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Malathi the Buttermilk Lady

“Once I started working, they just stopped going to school!”

Malathi explains how her three boys decided to bid farewell to their education. It was a decision they made for themselves ten years ago. Her husband had left her and there was no-one to ensure her children stayed in school. She came to work every day as a sweeper on the grounds of a production house, and the boys would roam the city, succumbing to various whims more pressing than education. It was a decision she couldn't contest.

There is a sadness surrounding her husband's departure that discourages further questioning, but it is momentary. She's soon back to laughing at the memory of her boys playing truant. She is without doubt proud of them; if not for their actions, for their buoyant, independent spirit.

Her eldest son, 22, is a taxi driver, but she doesn't know where he works. Her other two sons aren't yet employed, but she toys with the idea of them painting and tending to houses for a living. Her only daughter is 18 and works in a cloth shop. Unfortunately she's had to stop because of some leg pain she has been experiencing of late.

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Malathi's career began as a sweeping lady and she still is one, but an entrepreneurial spirit has led her to set up a buttermilk stand outside the grounds she sweeps. It has been four or five months since the start of this venture, and her cart is sparsely stocked, but she has her buttermilk along with biscuits and sweets. It's a beginning.

What captures the heart of the casual observer is the endurance that is embodied in this woman. Her story is not new, but it is as real as any other. Abandoned by a husband, and left with four children to tend to, she has put her head down worked as hard as she could to ensure the survival of her family.

More importantly, there is no bitterness in her. It would have a justifiable destination when entrenched in a life that is far from ideal. But instead of harboring any self-pity, Malathi took what Fate handed her, and has created a life to be proud of. She has come far with so little, and that gives us the glimmer that there is more to come. She believes that success is possible regardless of the odds, so her steps are that much lighter. Even an overcast sky can't dampen her spirits. With a ready smile, she is armed to face destiny on her own terms.

This we can applaud!