

Wish come True

We had heard before that dreams could come true. But this happened to us recently so it will be fun to share this joy with you all out there, who ever wants to hear read or feel our emotions. Wish was to make a village in India self-sufficient. Although under the circumstances in which it became reality, were not very encouraging, none the less we were excited.

Last year Gujarat was under the worst earthquake, we witness the carnage afterwards. Then and there we decided to help at least one family to have home of it's own but for practical reasons homes had to be constructed collectively. We saw and met lot of good people and organizations doing relief work. We helped M.K.T. (Manav Kalyan Trust) in obtaining 104 tents and delivering them fast to the affected area. We also went with devoted M.K.T. workers to some villages, destroyed by the earthquake and had good understanding of their problems through conversations and discussions with the villagers. Once back home in the U.S. we saw that lot of money was donated for the cause of reconstruction in Gujarat. Our hope to help in reconstruction of a small village of hundred homes could become reality if we act now, we thought. Wrote letters and submitted proposals for money to few organizations like India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) and India Earthquake Relief Of Michigan (IEROM), on behalf of Manav Kalyan Trust (MKT) of Kherbrahma Dist. Sabarkantha.

After a long pause of Eight months, things started moving in right direction. MKT appointed us as Project Director (Umesh), and Project Coordinator (Rashmi). Funding was awarded by IDRF in three stages total sum of \$50,000.00. (25k at start 15k at 50% and 10k at 80% completion of the work). No salary for us as we are volunteers but some allowance partially to cover our travel. Rotary, Active Friends of the Homeless (AFOTH) of Novi MI, and our family and friends donated money for the cause. Once we got the initial money, planning was made, ready to go to India in Jan 2002 for about three months.

Our aim was to talk to Villagers about what type of home they want and can afford with our help, government assistance and their own resources (money, locally available material and labor). Some important issues had to be discussed before they even begin to make the house plan or village plan i.e. bathrooms, play area for children, market place, and space for village community building/s in the future. This facilitated several meetings with villagers in January-February where we also discussed long-term benefits of saving habits, using local resources, making a village fund, eating self-grown healthy food etc. As soon as plan of homes as per govt. earthquake resistant specifications was passed and adopted by the villagers, we went into action. We quickly found out that the cost of one such very basic house of about 320 Sq. Ft. will be at least RS 85,000 and with all available resources so far no way we can make this dream come true. But believe me, God was on our side and an unexpected help came from the Disciple Center of Delhi who wanted to give help in form of concrete coping and columns and some cement blocks to the tune of RS 20,000 per home. We got excited and ball started rolling.

We were facing yet another hurdle. Transferring money from USA to India in not a smooth task, it almost took two months to touch money in order to buy construction material. Conditions of Gujarat were not helping either in getting the work started. A bank account was opened jointly with MKT and us, to have better control over expenses. We used to go to GHANDHIDHAM, which is 60 Km., two hours' drive from Lakadia, to check our e-mail and buy some fruits for us, as these were not available in the near by market. After spending few days at Lakadiya MKT center, which happens to be somewhere in Kutch, a small nearest village market exits 5Km.away, the work finally started on 29th of March 2002. There were rooms (with concrete roof) to sleep in, running water in common bathroom (not attached) and a western style w/c. Food was prepared fresh daily for us and other workers of MKT who slept in huts built in the premises. The conditions were excellent compared to what our neighbors were going through like sleeping in tent or under open sky. Temperature was still bearable hovering around 70-85 degree F. we used either bottled or boiled water in order to keep our self-healthy. The site of Sursardham Village is at least 28km from Lakadia and it used to take hour and half to reach there by the van provided by M.K.T. Nearest village is Kidia Nagar, about four kilometers from the site of new village but there is a temple named Sureshwer Mandir right by the site and we used to have our meetings on the roofless hall's floor, under the shattered tents. The priest and his family members were very kind and hospitable and people from far and near were coming to visit this temple every day.

