
UNIT 13 **GANDHI'S ASHRAMS: SEED BEDS OF ECOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Structure

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

In his work on Gandhi and His Ashrams, Mark Thomson observes that Gandhi's ashrams and his advocacy for an Ashram life were unique. They were seedbeds of Gandhi's communitarian ideas and experimentation. Most of the biographies on Gandhi and Gandhi's Autobiography have significantly concentrated on this aspect of life wherein the community life and brotherhood were widely encouraged. Gandhi himself maintained that ashrams were his finest achievements and whether these communities fostered the above feelings or not were merely a reflection of his own self. John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* was a major influence in this context as he himself acknowledged it time and again. Be it his establishment of ashrams in South Africa or India, Gandhi's emphasis was on understanding and inspiring brotherhood among one and all. The Phoenix Settlement, Tolstoy Farm, Sabarmati Ashram, etc., are all reflections of his way of thinking, living and advocating harmony between man and nature. This Unit dwells upon this aspect and acquaints the learner as to how Gandhi's ashrams inspired a smooth relation between the human being and nature.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- The concept of Ashram life
- The harmonious relation between man and nature
- a Gandhi's advocacy of ashram life and his experiments with the same.

13.2 ASHRAMS AS COMMUNITY LIVING CENTRES

According to the tenets of Hinduism, an ashram is a place where man would lead his life peacefully in its entirety- free of wants, desires and through adoption of self-discipline and self-purification. The concepts of grihashthashram and vanaprasthashram remain

important elements of the **Hindu** way of life. These were considered as crucial features, wherein an individual reins in his/her unwanted desires, wants etc., and leads a life of purity and sanctity. **Further**, it is suggested that along with other inmates of these small settlements, man should involve himself in positive activities that benefit society; good thoughts, words and **deeds** are supposed to be the mainstay of his/her life that would navigate one towards the goal of *moksha* or liberation from the worldly bonds, which is considered as the **ultimate** goal in an individual's life. The Ashrams were considered as the seedbeds on which the leading of such life was possible; they not only foster harmony between human beings but also between human beings and nature. Nature was always revered in the Hindu philosophy and the ashrams are generally regarded as the settlements that are closest to nature with an eco-friendly approach to life. The individuals, in a group, are said to **follow** this collective approach and lead a contented life.

Some of the activities **that** are usually taken up in such ashrams include promoting agricultural practices and growing vegetables, conserve resources like water, production of organic goods (to use the modern terminology), and so on. There would also be collective or group prayers; religious discourses, education- academic and creative, encouraging of craftsmaanship and imparting of vocational education thus leading to a simple life with high **thinking**. All these activities have certain aims: they encourage individual talent; they protect and **conserve** nature; they make the individuals realise the importance of natural resources; they **also** enable one to realise the significance of living in harmony with nature; and cultivate the feeling of oneness towards all living beings. Ashrams thus served the purpose of **social/collective** welfare of all living beings and develop a feeling of reverence towards God's creation.

13.3 GANDHI'S ASHRAMS

Mark Thomson aptly remarks on Gandhi's initiatives of ashram life thus: "The ashrams Gandhi established served as laboratories where he and his colleagues experimented with nonviolence as an alternative way of life. In these small monastic communities of men and women living according to absolute vows he sought to lay the ground-work for an egalitarian social **organisation** and economy, and to develop an education system that reflected the Indian genius. The ashrams provided economic and moral support as well as fostering the discipline and awareness necessary for their members to sustain grassroot civil disobedience. Gandhi saw the need in the tradition-bound, rigidly hierarchical Indian society, for a moral sanction able to inspire people to help themselves. He believed ashramic life, based on mutuality, simplicity and hard work, would nurture an asceticism that could be channelled through positive action to reform society" (p.4).

Apart from John **Ruskin's** work, Gandhi's ideas of ashram life thoroughly relied on his strict vows of vegetarianism and his religious outlook. While the family background and traditions helped him in being a vegetarian, it was the promise he made to his mother that saw him adhere to his **moral** principles although his life. This may be attributed to his non-violent approach too. To quote Thomson again, 'vegetarianism became for Gandhi much more than an **individualistic** practice. He interpreted it as a basis for mankind to attain a greater spiritual and moral unity' (p.12). To Gandhi, it was also a discovery of truth as it served **altruistic** purposes. Thomson also attributes the influence of Henry Maine's *Village Communities of the East and West (1881)* on Gandhi. This impressed on Gandhi the importance of simple and community living. Further, Tolstoy's works too had impressed upon **Gandhi** the need for an ascetic life. Tolstoy's courageous act of

repudiating the state and the church for a 'truly religious society, sustained by vegetarianism, celibacy and other forms of self-control' thoroughly impressed Gandhi. The former's ideas on small experimental communities coincided with the Eastern and Indian values of ashram life. The idea of cooperative communities was put to experiment by Gandhi in South Africa. By then, Gandhi was involved in the non-violent struggle against the racial discrimination in the Dark Continent. Therefore, his non-violence extended to all spheres of life. Further, community living provided him a great opportunity of taking along everyone in his life mission.

In his lifetime, Gandhi established few ashrams, notable among them include the Phoenix Settlement, the Tolstoy Farm, Sabarmati (or Satyagraha) Ashram and Sevagram. While the first two came up at the backdrop of his struggles in South Africa, the other two were set up at the background of Indian national freedom struggle movement. Surprisingly, the Phoenix Settlement was never called as ashram. Two aspects that Gandhi insisted were the purity of body and mind and economic equality. Gandhi viewed it primarily as a religious institution with an aspect of essential unity. He insisted on leading a simple life in the sparsely populated country. Even in Tolstoy Farm, Gandhi endeavoured to practise much of his doctrine by leading a life beset with simplicity. The two settlements became Satyagraha institutions and one important outcome of these was the beginning of the Indian *Opinion*. In these, Gandhi made common kitchen and prayers as main tools of community living. These would enable people to come together and share their experiences. Thomson remarks that it was an Order of Trappist monks living at Mariam Hill near Pinetown, sixteen miles from Durban, that provided him (Gandhi) with a functioning example of a micro-community living on the basis of voluntary poverty, self-renunciation and constructive work'. It is to be noted that all these are eco-friendly methods in themselves. These advocate limiting one's wants and placing less stress on the natural resources so that they are available to one and all in a community. In a way, the Trappist Settlement became the inspiring point for Gandhi to pursue similar life at a later stage. What impressed him most was the observance of strict vows of silence and chastity and as patterns of simplicity, virtue and gentleness. Perhaps the idea of giving training in various workshops originated from here. The workshops were undertaken to train people as blacksmiths, tinsmiths, shoemakers, carpenters and tanners while women were trained in ironing, sewing, straw-hat manufacturing and knitting. The printing press, oil press, flour mill were all part of these settlements. As Thomson observes, 'his (Gandhi's) conception of small communities of working men and women voluntarily devoted to self-realisation through the observance of absolute vows and service of the poor, is in many respects reminiscent of the monastic ideal of Trappists' (p.40).

Gandhi's idea of cooperative community was very much in consonance with the concept of ashram life in vedic age. His attempts to live according to high spiritual ideals often led him to memorizing The Gita and other religious scriptures; therefore, he inculcated truth and non-violence as the highest principles which need to be practised by one and all incessantly. One important aspect that Gandhi forever insisted on was the spirit of non-possession. This ideal is much easier in its proclamation but much more difficult to put into practice. Not to have possessions is humanly impossible and to follow it as a life-long principle, one needs to follow the path of spirituality persistently. These were important ideals not just for spiritual attainment but also living in contact with and close to nature.

One of the first requirements was to run the press in an ideal atmosphere, perhaps a farm, where the press could be located. Gandhi wanted to allot each of the staff a plot

to live and work on a cooperative basis. In contrast to today's way of life where **affluence** and unlimited **prosperity** rule the world, Gandhi appealed to his co-workers to join him in his **revolutionary** efforts to improve their quality of lives. As cited by Thomson, Gandhi insisted that 'living under such conditions, and amid the beautiful surroundings which have given Natal the name of the Garden Colony, the workers could live a simpler and more natural life, **and** the ideas of **Ruskin** and Tolstoy be combined with strict business principles' (p.47). Gandhi along with co-workers made the place habitable which was once **surrounded** by wild bushes and snakes. Gandhi persisted on manual labour and alternative **natural** treatments in case of illness.

At Tolstoy Farm, Gandhi **avoided** those inconvenient **shortcomings** that trapped the Phoenix Settlement. It was again **the** spirit of cooperation and bonding that primarily pervaded the environs at Tolstoy Farm. Unlike in Phoenix, here the 'accommodation was shared, and instead of each settler cultivating a separate plot of land, it was decided that the entire acreage would be **cultivated** jointly to ensure more efficient production of larger crops, and to enhance the cooperative spirit of the exercise. Gandhi viewed the experiment as an excellent opportunity to inculcate simple, non-materialistic values within the Indian community in South Africa'. It was a real settlers' endeavour in the Tolstoy Farm wherein they cultivated home-grown crops, taught children and ran school, did collective cooking, scavenging, observed **vegetarianism** and led a life of economy and simplicity. It was rather a model life that Gandhi envisaged in all spheres. This lived up to his expectations as the settlers were also **satyagrahis**, participating in the struggle against racial discrimination by the government and **symbolising** a spirit of unity and strength. Mark Thomson gives a detailed account of the community life as followed by Gandhi and his associates:

*The watchwords of the Tolstoy Farm community were industry, economy and self-sufficiency. Unused to ~~the~~ rigours of rural life, the settlers struggled in cold, hot and wet weather conditions to improve their quality of life. As Kallenbach knew something of gardening, it became obligatory for those not engaged in the kitchen, young and old, to devote some time to this pursuit. Of course, the young did the bulk of the work, **digging** pits, felling timber and **carrying** loads. Ample exercise, nourishing, regular food and clean air and water kept the settlers, and especially the children, in good **health**. When illness did strike neither a doctor was called nor drugs used, but at all times Gandhi persevered with nature cure, therapies such as earth, and water **treatment**, fasting and changes in diet. One of the rules laid down was that anyone ~~who~~ had to conduct business in Johannesburg on behalf of the community must **travel** by third rail class, and to discourage settlers ~~from~~ going to the city unnecessarily it was also stipulated that pleasure-seekers must travel there and back on foot. ~~In~~ fact many acquired the habit of walking as a result and greatly benefitted from the exercise, but most importantly precious money was saved by this one rule. Gandhi would often rise at two o' clock in the morning, walk the twenty-one miles to **Johannesburg**, attend to his law practice and other concerns, and walk back by **evening**. To ensure that money was not squandered in the city simple provisions were made available to day travellers. An iron **handmill** was purchased to grind **wheat** for home-baked wholemeal bread and groundnuts for butter. Marmalade ~~was~~ made from oranges grown on the farm.*

Despite the large number of settlers, the farm was kept clean. *All* rubbish was buried in trenches, ~~all~~ waste water collected in buckets and used to water the trees, and all food refuse ~~and~~ excreta was covered in earth pits and later utilised as manure. These methods were not only hygienic but **afforded** a rich supply of organic

fertilizer for the farm. Later, in India, Gandhi launched an extensive propaganda programme to teach the villagers the necessity of *efficient* sanitation and hygiene, and ways in which such practices could improve their crops. The settlers also made their own furniture, clothes and sandals, Kallenbach went to the Trappist monastery near *Pinetown* to learn sandal-making. All wore trousers and shirts made out of coarse blue cloth and fashioned after a gaol uniform, which were suitable for laboring. The food served was simple vegetarian prepared in Indian style and eaten with wooden spoons made at the settlement.

Similarly, in India, Gandhi established the **Satyagraha** Ashram (or more famously known as Sabarmati Ashram) in 1915 originally at **Kochrab**. It was later moved to Sabarmati, near Ahmedabad. As Gandhi put it succinctly, the object of this Ashram is that its members should qualify themselves for, and make a constant endeavour towards, the service of the country, not inconsistent with the universal welfare (MK Gandhi, Ashram Observances in action, p.65).

In order to fulfill the above objective, he laid down the rules for the following observances:

1. Truth
2. Non-violence or Love
3. Chastity (*Brahmacharya*)
4. Control of the Palate
5. Non-stealing
6. Non-possession or Poverty
7. Physical Labour
8. Swadeshi
9. Fearlessness
10. Removal of Untouchability
11. Tolerance

Gandhi recommended the following activities to fulfill the above observances. These were:

1. Worship
2. Sanitary service
3. Sacrificial spinning
4. Agriculture
5. Dairy
6. Tannery
7. National Education
8. **Khadi** Technical School

The setting up of the **ashram**, as in other places, was unique here too. It consisted of simple structures made out of **mud brick, tiles and wood, which was thickly painted with coal tar to seal it, were erected, including, in time, a school building, a dining hall and kitchen, a library, and the vanatshala, in which handlooms were installed.**

Gandhi emphasised the **activities** particularly related to spinning and khadi work. These were done to supplement the income as also to encourage the cloth production indigenous in nature. There were **also** experiments related to agriculture and labour was hired to tend to the crops. As **this** ashram set the precedent, all over the country, many people came forward to set up similar ashrams to re-dedicate their lives to simple ideals and at the same time, struggle **incessantly** to achieve independence **from** the colonial rule. Some such examples include **Jugatram** Dave's ashram in Vedcchi, **Vallabhbai Patel's** Ashram in **Bardoli**, **J.B.Kripalani's** Gandhi ashram in **Benares** and **Vinoba Bhave's** Satyagraha Ashram in **Wardha**.

While travelling through the country mobilising the masses towards struggle for independence, Gandhi **came** across Segaon (or now called seegram) and conceptualised an ideal ashram life to spread the message of Sarvodaya and social awareness. Gandhi was always drawn **towards** villages in particular for he believed that the real India lives in its villages. Moreover, unlike cities, villages continue to retain the innocence, sanctity and tend to take care of customs, traditions **and** the precious nature as well. Seegram, to him, in his own **words**, remained a laboratory for **his** experiments with ahimsa. It was his laboratory for **satyagraha** too. Gandhi wanted to get rid of the unhygienic conditions surrounding the ashrams and continuously strived to spread this message to one and all. In good humour, he **detested** the imminent adverse situations affecting the health and the inability to lead a **solitary** life that he was in search of. He also expressed his displeasure at the springing up of **new** buildings everyday in the surroundings.

Gandhi replicated many of the measures as had already been mentioned in the preceding pages so as to ensure self-discipline in the ashram premises. From agricultural practices to water cleansing **system**, Gandhi drew the attention of all to many a healthy practices of living and thereby **totally** avoiding unhealthy practices. Some of the measures Gandhi suggested included:

- Daily spinning so **as** to ensure manual labour and **encourage** the spirit of swadeshi
- Avoiding sitting idle or talking loudly so that peace may prevail
- Adopt simple **lifestyle** and avoid unnecessary wastage
- **Treat** one and all **with** courtesy and be considerate to all.
- Food must be **taken** like medicine, under proper restraint only for sustaining the body and keeping it a fit instrument for service.
- Bad or imperfectly cooked food should not be eaten.
- Not have more clothes than necessary, wear khadi and use village-made products.
- Everything must be kept in its proper place. All refuse must be put into the **dustbin**.
- Water must not **be** wasted. Boiled water is used for drinking purposes. Pots and pans are finally washed with boiled water. Unboiled water of the ashram wells is not safe to drink. .

- We should not spit or clean the nose on the road, but only in an out of the way place where no one is likely to walk.
- Hands should be washed with utmost cleanliness after using toilets so as to avoid unhygienic practices.
- The twigs should be used to clean teeth and these should not be thrown away after use. They should be collected in a pot.
- Waste paper, which cannot be used for writing on the other side, should be burned. Nothing else should be mixed with it.
- The fragments of the vegetables must be kept separate and converted into manure.
- Broken glass should be thrown into a pit at a safe distance from houses.

The above-mentioned measures have been carefully prescribed by Gandhi in order to ensure a safe and healthy living in and around ashrams.

13.4 ROLE OF WOMEN

Women, primarily, are seen as nurturers, especially of nature. In most of the countries and cultures, women are identified with protecting the natural resources and are perceived as being sensitive to the problems related to excessive utilisation of resources. Be it the Chipko movement or the Green belt Movement, women are at the forefront in conserving the nature and its abundant resources. Most of the movements related to ecology have women as the prime leaders, thereby resulting in the terminology and subject of eco-feminism. Gandhi too attributed these nurturing qualities to women and paid high tributes to their motherly attitude to one and all. He considered them to be morally superior and as having stronger character. Gandhi's advocacy of women empowerment and also his advocacy of non-violence towards one and all in thought, word and deed have been of immense appeal to the women in general. They found in him a champion of their rights and their innate identification with nature. Most of them who involved themselves in the movements related to ecology attributed their success to adherence to the principles of non-violence as propounded by Gandhi.

Two women from outside India were especially involved in the task of conservation of natural resources in India. Madeleine Slade, popularly known as Mirabehn and Catherine Mary Heilemann, known as Saralabehn have especially responded to the call of the Himalayas in India and dedicated themselves to the onerous task of social empowerment of women. The former set up a small centre near the Himalayan region where she undertook the task of promoting khadi and also started 'pashulok', with animal husbandry activities. She rendered immense service to the hill population by establishing her own ashram near Haridwar (now in the Uttarakhand state). She was immensely popular among the local population who realised the worth of her task and came forward to patronizing the same. Much of her contribution has already been discussed in one of the previous courses (Non-Violent Movements after Gandhi, Unit on Chipko Andolan).

Similarly, Saralabehn rendered an enormous amount of service by taking active interest in the Constructive Programme as forwarded by Gandhi. She was engaged in the real service of the deprived sections and helped in keeping the surroundings clean and hygienic. She also mastered the art of spinning, an activity to which Gandhi attached greatest importance. She was also engaged in the work related to the welfare of women and girls

in the mountain region. She also played significant role in the Chipko movement in the Himalayas. As Thomas Weber points out, 'her ashram was not merely providing an academic education and empowerment for women, but was also training social activists. Some of the young women who had grown up under her tutelage went on to form their own service centres in the hills from where they continued their social activities independently. In 1961, Sarala Devi founded the Uttarakhand Sarvodaya Mandal (Uttarakhand Welfare of All Association) dedicated to the uplift of the hill population and the protection of the hill environment' (p.303).

Gandhi's influence on women and their work was enormous. The above women were just two examples of selfless service, who lived the ashram life and carved out their niche in the arena of social work, especially among the hill areas/places they have chosen to work. They dedicated themselves to the task of implementing Constructive Programme in letter and spirit. There were many such unsung women whose contributions laid the foundation for social work and the conservation of the ecology.

