

Samaj Shilpi Dampati: Social Architect Couple for achieving Self-reliance in Villages

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ABSTRACT

There is always a dearth of dedicated extension workers who are willing to work for village development. Although the village level worker (VLW) is eulogized as a friend, philosopher and guide to rural masses, in reality, these grassroots level government staff lack the dedication, service orientation and empathy with villagers, and live in nearby towns and not in villages. They are urban-oriented, as they are outsiders. So, a new approach was experimented by Nanaji Deshmukh, a freedom fighter through his institution, Deendayal Research Institute (DRI) in the villages of Chitrakoot, which he called as 'Samaj Shilpi Dampati' scheme in which a newlywed graduate couple are employed to live and work in villages for achieving the objectives of self-reliance campaign developed on the philosophy and principles of Integral Humanism enunciated by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay. The scheme has been found to be successful and progressing well in about 80 villages of Chitrakoot.

Keywords: Samaj Shilpi Dampati, Deendayal Research Institute, Chitrakoot, Integral Humanism

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi in his autobiography, *'My Experiments with Truth'*, has highlighted the significance of local school teachers for teaching village people on the values of Swaraj and mobilize people for mass protest, Satyagraha and Freedom Movement. Gandhiji asked specifically local village school teachers to take along teacher's wife to meet and talk with village women. This approach of a married couple approaching people appealed

to the villagers and yielded beneficial results.

In fact, married couple command social respect and are well received by families living in villages in comparison to single male or female persons.

Ten years after India's independence, in 1957, this idea of a graduate couple working as teachers in a village school started by a zamindar got the attention of the people in the old black & white Hindi film, 'Miss Mary' (directed by L. V. Prasad and produced by

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AVM Productions) in which Meena Kumari and Gemini Ganesan acted as married graduates. The story was written by Hargobind Duggal and this hindi film Miss Mary was a remake of Missamma (Telugu in 1955) and Missamma (Tamil in 1956). All three versions were directed by L.V. Prasad.

In this fiction family comedy drama film, the local zamindar was happy as school got two able teachers who live and work in the village and children get good primary education. In fact, the zamindar faced problems of school teachers leaving after few years of serving the village school. While female teachers get married and leave with their husbands, male teachers leave for better paid teacher jobs in cities. So the zamindar thought that if both male and female teachers are married, then they will live in the village itself and hence published job vacancy in the village advertisement with a condition that only married graduate couple can apply. Although this is an imaginary fictional film story, the idea appealed to many people and the film was a success.

Just wonder, if such an imaginary idea comes to reality and if such married couple in real flesh and blood actually work in villages, then, the transformation of our village is sure to occur.

Yes, such a thing indeed happened and brought to reality in 2005. Nanaji Deshmukh, a

freedom fighter and close ally of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay and Atal Bihari Vajapayee. Nanaji got influenced by the experiments of Gandhi in ably motivating married couples for talking with families in their localities for participating in freedom movement. Nanaji was also influenced by the teachings and principles of Integral Humanism enunciated by Pt. Deendayal Upadhyay and designed a campaign for bringing self-reliance in our villages for which he brought in newlywed graduate couple to live and work in villages. The details of the scheme are given here.

Philosophical Bases for the New Scheme

Bottom-up Planning: Deendayal Research Institute's (DRI) commitment to the implementation of the development process from the bottom to the top, *i.e.*, formulated at the village level, necessitated sustained interaction with the villagers themselves to their problems and motivate them to change.

Focus on Family: This concept that it is the family that is the centre of the society also stems from the guiding principles of the Institute, as laid out in the philosophy of Integral Humanism.

It is an altogether untenable notion that men alone can succeed in the task of nation building, without active participation of women. Both of them are vital pillars of social system. Any imbalance in their rights and roles

threatens to tear apart the cultural fabric of the nation. It also retards the nation's development. Their lives are ought to be complementary to each other from the viewpoint of society, family and the individual. This was the philosophy behind the SSD scheme launched by DRI at Chitrakoot for the development of villages.

Nanaji Deshmukh, the brain behind the scheme said,

"A family or society is not created by only by men or women separately, but by the mutual cooperation of both. Earlier campaigns ignored this fact, and could not meet their goals.

Mutual cooperation and equal participation of men and women is the key to creating new society. Unfortunately, this aspect has always been overlooked. Therefore, to implement this fact and popularize it, contributions by newlywed couples in social development, is only the solution."

Issue of Trust with outsiders: The couple are asked to live in villages so that an element of homophily develops among them and the villagers. Generally, villagers are extremely wary of the intentions of outsiders who come to their villages claiming to want to help them. Once, the samaj shilpi dampati live with them in their own village, trust and mutual respect forms gradually and acts a

bedrock of faith to work together for self-reliance of the village.

