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# Mental illness shatters dream of RU female student



Chhaya Debi Tudu at the house of rural doctor Abdul Khalek and his wife Hasnara Khatun at Bherindi Bazar in Chapainawabganj. Khalek and his wife Hasnara take care of the mentally ill girl at daytime. The photo was taken recently. Photo: Star

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**Rabiul Hasan**

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Once celebrated for being an honours student, Chhaya Debi Tudu brought fame to her community for being the first from their neighbourhood to obtain GPA-5 in the public exams.

But now, she is confined to the walls of her home at Benipur village of Nachole upazila in Chapainawabganj district as she is mentally unstable and her family is unable to afford the medication to help her out.

Chhaya, belonging to indigenous Santal community, appeared for her SSC in 2009 from Bherendi High School and HSC from New Government Degree College in Rajshahi two years later.

She later got acceptance at the social welfare department of Rajshahi University. She stayed at a women's dormitory near her university and gave private tuition to make ends meet. However, it was

during this time that she started suffering from severe headaches.

In 2014, things took a turn for the worse and Chhaya was unable to continue with her classes for frequent mental breakdowns.

Chhaya's father Lal Tudu, an underprivileged day labourer, took her to several doctors in Rajshahi with his limited income. Lal has another daughter and two sons to take care of as well. Chhaya is the eldest among her siblings.

Seeing no improvement in her condition, her parents brought her to Dhaka for better medical attention.

There was a noticeable improvement in her demeanour when she started taking her medicines, and she even applied to RU to return and complete her degree. The university also arranged counselling for her so that she could transition back easily.

However, Chhaya relapsed within a fortnight and stopped going to class altogether.

She was becoming unmanageable by the day with sudden episodes of unwarranted anger, sometimes even hitting her family members.

Day to day tasks like bathing, eating and taking her medicine is a feat, said her sister Marina Tudu, who is currently preparing to give her SSC exams. She is the only other member in the family who went to school.

In October last year, Chhaya ran away in the middle of the night once by placing a ladder against the mud wall of her house, she added.

She was found the next day sleeping under a tree in the neighbourhood. "We had to chain her to the bed for a few days so that she would not escape in the middle of the night."

Her family members once had a dream that Chhaya will get a good job after completing her studies, but their dreams have been shattered, said Marina.

A rural doctor Abdul Khalek and his wife Hasnara Khatun of Bherindi Bazar came forward last month to help take care of her during the day time. Hasnara was her teacher at Shihu Shikkha School previously and always knew Chhaya to be a well-mannered, talented child.

Hasnara herself has two sons, both of whom are away studying in Rajshahi, and she always wanted to raise a daughter.

Chhaya was the first student of an ethnic minority background to get a GPA-5 in the district, Hasnara told this correspondent.

The biggest struggle is that she does not want to take her medicine, but they will not give up on her, she added.

"I want to go here and there, but they do not let me go outside. I hate that they insist that I take medicine," said a disgruntled Chhaya, laughing uncontrollably in between her talks with this correspondent.

Lal Tudu said, "I try my best to get her the treatment she needs. But it is not easy for us to afford it. We hope some kind-hearted people will come forward to help her out."

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