13.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF GANDHI'S ADVOCACY

The significance of Gandhi's advocacy of a simple life had many dimensions. First of all, they conveyed the message of simplicity and the need for liberal and high thinking in everyday life. Secondly, his setting up of ashrams and the lifestyle he suggested therein was well within the human consumption limits and propagated avoidance of unnecessary wastage of any object that comes our way. For example, even the teeth cleaning twigs were not thrown away thus measuring their potential use or value. The lifestyle he suggested is what we can call today as eco-friendly or environment-friendly lifestyle wherein the natural resources are carefully used so as to store them for future usage. Gandhi himself said many a time that we have to fulfil our needs and not indulge in greed considering the limited resources available on earth. He was also against India taking up western lifestyle for it would put enormous pressure on the resources and considering its growing population levels, its resource consumption would be a menace to one and all. The very idea of setting up ashrams was to live close to nature as much as possible. Gandhi was thoroughly impressed by the vedic life and the life that was advocated by *rishis* of our ancient times. Further, the ideas drawn from Ruskin and Tolstoy's works have been immensely encapsulated by him in all spheres. The spirit of non-violence thoroughly impressed upon him and he adhered to it in thought, word and deed. To Gandhi, 'mere birth as a human being and the amassing of wealth by committing wanton destruction upon the environment does not entitle one to be called a civilized human being in the real sense of the term. As stated above, Gandhi saw humankind's role as trustee of all other living creatures and therefore, the human race has to earn this distinction by better thoughts, words, and deeds. Non-violence and compassion are not only for all living beings, but also towards inanimate materials. Overuse of the latter, motivated by greed and the desire to make profits, is also a form of violence, since it deprives others of the use of such materials' (Khoshoo and Moolakkattu, p.27). Gandhi consistently advocated morality towards one and all and this extended to nature as well. To him, morality is not only towards one another, but towards nature as well. The passion to have more and more at the expense of nature and members of our own species, and a lot of others in the system who are less fortunate, is indeed one of the root causes of the environmental problems. Gandhi categorically stated, I refuse to buy from anybody anything, however nice or beautiful, if it interferes with my growth or injures those whom nature has made my first care' (Ibid, p.29). In today's highly consumerist world, Gandhi and his advocacy

towards a simple life through his ashrams sends a message to the humanity that being compassionate to one and all would not only enable us to protect ourselves but also the God created nature as well. It is up to us, as the custodians of this precious resource, to take immense care and nurture it with utmost passion and respect.

13.6 SUMMARY

Gandhi's ashrams personified an element of simple life and high thinking. By setting exemplary conditions, Gandhi sends message to the humanity about the respect and veneration one can extend to it. His ashrams were models of self-sufficiency, self-dependence and reverberated with the spirit of swadeshi. Gandhi was no mere advocate of simple life; he conveyed it through following it letter and spirit. His exemplary models inspired other prominent leaders and even the general masses to think and act in simple and respectful terms. His vows and conditions were difficult to follow but those who followed them became real satyagrahis and proponents of non-violence and truth. His ashrams gives us the message that we can all indeed live a life that is in tandem with nature and make world a better place to live.

13.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What is an ashram? How well they can serve the purpose of community living?
2. How did Gandhi make his ashrams exemplary models of ecological friendly life?
3. Discuss in brief the significance of advocacy of ashram life by Gandhi.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 14 EDUCATION AND GREEN INITIATIVES

Structure

14.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

14.2 Environmental Education and Its Objectives

14.3 Principles of Environmental Education

14.4 Environmental Education on Global Agenda

14.5 Environmental Education in India

14.6 Green Initiatives

14.7 Summary

14.8 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Education is an **essential** element in human life, for it enables one to perceive what is right and wrong and also enables one to seek knowledge. Knowledge does not necessarily mean the one that is **acquired** through reading literature. It is acquired through experiences in life, one's ability to adjust and accommodate in any context, and to view all with equanimity. It is this knowledge that enables one to stand up to **difficulties** and resolve the problems. Conflicts are bound to **occur** in human interactions. This applies equally to human interaction **with** nature- that is meant for the sustenance of the world. When human beings came **into** conflict with nature, trying to subjugate it and mould it according to human needs, the **gains** seemed to be in favour of the human beings. But on careful observation, it is **the mankind** that is at loss in this conflict. It becomes essential to avoid these conflicts and **this** could be done mainly through educating ourselves. Our education should instill in us **the** sense to respect our nature and take care of it for our own sustenance. In this **context**, education, especially related to environment has become an important component in the scheme of education all around the world. This Unit enables the learner to **understand** the real purpose of education and the knowledge it provides to view one and all **with** equability. It also highlights the basic objectives and principles of environmental **education** and the necessity to take green initiatives if we are to live in harmony with **nature** and ensure that the **future** generations too benefit by this reverential approach.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would **enable** you to understand

- a The objectives of education
- The **importance** of education in nurturing our nature; and
- a The **significance** of taking eco-friendly steps to lead a peaceful life.

14.2 ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND ITS OBJECTIVES

In **Gandhi's** Constructive Programme, education was given a significant place as a means of social regeneration. Gandhi particularly stressed on education in health and hygiene as a hallmark of a healthy society. Explaining as to why he laid special emphasis on it, he deemed it necessary for everyone to know and observe the laws of health and hygiene. He insisted that everyone should 'breathe the freshest air day and night' and that our 'water, food and air must be clean'; he also insisted on keeping one's own surroundings with the same threefold cleanliness that one desires for **oneself** (Constructive Programme, pp.19-20). Gandhi envisioned that kind of education, which would promote **character**-building and moral superiority in an individual. He also wanted that education should be imparted through arts and crafts; thus this scheme of education promotes local entrepreneurship and creativity.

Education, especially related to natural environment, is essential in order to inculcate respect towards nature and its habitat. Nature is a precious source of resources on which the entire habitat is dependent. Any harm to nature in the form of excessive extraction, injudicious use and abuse of resources is detrimental to the survival of the humankind. If one has to have respect for this nature, the foremost important element is to know about it. This becomes possible only through right education that inculcates moral approach towards treating the nature as a key to our life. The ancient *gurukuls* or abodes of education worked much in tandem with nature with pristine surroundings; there was abundant greenery around, and the atmosphere was free from any pollution. Over the ages and with the onset of the industrial revolution and its ill-effects, this respect more or less diminished. The ill-effects have reached such proportions as to call for the need to impart education in the realm of nature and environment. Initially, this education was deemed as part of biological science and Life Sciences in particular. As the importance of environment and its sphere expanded, a new discipline on environmental education became a necessity and was introduced in many educational institutions¹ schools and universities. Today, its relevance is being realised by all the nations around the world; as mentioned in the preceding lines, it has become an important curricula to be imparted to the learners.

Environmental Education

By environmental education, we may imply that education, which makes us aware of our nature, the natural surroundings, and the associated problems and the overall relationship of mankind with nature. Ecology and humankind are closely intertwined. Both have had a harmonious correlation for many ages. Unfortunately it resulted in disharmony due to heavy industrialisation and human desire for materialistic wants and enjoyment. The prime objectives of environmental education are as follows:

- To understand the interdependence of all life on this planet.
- To understand as to what constitutes sustainable development
- To increase the awareness of how humankind lived in harmony with nature and how the equation has been reversed of late.

To make people active participants in the conservation of ecology

- To work at all levels to conserve nature so that its resources could be used most judiciously.

The first **Intergovernmental** conference on environmental education was held at **Tbilisi** in the year 1977 and worked on the objectives of the mentioned area of study. These include:

- Creating **awareness** on environment and its problems;
- Promote basic **knowledge** and understanding of the environment and its interrelationship with man;
- Social values and **attitudes** which are in harmony with environmental quality;
- Skills to solve **environmental** problems;
- Ability to evaluate environmental measures and education programmes; and
- Appropriate **actions** to solve environmental problems to create a sustainable environment.

To put it in more clear terms, according to the Centre for Environment Education, this subject is the education **about** the environment, **for** the environment and **through** the environment. This education enables us to understand the natural system works, increases one's awareness **about** environment, and provides a clear understanding how the human activities affect the environment. It also makes us understand the significance of nature by giving us a **practical experience** through field surveys and visits and gives us a direct **experience of nature in our life**. It also fosters in us a sense of responsibility towards environment; helps in designing new methods to sustain it; and most importantly, it enables us to adopt a new lifestyle pattern that is compatible with nature.

14.3 PRINCIPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

As in other disciplines, **education in environment** too has its guided principles and practices that need to be kept in **mind** while imparting the said education. The principles guiding this discipline **include the following points**:

- Environmental education is interdisciplinary in nature and is a life-long process.
- It includes a **thorough** understanding on part of the teachers as well as learners and is meant for all sections of society.
- The approaches to this study are manifold, from local to global level.
- It needs a **thorough** involvement of all and considers every aspect of environment from its historical perspective to potential dangers to damage-control measures.
- It needs appropriate planning and development of eco-friendly measures.

The prime necessity of education is to ensure heritage protection, both historical as well as environmental. The natural environment has limited resource capacity. Therefore, the loss of habitat is as **much** threatening to the society as the loss of heritage. **In fact**, heritage cannot be classified as something historical; environment is also a part of it. The loss of biodiversity **hotspots**, animals like Tibetan antelope, extinction of even previously sighted birds like **sparrow**- is all loss of our immense heritage. Therefore, the first and foremost principle is to ensure heritage protection.

Secondly, the incessant harm to natural habitat is as much a violation of rights as a violation of human rights against individuals. Denial of right to life with dignity and respect is essential for the survival of mankind. Similar is the case with animal and plant species; these beings have an equal right to survive on this planet earth. Therefore, it is man's duty to protect not only himself but also the species on earth that are crucial. Education enables one to understand these aspects and live in harmony with nature.

Most importantly, it is important to have knowledge regarding environmental auditing. Environmental auditing refers to the assessment of 'comprehensive project accounting, utilizing money values of gains and costs coupled to long-term accounts of environmental and social advantages and dangers of particular management decisions'. The knowledge regarding environmental auditing has an unequal reach. While the developed world has made progress in this, the developing world has not yet taken a serious view owing to several factors. Prominent among these are the inability to cope up with extreme poverty levels, coupled with maximum extraction of natural resources for development purposes. For example, in India, dams have been regarded as temples of progress. The costs involving such constructions are assessed only in economic terms and the human costs are never considered. The human costs include displacement; loss of home and land; social, economic and emotional trauma that is to be suffered due to loss and so on. If the ultimate aim of education is to ensure the welfare of mankind, it is necessary to seek education that successfully blends man and nature. These are the basic principles on which the environmental education is based.

