

## Sandeep Kaur IAS Topper 2009

Sheer hard work and inspiration from an old TV serial have helped Sandeep Kaur, a peon's daughter, crack the tough civil services exam. She says she couldn't have done it without the rock solid support of her extended family.

Sandeep, 29, daughter of Ranjit Singh, a peon in the revenue department here, has given Punjab reasons to feel proud by attaining the 138th rank in the open merit list of the All India Civil Services Examination.

She is from the Scheduled Caste (SC) reserved category and hopes to better her rank in the reserved category list, which is yet to be declared.

“I am proud to be a peon's daughter and I want my father to complete his service with full dignity. I owe my success to my parents and god. Despite meagre resources, my father provided the best facilities to me,” Sandeep told IANS.

“I was very motivated after seeing the serial ‘Udaan’ the tale of a lower middle class girl who became an Indian Police Service officer.”

Morinda town is around 35 km from state capital Chandigarh.

While recounting her difficult days, Sandeep, a civil engineer, said: “After completing my engineering, I first wanted to do a job to become economically independent before starting preparations for IAS. But for two continuous years, I did not find any job, as there were very few opportunities for girls in the civil engineering sector.”

“There was nobody to guide me and we did not have enough money to pay the hefty fees of coaching classes. Therefore, I made the first two attempts (2005 and 2006) without taking any formal coaching,” she pointed out:

Thereafter, her father took a bank loan to fund the cost of coaching institutes. She took coaching at Chandigarh, Patiala and New Delhi.

Despite her engineering background, she meticulously chose the subjects of sociology and Punjabi literature. In 2007, she missed the main exam by a whisker. She got 933 marks whereas the cut-off was 936. My extended family also supported me during the preparations. Every day at 4 am my cousin went to Kharar town (around 10 km from here), to bring a copy of Hindu newspaper as we did not get it here.

“I have given preference to the Punjab cadre. I would certainly work against female foeticide and for the uplift of girls in the state,” said Sandeep.

Since the declaration of results last week, Sandeep's house has been abuzz with media persons. Her family members are upbeat.

“We are from a small town of Punjab with very few resources but still my daughter has successfully cleared one of the most difficult exams of the country. The whole town is proud of her and I cannot express my feelings in words,” a proud Amarjit Kaur, Sandeep's mother, told.

“I wanted her to become an IAS officer since she was in Class 8 and now she has fulfilled my dream. It was certainly not an easy path and it was a journey full of disappointments and countless hiccups. But her strong determination helped her sail all the way,” she said.

Gurpreet Singh, Sandeep's brother who is studying law, told: “This time Sandeep was desperate to clear the exam as last time she had missed it by just three marks. During the prelims she studied for 18 hours and for the mains she increased it to over 20 hours. She had actually forgotten to sleep in pursuit of her dream.”

“But my sister is still the same person. Reporters of many channels are coming to our house to interview her but she is very shy and afraid of facing the camera.” he said.

Gurpreet now wants to crack the exam himself. “I will also start preparing for this exam under my sister's guidance.”

## **The Hindu is the Success**

Overwhelmed by a deluge of accolades for clearing the civil services examinations, Sandeep Kaur, daughter of a peon, acknowledges the major role played by The Hindu in her success.

“I did not miss any article on the Edit page as well as in the Opinion section,” the civil engineering graduate from the Punjab Engineering College told this correspondent.

As her family resources were limited, Ms. Kaur never opted for any formal coaching for the civil services examinations, in which she had not succeeded in a previous attempt. She chose

Sociology and Punjabi literature as her subjects for the civil services examinations, in which she was ranked 138th this year.

For nearly five years, she had followed the guidelines given by her teachers, seniors and friends. “But the most important factor in my preparations was thorough reading of The Hindu, which provided a proper insight into current affairs, national and international developments.”

Ms. Kaur's father or her cousin Jaspreet Singh would travel nearly 20 km by bus to get her a copy of the newspaper from an agent at Kharar town.

“The agent was kind enough to keep copies for a few days, in case we could not collect them,” she recalled, adding that interviews by successful candidates and advice by her teachers led her to reading The Hindu regularly.

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While the Punjab government plans to use her success in its fight against female foeticide, Ms. Kaur says she is prepared to serve anywhere in the country. Poverty eradication and equal opportunities for all will remain her priorities, avers the eldest of the three siblings, whose father, Ranjit Singh, is employed in the sub-tehsil office at Morinda, about 30 km from here.

Courtesy: The Hindu

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