

Friends of VSSM & Dharampur

C/o. Rashmin C. Sanghvi

Because of Corona 19 Pandemic, we are working from home.

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Dear Friends,

Dharampur Visit on 6th, 7th & 8th March, 2021 Part I

Because of Covid Pandemic, for full one year I could not go to Dharampur or to Ahmedabad (VSSM). I have kept in touch with the Trustees of charitable trusts. But the charm & pleasure of meeting them personally & seeing their projects on site is a different charm. Luckily, now for several months there is no Covid -19 case in Dharampur forest. Hence we visited Dharampur forest & enjoyed its beauty.

I am presenting herewith the report of Dharampur Visit on 6th, 7th & 8th March, 2021. We five persons visited every trust covered under Friends of VSSM & Dharampur (FVD) programme and visited one new person. This visit report is divided into two parts.

- I. Avalkhandi Kelvani Trust & Mr. Hiren Panchal. Present Report.
- II. All other trusts. This report will be sent a little later. I am waiting for some details from trusts.

Observations for Part I are given below.

On 6th March Morning five of us left Mumbai towards Dharampur. Ms. Shweta Suraj Dodeja representing M/s. Vashi Electricals & M/s. Dodeja Charitable Trust; Her driver Mr. Ankush; Mr. Girish Saive – CSR consultant; Mrs. Meena Rashmin Sanghvi & Rashmin – myself.

Avalkhandi Kelvani Trust: (AKT)

1. **New Lake:**



AKT has taken up good Water Management (WM) & Tree Plantation (TP) programme. Since Avalkhandi is situated almost on the top of a hill at about 2,000 feet height, water scarcity after January every year is severe. We have already dug several lakes & wells; conducted Bandhpala programmes; Tree Plantation & Winter crop programmes to help this village. A new lake of more than ten feet depth is being dug at Paburnia Hamlet in Avalkhandi village. It is hoped that there will be good percolation of water into the underground and wells below this lake will benefit. This lake will cost about Rs. 3,00,000.

2. New Well

For AKT hostel we need good quantity of water. So far, a special pipe line of about one kilometre long was laid from hostel to a well in Vangan river. Between the well & hostel there is the mountain top. So the pipe line would go up the hill & again come down. Gujarat Government has started a new project in **Dharampur (discussed below in paragraph 6)**. These project contractors have broken up the pipe line. Hence under the guidance & help from **Dr. Shri Dolatbhai Desai** a new well is being dug. Full cost of the well will be paid by a trust with which Dr. Dolatbhai is associated.



This well is in the path of a stream with a series of Bandhpala within the stream. Hence hostel will get good water supply between June to January. We have to yet see whether the well can give water during summer time.

The road to this lake is down the hill on a temporary & rough road. Innova would not go there. So we went by hostel Jeep. Even this jeep would not go beyond a distance. So we walked down.



Ms. Shweta Dodeja on the rough road.

3. Mohna Kavchali Village: (MK):

WM & TP programme for several villages throughout Dharampur & Kaparada is now divided between two trusts: AKT & Sarvodaya Parivar Trust. This year AKT has taken up Mohna Kavchali (□□□□□□□□□□) village as a model village. While many villages of Dharampur & Kaparada talukas have benefited by village welfare programmes; some villages still need massive help. They are still very poor. See a home in Mohna Kavchali:



Santubhai, Ladakbhai & Kantibhai (AKT team for Village Welfare) had canvassed our WM & TP programme in this and surrounding fifteen villages. They motivated enthusiastic villagers from every village and

invited to MK village on 7th March. When we reached there, more than 150 tribals were building a big Bandhpala and were also waiting for us. It took the team several visits to these villages for motivating them.



Bandhpala work is done mainly by human labour. Men & women of the village work together. They work on one tribal farm at one time. Once one work is completed in a few days, whole team moves to the farm of next tribal. In this cooperative manner they try to cover all tribals interested in Bandhpala.

I first addressed the gathering on the need and benefits of Bandhpalas. They understand Gujarati. Still, it is better to tell them in their mother tongue – Kukna. So Santubhai addressed them in Kukna language. Then we had a few group photographs.