14.4 ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ON GLOBAL AGENDA

One of the most important aspects of environmental education is to ensure sustainability. As Wals and Jickling put it, 'teaching about sustainability includes deep debate about normative, ethical and spiritual convictions'. This education should not be limited to certain cliched concepts but to broaden the understanding of the subject and sensitise people to adopt sustainable ways. The foremost challenge of this education is whether this subject mould one's thinking into adopting sustainability as a way of life. For the mankind that is in perpetual reach out to materialism, sustainability makes no meaning. The challenge, therefore, is to how to disentangle oneself from this and adopt a lifestyle that is in tandem with nature.

The issue of sustainability in education figured prominently in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Agenda 21 did mention on this subject in its principles. It stated that the educational focus could include the reorientation of education towards sustainable development, the increase of public awareness of environmental issues and the promotion of environmental training among educators, as well as the more obvious and basic suggestion of improving the provision of basic education.

The *Thessaloniki Declaration* of UNSECO in 1997 intended to indicate that all subject areas must address environmental and sustainability issues that was further endorsed by the Economic Commission for Europe (United Nations, 2004). It was widely recognised that academics need to incorporate and integrate the ideas on sustainability in the curricula and hold it as a core value. Many universities across the world have tried to work out the modalities relating to the environmental education and introduce them as core component in the curricula.

The participants in the Johannesburg Earth Summit, 2002 recommended that sustainable development needs to be located in all educational and disciplinary domains. Some of the recommendations were provided in the Summit Report as follows:

1. We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, assembled at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 2 to 4 September, 2002 reaffirm our commitment to sustainable development.

5. Accordingly, we assume a collective responsibility to advance and strengthen the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development- economic development, social development and environmental protection at the local, national, regional and global levels.

11. We recognise that poverty eradication, changing consumption and production patterns and protecting and managing the natural resource base for economic and social development are overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development.

116. Education is critical for promoting sustainable development.

121. Integrate sustainable development into educational systems at all levels of education in order to promote education as a key agent for change.

124. Support the use of education to promote sustainable development, including...(d) recommend to the United Nations General Assembly that it consider adopting a decade of education in sustainable development, starting in 2005.

With these developments, the inclusion of environment as a core component in education was deemed as necessary. Many educational institutions are now stressing on the importance of environmental education in order to promote sustainability.

14.5 ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

There is no age or target group limit for those who are interested in education in environment. It is meant for people of all ages, all groups who directly or indirectly depend on the environment or those who take policy decisions on environment that has long-term effects. This education is much easier to impart if it is done in an organised manner, with different methods and approaches from time to time and through creating awareness about its need at all levels- local, national, regional and global. In India too, like in other parts of the globe, environmental education has come to be regarded as an important component of education.

The National Policy on Education, 1986, endorsed that 'there is a paramount need to create consciousness of the environment. It must permeate all ages and all sections of society, beginning with the child. Environmental consciousness should inform teaching in schools and in colleges. This aspect will be integrated in the entire educational process'. Even the Supreme Court passed on orders regarding introducing the curriculum creating awareness about environmental issues. It had also directed the University Grants Commission (UGC) to introduce a basic course on environmental education so that it is introduced at the college/ university level throughout the country.

At the national level, the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Ministry of Environment and Forests have been working towards including the knowledge on environment part of education process. Similar efforts are being made at the State level

towards this objective. Some of the **non-governmental** organisations are also involved in this task wherein they have been taking initiatives to increase awareness on environment, through training programmes in schools and colleges; various events are being held to promote awareness on the extinction of some animals and the need for efforts to restore them.

Accordingly, the school and **college/** university curriculum have included environmental education in their syllabi. **Apart from** that, to ensure the attention of students **from** a much younger age, various competitions- debates, elocutions, essay writing- are being held to heighten the environmental awareness. All these have made a definite impact on the awareness levels among the younger generation.

14.6 GREEN INITIATIVES

Green initiatives pertain to those initiatives that are taken to restore and conserve nature to its pristine uniqueness. The agencies involved in this include governmental and non-governmental agencies, academics, scientists, business houses and so on. These initiatives are a way of **affirmation** not to harm nature in anyway- be it directly or indirectly. The initiatives are taken to protect the plant and animal species as their rights to survival are widely recognised. The aim of environmental education is to bring about a positive outlook towards environment and take up pro-environmental actions. These include creating a love for nature and taking up measures to nurturing it.

Most of the educational institutions all over the world are usually located in green areas, with some of them even declaring their campus as green zones. In the ancient times too, the *gurukuls* were located in pristine forests and surrounded by natural wilderness. These have become the traditional atmospheres of learning for most of the educational institutions. For example, Shantiniketan, started by **Gurudev** Rabindranath **Tagore**, is based on an environment-based way of life. The focus of this institution is on harmonious association between nature **and** man. His conception of **curricula** involving visual and fine arts was very much in consonance with nature. There is a celebration of every season and ceremonial tree planting. It is a perfect example of environmental education and sustainable way of life that could be emulated by all.

Further, to cite another example, Mahatma Gandhi's ashrams also reflected a natural way of life that was predominantly **eco-friendly**. His advocacy of simple living and high thinking suggested completely a different pattern of living. He wanted India to be a role model to the world in this respect. In the contemporary times where pollution has become a way of life, Gandhi's and **Tagore's** models offer new alternatives.

The need of the hour is to make students aware of the natural resources and their importance and stress the need to restore nature to its original form. Ethical standards need to be set in this sphere too and remind one all to follow this benchmark towards conservation of nature. Today, even the business houses, as a duty towards corporate responsibility, are following these standards and are making strides towards this end.

Some of the green initiatives could be taken up at not only the individual level but also at the community level. These include the following:

1. Adopt the strategy of reduce, re-use and recycle: This **3 Rs** are prominent in the waste management process. Reducing means minimising the waste material; re-use pertains to converting the material into **useable** source; recycling helps in making the

product available for use once again. For example, paper could be recycled and put to use for various purposes.

2. The waste material from the domestic use may be converted into organic compost.
3. Segregating the waste into degradable and non-degradable so that recycling could be taken up.
4. Limiting the use of plastic material as plastic is de-soluble in many cases and difficult to recycle. Plastic takes many a year to decompose.
5. The disposal of garbage for effective management of waste and not littering the waste are necessary to maintain cleanliness.
6. Trying to choose products that are recycled.
7. Avoid use of pesticides as they are harmful for environment.
8. Checking the transport vehicle periodically for non-pollution purposes.
9. Create awareness about biodiversity to friends, family and the underprivileged who do not have much knowledge about it.
10. Reduce the use of wood products.
11. Report incidents of tree felling to authorities concerned.
12. Make space for parks in resident colonies and work place areas.
13. Install rain-water harvesting system for better use of water that would otherwise go wasted.
14. Planting of seeds, trees and taking care of them consistently.
15. Allot specific days for environmental awareness activities in the local communities and colonies.
16. Promote environmental sensitivity.
17. Undertake campaigns against environmental degradation.
18. Encourage planting of trees and campaign for the same in one's locality.
19. Grow terrace garden where necessary and use potted plants for decoration.
20. While visiting hill areas, try not to litter for they are more prone to degradation.
21. Take jute or cloth bags while shopping instead of packing items in plastic bags.
22. Encourage and follow limited use of paper. More use of paper means more felling of trees.
23. If need be and if feasible, use recycled paper.
24. Do not use plastic sheets for gift-wrapping.
25. Take active participation in heritage walks for they increase our awareness about our heritage areas and environmental conditions.

26. Volunteer as much as possible to conserve nature and join the organisations that encourage it.
27. Do not bother or tease animals when visiting zoos and wildlife parks. It is a violation of their rights to peaceful living in their areas.
28. Make space in balcony or terrace for birds and leave food or water for them.
29. Do not use leather bags or products for they are made out of animal skins.
30. Do not use ivory products as the elephants are killed for ivory and the tusks are forcibly pulled out from their bodies.
31. Open spaces at home and office may be used for placing creepers for they enhance the ambience of the surroundings.
32. Reduce the amount of water that is used on every day basis. Water should be conserved through limited usage.
33. Do not run taps on full force. Do not leave the taps half closed.
34. Re-use the water meant for washing vegetables before cooking. This could be used for watering plants.
35. The leak spots may be filled from time to time to avoid unnecessary wastage.
36. Do not push through the plastic bags through drains. They block the water flow and accumulate sewage that is unhygienic and harmful to health.
37. Do not throw plastic bags into rivers after religious rituals. They pollute the river.
38. Do not use chemical paints for idols during festivals. Immersion of these into rivers and ponds pollutes them with poisonous substances.
39. Take measures for energy conservation like turning off fans and lights when not in the room.
40. Use CFL bulbs for energy conservation.
41. Encourage and use solar energy and install the necessary equipment.
42. Cut down heavy usage of electrical appliances. Buy those appliances that are **energy-efficient**.
43. Position the chairs and sofas to the window side for more usage of natural light.
44. Try to use public transport as much as possible; discourage use of private cars that consume fuels on a large-scale.
45. Walk short distances instead of using vehicles.
46. Use bicycles for variation; they are the best-eco friendly vehicles.
47. Avoid usage of outdoor decorative lights.
48. Ensure access to safe drinking water.
49. Maintain hygiene for better health.
50. Try to follow a rigorous schedule containing eco-friendly measures.

Most of these above-mentioned points could be followed when one improves the awareness levels. These are necessary part of education at home as well as outside. They enable one to become a responsible and environment-conscious citizen and contribute in one's own way to the environmental conservation in our society.

14.7 SUMMARY

The follow-up of most of the green initiatives is possible when one is inculcated ethics/moral values from a nascent age. One has to realise that nature is our capital and that we need to restore it at any cost. This way, we would be able to ensure enough resources for our future generations. For this, one needs to be educated in the right way; for it is the education that ensures a careful usage of resources. It is only when one has the right knowledge and strong will, the environment would find caretakers. We can neither misuse our resource base nor leave the future generation to the unmerciful consequences of our acts right now. Education fills in this gap; therefore, it is necessary that one needs to learn, promote and encourage wise usage of environmental resources and ensure a peaceful life on this planet.

