

# From a farm hand to a farmer

## Case of Ramaiah and his family of Punganur mandal

### Prelude

He was a farm hand once, working at the command of his landlord and making a living by serving his master. 'When we were married, we didn't have any land of our own, and he worked as a farm hand in the land of upper caste farmer in the village' says his blatant wife. 'Ten years before, when I was studying, my father and mother used to go as labourers to other's land,' says his son. But the things have now changed for good. Now he has purchased 2 acres of land from the same landlord where he once worked as a farmhand. 'Now we are renting tractor from that owner to cultivate our own land,' his son further adds. This is a story of hope and inspiration, of a life being transformed before our very eyes. This is the story of Ramaiah and his wife Thimmakka, and their aspiring son Subramanyam of Penchupalle village.



### The Story before

Previously, the picture was not that rosy. The family went through a period of hardship and challenges. A break came when the government awarded free land to the landless under a scheme; the family got some 5 acres of land under the DKT patta. But owing to the uncultivable nature of the land, the family opted to migrate. The husband and wife, along with their young daughter and baby boy migrated to cities like Kalahasti or Tirupati, in search of living a dignified life. The two did all sort of odd jobs - they lived and worked in a quarry and also did earth works or any other work that came by the way. It was a time of hunger and starvation, for they couldn't even afford three square meals a day.



When they came back to the village, Ramaiah brought a pair of calves along with them. One of the calves died, while the other survived only to be sold later. They didn't have any bulls for cultivating their land. Ramaiah leased a pair of cattle and ploughed a small bit of land and for the first time he sow horse gram in his land. This carried on for few years. But the couple soon realized that this kind of cultivation will not be sufficient for their future survival. They

thought that something has to be done.

Slowly and steadily, Ramaiah leased a land nearby and cleared the shrubs and weeds in that land, and started cultivating that land also. Their son was then 7 years old and started going to school.

At that time, they even tried out sericulture for about two months and got an income of Rs.7000; this money helped them to pay back the leased amount to the land owner. Continuing farming, the couples started to realize some income from the farm, and with this money they bought some half part of the land that they once leased and cultivated.

Ramaiah then stopped his son's schooling reasoning that he better start working. At the time, they constructed a pond-like structure in their sloppy fields that could catch the runoff rainwater. He used a guda and aetham to irrigate a small bit of land. This was his first major achievement.

With the income from the farm that he saved through the years, he immediately purchased a pair of cattle. With this, he ploughed the entire land that he owned, but was not able to cultivate any crops due to lack of water.

### **Entry of DHAN Foundation**

It was during that time DHAN Foundation initiated its activities under the watershed project in Penchupalle village, which comes under the Kummaranatham Micro Watershed. Ramaiah's family was advised by the DHAN staffs that if they did these watershed works, their agriculture will improve and so will their family condition.

#### **Works done**

With the help of DHAN Foundation, Ramaiah dug a bigger and deeper pond in his field that could harvest rainwater better. Later, they also purchased a motor for irrigation. With this they were able to cultivate paddy, and variety of other crops both for their home consumption and for income.

Later, they even got some mango seedlings provided under the watershed project.

#### **MFG**

Ramaiah and his wife also joined microfinance groups promoted by DHAN Foundation.

#### **Savings**

'Initially we saved Rs.20, then 25, 30, and 40; now save Rs.50 per month,' Thimmakka narrates of the graduation that they made in the group over the years. Now, they both have a total savings of Rs.5600 in their group.

#### **Loans availed**

The first loan, Rs.1500, he took to buy one calf, some five years ago. Later, he took a loan of Rs.9000 to purchase sheep. A year ago, he took a loan of Rs.12500 to purchase a milch animal.

### **Impact**

**Food Security:** 'Before we have to buy rice from outside, now we no longer buy rice from outside,' Thimmakka says happily owing to the food security that they have now achieved. There was no possibility of cultivating paddy owing to the lack of enough water. But now after the construction of the farm pond, Ramaiah leveled the land downstream and now cultivate around half an acre of paddy using water from the farm pond. They harvested around 15 bags of paddy this year, which is used for home consumption.

