

MODEL SARPANCH

Series - I



Learning Lab
for Local Governance
SETU Abhiyan



About the Series

These success stories are a part of 'Model Sarpanch Series-I'.

Series-I includes 4 chapters, each from different blocks of Kutch, Gujarat. The mode of the documentation is based on telephonic interviews taken by Md. Faraz Ahmad, Programme Fellow, Setu Abhiyan. These are not verbatim of the interviews taken. All the interviews were in Hindi which has been translated, not word by word. The theme /essence remain the same. The interviewees were made aware about the edits and they agreed to publish it this way.

We are also aware of the rights of author/writer and it's creative liberty, yet went through moral dilemma while making changes. This needed to be shared.

THE INTERVIEWS CAN BE BROADLY CATEGORIZED INTO:

- Personal journey
- Development & Empowerment
- Vision, Achievements & Challenges



CHAPTER 1

Kanku Ben: A Model Sarpanch

"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved."

- Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar

Introduction:

Kanku Ben is the Sarpanch of a Juth (Group) Gram Panchayat that consists of 4 villages (Kukma, Nani Reladi, Moti Reladi and Lear). She is an award winning artisan having a long and interesting journey that is full of hard work and dedication, that led her to reach where she is today. In 2011, the then President of India (Pranab Mukherjee) honored her with a National Award for her unique design (Toran) at Vigyan Bhawan, Delhi.

There exists the concept of a "Model Gram Panchayat" but there is nothing called "Model Sarpanch". In fact, the idea itself came to me after being part of various meetings and activities with her. It is not easy to be a Sarpanch, that too as a woman. And, if you belong to a Scheduled Caste, then it adds even more layers to it. Such are the layered complications and boundaries of Kanku Ben's journey.

Thus, I decided to know more about her and document it.

Part 1: Personal Journey

Faraz: How has been your journey so far? If you could share something about your life experience

Kanku Ben: I belong to a family where education that too girl's education was the least important thing to think about. One big reason for that was financial situation of the family. Secondly, the school in the village was just till 7 class. So if someone wanted to study further she/he had to travel. In those days there was nothing called a free bus pass for girls etc. So it was an expensive deal to make. Thus, I completed 7th class and dropped the idea of going school and started working with the parents who were artisans. I was good in studies. Till 7th I always used to grab either 1st or 2nd division in the class. That was time when I decided that I will become something (didn't know what) and will not let at least my children go through this.

Faraz: What inspired you to become a Sarpanch? How did this happen?

Kanku Ben: Never even in my wildest dream that I could think or even my family could think or imagine that I would become a Sarpanch because my journey was such. I was very lucky that the seat was reserved for Scheduled Caste for the first time and I belong to the same community. Had it not been SC seat I would never become a Sarpanch. Also, I was an active member of panchayat and used to volunteer for various social welfare activities. I was also helping women through my shop in getting work. So it was a demand from the people that I should become Sarpanch rather than me choosing it.

**“A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture & transform.”
- Diane Mariechild**

Faraz: Did you face any discrimination because of your gender or otherwise (before & after becoming Sarpanch)?

Kanku Ben: We are a patriarchal society which has been followed since time immemorial. And it applies to all categories of women at different level. Strangely, earlier I did not feel bad or pained that I am being discriminated as many girls/women in the village see it as their fate or way of life. Now it pains me more because now I am working with various social sector organisations where I meet various people and know how women are being discriminated at different levels. I think awareness is also very important to identify it. Now we have Mahila Sabha, various committees where issues are raised to a large extent. It applies to even a Sarpanch who is a woman. A woman Sarpanch has to work at home and at office or in field. Thus, it is expected from a woman to complete household chores irrespective of her position or responsibilities.

Faraz: You are a National Award winner artisan. Tell me about your skills and experience as an artisan.

Kanku Ben: So this is our profession since very long. My parents did the same work. In fact, my in laws (both father in-law & mother in law) and my husband are also award winning artisans. I used to create my own designs for competitions that used to happen in Bhujodi (a few kilometres from Kukma village). Then I decided to create a masterpiece. It took me 11 months to create the design called Toran. It consisted of 22 natural colours all from vegetable and oil colours. The hard work paid off and got recognised by the then President of India (Shri Pranab Mukherjee) in 2011.

