



UNVEILING
THE UNSUNG STORY OF
Dr. Ketan Desai



Alamy

“

THIS LIFE IS SHORT.
THE VANITIES OF THE WORLD ARE TRANSIENT.
BUT THEY ALONE LIVE WHO LIVE FOR OTHERS.
THE REST ARE MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE.

MY CHILDREN, THE SECRET OF RELIGION IS NOT
MY CHILDREN, THE SECRET OF RELIGION IS NOT
IN THEORIES BUT IN PRACTICE.
TO BE GOOD AND TO DO GOOD-
THAT IS THE WHOLE OF RELIGION.

”

·SWAMI VIVEKANAND

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Alpan

Dr. Ketan Dhirajlal Desai is looked up in medicine circles as a jewel of not only our country but the entire world. The medical fraternity around the globe reveres him. He is the only doctor in the world who holds the prestige of being the youngest president of a medical council. He was unanimously elected as the President of the world body of doctors and needless to mention that the entire country is proud of this recent development. We all know about Ketanbhai's attractive personality and his towering achievements. But very few know that even after scaling such heights, he has remained a very compassionate human being who wishes to reach out to one and all. He is the only child of Shri Dhirajlal Desai and Kusumben Desai. Shri Dhirajlal was a very honest educationist and Ketanbhai's purity of heart and transparency can indeed be considered inherited from him. Both his parents and his wife Alkaben have been lending their relentless support to the heartfelt and selfless pursuits of Dr. Ketanbhai.

Once, in his childhood, Ketanbhai injured his forehead. His father Dhirajlal's colleagues insisted that he should take his son to Dr Chaturbhai's clinic- a famous name in Ahmedabad in those days. Dhirajlal checked his pocket and asked his colleagues to get back to work. He then took his son to the government hospital for treatment. Reason? He did not have enough money to pay Dr Chaturbhai's fee. Even today the scar on Ketanbhai's forehead is there for all to see, but the scar of not being able to pay Dr Chaturbhai's fees left an invisible yet indelible mark on his mind and this set him off on a philanthropic

course which has brought about a change in the lives of thousands of poor people till date. His compassion has reached out to attend to the silent helplessness of the deprived classes and also is a fitting reply to the general social apathy we see around us.

Dr Ketan Desai is the president-elect of the World Medical Association and former president of the Medical Council of India. He is a towering personality in the medical world, but when he ventures into the forest villages of Banaskantha, he becomes one among the tribal populace. He understands their problems, feels their pain and yearns to find a way across every hurdle that comes their way.

One anecdote from his exemplary life needs to be told here. Ketanbhai had gone to a medical shop to buy some medicine. He saw an old man give his prescription to the chemist. And when the helpless old man was given the bill, he asked the chemist to give him less than the required amount because he did not have enough money to pay for all the medicines. Ketanbhai was witness to this incident and it took away his peace of mind. He paid for all the medicines, but the helplessness of the man made him aware of a much larger picture. He was very disturbed by this pitiful condition of the less privileged class of people. So, he brought Dr Jitubhai Patel to the fore to offer solace to these people of Gujarat. Under the auspices of a reputed philanthropic organization he proactively decided to set up a cardiac and general charitable hospital to mitigate the serious ailments of poor patients and bring succor to them.



Dr. Ketan Desai-Dr. Alka Desai

On January 26, 2001, the land in Kutch trembled under the impact of an earthquake. Like many others Ketanbhai was also moved by the plight of the people but he did not just sit and pray rather decided to get to the site and do his best. That very evening he flew down from Delhi and reached his friend Dr Jitubhai's house directly from the Ahmedabad airport. Without wasting a moment, they reached Civil Hospital where the earthquake-affected were being brought in by the hordes. On seeing dead bodies strewn all around, both, Ketanbhai and Jitubhai were very shaken and their resolve to help was strengthened. Ketanbhai immediately said "Jitubhai, let's begin working from tomorrow morning." A temporary hospital was set up in no time and under Ketanbhai's initiative started working at the crack of dawn. Mr. Hiten Vasant from the Delhi Public School got to know of this great relief effort organized by these two individuals and contributed to the temporary hospital for many months.

But Ketanbhai was not satisfied with these efforts. He had decided that the earthquake-affected should have a hospital in the area where patients can be treated in the times to come as well. He shared his idea with the Indian Medical Association and under his able guidance, a well-equipped Rambaug hospital was rebuilt at Gandhidham- a city which was totally destroyed by the earthquake.

India resides in its villages. 'Let's go back to the village' the slogan given by Gandhian stalwarts had inspired many youth who moved towards villages in the times gone by. Their efforts did not go in vain

and many shining examples of steps towards rural poverty alleviation are still being carried out today.

Though Ketanbhai was not directly related to any kind of traditional constructive work so far, he adopted this slogan for development of medical services ten years ago. In the medical world, the race of money and fame has removed the general patient from the radar of the doctors' concern. At such a time, Ketanbhai's slogan has given a new call for compassion and feeling among the medical fraternity. Even today, after ten years, the slogan is still being heard in the nooks and corners of medical circles and that is because he first started implementing his strategies in a very backward tribal region. In October 2004, he organized a large-scale health camp for the medically deprived tribes living in 42 villages situated in the Aravalli mountain range between Balaram and Ambaji. Doctors practicing in 40 different fields came from Ahmedabad and offered free treatment to 7,500 tribal people suffering from various ailments. A similar camp was organized in July 2008 in which 3,500 poor tribal patients were treated. Not stopping at this, he and Alkaben trudged through the hills and provided bicycles for 100 very poor tribal laborers.

