



## Vicharata Samuday Samarthan Manch

VSSM is an organization which came into being with mission to give social identity, citizen's right, education, health facilities, housing, livelihood and basic facilities of daily life to Nomadic and De – Notified tribes

### AND WE THINK TO BUILD A HOUSE ALL WE NEED IS CEMENT, BRICKS, STEEL.....

Vijapur, a town in the Mehsana district where Dafer families have settled since last 40 years . Whenever availability of work becomes scarce in other regions, these families come and stay in the settlements of Vijapur. Earlier, when the town was small and land not as precious as today, these families did not face any harassment. But as the town developed, land became dearer and the settlement land, located in the center of the town, assumed of significant importance and value, leading to harassment from the builders and government on Dafer families to evacuate the land and move to another place.



Atleast six years ago all of these families a total of 89, moved from that place and settled near the railway tracks just on the outskirts of the town. This is the second largest Dafer settlement in Gujarat. These families are involved in their traditional occupation of patrolling the village peripheries and farms. They are required to migrate to other parts of Gujarat for this. During the agriculture season, the farmers of the regions that face fear of crop damage by wild animals like Nilgai, wild boars etc. call upon

the Dafer families to guard and protect their farm boundaries. The Dafers are excellent at this work that they have been doing for ages. Apart from this, they have recently begun working as laborers in BT cotton and potato farms and wood factories too.

The VSSM team came into contact with these families for the first time in year 2007. The process of aiding them to acquire various citizenry proofs was set rolling immediately.; first being Voter's ID Card. To get Voters ID card Additional certificates and proofs are required to attain a Voter's ID card and the families did not have these. It is almost impossible to get Voters ID Card without these documents. However, with the support of two top government officials of the time, Chief Election Officer, Shri. Vinod Babbar and Shri R. M. Patel, Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 218 individuals from Dafer community in Vijapur were able to get their Voter ID Cards. On the basis of these cards, applications were made for allotment of plots for residence purpose and Shri Arjay Bhadu, Mehsana's district collector at that time, ordered allotment of plots to these families. These families were to be allotted plots on the land which fell behind the Animal Hospital and graveyard. The families were instructed to vacate from their current settlement i.e. aside railway tracks and move to the area where plots to be allotted to them. 33 families started living on the earmarked plots while rest of the families said they would wait and move once the plots were allotted. Just when the process of plot distribution began, Shri. Bhadu drew VSSM's attention towards one missing word in the government resolution, which eventually stalled the entire process of plot allotment. According to him, the word "**De-notified**" does not appeal in the

resolution passed by the government for the allotment of plots to the Nomadic and De-notified tribes. The resolution only mentions Nomadic tribes; De-Notified tribes do not get mention in the resolution. The Dafers fall under the category of De-notified tribes thus, they were not eligible for receiving the plots under the resolution. He asked VSSM to get necessary modifications made in the resolution. He wrote to the Revenue Department to make the required inclusions. VSSM also wrote a request letter to the Revenue Minister Smt. Anandiben Patel and another letter to the Revenue Department. The Revenue Department asked VSSM to get a request letter stating 'to make necessary inclusion' from Department of Justice and Empowerment. Shri. Manoj Raval from Department of Justice and Empowerment spoke to the Joint Secretary on this regard and after numerous follow-ups a request was sent to Revenue Department. However Revenue Department refused receiving any such request and asked VSSM to hand deliver the request letter; which VSSM eventually did. Meanwhile, a letter was also received from Smt. Anandiben's office. Eventually the necessary inclusions/modifications in the original resolution were made. **One year! was eventually the time taken to get this modification done.**



Parallel to the process of getting the resolution modified, VSSM also undertook up the effort of obtaining Ration Cards for these families.

Necessary applications were made to the office of the Mamlatdar. The Mamlatdar refused to accept the applications stating that the work of issuance of new Ration Cards had stopped at the moment.

Meanwhile, after due modifications in the resolution, fresh applications were made for the allotment of plots in the year 2010. The office of Vijapur Mamlatdar asked each family to get affidavits and attach them as a supporting document with their respective application for the plot. VSSM as usual facilitated the process. 89 affidavits were done for 89 applications. **Cost incurred for each affidavit - Rs. 500/-**. However, the Mamlatdar never sent the applications to the Collector's office. VSSM continuously followed up the matter, but in vain. In the mean time the Mehsana Collector and the Mamlatdar both got transferred.

VSSM presented the case before the newly appointed district Collector. He asked the newly appointed Mamlatdar to take up the process. The Mamlatdar asked for fresh applications, with new affidavits. Also to be attached with the applications as one of the support document were the Ration Cards, which these families never had.

Applications for Ration Cards had been done twice earlier and had met with the same reply: the work of issuance of new Ration Cards had stopped at the moment.

With this new requisition popping up, a meeting was organized with the District Collector. VSSM explained to the Collector, 'There is a mention on the Ration Card that the use of the card is solely for getting ration and should not be used as a supporting document. How come it is asked to be attached as a supporting document, all the time? Why would we have to come to your offices, if NT and DNTs had all such documents and proofs? There would be no need of such special resolutions or sanctions!!' At last, the Collector was able to agree with our argument and requests. He agreed to talk on the matter with the Mamlatdar.

VSSM has regularly met with the Mamlatdar, who maintains that he will not make any changes in the application requirements until the Collector instructs him accordingly. We have also tried to meet with the Collector and take the matter ahead but have not been able to meet up with him after the last meeting mentioned earlier. Fresh applications have also been made for the plots.

The team of VSSM and the Dafer families of Vijapur together have been striving since 2008 to get the plots for residential purpose. What is stated here is just a glimpse of the entire process. We cannot express how difficult this journey has been. The countless visits at the block, district and the state levels to find a resolution to the issue have aroused a sense of disparagement for this democracy of ours. Tohid, VSSM's team member who has been running pillar to post in various government departments to see that the Dafer families are allotted residential plots, has seen so much of rejection during the course of these 4 years, that he has undergone depression and frustration due to all the mental stress that he has endured. Just imagine the state of the families who are struggling for a small piece of land so that they can start building a home on it. They have been called numerous times to make applications. They have to specially come all the way from regions they have migrated for work. Yet the result of all these has been nothing but dejection.

With every new want of document or more paper work, we see the dreams of these Dafer families come crashing down. For centuries the Dafers have been leading wandering lives, they are yearning to stay put at one place without facing the fury of police and dejection of the society. Nobody from this community, not even their ancestors, has ever stayed in a pucca house. In times when owning a house is becoming so convenient for the citizens of this country, with easy availability of loans and convenient single window processing, having a one room house is yet unthinkable for this communities. If we can have 'One Window' approval system to promote industries, why so many levels of approvals to accomplish one of the most basic need for survival for some of the most marginalized communities of our country.

The angst is reflected in this statement of elderly Dafer gentleman, Latifbhai. 'Why don't they send us to Pakistan? We would be able to accept such a behavior from an enemy country but such dejection becomes unbearable when our own country inflicts it.

Mittal Patel  
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