Part 2: Empowering Women

Faraz: What is women empowerment according to you?

Kanku Ben: Empowerment may mean different things to different people depending upon the economic & socio-political conditioning in which one lives. Earlier it may have been different thing to me. Now probably it's more evolved given the fact that my position is gives me some kind of privilege. It also depends upon the awareness of various things. Irrespective of all the restrictions of awareness & other resources and privileges women empowerment is basically is a step forward (a better stage whether it economic, social or political) that puts a woman forward from her earlier stage. It can be achieved through various mediums such as education and decision making powers given to women. Awareness, education and decision making is the good combination that will lead to women empowerment. For example, I made sure



(Design: Toran)



(Kanku Ben while receiving her Award)



(Women's Day celebration at Kukma Gram Panchayat)

Faraz: How did the idea of naming a street on the name of a girl topper from village school come about? Why did you feel the need for women's park?

Kanku Ben: The idea was in my mind that something like this should be done to encourage the girls of our village. In 2018, a special Gram Sabha was called to discuss specific agendas which otherwise are or might be left. There again, a similar idea emerged. Thus, it was noted down and legally formulated. It is also important because if talk about the decentralisation of powers which should follow bottom to the top, therefore, it should also be reflected at the local level. Why should every street, road and building be named after Rajas and politicians, why not the local people of the village? The result has been very positive. Now the girls feel emboldened and encouraged. They feel proud and many times tell me that ma'am please let us know if we can contribute in any way possible. They volunteer to encourage more people. Recently, a suggestion was sent by women commission to take steps to encourage girls also naming streets after their names. It felt good that different departments are thinking of something which is already being done in our villages.

As far as the women's park is concerned, it was a vacant place which had become a place for people to throw their garbage. It had become a very dirty place, causing illness and a rise in dengue cases, etc. It was also bad for our environment otherwise. Some people also wanted to occupy the land. So we decided to take a step. We took permission from the government and followed the procedure (legally) to take that land under the Panchayat. Also, 3rd January was coming which is the birth anniversary of Savitri Bai Phule. So we named the park after her. Many people asked who is Savitri Bai Phule? I felt that this is the right time to make people aware about her contribution towards education and women empowerment. A whole session was called to talk about Savitri Bai Phule. Now, this has become a landmark. People living nearby, identify themselves as residents of this landmark.



(Streets named after school toppers)



(Unveiling of the Savitri Bai Phule Women's Park, Kukma)

Part 3: Vision, Achievements and Challenges

Faraz: Tell me more about your vision, achievements and challenges (if any).

Kanku Ben: **Vision:** My vision is the same as Baba Bhim Rao Ambedkar had for everyone. In fact, now we can talk about rights and livelihoods or vision because he worked very hard to provide us the platform to do so, the vision document i.e. The Constitution of India. I wish to bring people together, where all communities are represented equally. Education is very dear to me and i want to ensure that no one should be left due to reasons which can be addressed by Panchayat and different government departments.

Kanku Ben: Achievements: We have worked hard and achieved various milestones. Our idea of achievement or development is not limited to infrastructure. We look into social issues too. Education should be a right to all and a privilege. When we visited private schools we saw students are taught to operate computer whereas government schools are taught traditional subjects. We contacted some companies to provide some funds from the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) which provided 13 computers to the government school. There is no provision for the government school to have a computer teacher. We appointed one computer teacher who is from our village, a computer engineer whose salary is ensured from Panchayat's fund.

Aanganwadis are mandated by the government cover, it's maintenance and proper check-up is done through Panchayat members and we have made sure that it runs smoothly.

Widhwa Sahay: We had organized a programme specifically for widows of our Gram Panchayat where more than 150 widow sisters participated. We made sure that this programme should encourage them both financially and socially. While we had different activities together we also filled widow pension forms, more than 60 people benefited from it. We had also organised a meeting with all the Pramukh (of every community) to discuss social issues and how to tackle the issues of ill practices that is has been followed since ages such as early child marriage, education of children etc. All Pramukhs agreed and took oath to end these practices and will not follow it.