14.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. How does education contribute to environmental conservation? What is its outreach today?
2. What are the objectives and principles of environmental education? Discuss them at length.
3. What are the initiatives taken by the global community to promote environmental education?
4. What is the status of environmental education in India? Is our country supportive towards this education?
5. What are the green initiatives that one could take up for ensuring effective environmental conservation? Enlist some of them.

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UNIT 15 GRAM SWARAJ AND ECOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Structure

- 15.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 15.2 Villages in India
 - 15.2.1 Gandhi's Concept of Ideal Village
- 15.3 Self-Sufficiency of Villages
- 15.4 Gram Swaraj
- 15.5 Summary
- 15.6 Terminal Questions
 - Suggested Readings

15.1 INTRODUCTION

"To serve our villages is to establish Swaraj. Everything else is but an idle dream".

Mahatma Gandhi

To Gandhi, India lives in its villages. In order to restore life in India through political independence, social and moral regeneration and economic self-sufficiency, Gandhi set out the task of **undertaking** the Constructive Programme. This was a blueprint of India of his dreams wherein he dreamt that every single individual, unto the last man, would attain real swaraj. His **interaction** with the villagers during his tours of the country made him realise the dire **status** of the **villages** and sought to mitigate whatever the existing maladies through social regeneration. Since the majority of the population lived in villages, Gandhi propounded his **idea** of the economic and social revival of the villages which topped his priority list; **in fact**, he took it up as his life mission to revive the pristine glory of the villages and **sought** to inspire his associates and co-workers towards this end. Upon witnessing the **difficult** ties faced by the most deprived sections of society, he proposed many a change so that **sweeping** reforms could be undertaken to attain the real Gram Swaraj. He wanted to replicate the success of the Phoenix and Tolstoy Settlements in India. These settlements **served** as exemplary models of self-sufficiency and caring for nature. He found that his **experiments** with community life, which he carefully nurtured in these settlements, were of great value and realised their importance. People in these settlements were engaged in all kinds of work- doing manual labour, cooking, tending to agriculture and developing the skills through crafts. He wanted these experiments to be repeated in the Indian **context** so that his vision of Gram Swaraj would become a reality. Some of the main **features** of his concept of Gram Swaraj were as follows: village republics with **self-sufficiency**, decentralised units, trusteeship, swadeshi, basic education, bread-labour, **full employment**, equality and harmony. He wanted to achieve all this while keeping in view the sensitivities of nature and its limited resources. In a way, his concept of gram swaraj was a **successful** combination of real development without any reliance on machinery; it was more of living in concord with nature.

Aims and Objectives

After going through this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The concept of gram swaraj and its significance;
- The substance of Gram Swaraj in tandem with nature;
- The importance of Village self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

15.2 VILLAGES IN INDIA

Gandhi was much inspired by the tenets of vedic life and the ashram life they propounded thereof; following this realisation, he thus wished to realise a village community throughout his life. Accordingly, the Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm in South Africa were established and these came close to realising his concept of community life. His ideas and thoughts on village life in India were not conceived at that time due to his prolonged stay in South Africa. Only after his return to India in 1915, he undertook an extensive travel of the country upon the advice of his political guru Gopal Krishna Gokhale. In India, he made his first attempt at Sabarmati ashram. He later founded and developed his ashram at **Sevagram**. Gandhi was much disillusioned with the ills of modern civilisation and the consumerism it promoted unmindful of the needs of the villages. In a way, his ashrams were more or less attempts at bringing back a generation that went off course under the blitz of modern Western industrial and consumerist culture and also to bring in an ideal village that would be replicated as a model for the seven **lakh** villages (the number of villages during **Gandhi's** time) and **prove** the efficacy of living in harmony with nature. It may be noted that the ashrams were more of precursors towards realising his concept of Gram **Swaraj** and efforts towards encouraging and patronizing the village and cottage industries. John **Ruskin's** work and its influence have already been discussed in other lessons and courses. What immediately prompted Gandhi was the point "That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living". Gandhi based his concept of Sarvodaya on this point, realising the importance of development of all, **upto** the last man. He espoused bread labour for all; in his farms in South Africa, everyone contributed by doing their share of manual labour. Education through vocational training was also given to the young people.

In India, during his travels, Gandhi observed that people in the villages lived in a miserable state due to under-development and with few options of employment. In fact majority of the population lived in villages. But due to much apathy of the officials concerned, these villages were characterised by factors such as poverty, unawareness, starvation, lack of sanitation and unhygienic conditions because of which there were widespread diseases. The colonial rule greatly altered the existing innocence and self-sufficient nature of villages, thus converting them into dungeons of poverty and diseases. The natural resources of the villages were thoroughly exploited to satiate the wants of the empire. Further, it led to widespread destruction of village life and culture which were slowly becoming the hub of western and modern life. The resources of the country were so ruthlessly exploited that they became scarce in the country side thus forcing the population to move away to urban areas in search of employment. The colonial rule disturbed the very rural life mitigating its ancient customs and way of life and the unexpected transitions to urban life. India's very culture, society and economy faced onslaught **from** the British rule that used the latter as a source of extraction of revenue.

15.2.1 Gandhi's Concept of Ideal Village

Gandhi was perturbed at the condition of the villages in India and felt an urgent need to transform the scenario for the betterment of the same. He engaged his close associates like J.C. Kumarappa to take stock of the situation and survey the needs of the villages. He could foresee the nemesis of what was to come if the situation prolonged persistently. It is in this context he remarked that if villages perish, India will perish too. He formulated his own ideas that would work for the welfare of the villages and make them a centre of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. He also encouraged his associates to strive towards village development and give them a new lease of life. He realised that only when villages become independent from such miserable conditions, India would achieve its real freedom. He also came up with his rural and social regeneration plans which he so effectively put in the *Constructive Programme* and its implementation towards village reconstruction.

The development of villages and its industries involved an element of nationalism according to Gandhi. He wanted a rural economy, polity and society wherein all the needs of the people are met within the village itself. He greatly believed in becoming rural-minded and village-minded if India were to make progress in the real sense. Gandhi said that, 'when we have become village-minded, we will not want imitations of the West or machine made products, but we will develop a true national taste in keeping with the vision of a new India in which pauperism, starvation and idleness will be unknown' (*Constructive Programme*).

According to Gandhi, an ideal village is possible to realise when one develops a sense of self-sufficiency and depend more on indigenous culture and economy. It would automatically lead to *Purna Swaraj* as envisaged by him. His establishment of ashrams was a way of reiterating the importance of living a rural life, wherein one would realise the needs of the fellow brethren and not blindly serve the interests of the colonial masters. Gandhi's establishment of a community settlement first at *Kochrab* and then on the banks of the *Sabarmati* river prove the point in discussion. These ashrams were more or less exemplary models of village development and community life embedded with harmony, casting away the factors like colour, creed, caste etc.,

To Gandhi, villages served as the base of the Indian culture, customs and traditions. At the same time, he was mindful of evil practices like untouchability that proved to be obstacles in the realisation of complete independence of the nation. Gandhi wanted to achieve Sarvodaya, the upliftment of all; in today's terminology it conveys the meaning of the inclusive growth wherein all the sections of the society should get benefits of the development. Villages would enable one to live with a spirit of village republic, self-rule by the villagers, where one can live with dignity, freedom and a sense of national pride. Life in the villages would encourage bread-labour, spinning, craftsmanship and cottage industries; as everyone would reap the benefits, they would live in harmony with each other. His *Constructive Programme* dealt extensively with his ideas on women empowerment, total independence, self-sufficiency, promotion of village industries, cattle-keeping, nature-cure, hygiene, compost making, organic farming, eradication of untouchability, encouragement of cropping patterns, agricultural and irrigation practices. Gandhi idealised a life of mutual caring and sharing, concern for each other, and living in tandem with nature as the base of the village life.

Gandhi construed his image of a village as having the following features that are eco-friendly to a large extent: 'An ideal village will be so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation. It will have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation built of a

material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it. The cottages will have courtyards enabling householders to plant vegetables for domestic use and to house their cattle. The village lanes and streets will be free of all avoidable dust. It will have wells according to its needs and accessible to all. It will have houses of worship for all, also a common meeting place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a cooperative dairy, primary and secondary schools in which industrial education will be central fact, and it will have Panchayats for settling disputes. It will produce its own grains, vegetables and fruit, and its own Khadi. This is roughly my idea of a model village' (Harijan, 9-1-1937).

15.3 SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF VILLAGES

From the historical evidences, one can find that India had had an organised settlement system wherein the basic needs of the small settlements or villages or *janapadas* were met through measures of self-sufficiency. Also from its historical descriptions, one can gauge the extent of autonomy or self-reliance that was in existence from times immemorial. The villages had their own system of governance with an organised hierarchy; self-sufficiency was the hallmark economically; it thrived with cultural vibrancy; and had an absolute system of justice that was delivered by the most eminent people occupying responsible position/status in the village and society. One stuck to one's own moral duty and followed the path of righteousness in all spheres of life. Unfortunately, the colonial rule gradually eroded the system that was much organised in every walk of life. The colonial rulers, for their own convenience in matters of governance, gradually ended then existing decentralised system of governance and replaced it with centralised policies to have an absolute control over the subject colony. This new system gave way to top-to-bottom approach in governance as against the system of development from the roots. Therefore, the foundation on which the traditional Indian system thrived was shaken away completely and led to an overall collapse of the coherence in governance.

