

Dr. Vikas Amte- Profile

Dr. Vikas Amte is the Secretary and Chief Functionary of Maharogi Sewa Samiti, Warora (MSS), headquartered at Anandwan in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra. He is popularly known as a Leprosy Rights Activist and a social entrepreneur changing the lives of millions of people with leprosy and other disabilities.

Dr. Vikas heads the organization MSS which is a pioneering institution and an apex nongovernmental referral centre for people afflicted with leprosy. MSS was established in 1949 by his father, Muralidhar Devidas alias Baba Amte with the basic objective of treating and rehabilitating Leprosy Patients and giving them a life with dignity and self respect through productive work. However, soon through his work, Vikas realized that merely imparting medical treatment and training to disabled leprosy patients will not work, as the remnant stigma in the minds of so called 'healthy' society will not allow them to lead a normal life. What they needed was a complete assimilation into a virtual society composed of disabled individuals like themselves, where they can forget their stigma, work productively as normal individuals and above all, enjoy their lost rights of sexuality, companionship and parenthood. He also realized that apart from leprosy patients, he had to treat the numb society suffering from mental leprosy by changing its perception towards disability as a whole. For that he had to design a systematic approach to win over the prejudiced world where these disfigured individuals will be seen not as recipients, but as meaningful contributors to the society.

Vikas derived his purpose from the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "Leprosy work is not mere relief; it is transforming frustration of life into the joy of dedication, personal ambition into selfless service". Vikas who has committed his life to changing the direction of his field, says, " I crave to discover new challenges and accept them. Instead of being called as a doctor, I would like to be called as a social mechanic with an oil can, who goes around and offers his help wherever he sees a breakdown".

Vikas served as an advisory to the Union Government's Working Group on 'Health for All by 2000 AD' where he urged to translate the WHO definition of health for rehabilitation of leprosy patients which stated that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. He, with his 'Land Army' consisting of thousands of severely disfigured, disabled people, has been striving hard to restore the lost dignity of leprosy patients and help them achieve a state of well-being in which every disabled leprosy patient realizes his or her potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and

fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. Today, the balance sheet of this leprosy colony, which started in 1949 with a capital of mere Rs. 14, has assets worth 27 Crores, all created by the fingerless hands of these leprosy-stricken human-Gods.

His constructive humanitarian activities have proved the dictum of Anandwan ' Parity not Charity ' which he vehemently endorsed for the disabled and disadvantaged sections of the society. Rather than leaving the social needs of leprosy patients to the government, he tried to find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to take new leaps. He created thousands of change agents out of the leprosy stricken society, seizing opportunities and improving systems, inventing new approaches, and creating solutions to change society for the better. MSS today is the only place in the world where 2500 survivors of leprosy & physically challenged, blind, deaf-mute, orphans and tribals, who are socially independent, live off the land. They have together set the world's standards for rehabilitation and coordinated some of India's most prominent ecological and social programs. The headquarters of MSS, Anandwan , has now become a living experiment in sustainable rural development and community living and was a proud recipient of the Nirmal Gram Award at the hands of President of India in 2006. MSS, through its constructive work, has benefitted 2.3 million disadvantaged individuals in last 62 years.

The Vikas Amte phenomenon cannot be defined in a single word. Though he is a qualified medical professional however, through his work, he has demonstrated that he is nothing less than an expert engineer, architect, agriculturist and a human rights activist. He ,who has been heading MSS for last 31 years, is a visionary, resourceful and versatile social entrepreneur responsible for ushering in a number of disabled-friendly, eco-friendly, cost effective, innovative, harmonious, sustainable and replicable technologies, development strategies, rehabilitation measures for the benefit of people with other disabilities. He has worked extensively for the 'rights of leprosy patients' in India, designed stable tricycles for people with disabilities, created a 'Therapeutic Orchestra' of people with disabilities and has done commendable work on Biomass Production and Low Cost earthquake resistant housing methods. Implementing his own perspective in the creation of a sample of an ecosystem in progress, model for understanding the needs of a community, turning point for the self-sustenance of an environment and rendering changes needed to evolve through time with forethought and planning..

