

New Lease of Life

Bulan Hansa is a man from Paraja tribe who lives in Datunput, a hamlet village of Khamra in Badel Gram Panchayat of Nandapur block. His family consists of his wife Gunu, daughter Parvati, (4 years old) and son Labkush (7 months). He owns a mud hut with tiled roof.

The year 2003, brought with it misfortune for Bulan as he was arrested by the police on charges of murder of Sonu Hansa, his paternal uncle. It was purely accidental. "One day all of a sudden my uncle rushed into my house and tried to kill me with an axe in hand. I wanted to defend myself, and in the encounter my uncle lost his life. I was quite fixed and stood shivering as I couldn't believe it for myself. In my heart of hearts I had never thought that I would ever commit such a heinous crime as murder and that too of my own paternal uncle," Recalls Bulan. He was arrested on charges of murder and sent to jail. For a moment he thought that his life is finished for ever to be spent within the boundary of prison cell, isolated from family and friends. "What would happen to my wife and children? Would I be acceptable as before? Would I walk out of the jail to be despised by everybody as a criminal? What would happen to my children if I would be convicted and sent to jail?" All these questions perplexed him. In side the corner of the jail he would long for his native village, his friends and family. "Most often as I closed my eyes, I would pray God to wash away all my sins I have committed though accidentally and forgive me, lead me out of this darkness so that once more I would be able to lead a normal life," says Bulan.

The trial continued for one and half year. But at last, the Hon'ble court of the District and Sessions Judge, acquitted him of the charges under benefit of doubt and he was set free. He returned home, a man who had lost many resources which were the only means of livelihood for his family. He had spent a sum of Rs 80,000/- including service charges of Advocate to court Stamp fee for which he had to sell away 5 Acres of land and mortgage another 3 Acres. Even his family had sold the bullocks to meet the expenses. For the time being he couldn't think of an immediate source of livelihood except wage labour.

Though he is now left with four acres of land, he has to depend on neighbors to till the land. He has to wait until they complete ploughing their lands and then only he borrows their bullocks for tilling his own piece of land. In exchange sometimes, he has to render free labour. Hence, he gets less yield in comparison to others as there is delay in sowing and he cannot cultivate the entire patch. Last year he could raise crops in 2 acres only and another 2 acres were left fallow as it was very late and the monsoon downpour had started. The yield was not adequate to feed his family even for six months. Worried and depressed, I left home and took up the job of Khalasi (local word for wage labourer) at Jalaput.

Pragati is implementing Community Development Project in Badel Gram Panchayat since 2003 and a Village Development Committee has been formed in Datunput village. As the

process was started in 2006 for selection of beneficiaries under Shakti Sahaya Scheme, there were two meetings in the village where the scheme was discussed by the staff of Pragati. The Village Development Committee was to select the beneficiaries in the presence of leaders of 'Gaon Sangathan' (Panchayat level CBO). The VDC selected Bulan as a beneficiary under the scheme to be supported with a pair of bullocks. The villagers have forgiven him, as his act was unintentional. They thought that Bulan should be given an opportunity to start a new life with his family as a normal human being.

He got an amount of Rs 6890/- from VDC and purchased a pair of bullocks from the local weekly market in November 2006 in the presence of Purchase Committee consisting of both VDC/CBO members. He also got Rs 1325/- for construction of shed for bullocks. Out of this, he had spent Rs 200/- to receive training for cattle care and management.

After getting the pair of bullocks, he thought of raising summer paddy but it was not feasible as he has only uplands which are rain fed. However he thought of an alternative. He requested Guru Hansa, of Masuri village to share his land (15 Cents) for six months. He ploughed the land by the newly purchased bullocks, which took a period of seven days. He raised tomato, beans and watermelon there. He along with his wife used to do watch and ward since open grazing is a practice in these areas. Due to water problem, he couldn't get proper yield. However, he earned Rs 1760/- excluding all investments.

With the first pour of monsoon he ploughed all his 4 acres of land and raised paddy, Ragi, Niger and vegetables like tomato and chilly. He got very good harvest i.e. 6 quintals of paddy, 2 quintal of Ragi, 1.5 qnt Niger and 3.6 qnt of kolatha (pulse crop) and also good yield from vegetable crops. The total monetary value comes around Rs 16500/- during Kharif 2007.

Now he wants to lead a normal life and pray God to forgive for the act he has committed by twist of fate. He participates in VDC meetings and shares about his bullocks and income he has earned. Some times he also goes to the CBO meeting held at Kanti. He is also helpful towards the woman of his deceased paternal uncle who lives in the village and has nobody to depend upon.

He and his wife look after the bullocks and constructed a shed for them as learnt from the training. "I am thankful for the compassion shown towards me by my fellow villagers and I owe all of them who helped me in the process of getting the support by dint of which I have got back my mortgaged lands. I have also insured my bullocks and started savings in my pass book".

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