In this unique camp organized by the Desai couple under the shade of the banyan tree, they gifted the pregnant women of the region with two well-equipped ambulances along with tricycles that will make it easy for them to reach the medical centers. If this couple had not made available these facilities to these tribal people, then even today



they would have been removed from the mainstream and deprived of medical facilities. The trend in the area has been that these poor souls used to mortgage their land to greedy moneylenders to get access to basic, yet expensive medical facilities.

The medical services provided by Ketanbhai and Alkaben have gone a long way in improving the quality of life of the populace of Banaskantha. Some prominent self-less organizations working in the area have managed to keep the torch burning by touching the lives of more than 30,000 tribal people through empathetic medical and surgical facilities. These facilities that have been offered free of cost and at the doorstep of these people and otherwise could have cost them lakhs of rupees.

Dr. Ketan's slogan of "Let's go to the villages" has acquired a new meaning today and has touched newer horizons. The seeds of philanthropy he has sown in the forestland of these tribal populations have sprouted and branched out to many more places in the country. His trusting and compassionate nature inspires him to continue the good work till he transforms the lives of children of seemingly lesser gods. His dream is to present this tribal area, which is among the most backward regions of India, as a model of 'sustainable infrastructure development', the world over.

This book begins with a look at the tribal families whose lives he

had changed with his empathetic touch; it then goes on to give an account of the efforts he has pioneered and ends with the celebration of life for these tribal people who till not very long ago knew the external world for nothing but its apathy.

Dr Ketan Desai has been relentlessly striving for the betterment of these tribal populations. But, his compassionate dedication to humanitarian causes has remained unsung because the man himself has kept his activities hidden from view. More than once Dr Ketan Desai has shared his dream that one of the most backward regions of the country today will, within the next five years, become the numero uno district of India and he would like to then present Virampur as a model region to the country. Dr Ketan Desai is indeed a world-leader in this sense, but he has remained secretive about it. This is what adds to the already exalted stature of the work of this compassionate personality. Now, more than ever before, it is time to appreciate his efforts that have transformed the lives of the backward and under-privileged tribes.

We feel proud to dedicate this book to Dr Ketan Desai and Dr Alka Desai for their silent, relentless and compassionate services for the rural poor. We salute his parents Late Dhirajlal Desai and Kusurnben Desai for inspiring and motivating the Desai couple. We also look forward to being a part of their mission of creating a model of 'sustainable infrastructure development' in one of the most backward regions of our country.

Dr. Ketan Desai's felicitation at
Ahmedabad on 6/12/09.
Tribal leader Sada Patel honoring
him with tribal turban







THE TRIBAL POPULATIONS
OF BANASKANTHA

The tribes of Bonaskantha live in the forested area between Ambaji and Balaram. Spread over 42 villages, these tribes negotiate the difficult hilly terrain everyday. Not just out of sight, but we can easily say that these citizens of the country have been completely left out of mind as well and therefore out of all opportunities of development accessible to the mainstream.

Their language, traditions, culture, style of living etc. may be very different as compared to our urban reality, but this is not reason enough to leave them out of the process of development. Most of these tribes live in temporary shelters in their fields.. They barely manage to make both ends meet with their cattle and what they cultivate on their small plots of land. Their conditions certainly worsen during a drought.

As they live in a hilly region, they have to overcome many hurdles to access medical and health facilities. They sell their food grains to get money to access these facilities and they do not send their children to school for similar reasons. Lack of medical and educational facilities make them a vulnerable targets of usurious moneylenders. For a minimal sum of Rs 50-100 borrowed by their ancestors, many of their lands are mortgaged with these moneylenders as of date.

Women here, give birth to 15 – 20 children each and many of them lose their lives during pregnancy due to anemia, unhygienic

deliveries and lack of timely medical assistance during child-birth. Many children here suffer from anemia and skin problems as a result of malnutrition and unhygienic conditions.

How can these poor tribal people, who cannot afford two square meals a day and enough clothes to cover themselves, afford to educate their children and cure their diseases?

These illiterate and ignorant people then, unfortunately, go looking for a cure in superstition. Be it fever, diarrhea, nausea, tuberculosis or diseases related to the kidney, heart or skin, or something as serious as cancer, they approach the local 'Godman' for a cure; they believe in chanting prayers, tying talismans, lighting lamps and incense sticks and offering coconuts; they sacrifice cocks and goats as offerings to the Gods and try to find solace in such efforts. They also use a lot of medicinal herbs to cure their ailments.

After so many years of we being an independent country, in this region, only darkness greets you on the medical front. The people here did not seem to know that ailments could be cured with medicines too. There was no awareness about medical facilities in these 42 villages. When they were affected by extremely serious ailments, they went to any doctor nearby, who in turn fleeced them. Under such deplorable conditions, Desai duo began bringing about medical awareness among these tribal communities who were indeed far removed from the realities of the modern world.

Dr. Mahendra Desai
Dr. Jitu Patel
Dr. Kirti Patel with tribals





અમે બતાવકામના અમારા એક
સરોવર આરોગ્યની ભાઈબંધો ડૉ.
કેતનભાઈના ફાઉન્ડેશન હોસ્પિટલ આરો
છીએ કારણકે અમારા હુપ્તર
તેમના એક ડૉ. અલકાબેનની
સંકારથી ઉઠ્યાં થયાં છે.



Tribal Girl Rasila of tribal hostel, supported by
Dr. Alka Desai, presents bead necklace to her.



