



La Leche League New Zealand Inc.
Order Department

Book Review

Hirkani's Daughters – Women Who Scale Modern Mountains to Combine Breastfeeding and Working

Edited by Jennifer Hicks

La Leche League International, Schaumburg, USA, 2006

Reviewed by Rosemary Gordon

The unusual title derives from an Indian tale from the 1600s of a milkmaid, Hirkani, who one day delivered milk to the royal fort, high on a mountain. At dusk the gates to the fort were closed for security reasons, and Hirkani was trapped in the fort, with her baby waiting in the village below. Determined to return to him, she climbed down a vertical 1000 ft cliff to get back to her village. The king was so impressed that he honoured her, and even today, the village is still called Hirkani Village.

I found myself involved and amazed from start to finish of this book. Many of the stories tell of women so determined to breastfeed that they went to great lengths and made many sacrifices to succeed – sometimes with support and other times with none. Also fascinating was the information about support available in different countries for breastfeeding mothers in paid work. Many countries have much better legislation and conditions than does New Zealand, where a big gap exists in that there is no provision for breastfeeding breaks, let alone paid breaks. By contrast for example, in Slovenia, where 67% of women are in the paid work force, and where the birth rate is extremely low, there are 365 days of paid parental leave and the mother can use an hour a day for feeding or expressing, plus there are many other child-friendly benefits.

There is also a section on Breastfeeding-Friendly Employers. Would that all employers were like the ones mentioned here! For example, I can't imagine anyone ever wanting to leave the SAS Corporation in North Carolina, where employees have access to lactation experts, a lactation room with breast pumps, childbirth and breastfeeding classes, a company-wide recognition of World Breastfeeding Week, an on-site Montessori daycare centre, and where mothers are paged when their babies need feeding and can use the breastfeeding lounge any time of day!

There is a New Zealand connection with *Hirkani's Daughters* – Dr Judith Galtry has written a Foreword and Sarah Farquhar, an early childhood educator from

Wellington, tells her story. Some of you may remember their session from the 2004 LLLNZ Conference, which Sarah mentions favourably in her story.

If you want a book that is full of the 'how tos' of combining breastfeeding and working, then this is not the book for you. Try *Nursing Mother, Working Mother* by Gale Pryor instead. Although *Hirkani's Daughters* does have a brief section at the end called 'What Working Mothers Need to Know' which contains handy hints, and although there are good ideas contained in each story, the focus of this book is really on the amazing and inspiring stories of real women from all around the world who have "scaled modern mountains to combine breastfeeding and working."

Original review, printed in Aroha [the LLLNZ journal for families] Volume 8 Number 4

Price list and Order form <http://www.lalecheleague.org.nz/resources/books-a-leaflets>