



Amidst such tragedy, she still wears a smile!

Shenda Park, a settlement of Kolhapur is one of a kind. It is a settlement where all leprosy affected individuals have come together and started living as a community. These people have been boycotted by their families and they have no one looking after them. Around 158 households are located here and the people here have been residing here for around 70 years.

One such woman named Muktabai Mali, aged 75, has been staying here for over 40 years now. She is a leper. Originally belonging to Sangli, she was married at the age of 17 years in very critical helpless circumstances. Her husband was a construction labourer, trying to make two ends meet and sustain. They had a daughter, who's arrival brought in more expenses due to which Muktabai started doing domestic work in apartments situated close by to help her husband financially.

She later gave birth to two more sons but lost them, one due to malnutrition and the one to a very unusual disease. This was followed by her being detected with leprosy. Such tragic times were testing the patience of this couple and their daughter.

Her husband was forced to dump her and her daughter as the families staying in the neighbourhood kept polluting his mind about how everyone else too would then contract leprosy. Falling prey to this pressure, her husband left her and their daughter and remarried into another family and two children shortly.

In the interim, Muktabai with her daughter went to a leprosy colony, being helpless and trying work ways around being medically treated. She moved into Shenda Park settlement with her daughter. Muktabai sought support from someone who would help her raise her daughter. She married another leprosy affected man and started living with him. She domesticated goats and started to earn a living through goat rearing.

As her health kept deteriorating, she wisely got her daughter married into a decent family. Owing to her health conditions, she could not manage to rear her goats. She had to sell her goats to be able to get some money for getting herself and her husband treated with regular medication.

Few years later she lost her husband. Her daughter was busy with her family and hence Muktabai was helpless and had no option but to eke out a living by begging and seeking food from her neighbours on a daily basis. In such conditions, using the ill-maintained community toilet block was a pathetic and would lead to contracting more infections and illnesses. She was then left with no option but to defecate in the house itself and then throw away the faeces later. With SA's intervention, she saw a huge ray of hope and the smile she wears today is a sign of how the toilet facilitation has been a boon to her.



Muktabai and her house