Challenges: There are quite a few challenges, both social and political in our panchayat. GPDP (Gram Panchayat Development Plan) is a good process which has been followed by our panchayat. However, it sometimes does not get implemented by government officials. Talathi (Secretary) of our panchayat gets transferred frequently that puts a hurdle in completing records and that also becomes a challenge in coordination between the Talathi and Panchayat members. Social change on the other hand, is a long continuous process which needs to be carried on People do understand and change their practices if it can be communicated properly and made people aware of it in such a manner that it touches them at a very personal level. Social change is possible from within the society. Therefore, people of the village should always be the driving force for any change.



CHAPTER 2

Nitinbhai Patel: The Youngest Sarpanch of Ghaduli Gram Panchayat

Introduction:

Nitinbhai Patel is the youngest Sarpanch of Ghaduli Gram Panchayat in Lakhapat, Kutch. He has been an active member of Taluka/Panchayat since very long. He is an artist and performed in various parts of Gujarat and was President of cricket club in his village i.e. Ghaduli.

Part 1: Personal Journey

***“The only impossible journey is the one you never begin.”
- Tony Robbins***

Faraz: How has been your journey so far? If you could share something about your life experience

Nitinbhai: I belong to a mazdoor warg family and had a very humble economic background therefore; soon after my 12th class I started working. However, I continued my study and work both. I completed B.Com. and worked as a computer operator. I was working in the taluka when new Aadhar project had come. I was involved in that project and helped in whatever way I could as per my skill and capacity. I was always interested in the affairs of my village and would participate and volunteer in the same. That led in building trust among people of my village.

Faraz: What inspired you to become a Sarpanch? How did this happen?

Nitinbhai: It was always in my mind that I wanted to do something for the village but was not really sure if I wanted to become a Sarpanch in the beginning. Slowly but gradually I could see my role in the society. However, it could not have been possible if the people in my village did not encourage me. I am the youngest Sarpanch in the village. I was always active in any activities including social work, Natak, sports etc in the village. People thought that if I am given a chance I might do something. This is how my journey of becoming the youngest Sarpanch began.

Faraz: Tell me about your Panchayat? How do you see brotherhood & communal harmony in your village?

Nitinbhai: Ghaduli panchayat consist of all communities including different caste, religion and political ideologies. If I could give you one insight about communal harmony in our society, there has been no communal riot in our village ever. There was one Patidar Baba Peer whose death anniversary is celebrated by all communities. We cook meethi-bhaat and eat together. It is ensured that all food will be cooked in same utensil and distributed the same way. Not only different caste & religious groups co-exist together but also the members of different political parties in our Gram Panchayat come together whenever the issue of development of Panchayat is in question

Faraz: You are an artist and held the post of President of Cricket club. Tell me about your skills and experience as an artist and sportsman.

Nitinbhai: I always liked playing cricket. I was the President of the cricket club in my village. However, there were not many facilities available that people from my village could take sports seriously. We did not have proper ground to play. This was something that I took interest in and now we have a playground where people can play their games. I believe that facilities play an important role in shaping one's dreams & aspirations. I believe at least lack of facility should not be a hindrance to people from dreaming big. It is a continuous process that needs to be maintained throughout by everyone including the Sarpanch.

As far as acting is concerned, I was always into acting for many years. We performed so many Natak (Drama) in our village and across Gujarat and received recognition and appreciation for the same. Apart from my interest in acting I always perform character based on our historical figures of my region so that it is registered in the minds of our younger generation and they do not forget it. For instance, many few people of younger generation to know that Kutch was also attacked by Allaudin Khilji and we fought back.

We also perform for social causes pertaining to our village. Sometimes it is done for entertainment purposes and also to raise funds for some cause. For instance, we performed and collected 14 lakh rupees for the welfare of cows in our village.