Glimpses of Second "Aao Gao Chale" camp
inauguration at Virampur in July 2008.

Seen are Dr. Parimal Desai,
Dr. Alka Desai & Dr. Jitu Patel



Dr. Ketan Desai - Dr. Mihir Joshi
exchange goodwill



ભુતિ: સદગત ધીરજલાલ દેસાઈ
સહયોગ: ડૉ. અલકા દેસાઈ- ડૉ. કેતન દેસાઈ
સંચાલન: સંવેદના ટ્રસ્ટ, અમદાવાદ
સ્થળ: ધોળી ભાંખરી, વીરમપુર
તારીખ: ૧૩-૦૦-૨૦૦૮, રવિવાર

Rabari Leader felicitates Dr. Ketan Desai



Dr. Ketan Desai presents food grains to
the most poor tribal Bhikha Dungasia



Dr. Alka Desai Presents clothes to an
orphan tribal girl Mevli



Desai duo's gifts- Seva Vahini and ambulance
in service of the tribal people



EFFORTS THAT HAVE MADE
A DIFFERENCE

In 2004, as part of the 'Let's go to the village' programme organised by Dr Ketan Desai and the Indian Medical Association, Ahmedabad, a large-scale medical camp was organized in Kanpura village. At the camp, 40 doctors treated 7,500 patients from 42 tribal villages and this was the bright beginning of medical awareness in this tribal region. Many people suffering from severe diseases could now bear children too. The people became aware about medical help and started taking medicines when they took ill. As a result, medical camps are being organized every month and people are regularly examined, treated and even operated upon.

- Dr Ketan Desai donated two well-equipped ambulance vans to ensure timely help to pregnant women.

- Dr Alka gathered information about the female patients. She learnt that every tribal woman has 15-20 children. Most of the deliveries took place in the forest or at home, in case anything went wrong with the delivery, the woman died while being transported to the main road from where they could get access to an ambulance. On learning of this, Alkaben arranged for five tricycles on which pregnant women could be brought to the ambulance. She also told the women that they could come to her for any ailment and she would try her best to cure them.

- Alkaben took the initiative to get bicycles for 100 labourers who used

to walk down bare foot to the quarries where they bled breaking stones to earn a living.

- The disabled and old are given food grain support throughout the year. Not a single disabled person in the region is without a cycle.

- 15 sewing machines have been made available to poor women for sustainable livelihood. In addition, more than 1,000 women have been enrolled in self help groups(SHG)s where they save Re 1 per day. Now, these women have access to small loans for their everyday needs.

- Five special women's workshops were organized on the issue of reproductive health and childcare. 4,000 women from these villages were given intensive training on the different aspects of RCH by experts.

- For the first time, in the beginning of this decade a maiden medical camp was organized specially for tribal women at Kanpura primary school. Many serious diseases were detected during that camp. IMA expert doctors rendered their services.

- Pregnant women are given vitamin tablets for free and tribal children are also given vitamin A tablets on a regular basis.

- IMA helped in preparing kits for treating pregnant women and infants.



- The older children in this region suffered from severe skin problems. A special drive was launched in all the primary schools of the area for the eradication of these skin ailments with the support of expert doctors. Local tribal youth volunteered in this mission.

- A survey was conducted to detect those poor women with anemia. Those who were anemic were extensively provided with iron tablets and injections.

- The training and motivation camps are being organized regularly for the adolescent tribal girls and life skill training is being imparted to them.

- Keeping in mind the inaccessibility to schools owing to the difficult terrain, Dr. Alka Desai and late Prof. Kusum Modi have provided free lodging and boarding to 60 poor but brilliant tribal children at Virampur. They also have been imparted free computer training and their tuition fees are paid for too. Two tribal girls have successfully pursued higher studies at the Gujarat Vidyapeeth and are the first to do so in the whole area. A special dormitory for tribal girls has been established at Virampur with the support of Dr. Alka Desai and Prof. Kusum Modi.

- 15 informal schools were opened in the inaccessible hilly areas in

2003 without government funding but with its approval. Eventually the government also started providing school infrastructure to some of these villages. At present 5 informal schools for tribal children are being run in five villages with kind support of Karuna Setu Trust and Desai couple.

Midday meals have been provided to the 300 tribal children of informal classes (up to std-3) being run in the remote hilly regions. 3000 tribal children have already benefitted through this programme so far and have gone to mainstream schools.

- Shri Kaushik Patel, NRI, provided computers and dinner sets to tribal children residing at the hostel in Virampur.

- All brilliant tribal girls were provided with their tuitions fees by Dr. Alka Desai, Late Prof. Kusum Modi and Late Prahladbhai Bhagat (Kadi) and his family.

- Different livelihood trainings are being imparted to poor tribal men and women and they are also supported for marketing the products.

- The task of construction 135 low cost houses for most poor families has so far been completed. Some of them were supported by the Desai couple.

Glimpses of "Aao Gao Chale" camp at
Virampur Doctors examine poor tribal
patients at the camp.









