

Hirkani's Room: A Concept Note**Prepared by: Dr. Prashant Gangal****Mother Support & Training Coordinator, BPNI Maharashtra****About Hirkani**

Hirkani was a milkmaid who lived at the base of Raigad fort during the times of the great king Shivaji. Hence her story dates back to the middle of 17th century i.e. about 350 years back. Tales of her courage and love for her baby are often told in the state of Maharashtra. Historians debate whether Hirkani was real or legend. However her mothering instinct is real and universal.

Hirkani was a working mother who had to leave her baby behind to go up to Raigad to deliver the milk on the occasion of full moon night of 'Kojagiri'. Unfortunately she got delayed and could not leave the fort before sunset when the fort doors were closed for the night. An official permission to open the gates would have taken away many valuable hours. Her baby was already awaiting her return for quite some time. She stood frustrated at the top of a vertical cliff looking down at the dim lights of her village more than a thousand feet below in the dark valley. Soon the mother's love and determination took over against all odds and she climbed down the cliff to embrace and breastfeed her baby.

Hirkani's story is representative of thousands of working women world over who scale a mountain of difficulties to combine breastfeeding and working. La Leche League (American Mother support Group) in 2006 published a compilation of inspiring stories of such modern mother's from 35 countries and 6 continents. Hirkani's story provided the title 'Hirkani's Daughters' and lead story to this book. A photo of 'Hirkani's Cliff' ('Hirkani's Buruj' in local language) gave the book its cover page. 'Hirkani's Room' is a concept introduced by BPNI Maharashtra as a continuum of this success story.

It is the right of every working mother and duty of every workplace to provide an appropriate environment and sensitivity to help her to meet this challenge. It is this very challenge that gives birth to the idea of 'Hirkani's Room'.

About Hirkani's Room:

Hirkani's Room is a facility at a workplace for lactating mothers to express and store breastmilk. If baby can be brought to workplace at intervals then mother can also breastfeed the baby in this room. **This is Stage I.** If feasible the facility can be expanded in to stage II & III as follows:

Stage II: Crèche where mother brings the caretaker

Stage III: Crèche with provision of caretaker by the employer

(This staging based on physical facilities has been conceptualized by BPNI Maharashtra. Staging is irrespective of lactation support that coexists)

The above concept is a paradigm shift from the existing concept of starting with Stage II and III type of facility directly. However the feasibility for the mother to bring baby to the workplace and feasibility for the employer to provide necessary space and manpower for a full fledged Crèche are not easy to combine. **Hence the concept of Hirkani's Room in its most basic forms (Stage I) starts with just provision of a place for expression and storage of breastmilk. It is in this most basic form that many employers are most likely to provide it and a much larger percentage of mothers more likely to use it.** Hirkani's room is a representation of employer's commitment to

the well-being of their employees in general and lactating mothers in particular. It shows that the workplace is Mother and Baby Friendly.

Why provide Hirkani's Room? : To bridge the gap between the truth and reality

Truth	Reality \ Myths
A baby needs to be exclusively breastfed (nothing else but mother's milk: not even water, traditional medicines, vitamin drops or calcium supplements) till completion of six months and continued to be breastfed along with complementary foods at least till second birthday.	Employers and many at workplace largely unaware of these recommendations
Animal milk (fresh or formula) does not give advantages which are offered by breastmilk and in addition it increases the risk of many illnesses	Animal milk (fresh or formula) is considered as a reasonable substitute for breastmilk
Nutrition up to 3 years of age (including nutrition of pregnant and lactating mothers) has huge impact not only on childhood malnutrition, diseases, deaths but also on economy, environment and health as well as intelligence and health at all ages	Fact unknown to many
After joining work mothers need to express milk and empty the breasts every few hours to keep up the milk supply (prevent drying) to help feed their babies when they are at home. Hence employer is supposed to provide 'breastfeeding breaks' to mothers.	Due to lack of awareness and facilities many mothers do not empty the breasts periodically when they join work and gradually dry up affecting total duration of breastfeeding. Some may express milk in toilet and discard it there. Thus the richest source of nutrition is put down the drain.
Expressed milk can be stored at room temperature for 4-6 hours and in refrigerator for 24 hours.	Not known even to many mothers and caretakers. Even if mothers are aware, office may not have facilities for storage and hence the breastmilk gets thrown in toilet.
<p>If a workplace supports a lactating mother then in return the employer gets benefitted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases employee loyalty • Decreased absenteeism • Decreased health care expenses for mothers and their children • Shows company's commitment to employee's well-being • More productive cost effective business 	Employers feel that supporting a lactating mothers is a loss incurring proposal.

Is your workplace Mother and Baby Friendly?

Kindly answer following 10 questions:

- 1) Did you know the recommendations for exclusive and total duration of breastfeeding?
- 2) Did you know that animal milk is not an equivalent substitute for breastmilk?
- 3) Did you know about the hazardous effects of suboptimal breastfeeding on child health, maternal health, adult potential and environment?
- 4) Did you know that supporting breastfeeding mothers at workplace was beneficial for the employer?
- 5) Did you know that mothers need to express milk at workplace in order to maintain their milk supply?
- 6) Did you know that expressed breastmilk can be easily stored for 24 hours?
- 7) Does your workplace provide a facility to mothers for expression & storage of breastmilk?**
- 8) If your answer to question no. 7 is 'No' then do you know that mother's at your workplace are either not expressing milk or discarding this most nutritious source for the baby in Toilet?
- 9) Does your workplace provide maximum possible maternity leave and other facilities like flexible working hours, working from home and breastfeeding breaks?
- 10) Do you feel that majority of your colleagues are well aware about the truths given in the table above?

If majority of answers to above questions are 'yes' (including mandatory 'Yes' for question no. 7) then your workplace is 'Mother and Baby Friendly'

An Appeal

If you get inspired to make your workplace 'Mother & Baby Friendly' by establishing 'Hirkani's Room', BPNI Maharashtra will give you all the technical support to achieve this goal. On the day your workplace inaugurates 'Hirkani's Room', BPNI Maharashtra will do its best to send a faculty to conduct a session on logistics of 'Hirkani's Room' to sensitize all staff members. And of course this comes as a gift from BPNI Maharashtra.

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