With the help of dedicated M.K.T. workers like Mary, Cyrus, Ashok, Saroj, Nirmal, Rekha and others we could visit few more villages to see some of the other projects of M.K.T. while we were in Lakadiya. We met and talked to members of different communities i.e.: Maldhari, Rabari etc. and it gave us more insight into the problems and struggles as well as the understanding of their deep-rooted culture. In center M.K.T. frequently arranged different camps to educate and inform the men and women of surrounding villages. Issues discussed were agriculture, food, health, hygiene, childcare, etc. One such camp of young girls, about 30 of them, age eight to ten, from five villages, took place while we were there. These girls did not receive any school education because it is not considered good in their culture. They were smart and beautiful but an older woman from each village chaperoned them in tractors. They stayed whole day at the center and participated in a fun and information filled program. They learnt about common diseases and their cures. They were served healthy food, which they also helped M.K.T. workers prepare. It was a very positive and enjoyable experience for us to see such good work being done.

We accompanied Syrus and Rasikbhai to MAVAKA, MOTIRAV, KHANPAR and SAI when they went to these villages for a survey about the possibility of goat cheese plant to help villagers find a second source of income by selling goat cheese, which is more expensive than regular cheese. Water scarcity had forced villagers to replace cows with goats for milk since goats eat much less and can survive on dry twigs and thorns unlike cows who only eat greens. We went to Thoriyar with Mary and Ranchhod and saw massive digging for water collecting talaabs by the help of tractors. We also saw houses being constructed and Umesh's expert advice was well taken when he noticed that the laborers were not following code in laying the steel bars.

One day we went to see DHAULAVEERA with Mary and Ranchhod. It's six Thousand years Old City of archeological importance being excavated, similar to the famous Mohan-Jo-Daro. It was very interesting to learn how people in ancient time had planned that town with massive water storage tanks and big drains leading to those tanks probably to collect rain water.

Dhan Dhan Satguru Dera near M.K.T. Center in Lakadia had a beautifully green, fruitful farm in the middle of dry land of Kutch. It's occupants came from Haryana and with the help of powerful pumps drawing water from under the ground in short span of 12 months having so much yield of vegetables and fruits they were sharing with neighbor and selling in market. We wondered why they could not be an example for others and soon learnt that people know, it is not so good for the already water deficit area to draw water from deep down under the earth. Besides, common man in Kutch does not have resource to buy those powerful pumps.

We wanted to see CHUBDAKA and RATNAL even in riot torn Gujarat, specially because we had seen those places last year when everything of these villages was gone and they looked like Ghost Towns. We had talked to it's people about their miseries then and also had shared and assured hoped in better future. Chubdak is a Muslim town so our friends tried to persuade us from visiting it just on the day of Moharram. But we went there next day with our driver (Raju) from MKT. We were very happy to see that they have their homes rebuilt with the help of some foreign agency. They were also very happy to see us again after they realized, we were Lallubhai's friend from MKT, they had all praise for MKT. RATNAL which is mostly Hindu town, also had quite a few brick homes and people are doing their normal business. During Moharram we saw many tazias and both Hindu and Muslims were participating in Festivities. We saw and felt during our Gujrat trip that mostly people like to live in peace, provided outsiders and so called petty leaders, left them alone.

In this 80 days trip we covered almost six states in Western and Northern India. Following are the details of what we did in some places we visited.

ADHOI was worst place we witnessed during our trip. Whole town is still as it was on the fateful morning of 26th Jan 2001. People started their life near the bottom of hill in tents and schools, shops etc. were running in tin sheds. The money promised for relief was distributed but only two or first installment was completely given by Government, which is not sufficient to start the construction of homes. Government of Maharastra promised to do reconstruction of Adohi but as all we know lot of snags are to be worked out, as result of that people are still sleeping out in open or under the tents shattered by the high winds.