Gandhi, who widely travelled through the length and breadth of the country, was aghast at the underdevelopment and massive levels of poverty that engulfed the entire stretch of villages although. For the first time, he witnessed the reality that plagued India- a reality ridden with uneducated masses, with unhygienic conditions of living, with little or no employment or involved in bonded labour as in the indigo farms at Champaran. He was also horrified at the mammoth levels of ignorance that people were afflicted with and their uninhabitable conditions in their surroundings. Gandhi encouraged his associates and followers to teach the villagers basic hygiene and make them aware of their conditions through a system of simple but apt education. He could be credited for turning the elite leaders of the Congress towards a life of absolute simplicity and sincerity. Stalwart leaders like Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel are notable examples in this context. The former stood by Gandhi in his fight against the British in the Champaran district to mitigate the sufferings of the indigo farmers and the latter effectively conducted Satyagraha on Gandhian principles to relieve the masses from unreasonable tax-paying system in Gujarat. Through their immense dedication and steadfast work, they transformed the simple villagers into bands of Satyagrahis, actively engaged in the freedom struggle of the nation. It is to be noted that these leaders remained committed to the grassroots levels of work and strived for achieving real progress even in the post-Gandhian era.

Gandhi wanted his idea to be implemented not with a spirit of violence but with a sense of mutual co-operation and everyone should contribute voluntarily to work for the same for the common good. Gandhi was well aware of the problems existent in the Indian

villages. He deplored the unhygienic and insanitary conditions under which the villagers chose to live and appealed to them to turn the villages into gracious hamlets. He would rather make the task of visiting the villages a refreshing experience. This would enable the city dwellers to realise the importance of villages and contribute effectively for their betterment. He further reiterated that it is not impossible to achieve this ideal village. As he said, 'to model such a village may be the work of a lifetime. Any lover of true democracy and village life can take up a village, treat it as his world and sole work, and he will find good results. He begins by being the village scavenger, spinner, watchman, medicine man and school-master all at once' (Harijan, 26-7- 1942).

15.4 GRAM SWARAJ

What Gandhi envisaged by freedom in its real sense was the Sarvodaya and Swaraj of the village and subsequently, the nation. His idea of the Indian society was based on the development of village system with the village as the basic unit. To him, it constituted real Gram Swaraj. He wanted that the villages should show the way to others as to how to live a harmonious life and make it sustainable by protecting its resources with utmost care and concern. He wanted everything to be produced on an indigenous basis and distribute the benefits thereof. His basic principles of Gram Swaraj include:

1. Supremacy of Man- Full Employment
2. Body-Labour
3. Equality
4. Trusteeship
5. Decentralisation
6. Swadeshi
7. Self- Sufficiency
8. Co-operation
9. Satyagraha
10. Equality of Religions
11. Panchayat Raj
12. Nai Talim

The above points have already been discussed at length in one of the previous Units and need no elaboration here.

Gandhi, once in communication with Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote to the latter that 'My village today lives in my imagination...He (villager) will not lead his life like an animal in a squalid dark room. Men and women will live freely and be prepared to face the whole world. The villages will not know cholera, plague or small pox. No one will live indolently nor luxuriously'. He further stated that 'Man is not born to live in jungles, but to live in society. To ensure that one person does not ride another, the basic unit must be imaginary village or group that can remain self-sufficient, and within the group there needs to be mutual dependence. This way of thinking provides a picture of the relationship among human beings inhabiting the entire world'.

Gandhi's gram swaraj was considered as utopian in nature but on close observation, one can conclude that it could be constructed as the right course considering India's huge numbers of village population and in the contemporary times, the massive migration from the villages to the cities in search of employment. As Khoshoo and Moolakkattu remark in their work that, 'from a close study of his (Gandhi's) thoughts, one would conclude that he would have liked the governance in villages to be bottom-up and not top-down; self-defined and not stranger-defined; to produce basic goods and not non-basic goods; fulfil basic-needs and not luxury-needs. Products should have use values and not exchange values; production should be need-oriented and not greed-oriented; production should be by masses and not mass-production; and the approach should be pluralist and not singularist' (p.57).

Gandhi categorically stated his views on gram swaraj thus: 'independence must begin at the bottom. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs...the government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat (village council)...these will have all the authority and jurisdiction required...the greater the power of the Panchayats the better for the people. It is the function of the Panchayats to revive honesty and industry. It is the function of the Panchayats to teach the villages to avoid disputes, if they have to settle them. If we would see our dream of Panchayat Raj, i.e., true democracy realised, we would regard the humblest and lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land...this presupposes that all are pure or will become pure if they are not...and purity must go hand in hand with wisdom' (cited in Ibid., pp.57-58).

Gandhi reminded us time and again that we are moving away from the roots by neglecting our villages. To him, the improvement in the conditions of the people living in villages is the hallmark of development. 'Till today', he said, 'we worked in a wrong way- we did all our work in cities and formulated all our schemes keeping cities in view. We stayed away from village folk, hence they have so far regarded their privations as the result of divine wrath and could think of no other causes. Institutions of public service should be located among the people, be partners of their joys and sorrows and render service by spreading knowledge among them' (Navajivan, 12-4-1931; CWMG, vol.45, p.391).

Gandhi's ideas on gram swaraj and their implementation had certain shortcomings. Though Gandhi's ideas were much practicable, even in his own times, many of his associates found them difficult to put into practice.

- First and foremost reason was that the ideas did not find enough leadership at the local level. The planning and implementation of ideas was mostly done through external leadership by someone not familiar with the village conditions.
- Secondly, for an average man and woman, these ideas became impracticable as they failed to reach the standard set by Gandhi in his scheme. Be it because of their occupational status or lower levels of spiritual and intellectual thinking, they were unable to inculcate the ideas to the core and thus failed to implement them.
- The amount or volume of work done was minimal in many a village, as it became subjective to various factors that did not coincide with the scheme as envisaged by Gandhi.
- The village workers faced much criticism especially when it came to issues like untouchability and insanitation. The villagers were reluctant to the idea of accepting

the deprived sections as their brethren and lacked equanimity to all: They could not reconcile to the idea of eradicating untouchability in the absence of sustained motivated leadership to do so.

- The insanitation issues too faced flak as the villagers were unable to live up to the standards of good sanitation and hygiene. They, in turn, vented their reluctance and anger on the village workers who attempted to enforce such work.
- Mark Thomson remarks that Gandhi and his co-workers had pre-conceived notions of the conditions prevailing in the villages and the work to be done. Rather than seek to familiarise themselves with the problems unique to each village as conceived by the villagers themselves, the *gram sevaks* would often impose Gandhi's experimental theories outright on illiterate people. By adopting an attitude of superiority in their dealings with the villagers, and by preaching a preconceived gospel of salvation, many *gram sevaks* merely succeeded in alienating those they were sent to serve' (p.184).
- Even the workers themselves became disgruntled with the attitude and response of the villagers and were dissatisfied with the task of meeting up to Gandhi's expectations. They voiced dissatisfaction with Gandhi's concern for quality of work, purity of spirit, and the duty of bread labour apart from the approach to the problems of poverty and exploitation (Ibid.,).
- Most importantly, his ideas had few takers from the Congress who failed to convert his ideas into practice. Aware of their own status and importance, it became difficult for the leaders and congress workers to become first and foremost a *gram sevak* and then assume a prominent role in matters of national importance.

Thus Gandhi's ideas remained utopian as some would say even before a wholehearted attempt was made to implement them: Gandhi himself was displeased with the pace of work taken up by the workers and could not fail to notice the lack of enthusiasm among many of them to work towards the goal of *gram swaraj*.

Nevertheless, we cannot afford to ignore the fact that many of Gandhi's views and ideas regarding the scheme of ideal village and *gram swaraj* rightly coincide with the contemporary discourse on ecology and environment. Due to unsustainable growth of urban areas that are facing enormous pressure because of mass migration of villagers to the city, the villages have become less important and with little or no support systems available; these too have become victims of unsustainable growth and development. As Khoshoo and Moolakkattu remark, 'his philosophy of *Antyodaya* (welfare of the weakest) leading to *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) will remain central to all anti-poverty and land-rehabilitation schemes which are essentially based on combinations of healthy cropland, grassland, woodland, agriculture, animal husbandry (fisheries included), forestry, and permutations and combinations of these. Agri-pastoral, silvi-pastoral, agri-silviculture and agri-silvi-pastoral systems are all relevant to the situation in Indian villages' (p.58). To interpret it today's world, all these have been sustainable forms of livelihood and led the man to contentment in his occupation. As the industrial revolution brought in machinery and technology, these have been used excessively to displace manual labour, leading to mass unemployment and poverty. It is time to revive the traditional or indigenous system for our own benefits if we have to make this planet sustainable and habitable.

15.5 SUMMARY

Gandhi's ideas on villages, gram swaraj and his views against excessive use of machinery are worth considering even in today's world. What he suggested was once taken as primitivism but it is being widely recognised all over that his views have immense value- in terms of pursuing a sustainable livelihood, living standards and **an organised** way of life. Today we are dangerously living on the brink of many ills- **from** pollution of all sorts to the dangers of nuclear disasters, apart from counting the natural disasters. **Gandhi's** ideal village and gram swaraj serve as exemplary models if we have the willingness to follow them. He expressed his views on everything from the ventilation of the house to the system of justice that is necessary to make the villages **self-sufficient** and sustainable. He showed his through his remarkable examples **from** his own life that if willing, man can make his life peaceful by adherence to truth and non-violence. These are not merely principles. These can be taken as guidelines for the present and **future** generations and extend them to one and all- all living beings on this earth. This may be taken as the most viable ways to achieve real progress and ecological development.

15.6 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Briefly describe the conditions of the villages in India during the British rule.
2. What is Gandhi's concept of ideal village?
3. Discuss at length Gandhi's views on Gram Swaraj.
4. How does the self-sufficiency of the villages lead to national development? Write in your own words.

