

History

Founders of Shashwat Trust Mr. Anand Kapoor and Ms. Kusum Karnik have engaged with tribal communities in the area since 1981, working on issues relating to forest protection, community resource access, and economic development. Between 1995 and 2000, Mr. Kapoor worked on the rehabilitation of 152 villages displaced by the Bargi Dam near Jabalpur, where he was involved in the development of a small-scale fishing project, among other programs. When the Dimbhe dam project had a similarly ruinous impact on nearby communities, the architects of Shashwat saw an opportunity to develop a similar project on the banks of the Ghod River.

Shashwat was officially registered as an organization in 1996 and has operated in its current form since 1999. Shashwat is a grassroots initiative that was developed in response to a range of challenges faced by indigenous and tribal communities in the Pune district of India's Maharashtra state. initiative that was developed in response to the displacement of Mahadeo Koli , Thakar and Katkari tribal communities by the construction of the Dimbhe dam, which submerged 11 villages and destroyed cropland in another 13. The organization helps local communities develop small-scale fishing activities in the dam reservoir and improve agricultural production on the remaining cultivatable land, much of which is on steep slopes. The dam reservoir has been stocked with fish and the local population is supported to obtain fishing leases, boats, and nets. Fish size and abundance have increased, as have local incomes. Tribal farmers have been supported to cultivate small paddy terraces on steep slopes in the local catchment area. The organization also supports local farmers with land tenure securitization, through securing official ownership documents. Other Shashwat activities include education and healthcare programmes focused on women and children.

[Read more on Shashwat's History from the eyes of Mr. Milind Bokil](#)

One feels very pleasant standing on the wall of any dam when one sees the back water of the dam. Especially if the dam is huge and the water is spread over a wide expanse. Dams are in beautiful hilly regions where one sees blue-violet mountain peaks, blue sky overhead, blue water below and a soothing breeze. The ripples created on the surface of water are mesmerizing. Water otherwise is also pleasant to the eye and is a visual bonanza if it is spread in huge area.

Off course this is a personal experience but considering the social aspect, huge dams are considered as symbols of progress. The purpose of building these dams is that Rain water otherwise which goes waste is utilized for human benefit. Arresting of rain water for agriculture is being practiced from ancient times. Construction of the dams is the modern version of the tradition. Stored water in a dam is distributed in a controlled, systematic manner through the channels and is being provided for agriculture which on getting reliable source of water prospers.

Irrigation is the only solution for providing water to the area of inconsistent and scanty rainfall. Productivity of irrigated farming is more, more number of crops are grown, and this also generates more employment.

Crops like sugarcane can be grown which provide industrial raw material for sugar factories. The profit doubles if sugar factories are managed on co-operation basis. Agro production gets an assured market and the profit earned in it can be shared. Sugar is on constant demand and consumption of sugar per head is an indicator of measuring progress. Our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had called dams as holy places in India after understanding the importance of such dams.

Though pleasant to watch and being responsible for irrigation, the process of storage of water on the other hand is painful for the society. The larger the dam the more the agony. The reason being that the area before construction of dam was a river and was inhabited by local human settlement for centuries. Construction of a dam means relocation of habitats and farm land being submerged under the back water of the dams. Those who are benefitted by the water, progress, but for those who are relocated it is painful process heading towards disaster. The only solution is good rehabilitation of the displaced community which as believed by everybody can reduce the negative impacts of the construction of the dams. However, it does not seem to be happening in actual practice. We may safely say that the rehabilitation of displaced population is not satisfactory in any of the dams constructed till date.

Current progress of construction of dam means progress for one and disaster for another. Dams are rightly considered to be the symbols of progress. We have accepted the process in which some of us are benefitted at the costs of others. Our process is unequal and unjust. Unfortunately, the loss incurred is by down trodden, poor and weaker sections of the society. Large dams are being constructed in the hilly regions inhabited by traditional tribal population. The population displaced due to dam constructed in India, mostly consists of scheduled tribes. Though the government directs various schemes for the benefits of scheduled tribes, the situation at the ground level is exactly opposite. Those who are supposed to be protected are being destroyed. The situation is similar in other projects like wild life sanctuaries. The wild life started depleting due to uncontrolled killing of wild life. Protected forest areas are supposed to be essential but the areas are declared as national reserves forests or wild life sanctuaries. However, these lands also belong to human inhabitants residing there. Unfortunately fearing harm to the wild life, the local inhabitants are displaced and thus they lose their homes. Their rehabilitation programs are a mere show and are never satisfactory. These people almost meet a tragic end.

What is the solution for this? Should we continue on this path for progress in an unjust uncontrolled manner? Can there be schemes which can be implemented for the displaced population. Can something be done so that the people displaced due to the dam can live a life better than they are currently living?