In front row from right to left: Ladakbhai, Meena, Rashmin, Santubhai, Shweta, Kantibhai, Girish & friends.

This group of about 150 tribals was very happy to meet us. Santubhai reminded them their own **history of just fifteen years back**. In year 2005 most families in Dharampur & Kaparada were poor. By May/ June their earlier year's harvest would be exhausted. People would have kitchen salt & some cooking oil. But no grains. No rice, no nachni, no tuver daal. Consider a family of six people. All would be hungry. Then the man of the house would go to Nashik or Dharampur city & meet some Shethji. He would request for a loan of a few hundred Rupees, buy food grains & return home. He would walk both ways from home to Shethji & return journey. It may take two days. For all this time entire family including senior citizens & children will just sit at home hungry.

The meeting agreed with Santubhai.

Then Santubhai said: Today we do not have that poverty in Dharampur/ Kaparada. People have enough to eat. They have reasonable houses. Every village has more than fifty motorcycles and a few have Jeeps also.

At this stage a few villagers intervened. One man said: In year 2005, I was in school. If a man came **wearing full trousers**, then entire school children would come out to see the man. Another said: there were no vehicles in entire village. If an outsider came on a motor cycle, children would run after him as long as he stayed in the village.

Santubhai continued: From that terrible poverty we have come to a better living condition. This is due to water management, job opportunities in Vapi and roads covering Dharampur & Kaparada. Still, most of us are uneducated. If we want to see our children better off we must do water management & tree plantation; and send our children to schools. People accepted.

Later, Santubhai enquired with village enthusiasts who had come from several different villages. They had accepted the idea and will work on the WM & TP project. Our trip from Mumbai to Mohna Kavchali and the Team's efforts for last few months was worth it.

I earnestly appeal FVD donors to donate liberally to Avalkhandi Kelvani Trust & Sarvodaya Parivar Trust for their Village Welfare works.

Avoidable Violence:

After the meeting we left for our car. All the tribals started coming on the road – they would all go back to their village homes – a few kilometres away by motor cycles. While some were waiting for their friends, I saw one tribal came, sat down & without any reason, used his axe & cut down a small bush. I talked with him: "This plant had life in it.

You have murdered the plant. Why? For what reason you committed this murder? Now I am taking your photograph & will submit as evidence to police. They will arrest you."



Everyone had a good laugh. Then Santubhai explained them seriously in Kukna language - "We are committing unnecessary violence on life. We should stop this."

Shri Maharshi Dave & his wife Ms. Rutu Dave of NGO "Sparsh" have taken up a project seriously. They will educate villagers to stop killing birds. FVD has agreed to introduce both of them to all FVD schools in Dharampur & Kaparada. They will meet teachers & students and show their videos & urge them to stop killing birds.

Visible Benefits of Water Management:

In March, many mountains are dry. All farms have no standing crop. So farm land appears brown. However, wherever water management programmes have been conducted, valleys in the mountain have good water supply. Some farmers who are ready to put in hard work, take a crop even in March. See Shri Ramjibhai & his green farm in the valley of Mohna Kavchali village.



Normally, the Village Welfare Team allots one Bandhpala per farmer. This way, the total cost remains within budget. However, since we have taken up Mohna Kavchali village as model village, there will be no limit. Every farmer can build as many Bandhpalas as he wants. Even then the total cost of Bandhpalas built this year in MK village will be less than Rs. 5 lakhs. We hope that in about four years whole village will be covered.

4. Khoba Village Water Management:

In Khoba village good Bandhpala work has been done in the years 2020 as well as 2021. As a motivation to the villagers we had arranged a dinner party for all farmers who had built Bandhpalas. We had invited about 50 tribals. **Mr. Nilam Patel** is managing a hostel for students under **Lok Mangalam Trust** at Khoba village. We had requested him in advance to arrange for the dinner party. He gladly arranged dinner.



Before dinner we had a meeting of all guest-villagers. Santu is explaining them the benefits of Bandhpala.

I met the villagers individually and thanked them for coming for dinner. (Just for clarification: such costs are borne personally by FVD Core group and not borne out of donations.)





