

Listening, Understanding and taking Action Change life

This is the story of Ranu Begum, a hard working fighting lady lives in Basundhara village in Satkhira, her story tells the affect and impact of social bondage, culture and practice in people life and how these push families to difficulties. She is a business women sales fire wood in her shop for villagers. This is her income, and she lives in a single room house next to her shop. Her day starts early in the morning and ends late night. This also will tell how after coming in touch with SOHAY employees, her life has been transformed. SOHAY stands by her side taught her how to fight back and challenges the social culture and practices prevails in the village, that refrained her entering into another hardship and difficulties. In this story SOHAY will highlight the downside of the social culture and practices, unless there is group or people in the community to challenge it. Ranu Begum is the vivid example where the social capital and culture are the cause for hardship and difficulties. This is general understanding and belief that social bondage, capital and culture helped people living in peace and harmony. SOHAY agrees the social culture, practice and bondage are important in social life. But the organization experienced that if the good social culture and practices are undermined by the bad practices then the result is totally different. SOHAY would like to argue here that the social culture, practice and bondages are helpful for families' life if the society work positively.



Ranu Begum a middle age women, living in Basundhara village in Binerpota, Satkhira. Her husband left her with two daughters married another lady moved to other location, stopped paying any expenditure of this family, the society did not help her during the difficult time. None was by her side. So, Ranu Begum asked if in difficult time society does not stand by her side what the use of the society, she does not like. Ranu Begum in her hard time, looking for



work, but did not get any, so seeing no other way she started her own firewood selling shop. Slowly, she started earning and managing the family expenditure. She gave marriage of her elder daughter to a day laborer due the influence of the society. The arguments were she will be relieved and one less mouth she has to feed if she gives marriage to her elder daughter. She will live in peace and good life with her younger daughter. According to her the fact is different. She agreed the marriage of her elder daughter. She did not think the other side of expenditure; she paid the dowry for her elder daughter happiness. She earns very little, she knew she needed money for the marriage of her

daughter, so she saved money from her tiny income. During the marriage ceremony of her daughter she spent all her savings, borrowed money from relatives and neighbors meeting the cost. Now she has to pay the dowry and other demand of her son-in-law including she has to repay the loan to relatives and neighbours. She worked long hard hours for the smiles of her children life, but she still did not see this. She does not know when the comfort time will come, and does not think will come soon. Ranu Begum thinks listening the voice of the community did not reduce. She entered into another form of hardship. Her younger daughter is also growing now sixteen years of age.

The same local neighbors and relatives were pushing her to do the same she did for her elder daughter. She also felt forced listening to them. Her daughter did not go to school, stay home with her and move around the villages with friends. She felt if she does not agree with the local people it would be hard for her to give marriage of this girl in future. She was thinking what she should do. She was in dilemma.

SOHAY women empowerment program in Binerpota, Satkhira started last year. The first part of the programme was to move around the villages and speak to local women to understand the situation of women and what type of programme they expect from SOHAY that will help them. In the community meeting SOHAY staff highlighted how the village women enter into different difficulties including listening from neighbors or relatives. Ranu Begum was present there and listened what SOHAY staff discussed with full attention and find her problem are almost similar to what had been discussed by SOHAY staff she indicated the SOHAY staff that she would like to speak to her alone.

SOHAY field staff listen Ranu Begum bring it to the office for discussion. The team sat and discussed the root cause of the problem and difficulties, through analyzing the current situation and detail discussion with Ranu Begum and neighbors they came to the conclusion that the social culture and practices are the real culprit. This has also been revealed that the present situation is not because of something had happened yesterday or a year before; this has cropped over number of years. So, this



is not easy to say that this will go quickly, the present social culture and practices. The illiterate women like her despite born and brought up in the society, does have any value in the society. They are looking ways, how they could fight back to the situation that they do not want to enter. SOHAY played a critical role here, SOHAY arranged neighbors meeting at Ranu Begum Home, asked local elite and influential members joining the meeting. SOHAY Programme Manager, explained what SOHAY so far did such as detail discussion with Ranu Begum, her close neighbors, local elderly women and men, etc, etc.

The SOHAY programme manager appreciate the social culture and practice and the good intention of the community of helping Ranu Begum, this is good that the community is thinking how they could reduce the burden of Ranu Begum. He also said SOHAY is very happy seeing such a community where neighbor think about neighbor. He said SOHAY would be very happy if the community in this meeting also thinks the other side of the coin. And that side is not as bright as we are currently thinking. He said marriage is not a solution of any problem, it can create additional burden on families if the marriage is not good. He said at the age of 16 this would be unwise to give marriage of her younger daughter, because her daughter is not yet physically ready for marriage. He also asked the critical question to the community that how many of the participants can with full confidence can say marriage of her younger daughter is the right solution at this stage in Ranu Begum family. How many of them can guarantee that her younger son in law will be good boy and will not demand anything from her because of her present economic situation.

There were good discussion and arguments among the participants in the meeting. At one point the participants were divided along the line of their opinion. The SOHAY team listened to all, asked one critical question to the participants that what they had done if they were in the same situation Ranu Begum is now. The discussion immediately changed to the different direction, SOHAY team informed them what is Ranu Begum's present situation and how as her neighbor they could help her in the present situation. They all came to the agreement that giving



marriage to her younger daughter at this time and age is not the solution. So, Ranu Begum has to think what she could do with her younger daughter now and the steps she has to think. She can think the marriage of her daughter in three four years time.

Ranu Begum is thankful to SOHAY for their assistance to her problem, helped her coming out of the difficult time. She also thanks SOHAY chosen her village for its women empowerment programme. Ranu Begum join the programme as one of the families will work with SOHAY programme people how to ensure women dignity in life and the way of helping families.

Ranu Begum is organizing secretary of the SOHAY formed women group in the Basundhara village. She is now one of the leading women in the village stand by the side of women living in difficulties. Women in the village now come to her for assistance and learn from her experience facing the difficult time. Ranu Begum and her team is thinking of building relationship with the local community leaders, law and enforcing agencies and union parishad. She and her team have stopped several child marriages in the village. Ranu Begum is the name of change in the village.

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