We went to AHMDABAD twice, once before the riots and another time when P. M. Bajpai ji was also visiting it. Instead of our anticipated meeting with him we unexpectedly met the new police commissioner Mr. Robero, appointed by the Center to see the working of Gujarat police, he was also commissioner of police during earlier riots

in Gujarat and had handled the job very well. Hopefully he had lived up to their expectations now as well. We were fortunate to have met him and asked questions like how police can match the firing power of AK47 Vs Antique 303 rifles. We stayed at Hare Krishna Temple where it is very peaceful and we could have Darshan, Prashad (food that has been offered to God), and attend Mangalarati at 4 AM in the morning. We visited Manu Bhai Shah's Consumer Education & Research Center (CERC), which is a fine non profit establishment to scientifically research the products and grade them on basis of acceptable standard of their claims made by various manufacturer companies. We met the dedicated and highly professional staff, saw their laboratories and library and learnt stories about their struggles as well as accomplishments. We also made two gift subscriptions of their quarterly magazine "Insight", which they publish without any advertisements, to our two brothers so they can be aware of such things happening in India (Buyers Guide). In the evening he treated us for dinner at a very prestigious Ellis Bridge Gymkhana Club with his wife and son. This area was very peace full during riots. In Ahmdabad we also met Mr. Dhaval Chandora regarding some donated money, which was left from a previous project, for our village Sursardham but because of the riots it could not be achieved.

In AJMER we met most astonishing man, Dr. K.C. Jain who is expert accupressurist, who was very loving and commands respect through his experience, knowledge, behavior and dedicated service to his patients. We picked couple of tricks and for every body's benefit we will try to narrate them here. First, if you have problem of bowl motion every day, try this your self, no medicine, put your right hand thumb over the middle of your chin and rotate it anti-clock wise for few minute and hope fully you will have clear bowl. If it is not working, drink a full glass of lukewarm water before doing it. Second thing, if you are feeling dizzy, clasp your hands firmly together squeeze and rub like you are washing them with water but use little more pressure, hope fully you will feel batter and may avoid fall and injuries, save your bones. Introduced Dr. Jain to our mausi's children who reside in Ajmer as well.

In ANAND we met with DR. S. Mohana, (Deputy Director of SPRERI) about the possibility of meeting energy needs of Sursardham by unconventional sources. Gas can be made from Sabzimandi waste, only 20 to 30 kg of waste can produce some 3 cylinders of cooking gas we learnt from him. There we came to know about our long lost friend's sister Poonam Khanna and we surprised her by our visit and celebrated her daughter Komal's birthday as well. Visited and dined at Hare Krishna Temple of Vallabh Vidya Nagar. It was very nice prashad, which we enjoyed with the grace of Krishna. Once we had lunch with Gita ben, sister of Praveen Patel of Milford MA. She also is interested in active social work at local level, so we were told. We met our new friend Mr. Rajput and his family whose son lives in Detroit area.

BALESARA is a prosperous village in Gujarat where one can see the impact of collective work and resource utilization. On our way to Lakadia we got lucky to be able to see a regional conference on water management held in Balesara where NGOs shared their thoughts, ideas and accomplishments with each other and work with each other. We were pleasantly surprised to meet few of our previously worked with NGO connections and hear their progress. We also saw a massive project that increased the capacity of village tanks and recharged the wells around it. This project was done in minimum budget but had it been a Government project it would have cost at least four times more. This is an example how cooperation can help us in achieving our goals. There we also experienced the village life for NGO workers first hand, like taking hot water bath in open, but it was fun.

In BARODA we met Mr. J.C. Mehta who is running a Dr. C.T. Mehta Rehabilitation Center and seen Novi Rotary money at work by providing artificial limbs and legs to polio victims and amputees. We had given a lecture about our work and life's philosophy to Rotarians in Baroda, we had good dialogue and they invited us for a return visit in future. We stayed and ate at Hare Krishna Temple.

We had been to BIKANER before but this time we went there to attend the wedding of our friend's daughter Neena Bohra in the beautiful GAJNER PALACE where we stayed two nights. It was a rare chance and we had lot of fun meeting friends from the U.S., enjoying the events and ceremonies in Gajner Palace. It was hard to believe that in the middle of desert some thing like this can exist.