(Nitinbhai Patel (right) during a play)

Part 2: Development and Empowerment

“True Democracy cannot be worked by twenty men/women sitting at the center. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

Faraz: What is 'development and empowerment' especially women empowerment according to you?

Nitinbhai: Development and Empowerment is a complex subject which is based on individual perception and viewpoint. Generally, development is considered to be something related to infrastructure and facilities which is true but should not be limited to this. It has to include social and political aspects as well. In other words, overall development is real development that leads to empowerment of an individual and community as a whole.

Women empowerment, on the other hand, is very crucial. Education is the key but not enough we also need to focus on skill development programmes so that those who want to work can do so that will also lead to economic independency that is economic empowerment for women. We, along with sakhi mandal ensure that sewing machines are provided to women and training is also provided. Literacy rate of women is comparatively better than boys. We ensure that participation of women is ensured. For this we collaborate with various organisations and seek suggestions.

Mahila Sabha is also operative where specific issues and demand from women are noted down which is also included in GPDP.



(Mahila Sabha, Ghaduli)

Faraz: How important is the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)? Tell me about the GPDP of your Gram Panchayat.

Nitinbhai: To be very honest we were not aware of GPDP (Gram Panchayat Development Plan) initially. Thanks to Setu Abhiyan we were made aware about the process. After this we went for some training and understood the importance. For me it is extremely important where direct people participation can be ensured. People also felt important that they are being asked and included in decision making. It helps us also because there are many issues which we could not address or know. Due to different committees and meeting we came to know about various issues including social issues which otherwise is ignored.

For instance, the issue of widow sisters in our village was discussed through GPDP process. This helped in documenting and making sure that they get the benefit of all welfare schemes directed towards them. Now we are 100% in this regard. GPDP has also ensured filling of different welfare schemes which otherwise was not being documented properly. It is also a tool for decentralisation of power. The process ensures ward wise demands to be included. This ensures bottom to top approach of power distribution.



Part 3: Vision, Achievements and Challenges

Faraz: Tell me more about your vision, achievements and challenges (if any).

Nitinbhai: **Vision:** My vision is that people should have basic facilities available to them. At the same time people should be self-dependent in our village that no needs to leave their village to earn for living. I don't want to see people migrating to other places. Since we are going through a tough time due to Covid-19 pandemic our policies need to be Corona centric post lockdown to help people. Right now the focus is on how to tackle impact of Covid-19. Hygiene and cleanliness needs to become our way of life. We are planning to make people aware about it and provide them masks, soaps and sanitizers. We have come a long way in terms of brotherhood & communal harmony that needs to be practiced throughout. We are working on Gauchar Plan for the cows.

Achievements: I have tried my level best to achieve in almost all area whatever was visible to us and demanded by people of the Gram Panchayat. Playground is something which was my dream agenda that has been fulfilled where at least people can play.

Transparency: One of the greatest achievements of our Gram Panchayat is that we have ensured transparency in our Panchayat financial expenditure. Earlier our Panchayat account was in minus. Nearby shops owed some amount or the other from Panchayat. It spoiled the image of Panchayat. Now we do not have defaulter image anymore. Now, the Panchayat's account always maintains a minimum balance. Currently Panchayat has more than 10 Lakh rupees in its account. We have ensured monthly & yearly reporting system where we tell about all expenditure and financial planning is also done in public.



Infrastructure & Education: We have completed 80% of gutter line work in the village. CC line and roads are well maintained now which was not there earlier. We had Sarkari Pustakalay (government library) which was not operative since long. This is being functional and a lot of books are being put in there. We have also managed to provide computer lab, music equipments from CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) fund.

Gauchar Plan: We have identified land and allocated 5 acre for gauchar. We collaborated with other organisation to achieve this. Sahjeevan is having some fund for the same which is helping us in this project. We have been given financial consulted BADP (Boarder Area Development Plan). The reason for doing tis is to provide protection to animal and this will become an opportunity for employment within village. We will be self sufficient through our animal.

