

Our Village Development Issues and Opportunities

In a vast majority of cases we the people of Mandhata Samaj from Navsari District in Gujarat, are a second and third generation growing up in the countries we have settled in. It is the strength of our unique culture that even after 70 and more years of foreign residence, the villages of our motherland and fatherland in Navsari District Kantha Vibhag are so close to our hearts and mind.

Even our youths who may not have yet visited India enjoy Indian music, Indian cuisine, Indian RasGarba, various festivals, Hindu dharma and now Yoga is not far from their mind. To-date they may not have involved in studying the local conditions but the trend is changing, particularly after Shree Modi's visit to our respective countries.

More and more of our people are visiting India and their family villages and are inclined to do something for their Gam. This is particularly so of the large number of our retired people who visit and stay for two or three month in their village to escape the cold weather, or looking for a change.

This brief article is written to make you aware of the things most useful and needed to help our people who indeed are our kith and kin or distant relatives.

Before I write further let me introduce myself. My name is Keshavlal J Patel and I am from Bodali. Like most of you I left India at the age of eleven, seventy years ago, (23 years in Kenya and 46 in UK) but kept in touch with India and its culture just like most of you.

What gives me the knowledge and experience to write about our villages is my involvement in the **Kantha Vibhag Friendship Trust**, which I started 33 years ago. We do 15 to 17 Samaj development programmes a year every year in 50 Kantha Vibhag villages (for details see the write up on our website (www.mandhataglobal.com)).

Anyone visiting our villages will notice that the opportunities and facilities we have in our adopted countries are totally lacking in the villages. Basic facilities that we take for granted in our adopted countries are few and far between. It is only in recent years that there is tapped water (available for perhaps an hour or two a day), a few local roads and electricity.

For lack of proper education and skill majority of our people have to survive on a bit of farming, keeping buffalos and some semi-skilled or labour job in a near by city.

Our older generation settled overseas fully identify with India and speak with great emotion about our Gams. Hundreds of them visit every year and donate generously for their village school, temple, sport facilities, help relatives or some other cause. It is a fact that almost all families in our villages depend on overseas remittances. Their good fortune is that at least one member of the family may be overseas, this however can only keep the wolf away from the door. Unfortunately, there are some families who do not have any supplemental income from overseas, so they suffer and live a life of poverty.

Development projects in any village can only get done with the generous help of sons and daughters of the respective village.

We are now at a stage when ad hoc projects need to fit in an overall development of the Gam.

A comprehensive plan must consider education, health and hygiene, training and skills, etc.

All the above are interrelated. Each project helps the other to make quicker progress.

For our villages my priorities would be:

1. **Good Filtered Drinking Water** – This will cut out 50% of visits to a doctor and raise revenue for the Gam. (this is our experience in over 4 years in Bodali)
2. **Good Health and Hygiene** will improve concentration in children for studies – improves education.
3. **Education and Training in Technical Skill** – This will prepare youths for skilled jobs.

People in jobs are more confident and responsible – This I hope will cut **alcohol abuse and gambling**.

For the time being let us concentrate on these 3 Projects.

How do we go about achieving these basic needs?

These projects are not particularly expensive. Neither are they cheap as they have to be continued on a yearly basis.

We have set up Gam Mandals in all the countries where we have settled. Gam Mandals can take the initiative. Some Gam Mandals do that but there is nothing stopping individuals taking on a project on their own or with a few Gamvasi friends.

R. O. Water Filter Plant costs about £6000. This is a one off cost. An individual or a few friends can take this on. (Generations of people will be grateful to you).

Cleanliness and Hygiene – a part-time employee will easily rid the Gam of rubbish and plastic bags on a weekly basis. A sponsor or two can commit his/her wages on a yearly basis.

Education and Training: Commit to pay tuition fees for one or two students to attend computer, welding, motor wiring, motor mechanic, or other skill classes. Historically, our area has not produced any doctors, dentists, scientists, accountants etc. Similarly we have not produced any state representatives, top government officials, industry experts, or political leaders because students families do not have the necessary funds to send them to attend college/university, so our area continues to remain stagnant and backward because of a lack of higher educated individuals and professionals. The same students if taken to foreign lands will excel and do very well.

On this topic we must give serious consideration to setting up a Navsari Kantha Vibhag Scholarship Fund on a large scale. We have no doubt that lots of our people will commit to a regular or one off donation.

If enough support is forthcoming then we will set up a system to manage this highly commendable venture. Please let us know on the email given below or on our website.

A bursary fund for college education is of paramount importance for our people if we want to make progress.

In any case there is no end to what **you** can do and it need not prove expensive. But make at least a few years' commitment.

If you only want to do just one little thing then **Buy someone a buffalo, Plant a few fruit trees, sponsor a child's education or provide some street lighting.**

Finally, let me suggest an easy method of financing the project you select. Here in the Western World we earn very little interest on our bank deposits. I would like to suggest, you open a Fixed Deposit NRI account in your Gam bank on a long term basis in your or your family's name. You will earn about 7% interest. Donate the interest to your Gam for your project. Arrange with the bank to credit the interest to your Gam's, "Gam Seva Samiti Account" for whatever youkile to do for your Gam. Sacrifice the interest for the benefit of your Gam and your spiritual wellbeing. For Scholarship Fund we will open a separate account.

There are hundreds of graduates, professionals and businessmen in our communities around the world, please consider a regular donation and your suggestions to make a difference to all our villages.

If you wish to discuss this further email me at kjspatel@yahoo.co.uk

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