DEHRADUN is newly formed capital of UTTRANCHAL and we happen to have our Naniji's home there. Our younger mama's daughter was getting married so we attended that, and shared our articles and thoughts about our project and life with all our relatives. Also visited Peoples' Science Institute and gathered some informative materials like posters which were very helpful in training villagers since few of them were even printed in Gujrati (native language of Gujarat) for building the earthquake resistant homes.

In DUDU we stayed with our old friend Lakshaman Singh, who also runs an NGO named GNVML (Gramin Navyubak Vikas Mandal Lapodiya). We talked to villagers about health issues, food and personal hygiene, by using alternatives to commercial products they can save money and invest it in other important items for better life. In turn we too could learn from many experiments they were doing in village to improve agricultural land and water deficit by understanding and working with nature. Different seeds are dormant in the earth and bloom in time when the conditions are favorable for certain type of seeds. Once the impurities are given a chance to surface by providing different pattern of earth digging in form of squares or rectangular, soil can be cleaned and grass can be raised for cattle. Also that in order to break the tidal waves, they had left an Island in the middle of big ponds. It also can serve as the resting and breeding ground for waterfowls like pelican etc without fear from dogs and other animals that harm them on shores.

GANDHINAGAR is capital of Gujarat; we met Mr. Priyakant Mehta of Center for Employment Development (CED), in order to inquire about some schemes of vocational training for the residents of new village Sursardham. Submitted a request officially from M.K.T. office to him as well after reaching Kherbrahma.

Our younger sister lives in GAZIABAD and we went to see her new flat that was being built in Sahibabad (out skirt of Delhi). As always, it was fun to visit her and our two nieces and spend some time with them.

In GULABPURA and JAIPUR we met five of our relatives and had some nice time and much needed rest from our active schedule. We also enjoyed shopping for our granddaughter Meghan in Jaipur's busy markets. In Jaipur we met my grandmother's brother for the first time, he is more than 84 years old.

HALDIGHATI is a historically famous place we saw with Anand; the place where Chetak (Maharana's Horse) lost his life, stands a memorial now. Two hills used for the legendary jump in order to save his masters life and the valley, which seems to be telling the story of the fierce fight in a very complicated and narrow passage. Seen India's great wall of KUMBHALGARH, on which 6-horse riders can travel side by side, it is almost 40 km in length, second great wall in the world. In this fort Great Maharana Pratap was born. It divides Mewar and Marwar area of present day Rajasthan.

The best experience we had in JAMNAGAR where we witnessed the handing over ceremony of school building (constructed by the IDRF, USA donation of 25 lakh Rs.) from Navtanpuri Dham to BDO (Block Development Officer) in Vakiya village. Meeting a great man Swami Shri Krishna Mani ji, and other dedicated people of Navtanpuri Dham and staying there is in it self like a beautiful dream. Getting to know Pranami Sampradaya was result of our lucky stars. There was love flowing in the air. The Maharaj (chef) who used to cook two meals each day for about 500 people, fed us lovingly each time as if his sole responsibility was to feed only two of us. He ate only after he was completely satisfied that he has fed us personally with love no matter how late we became. Swami Krishnamaniji himself personally made inquiries about our every need and comfort from sightseeing to sending us safely and comfortably from Jamnagar to Ahemdabad. The Dharmacharyas of Jamnagar are involved in charity and social work other than their religious duties and with the cooperation of local government officials, this place was peaceful in spite of tension in Gujarat. Hindus and Muslims were doing business with each other as usual and even up till ten o'clock at night we were roaming freely, enjoying our walk with others.

In KHAMBHAT (Ralej) we went to our friend Mr. Kanti Bhai and his brother Rav Bhai and their wives, who spend half year in India and half in the U.S.A. They have nice farm and a big house and heart as well. With their hospitality we learnt how to relax, spend quiet time, read books and enjoy nature. Seen Shakotri Devi Temple and made an unsuccessful attempt to see the sunset at Bay of Khambhat (famous for salt making) due to dusty or cloudy skies.

