Foundation *for* Restoration *of* National Values

Newsletter

March 2016

Creating Forests

India ranks on 155th position out of 178 countries, with a score of 31.23 out of 100 on Environmental Pollution Index (EPI) 2014, an initiative undertaken by Yale University that evaluates how countries protect ecosystems and human health. While efforts are afoot to expand access to water and sanitation to all citizens, we have failed to reverse the degradation of air quality and we have destroyed habitats of fish, birds and animals due to the destruction of forest cover.

More and more people are falling prey to respiratory problems and poor immunity caused due to rapid deforestation and increasing water and air pollution. Loss of tree cover upsets the oxygen-carbon dioxide balance leading to lower oxygen levels and higher levels of pollution.

There are countries which have successfully managed to conserve their forest and control their pollution level rank fairly well on EPI. Cuba is one such country, with an EPI score of 78.1. Nearer home, in Singapore, in order to check pollution, vehicles are becoming eco-friendly. They are run on diesel and battery power, and use up to 30 percent less fuel.

As the countrymen battle pollution, efforts to 'create' forest by some conscientious citizens in different parts of our own country offers hope and consolation to otherwise a very grim situation.

Jadav "Molai" Payeng, who belongs to Mishing tribe in Assam, started planting trees as a teenager. Today, he has covered 1,360 of acres of land into a 'Molai forest' which now houses Bengal tigers, Indian rhinoceros, and over 100 deer and rabbits. Payeng's story began in 1979 when he was hired as a labourer for an afforestation project undertaken on 200 hectares of land on Aruna sapori by the Social Forestry Division of Golaghat district. The five-year project was abandoned in three years and while the rest of the workers packed up and disappeared into government files, Payeng, who had nowhere else to go, continued to plant more trees while nurturing the existing vegetation himself.

Educated up to Class 10 at a local school, Jadav Payeng, now 54 years old, chose to plant trees while his friends joined the army. His efforts bore fruits and today the forest planted by him stands tall defying the annual cycle of floods and constant erosion caused by the mighty Brahmaputra.

Eco-entrepreneur, Shubhendu Sharma, an engineer by profession, started creating a forest in his own backyard in Uttarakhand singlehandedly and has now set up his own company, Afforestt, an end-to-end service provider for creating natural, wild, maintenance-free, native forests.

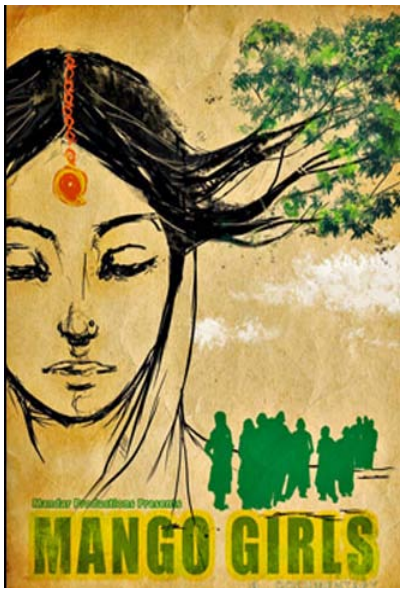
Shubhendu, an Industrial Engineer, was working with Toyota plant in Bengaluru when he met Akira Miyawaki, a naturalist. Akira Miyawaki was working to cultivate a forest at the Toyota plant and Sharma volunteered to help her. Miyawaki's technique has managed to regenerate forests from Thailand to the Amazon. While assisting her, Shubhendu learned the technology of using soil amenders to cultivate forest. Sharma thought of replicating the model with slight modifications.

His first tryst with making forests was in his own backyard in Uttarakhand where

he grew a lush green forest within a year's time. This gave him confidence and he decided to launch it as a full-time initiative. So far, Afforestt has planted 31 forests for residences, schools, businesses and hospital campuses throughout India.

Another heartening story of tree plantation is of a tiny hamlet in Bihar. In Dharhara village of Bhagalpur district, a family plants a fruit-bearing tree on the birth of a girl child. The fruits provide financial insurance for the girl as the family deposits the money by selling them in her name. The money, which multiplies in the course of time, is spent during the marriage of the girl.

This tradition of planting of trees by families on the birth of a girl child was much appreciated and became the theme of Bihar's tableau in this year's Republic Day parade. Not only has this improved the environment but it also provides financial security to girls.