Relief work for Covid-19: We have ensured social & physical distance in the village. There is no case in our village yet. People from other parts of country are coming back to our village. So we have provided facilities to quarantine. We have distributed more than 1800 masks and planning to distribute more. These masks are also being prepared by the women in the village that way it is also helping them earn some money. Apart from this, entire village is being disinfected regularly.

Challenges: Challenges are many as we go forward. GPDP (Gram Panchayat Development Plan) is an extremely important process. However, the new guidelines of GPDP by the Government of India under 15th Finance commission require new approaches but there is no facility provided for training to the Panchayat. Government needs to also work on capacity building and training.

Scarcity of Water is an issue in our village. Conserving rain water is the biggest challenge. Especially drinking water is the biggest challenge. We are planning to build a dam in the village so that we can conserve some water.

Recruitment and Accountability of local health workers and other department workers should be within the jurisdiction of Panchayat. It seems unfair that Sarpanch is responsible for development of the village but has no say in its functioning and accountability.

Soil testing is another challenge that needs to be addressed to guarantee sustainable agriculture practice in Ghaduli. Our village relies completely on agriculture. Manjority of villagers are farmers. We have consulted government officials to get our soils tested so that we know which land is suitable for what purpose and for how long. We did not get any response yet which I hope will be done soon.



CHAPTER 3

Dineshbhai Velji Dungriya: A Young Model Sarpanch

*"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way."
- John C. Maxell*

Introduction:

Dineshbhai is an Advocate and the youngest Sarpanch of Bhimasar Juth (Group) Gram Panchayat in Bachau block, Kutch. Bhimasar is known as the political hub of Kutch. It has a very long history of various leaders that contributed in the development of village as well Kutch. He is considered to be the most active Sarpanch who takes initiatives even if something new or innovative needs to be introduced in his Juth Panchayat.

Part 1: Personal Journey

Faraz: How has been your journey so far? If you could share something about your life experience

Dineshbhai: I belong to a farmer family. I was always interested in studies and social work. It is interesting that when people ask me about my hobbies I tell reading and helping people are actually things that are part of hobby and like doing that. I am also someone who likes to think out of the box and do something which is new and challenging. I was always interested in the affairs of my village.

Faraz: What inspired you to become a Sarpanch? How did this happen?

Dineshbhai: Gram Sabha is something that used to always fascinate me since childhood. Since I like to participate in the village's affairs and took whatever responsibilities offered to me. I worked with youth congress as a volunteer for around 8-10 years. Thus it became very clear and evident that to serve the people of my village I should become Sarpanch. This is how I started my journey as becoming a Sarpanch.

The biggest inspiration of life is Baba Bhim Rao Ambedkar because of his role in nation building and especially empowering the most underprivileged people of the society. I started studying him when i was in class 10. I belong to Schedule Caste so I can feel why he was so determined to achieve equality in the society. He is also a reason for me why I studied law and joined Bar. Now we have a firm. He is my all time role model.



Group of Advocates including Dinesh Bhai, Sarpanch Bhimasar

Faraz: Tell me about your Panchayat? How do you see brotherhood & communal harmony in your village? Did you face any discrimination before and after becoming Sarpanch?

Dineshbhai: We have a long history of being the model in the district. We have a long history of leadership. Our Panchayat is also known as political hub which has given many leaders that contributed in the development of village and also at district level.



Bhimasar entrance

National highway is just 3 km from our village this also helped in connectivity. Our village is now considered as industrial zone after 2001 earthquake. Earthquake was a disaster but it also brought many opportunities to develop our village. Sahara India for example build 850 houses which is still so well maintained.

Our society is casteist for ages and continues to be so. I do feel bad about it but not that much anymore because we have to work hard to get rid of it. Yes I do feel discriminated sometimes. For example, there was this Katha by Jignesh Dada which continues for 9 days. I was not invited to the Katha despite being Sarpanch. What was more disturbing was that 50% of the population did not participate in the programme. Incidents like this create more gaps in the society. Some people also insulted Baba B.R. Ambedkar by putting shoe garland on his statue. Police investigated but could not find the culprit. But these are very few in number. Majority of the people are good. This is true for every society and region. We have to overcome this together.

