

POST COVID WHAT?

SAI DHAM'S PLAN FOR TREE PLANTATIONS

We have the toughest and the grimmest reminder of nature's revenge in the form of COVID 19. Today, Delhi's smog has cleared; the air is sublime — we can see the blue sky. Chirping birds have replaced the honking cars.

In all the cities across the world — as we lockdown ourselves to deal with this mutant virus which has cost lakhs of lives and has gripped the humanity with fear — it seems that mother nature is reclaiming her space.

Rivers in India — earlier declared dead because of zero oxygen levels due to continuous inflow of sewage and industrial waste — are bouncing back; beaming with life and freshwater. Animals are roaming in the streets that once must have been jungles, their own habitat. Images of lions from nearby forests venturing out and basking in the sun in the port lands of Junagadh in Gujarat; civets strolling in the streets of a small town in Kerala; vibrant flamingos making their way to the salt pans of coastal India; and, dolphins dancing in the waters are a proof that nature does not need humans for it to flourish. Rather humans need nature for their survival.

We must not forget this valuable lesson in post-COVID times. If we go back to indiscriminate extraction and use of fossil fuel, ruthless industrialization by cutting trees and sucking valuable underground water, unjustified constructions of buildings in name of urbanization and heavy use of fossil-fuel-run transport system then we must remember, that we will be doing ourselves more harm than any virus, weapon or natural disaster. It will be a suicidal step.

SAI DHAM proposes massive TREE PLANTATION movement as a first and major step to gently heal our mother nature. That mother nature who only gives us while we humans have taken from her womb much more than we deserve.

THE BENEFITS OF TREE PLANTATION ARE THREE-FOLD –

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

1. INCREASE IN OXYGEN LEVEL

Trees that soak carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide are getting lesser every day, while humans and machines (AC, refrigerator, heater, computers etc.) that produce the poisonous gases are increasing day by day. This is extremely hazardous for both mankind and environment. To put things in balance, we will have to increase the level of oxygen in the environment and the only way to do it is TREE

PLANTATION. This way, we can reduce the overall air pollution, making the air we breathe much cleaner.

2. GLOBAL WARMING

Upon, reducing the level of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide, the unnatural global warming being caused by human activities can be reduced and/or controlled. India's per capita emissions today are 1.6 tonnes of CO₂, which, because of our demographics, is well below the global average of 4.4 tonnes. It is also because of our demographics and growing economy that India's effort is vital for the success of the Paris agreement to keep the global temperature rise well below two degrees Celsius (°C) in the current century.

3. ENHANCE UNDERGROUND WATER TABLE

Trees have the ability to take the rainfall to the deeper beds of land and also filter it while doing so. This will help us to replenish our precious underground water table that is depleting at an unprecedented rate. Packaged Food and beverage industries that are heavily using underground water need to be brought under strict regulation. No ready-to-eat food can replace rice and roti. No cold drink can replace water.

4. PREVENT SOIL EROSION

Trees hold the soil, thus preventing its erosion. This will have a direct benefit on the fertility of the soil. Soil erosion also leads to increase in number of dust storms which is common nowadays. It also leads to sweeping of the soil into the nearby water bodies, which in turn causes water pollution. Trees hold the soil, provide it with nutrients thereby increasing its fertility.

5. HABITAT FOR ANIMALS AND BIRDS

Last but certainly not the least, we must not forget that we are not the only children of mother nature. Animals, birds and other species belong to planet earth as much as we do. Our activities have already rendered many species of animals and birds extinct or endangered. Let us not commit this sin anymore and provide the voiceless animals and birds with homes. COVID 19, after all, emerged from humans mercilessly killing animals for their luxury and selling them in wet markets.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

1. BETTER RAINFALL, BETTER AGRICULTURE

There is no doubt that trees restore the ecological imbalance, leading to better rainfall. A good amount of rainfall, at the right time, at the right place is becoming more and more uncommon. Trees can rectify this. A good rainfall has direct benefit to that year's produce. Upon securing enough produce for ourselves, we can declare that India shall no longer suffer from the problem of food security which is a very important issue post COVID 19.

2. GDP GROWTH

Given that our GDP growth rate is currently steadily declining from eight per cent in 2016 to currently six per cent, we must act fast and save our economy which is primarily agrarian. Restoring the ecological balance seems the only way out of this. Instead, if we employ artificial methods of using chemicals (pesticides, insecticides) or genetically modified seeds it will only worsen the health condition of the Indian soil and the Indians. The poor will be hit the most.

India is ranked 129 of 189 countries — sandwiched between Nicaragua and Namibia — in the global listing on the Human Development Index. We must ensure the health of our billion plus population as prevention is better, then cure.

3. LESSER EXTREME TEMPERATURE, LESSER ELECTRICITY USAGE

Extreme of weathers that had been unheard of – snowfall in Sahara desert, 40 degrees in summers in Northern Europe can be checked only if we agree to reduce our carbon emissions. Ice in the Arctic is melting leading to ever increasing sea water level. Many islands that were one inhabited, like that of Maldives, are now lying under water. Planting trees will mitigate such unnatural weather patterns. That would mean if we do not have extreme summers and extreme winters, the usage of ACs and heaters can be reduced thereby reducing electricity consumption.

Also, we have done well in implementing energy efficiency policies, pushing solar energy, and replacing over 700 million street and household lights with energy-saving and long-lasting LEDs.