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UNIT 16 CASE STUDIES (WATER HARVESTING IN ARID RAJASTHAN AND RALEGAN SIDDHI)

Structure

- 16.1 Introduction
 - . Aims and Objectives
- 16.2 Community-based Management of Resources
- 16.3 Water Harvesting in Arid Rajasthan
 - 16.3.1 Water Management
 - 16.3.2 Water Harvesting and Traditional *Johads*
- 16.4 Ralegan Siddhi
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- 16.6 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Natural resources and their conservation are necessary for human and other being survival on this earth. Without these resources, it would be difficult to maintain the ecological balance and sustainable development. India has been home to following many a traditional system and knowledge that developed over the ages. These were the tools through which generations effectively conserved the natural resources. Today technology plays an important role but in those communities and generation survived without any dependence on technology. Yet they venerated and worshipped nature so that nature, in turn, could give them immense benefits for their livelihood. This Unit on Case Studies provides the learners with two exemplary case studies and discusses at length as to how the traditional knowledge systems could be effectively used towards conservation of natural resources even in this technological era. These are exemplary because they could be replicated anywhere using our age old traditions and most importantly, they do underline Gandhian principles to achieve their ends.

Aims and Objectives

After going through this Unit, you would be able to understand

- The importance of traditional knowledge systems
- The importance of community-based management of resources
- The significance of using traditional methods to conserve our natural capital.

16.2 COMMUNITY-BASED MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

Eminent scientist and environmentalist, Prof. Madhav Gadgil, observes that 'an important

element of a prudent management of our natural resources would be the reestablishment of community management systems for common property resources. Such systems functioned well in pre-British India, but were largely destroyed when the British abolished all community control, converting rights into mere privileges. This served to transform waters and lands previously well-managed by communities into no-man's lands and waters subject to abuse by all. In spite of this a few examples of good **mánagement** of community resources, including forest Panchayats or small tank water-sharing systems persist to this day. Reviving them in a form appropriate to present-day conditions is required, taking into account the abolition of traditional social hierarchy and enhanced population pressure. The key lies in a reestablishment of the relation between the control over and the use of resources' (Ecological Journeys, p.134). He suggests that we need to set up a network of conservation areas all over the country in order to effectively combine resource management with ecodevelopment. Most importantly, he observes that the traditional system wherein the power distribution percolates down to the local communities so that there is a respect for nature as a human habitat.

With liberalisation, India's economy opened up and has become home to many a business houses and multinational companies. The pressure related to trade and business has become enormous and the government, in order to meet the development goals, has been extending extreme cooperation to these business interests. In the process, the natural resources are being injudiciously extracted and used; unfortunately, these are serving the interests of only the narrow and affluent sections of society, leaving many a poor and deprived groping in the dark even to meet their basic requirements like food and shelter. The creation of special economic zones and fertile-land acquisition has become a norm; the population in the rural areas are now gradually realising their rights and are protesting against the big companies exploiting their resources in an unsustainable manner. Some of the movements where the communities have fought such business interests include Chipko movement, the fight of the villagers of Plachimada in Kerala against the business giant Coca Cola to secure their water conservation rights, protest against using the Western Ghats for commercial purposes (Silent Valley case) and so on. Of late, some of the local communities have been protesting in Odisha (erstwhile Orissa) against mining and efforts are on to address their interests and end the uncertainty over the prevalence of business vs community interests. In order to protect the business interests, there have been efforts from the government to keep the people away from asserting their rights and prevent them from participating in the local governance matters/ issues or having their say in the developmental project implementation.

Nevertheless, the increasing levels of awareness and the growing number of activists who are ready to work along with the local communities in their areas have, to a great extent, brought about enormous changes in the levels of participatory management. The local communities are now waking up to the ills of the unsustainable and inequitable development issues and are asserting their rights. While development in any region brings along its own advantages, the ensuing disadvantages tend to outweigh the advantages in most of the cases. Therefore, campaigning at the local levels has become immensely important to balance the pros and cons of many of these projects. There have been calls to all the sections of the population like academics, scientists and officials and workers of non-governmental agencies and civil society groups in order to bring about equal measure and representation of all the sections, of the society. Ultimately, everyone gets affected due to erroneous decisions regarding the developmental projects; therefore, it becomes the responsibility of one and all to work towards correcting these errors and take recourse

to the right path of development. To quote Prof. Gadgil again, 'good decisions on the environment can only emerge at the appropriate local scale through a bottom-up process of informed decision-making' (p.206). He cites the example of Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad that was instrumental in the Silent Valley Hydel Project. They effectively took lead in generating awareness among the population regarding the disadvantages of the project and incessantly campaigned to save the precious Western Ghats from the onslaught of the commercial uses; it serves as one of the best examples of resource mapping and participatory resource management.

16.3 WATER HARVESTING IN ARID RAJASTHAN

This case study gives an insight into the arid Rajasthan state where rainfall levels are low and the water levels are dismal. Nevertheless, the state has made significant gains with the revival of *johads* for water harvesting. It also emphasises the superiority of traditional knowledge systems over the inappropriate use of technology.

16.3.1 Water Management

Wetlands, ponds and tanks make up for the traditional forms of water management. These store water especially following rains making them the most viable forms of water storage. These traditional systems have been ignored for long, leaving no comprehensive data regarding their existence. Nevertheless, these are in operation in many states including Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Bihar and Rajasthan to name a few. These served the purpose of minor irrigation and local consumption. It is important to note that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Ramsar Convention (1971-89) emphasise the significance of wetlands and their reclamation and management. The Government of India, in 1989, formed a National Commission on Wetlands and planned to implement them via four Acts of Parliament: the Wetland Conservation Act (1972); the Water Act (1974); the Forest Conservation Act (1980); and the Environment Protection Act (1986). But the data available on the water tanks is rather insignificant; the minute data available does not show more than an average of 30% in the water tank management. The tanks are not only economically profitable, as Sharma says in his study (1997) but also ecologically resourceful for drainage, storage, charging wells and reducing flood havocs. With the disappearance of these tanks, the tube wells came up and the tank lands were encroached by the local authorities or sometimes even the government. Sharma suggests that two approaches help in the protection and regeneration of the traditional system: (1) Ecosystem approach to irrigation tanks: villages and everything around the tank are to be considered as parts of the tank system and not vice versa. Therefore, everything needs conservation and development in a holistic fashion and not sectorally. (2) Treating all water bodies in one genre, one umbrella, one taxonomy and extending the system approach to them: wherever water can be impounded from loss by whatever means or policies it should be done, thus extending the approach to all water bodies. The following section examines at length the traditional johads and water harvesting in the state of Rajasthan.

16.3.2 Water Harvesting and Traditional Johads

In 1985, in the arid region of Rajasthan, especially in the Alwar District, the excessive drawing of ground water for crop production resulted in its shallow water table aquifers dwindling to very low levels, as low as 100-120 meters. With either salty water surfacing or the aquifer too deep to draw water, only 11% percent of the land remained under

single cropping and 3% in double cropping in the Alwar district. The forest cover, including the **Sariska** Tiger Reserve, too witnessed shrinkage of around 7% that is 6, 500 sq. km. There was massive migration of the villagers to other places as the villages no more provided employment. The farmers could neither grow much food nor fodder or pasture; even the fuel wood for any need was unavailable. Since the region mainly comprised of the deserts, and with no water available, the climate became unbearable. The rains (with an average of 16-50 cm per year) came in **3-4** high intensity events in 7-10 days rainy season, leaving behind many lands thirsting for water. There was no vegetation or crop cultivation for want of water. It is out of this desperation that the traditional methods of johads were revived, which continues to go stronger year by year. **Dr. Anupam** Mishra, an eminent expert on traditional water harvesting system in India, observes that, 'hundreds and thousands of traditional, small reservoirs did not appear all of a sudden from the blue in India in older times. For each promoter of tanks, there were tens of people who actually worked on these tanks. These ones and tens combined to make hundreds and thousands. But a society brought up on superficial modern education that it has acquired in the past 200 years, has reduced these tens, hundreds and thousands into non-entities'.

Johad, popularly known as pond in the other parts of the country, is a traditional system of water storage especially to meet the water needs in the non-rainy seasons. **They** are not just relevant but vital sources of water conservation. These are simple mud and rubble barriers built across the contour of a slope to arrest rainwater. These structures have high embankments on three sides while the fourth side is left for entry of rainwater. The shape of johad is in concave and resembles a crescent shape. The height of the embankment is such that the capacity of the johad is more than the volume of run-off coming from the catchment. This is based on a rough estimation of maximum possible run-off that could come into it. The height of one johad varies from another depending on the site, water flow, pressure etc.,. The cover area of johads varies from 2ha to a 100 ha in Alwar. The estimation is based mostly on the villagers' own experiences and intuitions, devoid of any physical or engineering measurements. The point at which the pressure is more, the width at the base is increased by 2-3 times that of the normal. In some cases, a masonry structure is made for the outlet of excess water. To prevent the johad from being trampled upon by cattle, the inner side is constructed vertically up to a height of 5-7 feet from the base. Thereafter it is made to slope outward.

The water collected in the johad during monsoon is directly used for irrigation, **drinking** and other domestic uses. For irrigation, the water is either pumped or taken to the field through unlined contour channels. The advantage of this structure, apart from arresting and storing rainwater, is in improving the moisture level at sub-soil level in the field, particularly in downstream areas, which recharges groundwater and wells.

Johads are not mere structures for the local community. They have cultural significance too. Most of the ceremonies take place around these structures. The johad is worshipped with the birth of a child in the family; the house is cleaned with water from the johad; after the wedding ceremony, the newly married couple takes a salutary walk around johad; the bride's family contributes in a nominal way to the maintenance of the johad; the last rites of a person take place near johads. Small temples adorn the johad premises as it not only offers a sacred atmosphere but also enables people to take a look at the johad and assess if it needs repair or maintenance. The Tarun Bharat Sangh, headed by **Shri Rajendra Singh**, was instrumental in reviving most of these johads.