However, when I read about Baba Saheb I realize that what he has gone through is nothing compared to what we feel now. Still he continued his mission. Our vision and mission should be the same.

Faraz: Tell me about your interests and hobbies.

Dineshbhai: I like playing cricket. So I have initiated cricket where people from the community play among themselves. Sports are important not only for health but i feel it build a sense of teamwork and sense of belongingness. Apart from games I have a keen interest in reading. I have a small library in my house. So I continue reading which gives me ideas and strength to do something meaningful for our society.



Garlanding the architech of the Constitution of India

Part 2: Development and Empowerment

Faraz: What is 'development and empowerment' especially women empowerment according to you?

Nitinbhai: Development and empowerment is a viewpoint of a community, people of the village and its leaders. Opportunity and facilities are important so that one can feel empowered. It is an idea but that has to be executed.

Women empowerment, on the other hand, is very important issue. Women of Kutch are very talented especially in handicrafts, art and other skills. Women are more sensible human being. Thus if they are self dependent and financially empowered, they can manage their homes better. For example, we have a training centre where women get trained. They are provided stitching machines which is being utilised to make masks. This way they are contributing for their village and earning for their families.



Cultural performance by children of Bhimasar

Faraz: How important is the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)? Tell me about the GPDP of your Gram Panchayat.

Nitinbhai: Democracy means people's rule. Thus any plan for the people should come from people. This is the crux of GPDP (Gram Panchayat development Plan). GPDP ensures people's participation. Many of plans are the direct result of the people demanding and raising their issues. It is also not possible for Panchayat representatives to know everything. In our Gram Panchayat we have managed to incorporate all possible demands coming from people. For example, we had an issue of gutter and water. It was included in the plan and implemented. We have build water tank and check dam in our village. GPDP does not only help in identifying infrastructure issues but its guidelines are elaborate enough to include social issues that include different communities and gender.



Mahila Sabha

Part 3: Vision, Achievement and Challenges

Faraz: Tell me more about your vision, achievements and challenges (if any).

Nitinbhai: Vision: Since I am a keen reader and one who believes that education changes people for good. I was wanted to see my Juth Gram Panchayat to known as educational hub as well. We are planning and working on improving schools. Apart from educational institutions I want to see improved training centres that will guarantee skilful youngsters of our Gram Panchayat. Development should not come on the destruction of environment on which we all relied upon. We have planned to continue plantation and plant 10,000 trees in our villages.

Nitinbhai: Achievements: Covid-19: We have sanitized the village (every 8-10 days it is repeated) and distributed masks to whole village. We have taken all possible initiatives to ensure the migrants from other states are not stranded. More than 4 trains left in which labourers who were working in the industries in our Gram Panchayats left for their respective states. Ration kits were to the migrant workers.



(Distribution of ration kits)

Talab & Water Conservation: We have decided that nobody should pollute our rivers. We realized people started putting wastes in the river. We cleaned it and did meeting and made people aware why it is important to keep it clean. We made it clear whether it is coming from religious practices, household or the companies. Nothing should be tolerated. So we have put a board. People understood and now it is clean since last year.

Apart from this we have solved the issue scarcity. We conserve water in our villages which is utilized when we need them.



(Caution board to prevent from polluting village river, Bhimasar)

Boundaries: It was felt necessary to take care of the land which is for specific purposes. It is therefore important to clearly demarcate and put boundaries in Gaushala lands. We also made sure that religious places for death related rituals (crematorium/graveyard) should also be clearly demarcated and proper boundaries made.

Waste Management: Solid waste management is functioning well in our Panchayat. We have very active, dedicated and professional members that help us in providing door to door waste collection. We have provided the facilities for collection and segregation of both dry and wet waste. Cleanliness can be guaranteed when facilities are provided for the people to do the needful.

Training Centre: Training centre for women is something that we have managed to build. That is specifically for women. Women in our society study but do not go to other places for work. We realized that if they can't go why we cannot bring the opportunity here so that they feel encouraged to fulfil their dreams and earn livelihood.