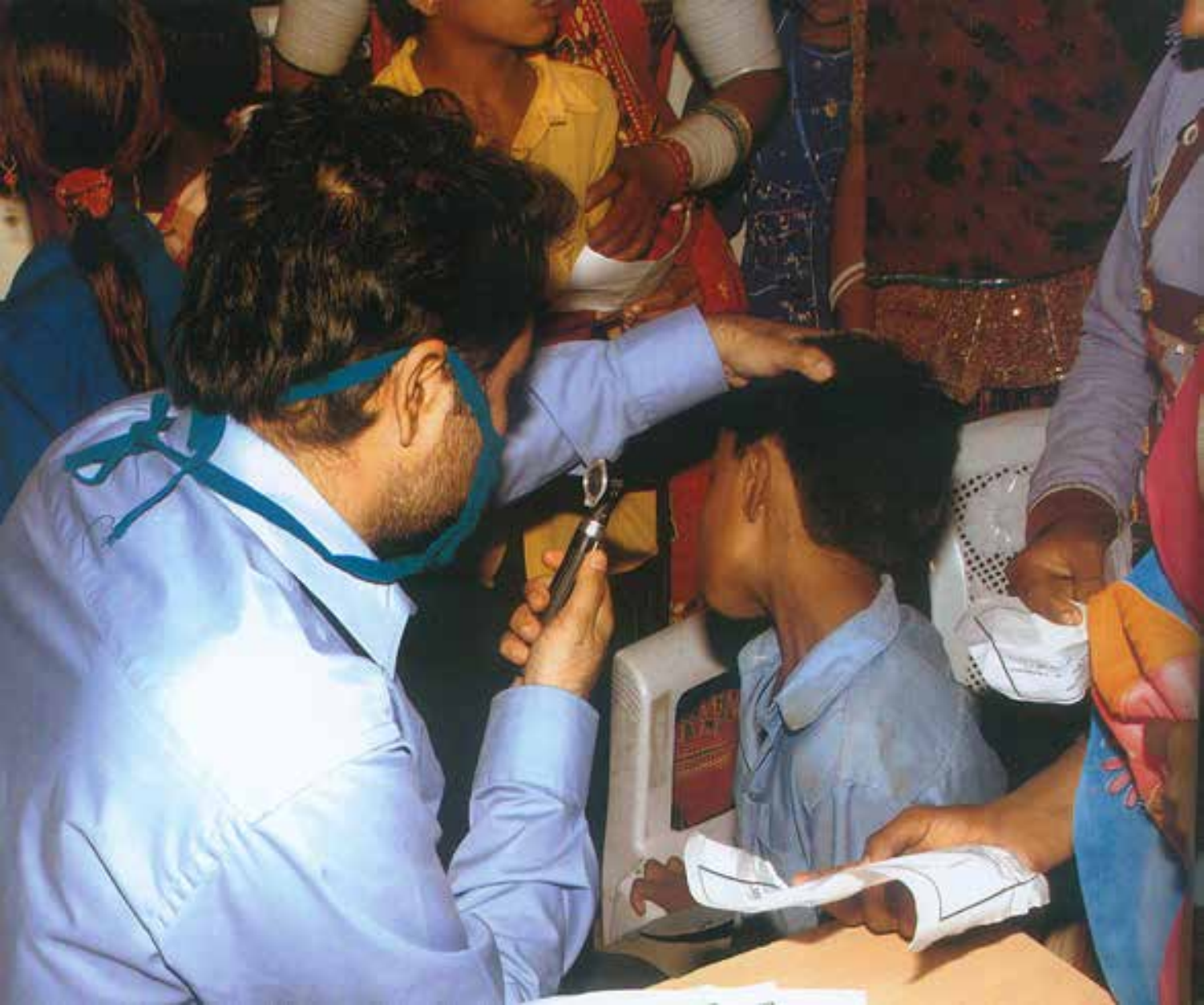


























Glimpses of Third "Aao Gao Chale" camp
at Lakhavad Dist. Mehsana

Inaugural gathering in the camp

Former CM and Union Minister Shankersinhaji
Waghela and other dignitaries lighting the lamp



गुजरात राज्य सरकार

Former Union ministers Ms. Urmilaben Patel and
Oscar Fernandes in the Lakhavad camp
Organized by IMA leader Dr. Anilkumar Nayak

Indian Medical Association
National Launch

"AAD GAON CHALEN"

A driven project of IMA

August 2004

Shakti Vast Villages

लाभपर्यंत पंथायत

पणुं हलि स्वरायत करेछे.

People and patients in the camp even in
heavy rains at Lakahvad camp



A WORD OF THANKS

(THESE ARE A FEW WORDS OF GRATITUDE THAT THE TRIBAL PEOPLE OF BANASKANTHA HAVE SHARED IN HONOR OF DR. KETAN DESAI.)

WELCOMING DR. KETAN DESAI
ON BEHALF OF THE TRIBAL
PEOPLE OF BANASKANTHA

We, the tribal people of Banaskantha, have come to your city today. We are the representatives of 42 villages in the forested area between Ambaji and Balaram. Our villages are spread over remote and daunting hills. To reach our villages, you have to negotiate a difficult hilly terrain. In a way, you could say that we are the citizens of this country who have been left out of the mainstream. Yet, in spite of the difficulties presented by the hilly region, some NGOs like IMA have been rendering their selfless services for our better living.

Our language, cultural traditions and way of life is very different from most of you and there is a possibility that our presence has surprised some people present in this room today. Nonetheless, we request you to listen to us very carefully.

We learnt that Dr Ketanbhai Desai will be present here today. You cannot imagine the place that Dr Ketanbhai and his wife Alkaben have made for our lives. We all know that Dr Ketanbhai is a celebrated man worldwide. We all know this for a fact, and yet for us he is not a world-famous man but a part of our family. Today, we have come here on our own expense because we feel that Ketanbhai and Alkaben are our own people. This is not just an emotional statement rather our souls have touched each other in many significant ways. Today, we would like to share those details with you.