The first johad took three years to build; 50 johads were built in the fourth year; a 100 were built in the fifth year; and by 2001, around 1000 of them were built. In total, over 5000 structures were built in 1058 villages across Rajasthan. The construction involved advice and supervision from the village elders and communities who had traditional knowledge and wisdom as their main qualification. From the designing of the structure to the identification of the site, from the contribution of the cost to the maintenance work—all structures were built as need-based and easy to maintain. Resultantly, water was available in abundance; the conditions of the soil improved; there were better vegetation and crops; increased the forestation levels and helped in supplying water to the wildlife area.

It is important to note the progress of the region from the following paragraph: 'Prosperity returned to the region, agriculture became more productive and due to availability of fodder, cattle-rearing started, resulting in increased production of milk. Higher water levels also meant less money on diesel for pumpsets. In 1985 only 20% of the agricultural land was cultivated, now it is 100%, and villages have started selling surplus grains in market for the first time in many years. Johads are extremely remunerative; studies have shown that an investment of Rs.100 per capita on a johad raises the economic production in the village by as much as Rs.400 per annum'. Further the importance of community life was reiterated through this: 'As villages mobilized themselves to improve their quality of life by building johads, this participation of the people enable the community to become self-reliant by optimizing social cohesion and emotive bonding in the community' (Rajendra Singh, *The Waterman's Journey*, Rashtriya Jal Yatra, pp.6-7). This success further led the Tarun Bharat Sangh to organise the Jal Yatras so as to spread the awareness of water conservation and its benefits and also the revival of traditional knowledge systems and practices. The Jal Chetna Yatras emphasised that we should strive for linking people to rivers than interlinking rivers. Local communities can play an active role in achieving this goal.

16.4 RALEGAN SIDDHI

'Ralegan is not just a story of change as a result of access to water. It represents remarkable economic, social and community regeneration, only realisable under a strong, selfless, ethical and accountable leadership, which enforced a principled value system to bring about behavioural change. Since the rural poor are dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, natural resource conservation and access to water are central in poverty alleviation strategies. The Ralegan model reinforces the normative principles of human development – equity, efficiency, sustainability and people's participation – all of which were realised. The human development strategy seeks to fulfil people's potential by enlarging their capabilities, and this necessarily implies their empowerment to participate actively in their own development' (Mehta and Satpathy, p.4). Ralegan Siddhi is a village located in the acute drought-prone and rain-shadow zone of Parner Tehsil of Ahmadnagar district, in central Maharashtra. This village has an area of 982.31 ha and has erratic and scanty rainfall, ranging between 450 and 650mm (Government of Maharashtra). The village gets rain on approximately 35 days of the year (CSE, nda). Of the total area of 980 ha, the village does not get around 300 ha for the purpose of cultivation. The quality of the soil is poor and the water does not percolate down during the rainy season. Like in any other village, agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the people here.

With no means to harvest or store this resource, the village had little vegetation or crop

cultivation. The rainwater that was collected was **sufficient** to cultivate only one crop on 300–350 acres of land out of a total 2200 acres of land available in **village**. Majority of the families had to survive only on square meal in a day. With meager or no employment opportunities and in the absence of enough food production, the villagers turned to brewing liquor in order to meet their ends and thus the number of breweries rose to almost 35 in such scarcely populated village. The helplessness and desperation arising from poverty, severe debts and unemployment forced the villagers to follow this course. Further, consumption of alcohol became a norm with the men and the circumstances provided an excuse for such habits.

Anna Hazare, one of the inhabitants of the village, after a brief stint with the army returned to his village and was horrified by the pathetic conditions prevalent there. He, therefore, decided to dedicate his life for social cause in 1975 and undertook this task **from** his own household. Swami Vivekananda's philosophy and thoughts deeply influenced him and he was determined to bring about a change by entirely changing the existing scenario. He was much impressed by the work of Late Mr. Vilasrao **Salunkhe** in 1972, wherein he started experiments in the watershed development and management in villages near Saswad in **Pune** district and gained reputation for his work. Hazare, upon a visit to one of the villages, saw the entire project being successfully carried out and decided to replicate it in his village. This visit changed the course of his life and others' too.

Hazare's visit to the office of the then Director of Agriculture, Mr. Dikshit, made his mission possible as he expressed his intention to work for the improvement in the village condition by taking up the water harvesting project. The latter surveyed the village and was convinced that the topography of the village was suitable for undertaking the watershed development programme. The watershed development work in the village began under Hazare's supervision at different sites **throughout** the day. He drew people to participate actively in the task for their own collective good. Around 48 **small** bunds, 5 cement check dams and 16 **Gabion** structures have been constructed. The villagers also undertook the job of fodder development, continuous contour trenches and loose boulder structures on 500 acres of land. The work helped in the conservation of rainwater in the village and recharged the aquifers thereby raising the groundwater levels. The villagers began harvesting two crops in 1500 acres of land, in contrast to the earlier levels of 300–350 acres of land for one crop. The agricultural production improved, migration to cities came to a halt as the village itself now provided **enormous** employment opportunities to its inhabitants and also provided a means of livelihood to those in other villages, who came to work as daily labour. As this progressed, the liquor brewing was completely given up and the sale of tobacco products like cigarettes were subsequently given up. Even the milk production witnessed an enormous rise as the production increased **from** the earlier 300 litres to 4,000 litres as on today. It is purchased by the cooperatives and this brings an income of 1.3–1.5 crores of rupees annually. The per capita income too witnessed a steep increase **from** Rs.225 to Rs.2,500. The village economy and social milieu witnessed a complete transformation for the better. The village now has facilities like schools, hostels and **sports/** gymkhana. Culturally too, there was transformation as mass marriages are conducted to avoid unnecessary expenditure and efforts are on towards bridging the gap of caste divide and improving the social cohesion. This success model was replicated in other villages and yielded encouraging results. The project is now replicated in almost 80–85 villages in Maharashtra. Even the menace and practice of untouchability is slowly **being eradicated and people of all creeds live in brotherhood.**

In the last 35 years, many institutions and cooperatives like Gram Panchayat, Cooperative Consumer Society, Cooperative Credit Society, Cooperative Dairy, Educational Society, Women's Organization and Youth Organization, with different mandates are operating in Ralegan Siddhi. Till date no elections were held for the selection of members of these institutions. The members were selected unanimously by the villagers in the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha has emerged as a powerful forum for taking collective decisions at the village level. All the developmental programmes are implemented in the village after taking consent of the Gram Sabha. Ralegan Siddhi has also become a model village and came under the study of different sections of society like academics, government officials, political leaders, students and youth organisations and so on. There is also an institute to impart training in watershed development programme and thousands of people have already been benefitted by this training.

Ralegan Siddhi proves the point that the transformation of village economy would effectively bring in transformation of the economy of the nation. This is possible through the development of eco-friendly measures and their use for the collective good of the society. Today's concept of development is thoroughly based on the exploitation of environment and humanity and development is associated with progress in fulfilling materialistic wants. The development now is characterised by injudicious extraction of surface resources like petroleum, coal, groundwater, vegetation and aquatic resources and construction of high rise buildings. The lack of resources would, in future, play a key role in spreading inequity, exploitation and massive use of the remaining resources. Most importantly, there is an acute water shortage in both the rural and urban areas and has become a precious resource. Ralegan teaches us as to how to pursue a sustainable way of life; how we can make real progress possible and promote social cohesion; and how we can make life easy and livable on this planet earth.

Ralegan also serves as an example wherein it proves that 'the development of an individual, family and village is not possible by exploiting environment indiscriminately, but by sustainable use of available resources. Watershed development and water management is the right approach in that direction. Today, every country is facing the problem of environmental degradation. International leaders and scientists are worried about the future of the Earth alike. Watershed development will certainly provide a solution to maintaining ecological balance'.

It also proves as to how shallow the evolution of our ideas could be regarding development. 'Our idea of development is limited to construction of skyscrapers and wide roads only. On one hand, the height of buildings is going up day by day and; on the other hand, the level of human values is coming down. This is not real development. An individual should be able to stand on his own and at the same time-think of betterment of fellow beings, which is true development. One should be able to look beyond oneself, think of one's neighbour, village and the nation. Today, there is a need to create such individuals who are capable of looking beyond oneself. Such individuals are not created through donations, subsidy and grants. This is possible through local leadership building programme where stress would be given on character, right values and dedication. Somebody has to make sacrifices. A field full of swaying crop tells us that a grain has buried itself into the ground to give birth to thousands of grains. The grains which do not bury themselves are taken to the flourmill and ground into flour. The grains which sacrifice by burying themselves in the soil, give birth to a swaying field of crop'

(<http://www.annahazare.org/ralegan-siddhi.html>).

16.5 SUMMARY

The above two case studies stress the importance of traditional knowledge systems and practices that could be effectively put into use in the current phase of development. Due to our own shortcomings and short-term goals, we have moved from the precious store of wisdom and knowledge that characterised the life of our ancestors. It also shows that every individual can contribute to the good of the society if there is a willingness to do so. Be it **Shri. Rajendra Singh** of Tarun Bharat Sangh or **Shri. Anna Hazare** of Ralegan Siddhi, have not evolved overnight as leaders. It is their willingness, hard work, personal sacrifice and the zeal to work for the good of the society that has seen them through many a crisis and become role models for others. Their efforts in reviving the traditional systems of knowledge and practices are replicable and should be pursued vigorously if we are to make progress. We need to realise that the villages are centres of development and as Gandhi said, we cannot allow them to perish. This alone will ensure real progress of the nation.

16.6 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What are traditional systems of knowledge and practices? How does a community-based resource management help us in reviving these systems?
2. Discuss at length the efforts of reviving johads in Rajasthan and how it improved the water levels and prosperity in the region.
3. 'Ralegan Siddhi is an ideal village that made consistent progress in human development'. Examine at length.

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