Challenges: Challenges are something that should be taken in a positive spirit to overcome. Infrastructural challenges are comparatively easy to overcome. Social changes take time which is more important. This will happen only through education and awareness. The more and more people become aware about their rights and responsibilities it will create a good environment for everyone to live as a society.

Education is another challenge that we still need to improve upon. We need to work more in this area we are lacking behind in the literacy rate.

CHAPTER 4

Mutwa Mustaq Rasheed: A Model Sarpanch

*"A genuine leader is not a searcher of consensus but a molder of consensus."
- Martin Luther King*

Introduction:

Mushtaq Bhai is the Sarpanch of Juth Panchayat (Gorewali, Pannawali & Adhyank) of one of the most unique and beautiful land that is famous for Rann Utsav and Banni land (also famous for Banni Utsav/Mela). He has been serving Gorewali Gram Panchayat since 25 years. He was also Dairy Minister in 1982 for 2 years in Kutch Dairy. Currently he is a Karobari member of Kutch Zilla Sarpanch Sangathan.

Part 1: Personal Journey

Faraz: How has been your journey so far? If you want to share something about your life experience and interests/hobbies

Mushtaq Bhai: My journey has been very long and fulfilling so far. I have studied till 9th class. I had to take responsibility after my father died who was a Deputy Sarpanch. So before I could be involved in anything I got involved into the world of my father. In 1982, I became Dairy Minister for 2 years. I was also the President of Kutch Laghumati Morcha and Karobari Sabhya in BJP. It is interesting that my father worked with congress party at that point of time and me with BJP. The goal is simple and that it is to help the people of my Gram Panchayat.

Politics is something that I would say I inherited from my father in a very young age. Soon after I started working for the welfare of my village that became my interest/hobby and did not really think much about other interests or anything of that sort.

Faraz: Tell me about your Panchayat? How do you see brotherhood & communal harmony in your village? Did you face any discrimination before and after becoming Sarpanch?

Mushtaq Bhai: According to 2011 census we have 2100 basti in our gram Panchayat. 840 voters are register in the voter list in our gram Panchayat. People are mostly dependent animals. Banni cows & buffaloes are famous across country. Rann Utsav is another source of income for the people our villages. 40% people get involved in ran Utsav for 3 months. . People get a lot of work in Rann Utsav like handicraft, transport; camel, etc are used so we make sure that people from our villages get work. We authorise them to thus they are identified as locals who can keep their shops in Rann Utsav.

We have unique land where grass is produced for animals and the quality of the grass is such that animal need not be fed anything else.

If we talk about discrimination it is absent in our village. People are very innocent and inclusive when it comes to different identity. We understand it also because it is our long history of living together.

So people are not very concerned about what is happening in the outside world. Especially people do not get affected by negativity that is spread in country or even in the state. People of Banni are soft like their land

Faraz: Tell me something about Banni Mela/Utsav.



(Photo credit: First Post)

Mushtaq Bhai: It is unique in Gujarat and even in the country you may say. The people of different tribes live here. Banni animals are very famous specially its cows and buffaloes which has a record of the highest production of milk. Banni Mela is celebrated in a unique way where there are competitions between different animals and whoever wins is rewarded as per their positions in the competition. Another unique feature is that every animal in Banni has a name/identity.

Part 2: Development and Empowerment

Faraz: What is 'development and empowerment' especially women empowerment according to you?

Mushtaq Bhai: Development and empowerment is an idea. Idea differs from community to community, people and individual to individual. Our idea of development is related to our unique identity. We do not consider development that takes away our identity or our way of life.

Women empowerment, on the other hand, is very important issue. Women of Kutch are very talented especially in handicrafts, art and other skills. Women of our villages are involved in Hastakala in association with Shrujan organisation that provides training and other technical help. Our women are extremely talented and produce one of the best Sarees in the state. However, to be honest women in our society has a long way to go. We have failed them to some extent because many of the projects relating to women are not as operative as it should be. Education is another area that needs more attention. The importance of education can be understood by seeing the alumni list of our school in the village. Most of Sarpanch are from the same school. Other alumni are also doing well in life. Basically those who studied are doing well in life.