Ketanbhai has conducted many medical camps in our far-flung hilly region. In 2004, he treated 7,500 poor patients and in 2008, he gave free medical treatment and medicines to 3,500 patients. He bought us two modern ambulance vans to take the pregnant women from our villages for timely medical help even at midnight. And, Alkaben

took the initiative to get bicycles for 100 laborers who used to walk down bare foot to the quarries. Not just that, she also got tricycle rickshaws in all the villages to help those living in hilly areas to access the ambulance service.

The ambulance donated by Ketanbhai is a great respite to us. Every month Dr Mihirbhai Joshi and his philanthropic team from Jyoti Hospital in Visnagar organise a camp here. They take the patients, who need surgical intervention, to Visnagar and treat them for free. Hundreds of poor patients are being taken to Visnagar for free in these ambulances given by Ketanbhai. Can you imagine our plight if this ambulance service were not available? Without access to cash, how could we have managed to spend millions rupees for our treatment? This would not have been possible even if we sold our small plots of land. When we try to seek answers to these questions, our minds just stop working.

In spite of difficult circumstances in our region, it is people like Ketanbhai, Alkaben and many other philanthropic organizations that have helped us sustain our livelihoods. And this is how Ketanbhai and Alkaben have woven themselves into our lives.

Dr Ketanbhai has laid the foundation of helping us break free from the vicious circle of difficult conditions we lived in. Because of Ketanbhai and Alkaben's efforts, we have managed to make some progress. Today, we have come all the way from Banaskantha to share our gratitude. As you all have gathered here to honour him, we have come over to do our bit. We are all illiterate, but a few of our moderately educated brothers have helped us express our feelings through words.

(Excerpts from the leaflet distributed by tribal communities at the felicitation function of Dr. Ketan Desai on 6 December 2009)

Panri Bhura, a tribal woman
expresses her gratitude to
Dr. Ketan Desai over the camp to ETV



Dr. Ketan Desai - Dr. Alka Desai inaugurate
Tribal Girls' Hostel at Virampur



Tribal women are provided
livelihood through a sewing centre



Dr. Jitu Patel (IMA National President) and
Dr. Parimal Desai Distributing clothes to poor tribal



Dr. Jitu Patel, Present IMA National President
addressing the gathering under the banyan tree



Old tribal orphans being
provided food grains
A humanitarian support by
Dr. Alka Desai