Village farmers taking dinner.

While we invited only men & women who built Bandhpalas, their children also came. I had never anticipated children. **Instead of 50 guests, we had 150 guests.** See below the children enjoying sweets & dinner. While I am still inexperienced about the ways of the tribals, Shri Nilam Patel was well aware that children & others would come. He had cooked food & brought sweets for 150 guests. There was no hitch & no embarrassment.



Ankush took all the photographs for all three days while we were busy talking with farmers.

Total cost for dinner for 150 guests was **Rs. 10,000** - Rupees Ten Thousand only.

5. Women's difficulties: Avalkhandi.



This well has already gone dry in March. Women keep their pots ready near well. In about one hour enough water accumulates at the bottom of the well to fill in one pot of water. They collect two to three pots in about two to three hours. And then carry these pots on head and in hand.

She will carry three pots with more than 30 litres of water – 30 Kg weight and climb up & down the hill side to reach her little home. In Mumbai, for most people it is difficult to understand the plight of Dharampur women.





This old lady was waiting near the well for her turn to take water from the well. Of course she cannot carry weight. She was just maintaining her number in the queue. When her turn came, her grand- daughter came & fetched well water.

6. Water supply from Madhuban Dam:



Government of Gujarat is concerned about the plight of women living on the mountains in the forests of Dharampur & Kaparada. An ambitious

programme for supplying tap water in homes is being conducted. Water will be lifted from Madhubhan Dam near Silvassa and taken up Dharampur mountains at a height of 2,000 feet. Huge water pumps have been installed and Large Tanks have been built on top of mountains. Water will be carried by pipes to the villages of Dharampur and Kaparada. **This project will provide drinking water. For agriculture, they have to rely on Water Management projects.**



Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated this project in the year 2018. It is planned to be completed this year. He is one man who understands the plight of villagers. And he is capable of executing most ambitious projects for the benefit of village women.

Lifting water to a height of 2,000 feet and then supplying water to hamlets which have population of less than 200 people – is a complex engineering project. 2,000 feet height is roughly equivalent to a 2000 storeyed tower.

Till now nobody considered it practical to provide pipe water in huts on mountains. But then twenty years back people did not consider it necessary to even build roads in these mountains. Once roads were built, prosperity came in this region. (Better words – abject poverty got reduced.) When this scheme - budget cost Rs. 586 crores - is implemented, village women will be free from torturous drudgery of carrying water on their heads and will save considerable time. God bless this scheme and the men who could plan & implement such schemes.

7. Hiren Panchal:

Here is a young man fully enthusiastic & optimistic. He has a workshop in Bilpudi village in Dharampur. He makes different tools for village farmers that make their life a bit easy.



In March – April 2020 he was busy giving food packets to unemployed poor villagers in Dharampur. In November 2020 he was busy distributing blankets to the villagers. Whole year he is busy developing simpler, economic tools for the villagers.



Hiren has designed this metal stove for cooking by using firewood. The stove is raised by an inch from the ground. It permits better air ventilation. So wood burns more efficiently. The top of the stove is small to fit the bottom of a cooking vessel. So all the flames heat the vessel. No heat is wasted. He has experimented and women have found the stove to be better than the traditional stoves. His cost of production is Rs. 600 per stove – if he can make it in lots of hundred at a time. He wants to sell at Rs. 300. We have promised him Rs. 30,000 to start with. Further Rs. 70,000 can be paid as he presents further plans.



Many different tools have been developed by Hiren Panchal. His workshop is called MittiDhan. "Soil is wealth".

In these villages, traditionally weekly markets are arranged. Every day the market will shift to another village. Hiren goes to these village markets & canvasses for his tools.



We plan to help him set up a proper organisation & expand his activities.

There is a special joy & privilege in helping young men & women giving up their alternative careers and working full time to make someone's life easier.

I am very happy that good work is happening in Dharampur & young people are coming forward to help the poor.

In part II, I will report observations in ARCH, Sarvodaya Parivar Trust, Vanpath Trust & Malvi Education & Charitable Trust.

Pranam.

For Friends of VSSM & Dharampur

Rashmin Sanghvi