

Anil Mehta: A Man with a Mission

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Twenty years ago Anil Mehta was like one of us, a regular resident of Udaipur. Till the time he fell acutely sick. Doctors told him not to drink from the city's regular supply of water without ensuring purification. A simple advice, which most of us would follow without a question. Mehta in fact did just the opposite. He started questioning a lot – where was the source of the city's water supply, why was it so polluted that people drinking it were falling sick, what could be done to change it, etc. The more Mehta learnt about Udaipur's lake-system, pollution and water management issues, the more he became determined to do something about it.

A few other citizens enquiring of the same issues somehow came together and a People's Organisation was born – the Jheel Sanrakshan Samiti. This Samiti was formed by former chairperson of SAIL, late Dr. P. L. Agarwal, former Foreign Secretary late Shri Jagat S Mehta, Anil Mehta, A. G. Trivedi, Dr. Tez Razdan, Suresh Goyal and L. L. Sharma to improve the water management system of the city and clean-up and conserve the centuries old lake systems which is such a draw for tourists. The important point about this PO is that they are a group of passionate people who work selflessly and without outside funds to help improve their city's heart – its lakes. Of this group's many successes, the key ones have been the inclusion of management and conservation of the city's lake at the state policy level through the establishment of Lakes Development Authority in Udaipur and the cleaning up of the Ahar River which had become a sewage canal dumping pollutants into Udaisagar Lake. Mr. Mehta and his teammates are also instrumental in developing the Lakes Conservation Plan and ensuring that enough budget is allocated by the state for the same. Despite these successes, the challenges are many like the encroachment on lakes' banks by land sharks, dumping of marble slurry in the upper catchment area, leaking sewer pipes (56 as per a check done by JSS) which go through the lakes and increasing pollution from tourism and industries. However, Mehta is upbeat. He says, "Every day is a new day and things have changed over the years which give us hope for the future." Anil Mehta, a water engineer by qualification, is the Principal of Vidya Bhawan Polytechnic, Udaipur. He is also the winner of Yashwant Rao Kelkar National Award for protection of urban environment and has been working for the protection and conservation of lakes and water resources since the last 20 years. First published on The Other Story Contact the Author: Bipasha Majumder