



Changing mindsets... enhancing lives!

We all know how our society is enveloped by various traditions, cultures and beliefs. Though change is an inevitable part of our journey, not all follow it or adhere to it when it revolves around religion and caste.

One such spectacular story flows here... In the settlement of Shahu Nagar in Kolhapur, the family of Shalan Sangavkar has brought about a huge transformation.

Shalan, aged 69 has been staying in this settlement since her birth. Her husband has been the head of the 'Wadar' community and a priest at one of the deities' institution. Gaining tremendous respect from families in the community, this family kept helping others through good deeds always. Shalan was busy raising her 2 sons and 1 daughter.

Gradually as the kids were getting older, it was difficult to keep pace with the financial needs. She started washing utensils and doing household chores in the neighbourhood to earn her living. They both made sure that their kids could avail decent education and ensured they got placed at work to start assisting the parents and become financially independent.



Shalan with her family members

Somehow after they had their share of good days, bad days were destined to follow. Shalan lost her husband to Alopecia and this left the entire family shattered. As he was a respected priest and liked by all, the community decided to pay a tribute to him in a very unique way. Instead of offering his ashes in a river, they decided to build a memorial in memory of him with the family's consent. They got this built right below the Peepal tree and paid their tributes to him everyday and prayed for his wellbeing.

Shalan was determined to water the memorial and do puja everyday and assume his presence right there. Soon their elder son followed his father's footsteps to become the next priest and their younger son would drive an auto rickshaw to earn a livelihood. As their families expanded they got new rooms constructed near the tree and partitioned the house to rent it out to families so that it would fetch them some source of income.

Gradually Shalan quit her work and started taking care of her grand children. As SA had intervened by then, during our primary survey, the field team came to realise that 12 people shared a toilet and the families on rent would use the community toilet block.

The main concern was the location for the toilet to be facilitated under SA's OHOT initiative. As the rental houses were small, having a toilet inside was nearly impossible. The only option was in place of the memorial next to the tree.

While discussing with the family, the solution of constructing the toilet in place of the memorial was being considered.

Though it was something to be well thought of and ideally avoided to retain the memorial, at the same time, the family was pressed with certain other limitations like space issues, and a dire need to have a toilet as well.

The family called for a joint community meeting where they expressed this concern to them. There were few people who opposed this concept but when they were spoken to in detail about how he was such a great man and always wanted the best for everyone, the people were convinced about this.



They all mutually agreed to pulling down the memorial and performing a ritual for his peace and then constructing a toilet in the same area for the betterment of all as he always wished for. Soon they arranged for a large puja and performed those rituals and invited lot many people for it and over lunch.



Before- location of the memorial

After- location of the toilet

This has not only proven to be a change in mindsets of people but also a cultural transformation at a community level bringing in such progressive and thoughtful approaches towards the betterment of the community!

