

## **Providing houses to the houseless, darling dear thy name is IAY**

Irshada Begum residing in one of the remotest villages, Surag, in Block Lohai-Malhar of District Kathua (Jammu & Kashmir) squats in the verandah. Her hands are busy in separating half-ripe grains from the cob. The grains will be dried, roasted in a pan, coarsely ground by hand or in a watermill and then used with tea or lassi as the situation demands. This sloppy food is called (Sudhama's) 'sattu'.

The daughter true to be her mother's child standing beside nurses her middle-aged mother by pressing her temples. 'Mauj chhu kamzore gomat. Kal dodh chhus', she says. (Mother has grown weak; has headache). A dupatta tied around Irshada's forehead tells that.

A furlong down from the main Malhar-Malad track four houses lie in a row like bogeys of a train with a narrow passage running in front. Irshada's house is unique in that it has been constructed under Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) and has the identity inscribed as such Her husband Bashir Ahmed died when she was young leaving behind three little children to fend. The house was unsafe with rotten beams and the walls were developing cracks because of the leaking roof. Anytime any mishap could happen particularly during winters when there was snow.

Irshada raises her hands in prayer to express gratitude to all those who insisted her from the village level worker to village panchayat. Realizing the danger she was in the gram panchayat recommended her case for financial assistance under IAY. The village level worker delivered her cheques in two installments to construct her new house. She has now a safe house to live in, be it rain or snow.

Unlike Irshada Begum, who has now grown up children, Kanta Devi (SC) w/o Late Des Raj across Dehri Gala (Gala is a mountain pass) far away in another snow-bound mountain slope has two children including a suckling. The hamlet is Sukhal of the newly created Panchayat Bhullari, Block Duggan.

Kanta, about 25 year old, has constructed a house with a roof over two rooms and a spacious verandah with aid provided under IAY but that is not all. She is giving finishing touches to her house. Calf-high legs and hands soiled in mud with suckling tied on her back, asleep, and the other four-year old following her like a lamb while she works, Kanta is applying specially made mud plaster in husk to the walls of her house to give it a matching look like others in the vicinity. Did neighbours help? She nods in affirmation but only after she got the aid to kick start the construction. That is after all the beauty and sustainability of village life.

On advising to send child to school she says, 'Rati dine mere kane rohnda par kuse sale school-e-nikli ponda' (Day and night he remains with me but sometimes slips away to school). The Pry.School is just 75 metre away from her house. Two young post-graduate teachers from Dhaggar teach children with laudable commitment. Kanta's kid, too, when goaded by instinct quietly goes to school to play and savour the mid-day meals. A promising beginning nevertheless.

Kanthu, the Frantu, also settles down. Name: Kanth Lal, Father: Late Mahanta Bhagat, Mother: Late Roopi, Residence: Village Ganika, Block Bhagwah, district Doda, State J&K.

As long as Kanth Lal alias Kanthu's parents were alive he did not have any worries. The only thing he loathed was work. Soon after their death young Kanthu left the house to live with his married sister in a village miles away. But how long! His sister died. He had to come back to the native village. The old house maintained with so much care by parents in the meantime had broken. A dark room was there to live but a persistent danger of its collapse lurked.

He would spend most of his time in watching people playing cards. And what else could be a better way to while away than to hop around the card players! So being an idle fellow and a yagabond-like he was called Frantu.

Villagers would have disowned him but for one reason. He was the pied piper of the village, a darling of children in particular. God had gifted him with a sweet voice. On festivities with a dholak and a stream of melodious and sometimes very melancholy songs he would sway the souls. Despite being loathsome, villagers did not want to lose their singer in this 'Frantu' either. So Hindus and Muslims of the village got together. Kanthu was called, reprimanded and advised to stop idling and work in his fields. But where to live, they decided to approach panchayat and Block office for IAY assistance which Kanthu was given years back. He built the house. Villagers also assisted him in this enterprise. Kanthu totally transformed is now a settled hardworking man. Recalling past he heartily laughs and goes on to say in his local Siraji dialect, 'Razi rant maine grame bale huni me sab ki chhim' (Long live my fellow villagers now I have everything).

Back again in Kathua district, Makhan Din S/o Imam Hussain R/o village Jarai near district headquarters, Kathua is feeding paddy husk to the bovines outside his house constructed with the financial aid under IAY. Earlier, his summers as usual were carefree in the highland pastures but come winter the worry would descend on him. He had no house, a three-cot hut with a roof of straw tied with strings. The village panchayat finally came to the rescue of this poor six-member nomadic family. A resolution was adopted recommending his case under IAY. Makhan Din (ST) now has a pucca brick house, not a thatched but, comprising two rooms, courtesy IAY. Permanently settled he does not move up from the plains to the meadows any more.

There is no denial that the neighbours and relatives assisted the destitute houseless families in house construction. But it can also not be denied that they came forward only when the poor families were provided assistance by the Govt. under IAY.