The progressive thinking couple: Kusum Karnik and Anand Kapoor started their social work in Ambegaon taluka of Pune district around the year 1980. Beginning initially with "Maharashtra Arogya Mandal" they established "Shashwat" society and through it formulated the "Ekjut" organization for performing

specialized operations. Ambegaon is a remote hilly area of Pune district more famous for Bheemashankar which is a place for pilgrimage. Both Bheema and its tributary Ghodnadi originate from the region. Local inhabitants of the area include Mahadeo Koli, Katkari and Thakar tribes. The area was declared as reserve forest in 1985. In 1990 a dam was constructed on Ghodnadi at Dimbe. 11 villages were displaced in the backwaters of the dam which included 1200 families. Few of them were given residential places and land for agriculture in distant regions. Many preferred to live in the same area and these people had been facing serious difficulties due to lack of means of livelihood, lack of communication and adverse terrain. The area being remote and hilly they are secluded from rest of the world due to no communication system.

Shashwat has embarked on a plan to stop the losses of the people affected by the construction of the dam which include 3 projects. First project is "Galpeer Sheti". Though the dam is full during the rainy season in October the water level starts receding as water is distributed for agriculture in summer. This exposes the land which was previously submerged underwater and is very fertile as it contains alluvial soil from the mountains. This is an opportunity for people living in the higher areas. Since the area is in possession of the government the people do not have a right to utilize it for agriculture. The government reserves the right to let this land for cultivation but people mostly do not get it due to negligence of government authorities and red tape procedures. Shashwat led the struggle and obtained the rights for agriculture from the government. Due to acquisition of this right, displacement of people in search of employment stopped, as employment was generated in this region. Farmers could stock food for their daily necessities for the entire year. Farmers' basic necessities got complied with and they now work for employment on their own terms.

Second project was titled as "Padkai", Small rice fields can be artificially created with the help of stone bunds on hill slopes. Alluvial soil gets collected in the area and forms terraces. This system is extensively used globally. Creating rice fields in this way is a laborious task and is essentially a group activity. The traditional activity to perform such an operation was called "Padkai" in local language. As people were staying at the foot of the hills they rarely required padkai but after displacement they moved higher in the mountain increasing the necessity of such activity. As one is going to work in his own field the problem was, who was going to pay for the labor charges. Initially the project was implemented in one village and funds were made available through adivasi rehabilitation plan but this was no solution to the requirement which was arising on a continual basis. Employment guarantee scheme provided a solution to the requirement. The scheme had a provision to be implemented on individual level but was not implemented due to government red tape procedures. Anand Kapoor being an engineer himself prepared the budget and plan and presented it to the concerned government authorities who approved the novel and perfect idea. This project was later implemented through the employment guarantee

scheme in Bhimashankar area. Padkai project came under criticism in the light of landslides and mishaps in, Malin village. Padkai did not use heavy machinery as the entire work of raising the bunds was done manually and hence did not account for the landslides. The real issues of the landslides were internal geographical problems related to the area and deforestation. Anand has extensively written articles clearing the doubts on the subject.

Third novel project implemented by Shashwat was fish farming. Any sensitive person will lament on the current state of adivasi people whose land had been submerged in the water of the dam. However, Mr. Anand did not express anything against the construction of the dam. He decided to use the water which had destroyed the lively hood of the adivasis for their benefit and prosperity. He decided to implement the Jabalpur pattern of fish farming in the area. Local adivasis Mahadeo Koli, Katkari and Thakars used to fish in the waters before the construction of the dam and after the construction they had resorted to same traditional fishing using inflated tyre tubes . There was no productivity in the activity as they were not supported by technology. Shashwat organization gathered information about the fish farming activity, held meetings with the locals and provided thick metal base boats used in Jabalpur. Their productivity increased considerably due to inclusion of boats and fishnets. Motivated by this they decided to carry out the business in an organized manner and they established” Dimbhe Jalashay Shramik Adivasi Machimar Sahakari Society Ltd”. They joined hands with self-help groups run by adivasi women and started their operations on a large scale. All the statutory processes like getting license from government departments, getting help of adivasi development ministry, releasing fish seed in the dam, deciding the method for fish farming and marketing of fish were done by the locals. The specialty of the project was that technical help was taken from Technical Institute of Fisheries Education, Mumbai. Today the society has about 275 members and their annual turnover is around twenty lakhs, Forty percent of the members are katkari . This project is an excellent example of how the backwaters of the dam which destroyed the lively hood of the population can be creatively used for generating income for the same population

Shashwat organization bagged the prestigious award “Equator Initiative” from United Nations Development Program worth three lakhs rupees for their efforts for the development of people using natural resources in Bhimashankar area in 2012 at Rio De Janeiro in Brazil. It also bagged the special award of nine lakh rupees for fisheries and water resources development. This has underlined the utmost significance of the mentioned novel activity