KHERBRAHMA is the place where Lallu bhai and Bhagvati Ben live. They manage the MKT affairs and office from their house, which is always busy with visitors. Their hearts and home both are open for every body 24 hours a day from villagers to N.G.O.s, even for birds, cats and cows whoever want something from them are never disappointed. Their simplicity and loving manner made us feel very much at home and close to them. We felt sad to see houses and shops of Muslims' burnt by mob but were guarded by police now. Businesses were down and there was fear and uncertainty in the air. We decided to do shopping here with the hope of contributing to the economy similar to the September 11th call of supporting local businesses by shopping in New York. We ended up doing all our shopping there and were surprised that we found very good selection of items there. We also saw another temple of Brahma here he is worshiped every day other than the one in Pushkar in Rajasthan.

HIMMATNAGAR means the place of courage but we were scared on our bus journey there on our way to Kherbrahma. Even our bus driver had announced that there might be a delay so the passengers who wish so, may cancel their journey because there was some tension expected ahead. When finally we reached Himmatnagar we noticed the area was charged with emotion and tension was in the air as we tried unsuccessfully to board the other bus to continue our journey to Kherbrahma. Without wasting any time we hired a taxi and got out of there. The incident had taken place earlier that some boy of business class Patel family had been abducted and was expected to have been killed by the extremist of the locality. As result there were good chances of riots and curfew was to be clamped in 15 minutes, which we knew later from our taxi driver, who did not comply with our request of stopping to buy a bottle of water on our way to Kherbrahma.

MUSSOORRIE is a stop we can't miss if we are so close to it in Dehradun where our sister Ranjana and brother-in-law Bharat lives, especially when our nephew who had bought a new car and was eager to pick us up from and leave us at Dehradun. It was cold, as we were not prepared for it in this trip. We had to borrow clothes from them. It was nice to talk to Mausiji and Mousaji as they are getting aged and this is only time we can learn few things from them.

MEERUT as usual was our first stop after landing in New Delhi and last stop before we reach Delhi for take off. But this is our best place where we do not have to worry about any thing and our great Bhayya (Rajeev) and Bhabhi (Sunita) will take care of us, together with our papa ji and amma. Their two beautiful, sweet and wonderful children are fun to be with. We accomplished lots this time as all our hand written Hindi articles that are hand written was converted in print and transferred on Floppy. Rashmi likes being in Meerut as she can get her errands done in no time and we rested some more here because we were advised by MKT not to travel to Gujarat for a while. Total stay in Meerut still does not add up to more than two weeks. This time we used to read newspapers and find appropriate articles to be share with Villagers. Some time we kept important clippings also to share with people in India and USA. I kept myself busy in other things including spending time with my childhood friend Prabhat who was stationed in Meerut. I was pleasantly surprised when another childhood friend Devesh came to Meerut to meet me from my hometown Bareilly and three of us had good time and a photo session together for a short while after 42 years. Prabhat now received his well-deserved and awaited promotion as he is transferred out of Meerut to Saharanpur we probably have to visit him there.

In MUMBAI we had wonderful time, as our friend Mrs. Mayurika Poddar wanted us to see her farm in Vadohi, located about 125 Km from Mumbai. We went there with mata ji and were treated and cared for, like her own children. There was more care givers than receivers. At farm the main thing was natural beauty and all the hard work that was put on to make this piece of land so fertile, things are grown organically, some of them first time in India, like Avocado etc. We got fresh milk to drink and ate few choicest things like dosa. In Khar we attended a marriage of our relative who is an actress in daytime drama and TV serial hence lot of Bollywood fashion we got to see. We also met all of our relatives in this marriage and visited my cousins' homes in Santa Cruz, Andheri and had a fabulous dinner with our very close old friend's sister Gomathi Srinivasan.

NEW DELHI as usual is hub of action so it is true for any body and we made six trips in all to the capitol. One of them was to pay our homage to our beloved Buaji (father's sister) who passed away at the age of 84. We attended the marriage of our cousin's son (who lives in California) in Gurgoan, Harayana.

We paid visits to our relatives as quite a few of them live in the suburbs of Delhi. We admired the famous Mugal Garden Of Rashtrapati Bhawan. We enjoyed meeting our phupaji who is a great person and always gives to us inspiration to excel in our endeavors, although visit was very short. We gave directions to one of our widowed cousin who wanted to do some social work.