He has accepted new trends of 21st century as a challenge and is tackling the issues faced by Anandwan in the most eco-friendly manner. Blending his vision of modernization harmoniously with nature, he has developed many innovative programs like 'Rid the weed' for replacing the farm weeds with better useful fodder-yielding-weed thus improving farm productivity manifold.

Addressing the concern of growing construction costs he developed Low Cost timber less houses customized to Indian needs by simplifying the technology and constructed them by employing disabled artisans. He has also provided technology for the societies of earthquake prone areas by exploring affordable earthquake proof homes. The idea of recycling and reuse of the refuse like plastic and rubber along with organic waste for construction of check dams for helping distressed farmers acted as driving force that provides economic viability and job opportunity to the inmates of Anandwan. His unique concept of empowerment of physically challenged people with the aid of music has given a new dimension to MSS. The musical group called 'Swaranandwan' comprising of 400 disabled inmates who perform professionally across the state has garnered millions of rupees for the help of other disadvantaged brethrens of the community. In 2006, Dr. Vikas launched the 'Centre for Social and Environmental Action' for helping the distressed farmers in western Vidarbha region of central India who were then on the brink of disaster, through a comprehensive and sustainable development program.

His is a life of selfless service, drenched with adventure of purpose, pouring unconditional love on all the wounded souls, dedicated to uplift the poorest of the poor and to promoting National Integration and Communal Harmony. He emphasizes that citizens of MSS may lose everything but self-respect. And indeed people of MSS work with a motivation, born out of a sense of belonging to a shared community.

Honoring his commitment to the cause, Government of India had appointed him as an honorary member of the General Council, Standing Committee and Executive Committee of Council for Advancement of Peoples Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), Advisor to National Leprosy Commission, Agricultural Advisor to Ministry of Economic Affairs, and he was the youngest of Eleven Eminent Leprologists and Social Workers called by late Prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi for Eradication of Leprosy in India by 2000 A. D.

He is presently a member of executive committee of YASHADA, Member of standing committee CAPART, Govt. of India (On Disabilities) , Member of Regional Committee – Council For Advancement Of Peoples Action and Ahmedabad Rural Techonology (CAPART), District Committee of People For Animals [Prevention Of Cruelty to Animals). He also gives consultation to Water distribution and sanitary committee of Govt. of Maharashtra and Ministry of Railways, Central India.

He was appointed as Chairman of Maharashtra Govt. Tribal Sub Plan Committee (Five Year Plan) in 1996 – 97 and later as a Member, on State Planning Board for integrated watershed

development program and member of Dr. Bhagvati Committee of Public Health Department of Government of Maharashtra.

He has also served as a Member of the Workshop of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, on issues related to Relief and Rehabilitation of People affected by Earthquakes in Koyna, Uttar Kashi, Osmanabad and Latur in 1994 – 95. He was specially invited to participate with a select group of experts from the Health and Education Sectors, by the Hunger Project, at the Global Office in New York City and Round Table Conference by the Commonwealth Secretariat, London on strategy Issues in Development Management - June /July 1987 and again in May 09th - 13th, 1988.

For his extraordinary work he was awarded with United Nations Right Livelihood Award from Sweden in 1988. Besides that he was awarded with Manav Sewa Award by Young Men's Gandhi Association (YMGA), Rajkot, Kustha Mitra Puraskar by Vidarbha Maharogi Sewa Mandal, Tapovan, Amravati, Shri. Nemichand Shrishrimal Award for Outstanding Role in Social Work, Late Shri. Mahadeo Balvant Natu Puraskar, Pune , SARTHI Award, Nagpur and Kumar Gandharva Puraskar in 1998.

Vikas holds a doctoral degree from Government Medical College of Nagpur University. He did Post Graduate Certificate Course in Leprosy from Central Leprosy Training and Research Institute, Chingleput, (CLTRI) Tamil Nadu.

Vikas is an Indian National. He was born on 27 October 1947. He is married to Dr. Bharati, a paediatrician who looks after medical and general administration at Anandwan. They have two children, Kaustubh, 33 a Chartered accountant who is now Assistant secretary of MSS and Sheetal, 30, who is a medical professional with a M.B.B.S. degree and also has a Masters degree in Social Entrepreneurship from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Both are venturing forward to define new paradigms of developmental work with MSS.