aired on DD, an old channel with a widespread reach in towns and villages, will definitely help the cause,” she says. Known as the host of the News Express talk show *Udaan*, Laxmi feels this format is effective as it arouses curiosity and inquisitiveness among people, encouraging others to talk and inspiring similar victims.

“The programme showcasing woman’s power will empower others. At the same time we have ensured that it is not preachy or sermonising. Each episode highlights the narrator’s story and how she battled against adversity to emerge strong.” With a view to give the series a different shade, it includes participation by celebrities like Johnny Lever, Raju Srivastava, Leslie Lewis, Anant Mahadevan among others. “They were all eager to appear on the show and were inspired by the stories,” remarks Mona. In the rags-to-riches Kalpana Saroj episode, Johnny Lever who was a chawl dweller shares struggle.

Mona hopes that the series will get transformed into a campaign motivating others to participate. “We are not limiting

the purpose of the show by bringing stories into the public domain. Our intention is that those who need financial, legal and medical help and counselling should contact us. I want it to become a medium to build connection among different stakeholders.” She candidly admits that producing the show has changed her. “I feel blessed to have got this chance and will remember this venture throughout my life.”

(To be telecast on Saturday and Sunday at 9 p.m.)

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