The book features articles showing other projects implemented by Shashwat in the area. This book has annexed few articles from Anand’s friend’s relatives and colleagues as it is being published in his memories. The articles and documents reveal the developmental activities carried by Anand, Kusum and their colleagues for the isolated scheduled tribes in the hilly region. This book reveals the history of the

social development process. There are various dimensions of the social development process. It unfolds through Anand's experience, the picture of his personality and his achievements. Anand had graduated in engineering from IIT Kharagpur. For a short while he worked in a private industry and could have easily chosen the beaten path towards prosperity. But he decided that he would utilize his intelligence and skill for the development process. This attempt though was extraordinary on the personal front but was also in harmony with the contemporary social conditions. In 1970 youth had joined hands together for social transformation getting inspirations from the social movement under the leadership of late Jayprakash Narayan. Thousands of young boys and girls willingly jumped in the movement for rural development and social transformation. Anand was a representative of that generation. He worked along with Kusumtai who shared his views. This was something special because we find many social workers who work single handedly but working full time for the society along with your family required extreme courage and loyalty.

Anand's specialty was that he was an engineer and it reflected everywhere in his work. Many people as industrialists, doctors and people having MSW degree also carry out social work but the contribution of an engineer in the social activity simply stands out. This becomes evident on studying the example of Anand's social work. Engineer possesses the awareness of science and technology and this helps him to understand the systems in his surroundings which results into inherent systematization in his work. Engineers have a different way of thinking and that's why they are able to find harmony between creativity and transformation. This might not happen with every engineer but it was fortunately true for Anand. Anand's engineering-oriented view point was evident in each of his activity whether it was regarding plan, progress or social relationship. Being an engineer contributed to a large extent to his unique personality.

The thought that their entire process for progress should be based on natural resources by increasing the quality and productivity of the offering, was a natural outcome of his engineering outlook. An alternative for sufferers of the dams was that after disposing their properties they should migrate to Pune city in search of employment. This was also prescribed by the contemporary leadership in the area. Leaving for cities in search of employment is an option but for those who choose otherwise and decide not to go for it, there should be an alternative to live and prosper in the same region with the help of natural resources there. If such an opportunity is available then on getting good education, producing good quality products and after possessing good selling skills it was more respectable to have a job dealing with commercial relationship with the urban population instead of migrating to the city as unskilled labor force. Those farmers in Ambegaon and Manchar regions who have got the water from the dam have transformed their farms into irrigated farmland and are progressing in a similar way.

One strategic aspect which becomes evident from Shashwat activities is that if benefit similar to what the farmers get due to availability of water would be given to population in the backwaters of the dam then they also will be included in the process towards progress. Shashwat has shown how it can be actually done. Government should incorporate the productive alternatives given by Shashwat while planning their strategy. It will imply that Government recognizes that the people who are adversely affected by the construction of the dam, have a right on the water of the dam and it reflects in commissioning of projects as Lift Irrigation, Galpeer Sheti or Fish Farming for them. If this is taken into consideration, the dam will not prove to be a calamity to the local population and there would not be a necessity for any agitation against the construction of the dam. If large dams are national requirements, then giving rights to the victims of the dam should be one of the national rehabilitation strategy. This aspect should be similarly applied to reserved forests and other development projects. If the people affected due to the projects are included in the process for progress then the process will not become unjust and violent as is currently the situation. The significance of Shashwat is that it has not only shown the alternative but also successfully implemented it with the participation of government administration, experts from various fields and common people. It has practically proved that process for progress can be productive collaborative and eternal.

It is evident in all activities of Shashwat that the organization has a clear understanding of, and respects culture. Whenever people from the higher socio-economic class of the society turn to this type of social work they go with a thought that these oppressed people are illiterate or less educated than us and hence there is a necessity to educate or improve them. Anand and Kusumtai never thought in this manner and in fact they respected traditions, customs and the culture which the people have preserved in spite of poor economic conditions. They really loved the environment and wanted to know how people are in harmony with nature. Such work, done with the kind of involvement seen in Anand and Kusumtai, is always appreciated by the people. Hence though they had a non-traditional type of marriage, the couple did not have any problems of getting accepted and absorbed in the rural background. Anand Kapoor was called Mama (maternal uncle) in Bhimashanker region as he was very dear to everyone. Mama is supposed to be extremely dear to a person than other relatives. The very fact that he was called mama indicates the emotional relationship between him and the local people in the region.

In accordance with the nature of social work, Shashwat had implemented the system of training the locals and authorizing them to do the work. This was a good move in the light of the fact that social workers generally pass on their authority to their next generation and do not delegate responsibility to the local workers, as an effect of it very few workers get trained to carry out the activity of strengthening the organization. This answers the question "What does eternal (Shashwat) progress mean?"

Eternal progress is not just effective usage of natural resources but keeping the urge for progress going and making provision of resources required for its completion.