Cash-rich trees like banana and mango are planted because the soil and weather are just right for these trees in the area. Earlier people used to plant *Sheesham* (Indian Rosewood) tree on the occasion, but it was not successful as the tree started decaying due to some unknown disease and also took a long time in maturing.

All these examples are reminiscent of the Sanskrit saying: *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, or "the whole Earth is a single family". It is a reminder of how humans and trees depend on each other to survive.

-Anupama Jha, CEO, FRNV

Clean India initiatives taken by common men

Communities in many parts of the country are joining hands to make ‘Clean India’ campaign a reality, beyond sloganeering. There are live examples of people coming together to achieve this goal by making efforts to eliminate open defecation, converting insanitary toilets into pour flush toilets, eradicating manual scavenging, complete disposal and reuse of solid and liquid wastes, bringing behavioural changes to people and motivating health practices and spreading awareness among people.

For instance, ‘The Ugly Indian’, is a group of highly motivated volunteers from Bengaluru, who clean streets in many parts of the country and started working in 2010, even before the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan came into being. This group uses the social media to plan the event, combine and coordinate the place and date, to transform the location, and call it “spotfixing.” They clean pavements piled up with plastic, defaced walls, footpaths rendered unusable by potholes as spot-fixing places. All tools, materials and instructions are provided on the spot. All spot fixes are self-funded and volunteers are requested to make a contribution towards material costs.

Their efforts can be seen in the area under Bengaluru’s KR Market Flyover, which was supposed to be the bus stop. Hillocks of garbage, solid and liquid waste, mounds of trash, cow dung, kitchen and toilet wastes used to be piled up on the roads, making it difficult for the commuters to stand and wait for the city buses. The Ugly Indian volunteers came together and gave this spot a makeover last month. Places around KR Market, especially its entrance has been turned around and is now very clean.

Similar efforts have been put by this group in various areas of the city to bring about such change. Basavanagudi near National College Jaynagar has been made poster-free and painted by the citizens. Another “spotfixing” has been done in HSR Layout Sector 2.

The efforts spearheaded by these volunteers has encouraged others in Bhopal, Meerut and Pune to undertake similar endeavors. In Pune, Deccan Bus Stand has been cleaned and painted by a group of volunteers. In Bhopal, Geetanjali complex and M. P. Nagar have had their dump yards “spotfixed.” In Chennai, an ongoing effort to transform a garbage dump into a badminton court has been undertaken by a group of enthusiasts.

Such voluntary action goes on to prove that if the community decides to come together and bring about the desired change, it is possible to clean the country and make the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan a reality. The Government, the private sector, the citizen groups, volunteers and the not-for-profit organisations are trying to achieve this goal, by making efforts. Equally important is to practice living mindfully so that we remain empathetic towards our fellow countrymen.

For example, we must learn to generate less non-biodegradable waste. This can be done by using alternatives to plastics whenever possible**.** Effort should also be made by communities to not litter toxic wastes like paints, batteries, mercury etc. This is because other litters can be cleaned but toxic litters can contaminate the soil, water and air. This contamination cannot be undone and will result in diseases. Another option which people have is to segregate biodegradable and non-biodegradable wastes at home. This, however, makes sense only if the municipality of the concerned authorities starts collecting segregated wastes, which they have started doing in many parts of the country.

We need a more focused and coordinated effort at the local, national and global level to make progress on making the world a better place to live.

-Shrennya Kalyani, Executive Assistant, FRNV

Stop complaining: ACT

News

FRNV partners with SRGS

Foundation for Restoration of National Values will soon sign an MOU with Shri Ram Global School for our "The School Initiative", to inculcate values amongst various stakeholders to develop an ecosystem to embark upon Value Based Living.

Task Force Meeting

The Task Force of Value Based Education met at FRNV office on 4th of March to discuss future directions and modalities for "The School Initiative" of FRNV. "The School Initiative" seeks o identify values to be 'lived' by all stakeholders and collectively create an environment which is conducive to such a living. The school ecosystem includes parents, teachers, students, principal, administrative staff and others.

Dear readers,

FRNV invites stories from its readers on the theme of our next newsletter,"Judicial Activism Collegium" and on deep-rooted values, that have helped us in our everyday lives. Some of these stories will be featured in the next issue of our newsletter. So put your thinking caps on, recall the values integral to your life which you cherish and write to us at shrennya@valuefoundation.in

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FRNV wishes its readers a very HAPPY HOLI

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