(Press note about Banni)

Faraz: How important is the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)? Tell me about the GPDP of your Gram Panchayat.

Mushtaq Bhai: Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) is extremely important especially for the people living in the remotest village of India. Problems of people can only be understood and worked out if they are party to it.

However, I will be honest with you that this is the first time we have started village planning known as GPDP. Earlier we did not know much about the plan. However, the guidelines and process of GPDP is very inclusive that I hope it will result in overall development of our Gram Panchayat.

Part 3: Vision, Achievement and Challenges

Faraz: Tell me more about your vision, achievements and challenges (if any).

Mushtaq Bhai: **Vision:** Education is something where we need to focus more. My vision for the Gram Panchayat is not my alone but a collective vision of the village. The demand of the people is blueprint for future planning. This can be achieved by implementing GPDP properly that we have started in our Juth Gram Panchayat.

Achievements: **Education:** as far as infrastructure related to education is concerned we have come a long way. In our villages we have primary school and high school. Not only studies but we have ITI College so that those who want to learn other skills they can. We are thinking of going forward so that we have facilities for higher education within the village. Currently those who want to study further have to go to Bhuj. We are also working with local organisations & companies to provide technical support to the villagers.

Infrastructure: So we have developed our villages in terms of providing infrastructural facilities. We have completed making C.C. Roads that is helpful for the villagers. We also made sure the road/street lights are provided and well maintained. We have achieved another milestone i.e. toilets. Toilet work for every house is also completed.

Covid-19: We have sanitized our villages including religious places (temples & mosques). Aakashwani Kendra, Bhuj recognized our work that we sanitized religious places and made people aware about it. State Government also praised for the same. We have made sure that people do not come from outside just like that. If this is followed properly there will be no corona case in our villages. We are self dependent already because of our cows/buffaloes. The milk distribution continued that helped our local people earn livelihood.

GIR Foundation: In collaboration with GIR Foundation we have produced a good amount of grass (almost 2 lakh) that would be sufficient enough for our animals in the coming days.

Bhungas: We have started Bhunga resort with modern facilities. We demanded the state government for financial support worth 60 lakhs. Tourists stay there and whatever income is generated is utilised for the development of our villages under our Juth Gram Panchayat.

Challenges: There are quite a few challenges in my Gram Panchayat like any other Panchayat. For instance GPDP (Gram Panchayat Development Plan) is something new for us we have started the process. However, it will take some time to actually do it properly.

Scarcity of Water: People still face water crisis. Last year we had good rain here because of which we did not face much problem. Generally we do not get sufficient water. Our land is such where dams cannot be made. Other places that have hard land or at the higher altitude they make dams and store water. We do not have that option available to us. We are very much dependent on rain water.



ભારત સરકાર ગુજરાત સરકાર કલેક્ટર કચેરી કચ્છ જિલ્લા પંચાયત કચ્છ જિલ્લા આરોગ્ય કચેરી ભુજ તાલુકા પંચાયતના સુચનના અનુસંધાને જાહેર સ્થળો મસ્જીદ મંદિર સસ્તા અનાજની દુકાન રસકચની દુકાનો પર આવતા જતા ગરાકો અરજદારો સંઘાળ્યો માટે સાબુથી હાથ ધોવા રબરૂ સુચન કરી અને સાબુ વિતરણ કરતા ગોરેવાલી જુથ ગ્રામ પંચાયતના સંરંપંચ મુસ્તાક રસીદ મુલ્વા



(Photo credit: First Post)

Banni Identity: There is a conflict over Banni Land. Forest department claim Banni is their land; our demand is that Banni should remain Banni which should not lose its unique identity. We are afraid that Narmada project may take away the right over Banni land and can be given to the industries. All we want is that Banni land should not go to the industries which may destroy its uniqueness.

Unity for greater cause like Banni issue and other issues require unity among leaders and the representatives of the villages. We all need to come together.

Charidand: Rain water is stored for one year. However, that water is such which cannot be used for drinking.

CONCLUSION



***"Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others."
- Jack Welch***