We learnt by a news item that our old friend Shri Rajendra Singh ji of Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) who recently got Madagascar Award of \$100,000 for social work, is In New Delhi and organizing a rally about water awareness (Jal Biradari) in New Delhi. He invited us to address the rally which we did and advised the attendees to take proactive active than be reactive when it comes to water problem and stand together to fight for their rights. People liked our ideas and many approached us for our address and email. Here we could also renew our friendship with the village people who we saw during our last trip to Rajasthan while we were working with Tarun Bharat Sangh. Later we met Rajendra singh ji another time in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). He then invited us for breakfast in Gandhi Bhavan next day and asked us to read the Draft Proposal of National Water Policy, give our comments and write an article on water usage, which we did and sent him a copy.

We unsuccessfully tried to meet Prime Minister (as Bajpai ji was on foreign trip) about our Sursardham project. Hopefully, we will meet him next time. We went to see Railway Minister Nitish Kumar but the meeting did not materialize because of his ill health just before we were heading back to USA. We missed seeing a school in Mahrauli for needy children. We met Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar (Petroleum Minister of state) about our village Sursardham and also to get help in meeting with Shri Nitish Kumar Railway Minister, regarding cleaning of Railways. We also contacted retired Lt. Cdr. N.S. Samuel VSM of Disciple Center in Mukheerji Nagar about helping people of Sursardham, to which he agreed. We met with Medical Officer Col. A.S. Gurang of New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC) about cleaning offices and streets efficiently with vacuum and forced air instead of water. He became interested and thought we are salesmen trying to sell something. We told him we could send some information about this method of cleaning, rest is up to them to directly peruse with the companies and local authorities. After coming back to USA we have already send him the contacts. Also in Delhi we met Shri Lakshmi Narain Modi who is very much active in Cow protection and many different uses of bullock i.e. Mechanical-plough, generator etc. He and his wife always treat us for lunch or dinner whenever we go to Delhi and we also learn new things from him. This time he told us about new research about lighting electric bulb from Cow's Urine.

In PATAN we met Satish Mistry's brother Pradeep and his family, we visited them again during riots when his daughter was blessed with a son. Both times they treated us like family members with a good lunch and their hospitality. Patan is old capital of Gujarat, It is very populated and nicely developed city with lot of history and old places.

In RAJSAMAND we met our good old friend Anand Godake who is very dedicated for the betterment of the villages and helping those who need to be uplifted. There we met a young couple (Ratan Singh and Pushpa) who dedicated them selves for education. They are running a school in their house for the children of low-income families around them. We stressed that they should teach every thing that they want but most importantly make them less selfish and more aware of their surrounding. As present education system makes us selfish and uproots us from our native place and takes us where there are more opportunities, but it should not create a vacuum in the place of our birth. Education should teach us, how to create opportunities where we belong, also how to analyze the problem and solve them with new approach, initiatives. Anand and Ratansingh took us on their motorcycles to Dwarikadheesh temple, Rajsamand Jheel and Nau chowki; A unique pattern in ghats around tank; it had nine sets of nine steps in each flight. There were nine such flights from road level to the water for each of the nine chhatries. This tank was very big and covers around 2500 acres. There were shila lekhs written about great Maharana Pratap.

Wherever we went, shared our ideas on health issues, saving money with alternative methods, and make people aware of correct construction ways. Including but not limited to right way to reinforced concrete. Most of the time we tried lending our ears to their problems. May the almighty God give us more understanding strength and opportunity to help our fellow beings next time. We came across an article in a flight magazine on our way back from India. Electricity from the waves in Holland; This can be a good source of electricity production in coastal areas in India and same electricity can be used to clean salty water to potable one. Another good source of electric generation is temperature difference in top and bottom layers of water in the sea.

We saw Best of Gujarat during Worst of the times for Gujarat.

In the end we can conclude that a chance to make a difference in life of 750 persons and make them self-sufficient is greatest satisfying work we ever did. This is only possible because of God's mercy on us

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