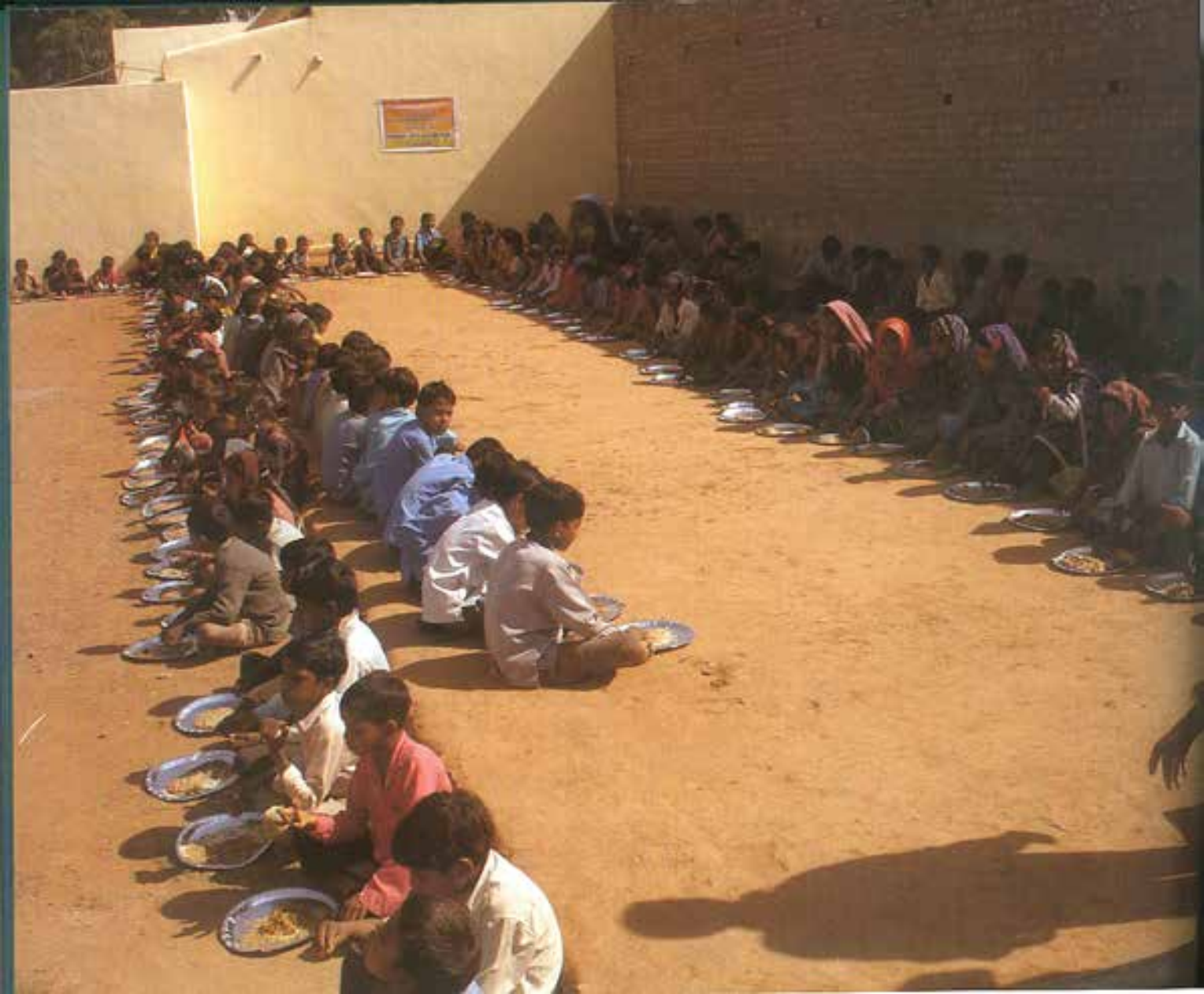


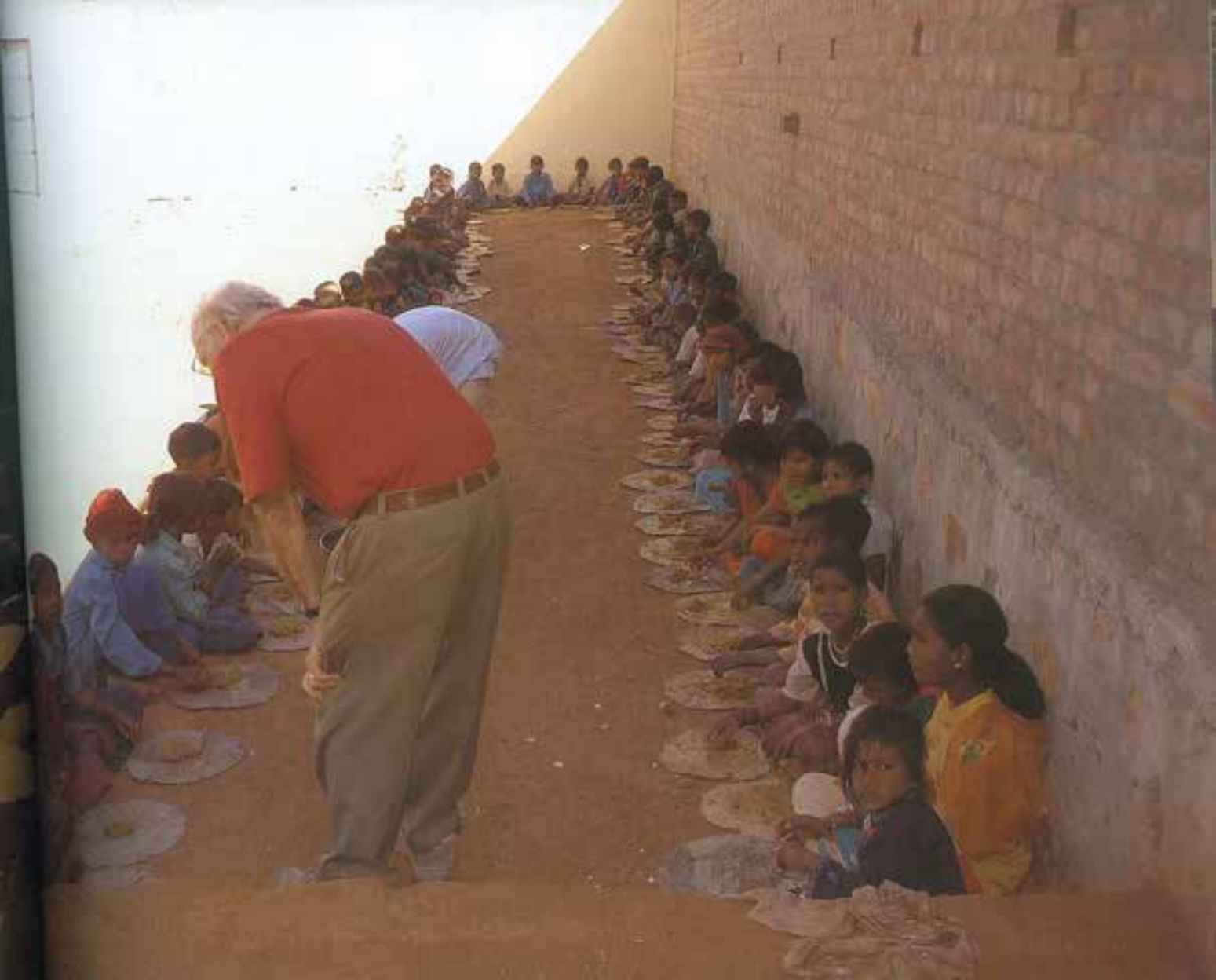


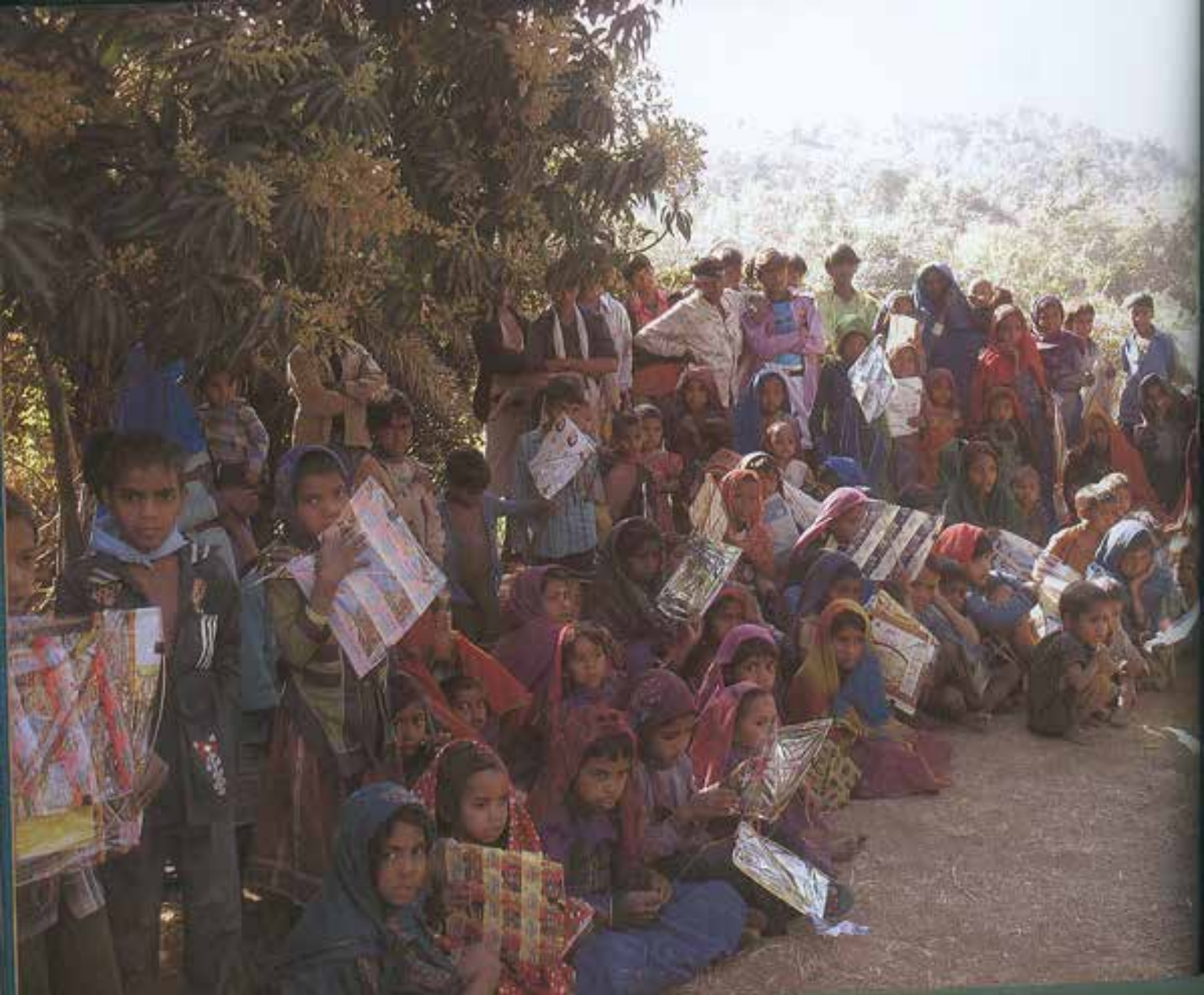
Tribal children of informal schools
located in the remote inaccessible hills
being given food.

Children of Jambupani have seen kites
for the first time - Mission supported by
Dr. Ketan Desai - Dr. Alka Desai











Tribal Dayan Training
by Dr. Laxmi Ayengar



Tricycles to disables
A Gift from desai duo



Bicycle distribution
by Dr. Vasant Parikh to
tribal laborers in memory of
Dhirajlal Desai

જુલાઈ સુધી પુસ્તક
સમાપ્ત સંબોધક કેન્દ્ર

- સંસ્કૃત સોલના
- વીરજી સોલના
- જાણકારી વિતરણ
- કાનગીર પાલ વિતરણ
- સંસ્કૃત સંવાદ વિતરણ
- પ્રતિષ્ઠા વિતરણ વગેરે વિતરણ

વનવાસી સેવા: સાયકલ વિતરણ
(વિરમપુર)

