



# Shenda Park. Kolhapur



A STORY OF HUMANITY EMBRACING HUMANITY

## THE HISTORY OF SHENDA PARK

***“Cursed by an incurable disease, driven out by our own relations & stigmatized and humiliated by society, where do we go? From whom do we expect help or sympathy? We feel helpless!”***

These were the remarks of the residents of Shenda Park, a colony of leprosy afflicted people, and the following is a story of how it got converted to Swadhar (meaning: *Self-supporting*) Nagar in due course.

Leprosy has long been stigmatized because of its infectious nature and the disfigurement it can cause and people afflicted with the disease would be treated as untouchables. Many such families stayed in Takala (centre of Pune) and would wander around the town.

Since the ‘lepers’ were rejected by the society at large, the benevolent & progressive ruler, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur allotted an independent piece of land to them at Shenda Park around hundred years ago. In 1963, they moved here and finally had a place to call home.

They helped one another build their own houses using sugarcane husk, dried leaves and mud. The people who were thrown out of the households they were born in found solace in these shacks they had built for themselves. Although these shacks were not big enough, it returned to them the dignity to live as human beings who had shelter.

But their troubles were far from over. Their neighbours resented the leprosy afflicted people for living next to them and fuelled by these feelings, burned their shacks to grounds.

Their daily routine involved facing a string of instances of humiliation. Not having any source of income or livelihood, their only alternative was to beg on roads and at temples. The people on the street did not give food in their hand but will keep it on the ground and the ‘leper’ is supposed to pick up the food given to them as alms. Coins were also thrown at them. Water poured from a height for the leprosy sufferer and when he/she had finished drinking water from tap,

people around will wash the tap and the place where the leprosy sufferer had stood.

Some people would even wash the road in front of their houses if a leprosy afflicted individual walked past the road. And if someone accidentally brushed past a leprosy sufferer on the road, he/she would be insulted in a manner one cannot imagine.

There is no question of getting society to accept a leprosy-afflicted individual as a life companion. Marriage had to be an internal affair and people marry within the colony itself. These marriages have no restriction of caste or religion as these people are bound together as people who suffer from the fate of being a ‘leper.’

Marriage at Shenda Park is a simple affair. The senior members of the Basti would get together and give their blessing. The couple gets married; tea and sweets are served to celebrate.

Usually, the next generation of these families would not be afflicted with leprosy, since it is a fact that leprosy is not a hereditary disease. But their families face the same ostracization; their children do not get admission to schools. The youth doesn’t get employment, no one marries them, even the grinding mill refuses to grind their grains. Shopkeepers wash the coins given by the residents of Shenda Park. No barber is ready to cut their hair or trim their beards. Even the government doesn’t support them. Civic facilities and identity cards, like Birth Certificates & Voter cards, were also denied to the residents.

They cry out in exasperation -  
***“Is there a saviour for us? We are an unfortunate lot of humans afflicted by leprosy. Would anyone come forward to stop this discrimination and delusory beliefs present in the society?”***



## THE HARBINGERS OF DEVELOPMENT OF SHENDA PARK

The saviours emerged in the form of three men who took up of the cause of leprosy-afflicted persons; Mr. Suresh Shipurkar, Deepak Devalapurkar and Dr. Athayel. They not only showed them a ray of hope but also generated self-confidence in them to face the world. From the community Balkrishna Jagtap, Bheema Pandhan and Nadif Chacha came forward to assist the three saviours. They took up projects like Rehabilitation & Welfare activities, Self-Reliance Workshops, Tree Plantation Drives, promoted Smoke-less chullahs, and most importantly secured Medical Help, Skill-development and education of leprosy-affected children.

With development, the size of the settlement also increased from 10 families to 158! Mr Shipurkar also brought in many social workers who donated wheelchairs, warm clothing etc. Full nutrition meals began to be arranged for the residents of Swadhar Nagar.

Furthermore, 5 representatives from over 28 Leprosy colonies in Maharashtra were encouraged to come together and form a federation of leprosy colonies in Maharashtra for solving their problems. In this way, this leprosy colony at Shenda Park became a true Swadhar Nagar.

