

Unity strengthened Junaidbhai's confidence Because of women and youth groups' support, Junaidbhai's life became better!

The post Godhra riots in Gujarat in 2002, left many Hindus and Muslims families shattered. They lost their belongings, houses, valuables, near and dear ones and even their livelihoods. The impact of these riots on the psyche of the two communities was not positive. This meant that the trust, love, unity and brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims was replaced with no trust, fear, lack of security and a strong feeling of revenge.

The ones who suffered the maximum loss were the Muslims of Dahod and Panchmahal districts. Utthan had been working in this area on watershed and livelihood security issues. Keeping the sensitive situation and the need of the hour of that time, Utthan began infusing peace and a fight for justice within watershed and livelihood security issues.

The first task that Utthan initiated was to locate Muslim families who were living in relief camps and who had lost their homes were first motivated to go back. There, they were rehabilitated – by helping them building their pacca homes by supporting them administratively and with other necessary help. Efforts were also initiated to build bridges of peace, trust and a feeling of oneness. The result was “Ekta Mahila Bachat Sangathan” made up of women members from amongst Hindus, Muslims, Tribals and other deprived communities. The major activities were exposure visits of each other's religious places or savings. During the meetings, both Hindu and Muslim women members were made to focus upon issues that impacted every religion such as domestic violence, livelihoods, savings and other economic issues. Issues and their solutions were also discussed. The women members kept their religious affiliations aside and began working towards a new social order.

In 2003, with the establishing of the Ekta Mahila Bachat Sangathan, enthusiastic and peace loving Hindu and Muslim youth too came together as a “Yuva Sangathan”. Both these community based organizations – Sangathans, today are making efforts to address issues irrespective of the religious affiliations.

Junaidbhai's Experience

Junaidbhai is a member of the Yuva Sangathan. On 28.1.2010, he called the coordinator of the Peace program Jayantibhai. Junaidbhai narrated that they had a rented shop since the time of his forefathers. The original owner cheated and now he was on the verge of losing that property.

To address this issue, the members of the Ekta Mahila Bachat Sangathan and the Yuva Sangathan were called for a meeting at the Gothib Resource Centre. A note was prepared during this meeting. The details are as follows.

Junaibhai's grandmother, Surgamasi, had a rented shop in the main market located on the main road in Santrampur. She had rented this shop over the last 60 years. The receipt for the rent and the electricity bill were charged to Surgamasi – that is in her name. After Surgamasi died, her son, that is Junaibhai's father – Salambhai Chand began operating this rented shop. The original owner of this rented shop is a resident of Santrampur, Mr Dilipbhai Shah. Today the selling price of this shop – at a prime location would fetch a big sum of money. Dilipbhai, for his own narrow gains, had also hired the services of a lawyer for his advice. To earn a quick and a hefty sum of money, Dilipbhai began using various ways and means to take this shop away from Junaibhai's father.

Dilipbhai knew Junaibhai's family well and their relationship was based on trust. Dilipbhai approached Junaibhai's father and placed his idea that he and Junaibhai's father had shops in the main market but these shops were *kaccha*. He stated that if they vacate the shops for some time, Dilipbhai would rebuild them with bricks and also construct an RCC roof. He further cautioned Junaibhai's father not to share this with anyone else they would complain to the Nagarpalika officials who would stop the work. Since Junaibhai's family completely trusted Dilipbhai completely, they did not share / discuss this with anyone and vacated the rented shop. They did not take anything written from Dilipbhai. When the *pacca* shops were rebuilt, Junaibhai went to take the possession of his shop. That's when Dilipbhai flatly refused and said that this was an idea given to him by the lawyer. Now Junaibhai's family had no shop. Dilipbhai challenged them that they will not get the shop at any cost.

The Ekta Mahila Bachat Sangathan and the Yuva Sangathan members discussed and came up with a plan to get the shop back for Junaibhai. It was decided that on 29.1.2010, certain members should reach their assigned spots at 6 am. Three persons namely Jayantibhai, Salimbhai and Rizvi must remain around the police station. A few women members namely Naseemben, Manjulaben, Radhaben and Akhamben with a few Yuva Sangathan members should be present at Junaibhai's residence and a few to remain at the Gothib office. Each one was at their assigned place at the assigned time on 29.1.2010.

Junaibhai took some luggage from home and went and entered the shop. Till 11 in the morning seeing no problems or resistance from anyone, everyone returned home. Junaibhai's family till the previous day was down and out, but today after he entered the shop; the family's confidence had increased.

That evening, Dilipbhai did go to the Police to lodge a complaint, but the police did not entertain him. The police explained to him that the families had rented these shops sixty years ago and today the same families are on rent. Hence there was nothing the police could do. Dilipbhai was sent back. This process helped Junaidbhai to build his confidence and reduce his fear.

Thus, to get the shop back, Junaidbhai's family received all the necessary support from the Ekta Mahila Bachat Sangathan and the Yuva Sangathan. The family is doing their business from that very shop. Everyone knows that in the near future, this matter will go to the courts. But then justice – based on Acharya Vinoba Bhave's perspective will be in favour of "the owner is the one who tills the land or lives in the house". This was the impact because the Sangathan were united. This is similar to the saying where numerous ants can kill a snake. This showcases unity and justice. A person from one religious background gets unconditional support from members from other religious backgrounds is important for peace. Had the Ekta Mahila Bachat Sangathan and the Yuva Sangathans not supported Junaidbhai, Dilipbhai a member of the Vishva Hindu Parishad would have used that group's force. But united members of different religious background were crucial in this case.

Post Godhra of 2002, whenever there were any tiffs, or fights between Hindus and Muslims, the Hindus would always get the support from the Hindus who are in majority and justice would always be in favour of the Hindus. The minority Muslims feared to seek justice. Hence they would accept whatever decisions the Hindus dished out to them. The reason was simple; they were scared to defy the majority Hindus as they had seen the impact.

Even amongst the minority Muslims, families were scared to lend support to other Muslim families. Even the tribals and other backward communities, who were neither Hindu or Muslim, were wary of the Muslims or were brainwashed by the VHP and were scared hence did not support the Muslims. But non-religious focused Ekta Mahila Bachat Sangathan and the Yuva Sangathan, made it possible.

In this case, Utthan's peace, justice and right based programs through Ekta Mahila Bachat Sangathan and the Yuva Sangathan has been successful. These Sangathans work on peace and justice is possible, because they have non-religious perspective. Their support to Junaidbhai enhanced his confidence. The members – women and the youth from different religious backgrounds intervened for justice because they knew that they were united. They believed that by supporting those in need and attaining justice for them will strengthen the Sangathans further and Junaidbhai's case was an appropriate opportunity.