

## Life story of Basamma

**Participants:** Basamma (aged 34)  
Janardhan (Mental health coordinator GASS)  
Shravya (BasicNeeds India)

**Date:** April 6<sup>th</sup> 2006

**Venue:** Residence of Basamma

**Written by:** Shravya, BasicNeeds India.

### Introduction

Grameena Abhudaya Seva Samsthe (GASS) has appointed volunteers, some of whom have been mentally ill at some stage in life and now have stabilized, and carers of persons with mentally illness as resource people to help the staff of GASS with identification and taking the persons with mental illness to the camps and regular follow-up. During the review of GASS, I met one such volunteer, Basamma. During the self introduction, when asked to talk about herself, she said with tears welled up in her eyes, and voice choked, that she has lost her husband, has two daughters and now works as a volunteer for GASS. Instantly I knew I wanted to write about her. So I spoke to Janardhan who told me that she has symptoms of depression ever since she lost her husband and I could definitely write her life story. So at the end of the review meeting, I took her permission to visit her sometime to write about her.

As per the arrangement, I reached GASS on 6<sup>th</sup> morning and both Janardhan and I left on a two-wheeler to Basamma's house in a village called Melekote, 16 km away from Doddaballapur. On the way, Janardhan briefed me about Basamma and her work. As a Volunteer she is involved in identifying people with mental illness, bringing them to the camps, and regular follow up. Under the SSA (Sarva shiksha Abhiyana – Education for all) scheme, she takes charge of three mentally retarded children and trains them in activities of daily living, basic skills like color, fruits recognition, etc. By June, she plans to take charge of two more kids.

As soon as we reached her house, she welcomed us and we all settled on a mat in the verandah of the house. She said she was aware that we were visiting us and I told her the purpose of writing a life story etc. and took her permission for recording her story and taking photographs as well. She readily agreed and we started off with the conversation. I asked her what she would want to tell us about herself. She asked if we would want to know about her childhood. I said we welcome whatever she would want to tell.

“ I have lived in Melekote all my life. I was born in 1972. My father passed away when I was seven years old.” And having said this tears welled up in her eyes and she stopped

talking. She gathered herself and continued, “ I am the second daughter of my father and second wife to my husband who married my elder sister. I was very interested in studies but my grandmother always discouraged girls studying. She used to question, ‘Why should girls study? Let them learn to do the household work’. I somehow tried my best and studied upto 7<sup>th</sup> standard. I was very good at both studies and sports. I was the class monitor and sports captain. My head master was very good. He used to encourage us to study. I used to do the homework of other girls for food and clothes. They all continued their studies and are doing well. I feel bad looking at them.”

“Till I got married on Friday October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1992, I was rearing the buffaloes. My mother’s elder brother’s son married my elder sister. Then he wanted to marry me also. I was not at all interested. I put my foot down for many days. But he liked me a lot and wanted to get married to me. Everybody pressurized me to get married to him. Some people stopped talking to me because I refused to marry him. Finally I gave up and married him. He used to stay with my sister near Devanahalli nearby to Bangalore. I stayed here in Melekote and he used to visit me twice or thrice in a week.”

I then asked how was her life with her husband. Did she feel neglected by him having two wives?

“ My husband looked after me very well. He never deprived me of anything. I am a vegetarian and he loved eating meat. He used to force me to prepare it. Eventually I used to cook meat for him. He passed away on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005”

When asked how he passed away, she said, “ He had problems of appendicitis and Hemorrhoids. We took him to M S Ramaiah Hospital in Bangalore. But that hospital did not suit him. Then he was admitted into Kempegowda hospital. There he underwent a surgery. Then he was all right. He came and stayed here with us for a few days. He again made me cook meat and he relished eating it. Some days later he complained of heart pain. So he went to Devanahalli and later got admitted in Jayadeva nursing home. I was here at Melekote as I had to look after my daughters. He was even given some injections. Infact I had prepared myself to leave the next day morning to visit him, when I got the news in the night that he had passed away. I just could not take it. I fainted after I heard the news.”

I went to my sister’s house soon after I heard the news. But the relatives used to point at me and show unnecessary sympathy. I could not take all that. So I came back to the village after three days. After I came back, I became a loner. I never used to talk to anyone. People around me always showed sympathy. As it is my appetite had gone down after the birth of my second daughter. Some days back, my friend got married. I didn’t even go to the wedding, as they would introduce me as a widow.

Then she narrated one incident, which happened in GASS. It seems, Janardhan told another colleague of his in the presence of Basamma that he saw another lady in Narendra Foundation who looked exactly like Basamma. It seems she felt very bad and even thought of quitting her job as a volunteer because she said she felt, “Janardhan looks

exactly like my husband. Every time I see Janardhan, I feel I am looking at my husband and I feel like crying”. After saying this she started crying once again. I didnt know what to say. I guessed that Janardhan also was taken aback. Then we just let her pull herself up.

We tried to console her by saying that she now has other purposes in her life. She has her daughters whom she can look after and give them the education she always wanted. She is doing such a wonderful job of helping the people in need etc. She agreed with it and said, “He used to give me Rs. 1000 every month and sometimes I used to just take another Rs. 500 from his pocket. Now from whom shall I do all that? I miss him a lot.”

We didn’t know what to say. Nothing we say can alleviate the loss in her life. Also the wound is fresh. Only time can heal the pain and let her reconcile with this way of life.

We then asked her to tell us about her daughters and what dreams she has for them. She said, “ My daughters are studying. I want them to become doctors.” At that point I said that she should not force them to become doctors if they did not want to. She said, “ Yes, I should not and will not force them to become doctors. Let them choose their careers. I am ok with it.”

When asked what her daughters’ name were, she said the eldest one’s name is Akshaya (which means inexhaustible) and the younger one Mouna (which means Silence). She also told us that the second daughter is exactly opposite to what her name means and she is very talkative.

I asked her to tell us more about how she got in touch with GASS and what she feels about her work.

She said, “ In November 2005, Mr. Puttaraju, staff of GASS, contacted the Anganwadi teachers for a volunteer and they in turn contacted me and I agreed to do the job. Now I am working with young disabled children. I also identify people with mental illness and bring them to camps. All the families I visit call me ‘ Madam’ and they like me a lot. They offer something to eat and drink every time I visit them. I share my feelings with all the families. They are very much concerned about me. I like to work with these people. I have realized, that their problems are more than what I face. But when I come back home, my problems seem bigger than anything else. I was more depressed before I joined this job. Now I am very much better and I hope to be better in the coming days. I am happy that I am not mentally ill. Now because of this job, I am sane. All I want is to be healthy myself and to see my daughters happy.”

With this she said she didn’t have anything more to say. At this point, her younger daughter Mouna came along with her friend and we clicked snaps of both the young girls. We thanked Basamma for spending time and sharing her story with us. We also told her how much we appreciate her love for her job and that she should keep herself busy and slowly reconcile with the past. She said she would do exactly that. Wishing her all the best in her life and in her work we said goodbye and took leave of them.