4. IMPETUS FOR OPTMAL USE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

India needs to be far more firmer on not building new coal-based power plants and transitioning the existing ones to renewable energy technologies. Arunabha Ghosh of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water in India, has been advocating this for years. Building more coal plants could push India off the 1.5°C-compatible pathway as agreed in Paris Climate Accord. India also needs to transition to electric private and public vehicles. India has therefore set a target of achieving 175 Gigawatt (GW) of renewable energy capacity by 2022, of which 100 GW is solar capacity addition and 60 GW is wind power capacity. Over the past decade, both the energy and emission intensities of India's GDP have decreased by more than 20 per cent, but total energy-related CO2 emissions continue to rise in India which indicates that we need to do more. By shifting to renewable sources of energy, our trees will be more beneficial as they will be functioning in an environment that is rid of carbon emissions to a large extent

5. LESSER DAMAGE DUE TO NATURAL DISATER

Trees hold the soil. In times of earthquake, tsunami, cyclones and flooding, it is the trees that fight out the forces of nature by holding on to the soil, thereby protecting the areas under and around it. It therefore, dampens the effect of the natural disasters. Society and economy is able to recoup sooner. In a developing

country like India, as there is nearly no social security provided by the state or private insurance in India to protect the poor from the loss of jobs, especially at the times of natural disasters, can be saved from being out of job for a very long time, thus reducing the burden of the state's expenditure.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

1. HEALTHIER INDIANS

More trees, lesser pollution, healthier Indians. Health is one of the primary indicators of the development level of a country. With lesser air pollution, lesser carbon emission better quality of underground water, organically grown food produce, such a Green India shall lead to healthier India.

2. PARKS, MEDITATION AND RECREATION

Unlike the Western and advanced countries, the number of green community areas in cities and towns as compared to the number of people inhabiting is far less. By developing more parks, with trees and ponds, we will be providing an area of recreation for city dwelling Indians who otherwise have to compromise by staying in cramped spaces. It will especially be a boon for the children and the elderly.

OTHER IMPORTANT SUGGESTIONS –

1. PUBLIC TRANSPORT

We must develop our public transport system efficiently in order to reduce the number of fossil-fuel-run vehicles on our roads. Our goal should be that in the next few years we can upgrade our systems so that 70-80 per cent of the daily commute is through high-speed and low-emission transportation — from trains to bicycles. One of the cities that records the lowest carbon emission is where the most used mode of transportation is bicycle – Amsterdam.

2. USE OF CLEANER FUEL BY INDUSTRIES

Industries must plan to opt for cleaner fuels as they are the ones who produce the maximum amount of carbon emission. To clean fuel, by starting with natural gas and then ramping up with all combustion moving to electricity from much cleaner power generation. Today, it is the price of natural gas, and not its availability, that is the obstacle to this transition, as gas is competing with the dirtiest and the cheapest of fuels, coal. But if the government was to include natural gas into goods and service tax (GST), it would turn the tables on coal. At present, coal or other such dirty fuels are included in GST and have a much lower taxation than cleaner fuels.

3. INNOVATIVE GREEN-IDEAS

Our young entrepreneurs should be encouraged to come up with green, innovative ideas. One of our mentors at the Fellowship for Climate Action, Chetan Maini created Reva, India's first electric car in 1998 which was seven years ahead of Elon Musk's Tesla Motors. The chotu-kool refrigerator that works without electricity, is yet another example of green idea. Such ideas have to be given incubation to be developed into full-fledged commercial ideas.

TREE PLANTATION AT SHIRDI SAI BABA SCHOOL, NISWARA, BUNDELKHAND (UP) BY SAI DHAM

Since, 2013, Sai Dham through its continuous endeavours has created an oasis of learning along with the environmental development of the land at Niswara.

In 2013, Mr. Vijay Bahadur Singh, former Member of Parliament donated 5 acres of his land at Niswara, Mahoba District, UP. Sai Dham bought additional 1 acre of land to widen the road connecting the land to the approach road. A meticulous building was constructed and a branch of Shirdi Sai Baba School was commenced and today around 600 underprivileged students of the nearby villages are being provided free education along with food, clothes, books, stationery, and health care.

Along with setting up of the school, the following activities were undertaken for the environmental upliftment of the area –

1. Boundary was erected along the entire 5-acre area.
2. Trees were planted along the school boundary. They are safe because of the boundary, watered and maintained.
3. Pond has been dig up for water conservation, improvement in underground water table level and rain water harvesting.
4. Cultivation of wheat, gram, other dals along with fodder for the cows is grown. The produce is used to make food for the school children and the cows.
5. 12 cows have been adopted. Cow shed has been erected. Their milk is used in the school mess. The cow dung is used to make vermi compost which along with cow urine are used as a natural manure for crop cultivation and tree plantation.
6. Sai Dham, both at Niswara and Faridabad, harnesses solar energy for its day to day use using the semiconductors.

Sai Dham is looking help in the following areas –

- Demarcation of land so that more areas can be environmentally developed as parks and for planting of trees like Neem, Peepal, Pilkhan, Karanj, Arjun, Amla, Jamun, Alstonia which will provide lot of shade and home for birds to make nests and the grass would soak the water work as rain water harvesting to raise grounder water level.
- Support Sai Dham in its goal to plant 1 lakh trees in the upcoming monsoon, and subsequently, every monsoon.
- Spread the vision and mission of Sai Dham's tree plantation.

JOIN US IN HEALING MOTHER NATURE

Some pictures of plantation done by Sai Dham at Niswara (UP)



Tree Plantation at Niswara



Trees planted, with brick protective wall around them along the school boundary



Horticulture



Lush green garden



Fields for agriculture



Cow shed

DONATE NOW!!

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