With all of these positive changes, even the civic facilities followed. Mr. Vhatkar, ex-corporator of the area, brought in electricity, street lights, common water pumps. Another corporator facilitated the community toilet block.

The residents remark, ***“Corporators provided us with basic amenities, no doubt! But it was Mr Shirpurkar Sir who brought us back our dignity as humans, got us acceptance by the society.”***

He encouraged the women of the Basti to also take up jobs around the colony. Women organized themselves into an organization called, “Sakshi Vikas Sanstha,” to get help from people and stand on your own legs, which is giving a new identity to the once neglected leprosy colony.

From stigma to sufferance to acceptance, the journey of the people at Shenda Park has been difficult. But the journey wasn't over yet.



## THE STORY OF RESHMA MADANE

Reshma Madane was orphaned at the age of 13. She had to shift to Kolhapur to live with her Maushi (Aunt), who was afflicted with leprosy and lived in Shenda Park in Kolhapur.

When her Maushi died, she was under the threat of being asked to leave Shenda Park. So, she married Saibu Madane. Although Reshma wasn't afflicted with leprosy, she could not secure a job in nearby colonies as she was a resident of Shenda Park. So she and her husband begged daily near the temple.

She and her husband practiced Open Defecation but after the CTB was built, they used the CTB facility, even though her husband had to slide on road to reach there & it did not always have water.

When her husband's illness grew, he could no longer go to the CTB and became bed-ridden and began to defecate at home. He died soon after because of infection caused by not having proper sanitation facilities.



After her husband's death, Reshma continued to live in Shenda park with her two daughters, Ishwari & Renuka. Renuka, who had given up studies to take care of her parents, got married to Suresh, an orphan and he too began to live with them. But tragedy struck again on the way to the CTB. Reshma Madane fell down and broke her spine.

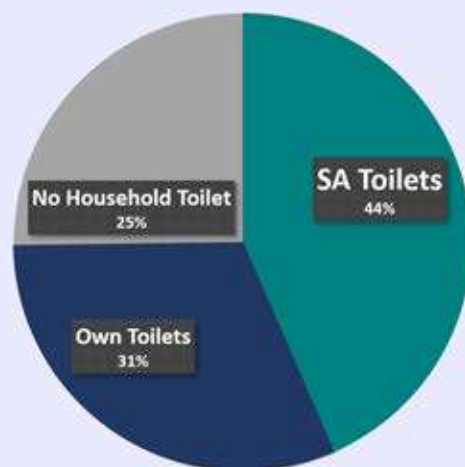
Hospital bills amounted to 1.5 lacs and the family of 6 had to mortgage jewellery. For two years, Reshma was bed-ridden and was and excreted & defecated on her bed. She had begun to walk using a walker but the CTB was still a difficult option



Reshma Madane & her daughters at their house in Shenda Park.

## SHELTER ASSOCIATES' INTERVENTION AND IMPACT

In 2015, Shelter Associates conducted a survey to study the situation in the slum after getting to know that the leprosy affected persons faced a daily struggle to reach the community toilets for defecation. It was a pathetic state of affairs where the old and the leprosy-afflicted people had to literally slide on rough roads through mud, filth and garbage to reach the Community Toilet Block (CTB). Few of the old people had broken their legs and backs while wading through water and filth to reach to reach the CTB. They were all extremely eager to have toilets when they came to know of the OHOT project of SA.



### Fifty households have been facilitated with toilets with septic tanks!

Residents of Swadhar Nagar, Shenda Park are thankful to SA for providing toilets in their households. One resident said, "We would not have built toilets for ourselves in even 7 births! It was very convenient to receive the material right at our doorstep. Placements of Septic tanks was also done as per our convenience. Till today, people visited us as a Social responsibility but Shelter took an interest in our basic needs and enquired about our needs and limitations. We are all indebted to Shelter Associates for life!"

#### SHENDA PARK, WARD NO - 1, KMC.



SA TOILET STATUS	
Completed [47]	Locked house [1]
Under construction [3]	Unoccupied house [19]
Own toilet [36]	Remaining Houses [29]
Community Toilet Block [1]	
Total Houses [135]	

19.10.2018  
Shelter Associates

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Reshma Madane & her family finally have a toilet of their own.

#### SANITATION



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