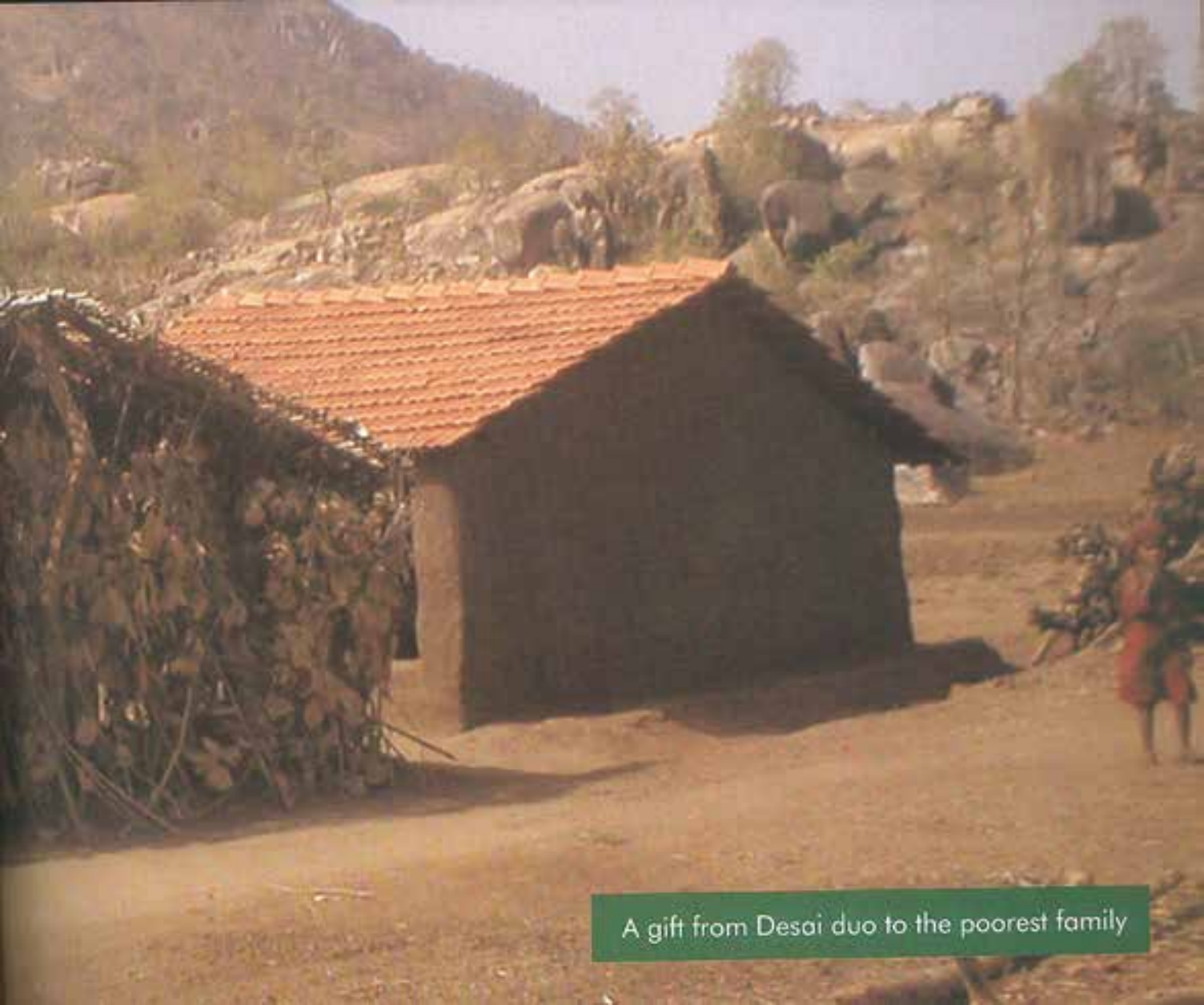
- સમૂહ: સહાયક ધીરજલાલ દેસાઈ.
- અધ્યક્ષ: ડૉ. કેતન દેસાઈ / ડૉ. અલકા દેસાઈ.
- સંકલન: ઇન્ડિયન નેડીકલ એસોસિએશન,
સમાપ્ત સંબોધક કેન્દ્ર, અમીરગઢ - વિરમપુર.



Rudakibai Purabhai poorest tribal family
with their children- their old and new house
in Tathodi village







A gift from Desai duo to the poorest family

Mevali, an orphan mentally sick tribal
girl being taken care by Dr. Alka Desai



Declared witches by the society and
outcast- living miserable life

Kelibai living under a tree being
provided clothes by Dr. Alka Desai



Late Bherakibai (Witch Declared by her community) &
her son Kalu being taken care by Desai duo



Tribal women's livelihood being
earned through wood selling



Migration for livelihood



Bamboo work by
Dalits - livelihood mission of Desai duo



Tribal convention being organized every year
more than 15,000 tribal people participate
and are given food



Newly constructed
RAM BAUG HOSPITAL in Gandhidham
with the inspiration of Dr. Ketan Desai
with entire support of IMA



Yellow sign with text, likely a directory or information board.



Dr. Ketan Desai inaugurating
the new Hospital building in
Gandhidham (Kutch)



Dr. Vallabh Kathiria
the then union minister,
Dr. Ketan Desai entering
the new hospital in Gandhidham



Dr. Ketan Desai addressing the gathering



ઈન્ડિયન મેડિકલ એસોસિએશન દ્વારા
અર વિમિન આઈ.એમ.એ. સમગ્રજન કમ્પ્લેક્સ સ્ટેજ પર
અર્પણ સમારોહ
તા. ૦૨-૨૦૧૩. ૧૦:૦૦ વાગે

A STEP FORWARD

Multipurpose service centre

A view of the multipurpose service centre which is under construction with the blessings of Dr. Ketan Desai to be devoted in the service of poor tribal of Banaskantha.

This Endeavour is to be established to create a model of sustainable development of poor tribal with an aim to change the face of tribal area in next five years.





“
WE MAKE A LIVING
BY WHAT WE GET
BUT WE MAKE A LIFE
BY WHAT WE GIVE.
”

MAY WE DISCOVER THROUGH PAIN AND TORMENT,
THE STRENGTH TO LIVE WITH GRACE AND HUMOR.

MAY WE DISCOVER THROUGH DOUBT AND ANGUISH,
THE STRENGTH TO LIVE WITH DIGNITY AND HOLINESS.

MAY WE DISCOVER THROUGH SUFFERING AND FEAR,
THE STRENGTH TO MOVE TOWARDS HEALING.

MAY IT COME TO PASS THAT WE BE RESTORED TO
HEALTH AND TO VIGOUR.

MAY LIFE GRANT US WELLNESS OF BODY,
SPIRIT AND MIND.

AND IF THIS CANNOT BE SO, MAY WE FIND IN THIS
TRANSFORMATION AND PASSAGE MOMENTS OF
MEANING, OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOVE AND THE DEEP
AND GRACIOUS CALM THAT COMES WHEN WE ALLOW
OURSELVES TO MOVE ON.