**Cultivating for home consumption:** Not only paddy, Ramaiah also cultivates ragi, horse gram, dhania, chilly, vegetables like radish, cucurbits, kooira, etc, which the family use it for their own home consumption.

**Growing cash crops:** Ramaiah also cultivates groundnut and tomato in the upstreams in between the mango plantation. With this, he got an income of Rs.25000 to 30000 and Rs.5000 respectively in the last year.

**Horticulture Plantation:** With the mango seedlings supplied under the watershed project and recently through the NREGS project, Ramaiah have also brought some 4 acres of dryland under mango plantation. Ramaiah availed support from the project to dig the mango pits, plant the seedlings, and fence the tree and to pour water, ensuring a good plant growth. He uses the water from the farm pond to provide necessary irrigation by pouring water manually.

**Fodder crops:** In the upstream, he also cultivates fodder crops like sorghum in between mango in the dryland, and CO3 grass along with tomato. This ensures year round fodder availability for his cattle and milch animal, apart from the paddy straw he gets.

Income realized in the year 2008-09

Crops grown	Yield	Income
Paddy – 0.5 acres	15 bags	Home consumption
Ragi	3 bags	Home consumption
Horse gram	3 bags	Home consumption
Dhania, chilly, radish, cucurbits, kooira		Home consumption
Groundnut	20 bags	Rs.25000 to Rs.30000
Tomato		Rs.5000
Mango plantation	4 acres	Yet to yield
Green fodder, Sorghum		For milch animal and cattle
Fish rearing	1000 fingerlings	Rs.2000 to 3000
Milch animal – 1	6 to 7 litres per day	Rs.1500 for every 15 days
Sheep rearing	20 nos	Sold to purchase auto for his son

With this income, the family was also able to meet the health expense of Ramaiah. ‘The farm income helped us to take care of all the issues and solve all the problems in the family,’ says Thimmakka.

**Milch animal:** Ramaiah with the loan of Rs.12500 availed from the MFG, purchased a milch animal. Now he gets 6 to 7 litres of milk every day giving him an income of Rs.1500 for every 15 days.

**Cattle purchase:** He also took a loan of Rs.9000 to purchase cattle, which he later sold to buy auto for his son.

**Auto purchase:** Ramaiah also purchased an auto for his son Rs.70000 by selling the cattle and sheep. Now his son married with a son of his own, drives auto, apart from helping his father on the farm.

**House up gradation:** With the farm income, the family also repaired their house, and built an extra room, investing an amount of Rs.50000. They also got electricity connection for their house. ‘We have now purchased TV, and have dish connection,’ says Subramanyam citing the increase in the quality of their life. ‘We are happy now, no problems.’

**Personal Savings:** Now, the family is also able to accumulate a savings of Rs.50000 to 60000 at the local bank.

**Insurance:** The family also had to face the sudden demise of Ramaiah who suffered from ill-health, immediately after this interview. As he was enrolled under the LIC-JBY scheme, the family got an immediate assistance of Rs.3000 to meet the funeral expenses, and later the death claim of Rs.30000 from LIC-JBY scheme.

### Future Plan

Now, Subramanyam has to shoulder the family’s responsibility. It so reflected when Subramanyam said in the interview before his father’s death, ‘After my father, I will definitely take up farming.’ Though he confessed that he is unable to decide on the fact to continue driving auto or to take up farming, he said ‘Now I am driving auto.... (But) I prefer farming. If I drive auto, I have to go here and there, but if I do farming, I can be in my village.’



In future, he hopes to bring the undulated upstream land under cultivation, by removing the boulders and gravels, and by leveling the land. He hopes to construct field bunding in those lands, and make those lands as cultivable as possible. ‘My father inherited some land from his father and gave it to me; I will increase and develop this land and give it my children,’ he says confidently.

He plans to lease or purchase nearby land and making it into one plot and construct fence.

When Subramanyam said, ‘Even if I don’t eat, I will invest in the land and cultivate crops..... (And) settle here in my village, and continue my life as a farmer,’ that the success of the watershed project was realized, where it continues to inspire the next generation farmers with more confidence and vigour, because of a good work done in this generation, today.