Samaj Shilpi Dampati Scheme

Deendayal Research Institute (DRI) was set up in 1968 by Nanaji Deshmukh to validate the philosophy of Integral Humanism. DRI initiated Chitrakoot Project as an integrated and holistic model for the development of rural India, based on the principles outlined in Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism, to create a society based on the complementarity of the family, primary school and the local population. The Chitrakoot Project is a self-reliance campaign that was launched on 26 th January 2002.

Deendayal Research Institute's (DRI) commitment to the implementation of the development process from the bottom to the top, (i.e.) formulated at the village level, necessitated sustained first-hand interaction of village extension workers with the villagers to understand their problems and motivate them to change.

However, after decades of exploitation, villagers are extremely wary of the intentions of outsiders who come to their villages claiming to want to help them. The only way to gain their confidence and trust was to have committed social workers who live within the community itself. The realization of this basic reality, led DRI to evolve the concept of grass

root level functionaries known as Samaj Shilpi Dampati (SSD), a newlywed graduate couple that have the sense of commitment towards community service, to live and work in the village for a period of five years. The SSD would work in a cluster of five villages. After an orientation and training camp, the SSD are taken to the village where they live either in the primary school or with a family that is sympathetic to the cause of social development. After first gaining the trust of the villagers, by demonstrating their open commitment to the betterment of all in the village, start with giving tuitions to the children, then start to talk to the villagers about socio-economic change. The SSD are catalysts of change, and key functionaries in DRI's self-reliance campaign. In all areas of the campaign increasing incomes, removing unemployment, improving agricultural techniques, education, health & hygiene, clean & green village, and to help them resolve their disputes at the village level itself. They also work to raise the social consciousness in the villages by encouraging them to live in harmony with mutual respect.

Village self-reliance campaign

The self-reliance campaign covers all aspects of the individual, family and societal lives of the villagers. The key to the success of the campaign is the concept of Samaj Shilpi Dampati (SSD), graduate couples that live

within the villages, and are responsible for motivating and guiding a cluster of five villages.

Objectives of the Self-reliance Campaign

- To bring about total village development through the members of village development committee & mandals
- To replicate self-reliant village model to the other parts of country

The major components are: development of agriculture and animal husbandry, income generation for the poor through self-help groups and non-farm sector micro-enterprises, providing health care to families, providing education to all villagers and forming a litigation-free village with social justice.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

Foremost among the aspects covered is income generation. This is achieved by introducing watershed and soil management techniques where necessary; adoption of new and improved farming technologies through 2.5 and 1.5 acre model farms that enable small and marginal farmers, accounting for 80 percent of the rural population, to look after the family needs and earn enough to save for other expenses.

Income Generation through SHG & Enterprises

By increasing non-farm sector incomes through entrepreneur training and the formation of income-generating Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that are both stand-alone, and vertically integrated.

Health Care

Issues of health and hygiene are the second most important aspect of the village self-reliance campaign, as an unhealthy individual is incapable of working to improve his/her economic condition. So, to address issues related to health the Chitrakoot Project resorts to Ayurveda and Naturopathy to keep villagers healthy. Locally available herbs and nutritional vegetable gardens, with medicinal Tulasi plant, are the key interventions used in the villages. 'Dadi ma Ka Batua' (grandmother's pouch), a collection of 34 Ayurvedic local herbs and medicinal preparations is kept at the village for use to treat common ailments.

Education

Illiteracy is the third area covered by the campaign. Adult literacy classes are conducted for the villagers by the Samaj Shilpi Dampati, our Educational Research Centre and the four schools that operate within the Project area. Ram Darshan, a unique museum that highlights socially relevant aspects of Lord Rama's life helps villagers inculcate social consciousness and human values to encourage

them to live in a spirit of co-operation and harmony with each other.

Litigation-free Villages

The Samaj Shilpi Dampati work with the villagers on the principles of mutual cooperation to ensure that the village is litigation free, and also on personal and village hygiene to make the village clean and green.

A Replicable Model

Deendayal Research Institute is confident that its self-reliance model, based on the universal principles of Integral Humanism that is both replicable and sustainable, can be a model for the future of India as also for global developmental problems.

Progress

The Chitrakoot project of self-reliance campaign covered 500 villages around Chitrakoot in 2 phases. The 80 villages taken up in the 1st phase were declared self-reliant by 15th August 2005, and the remaining villages were declared self-reliant and dedicated to society on 27th February 2011, the first death anniversary of Nanaji Deshmukh.

Current Infrastructure in Chitrakoot Project

Since the village self-reliance campaign is a unique initiative and needs special resources and inputs, Deendayal Research Institute has established a host of its own resource institutions and facilities to

enable the project to succeed. These resource centers would give inputs and facilitate the villagers for the success of the self-reliance campaign. These include:

1. Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Majhgawan (M.P.) - a 63 acre model farm that reaches out to farmers in the villages of the self-reliance campaign situated in Madhya Pradesh helping them to increase both farm and non-farm income through watershed management, improved sustainable agricultural inputs both on-farm and farmer s fields and training in various disciplines.
2. Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Ganivan (U.P.) - a 50 acre model farm set within a 150 acres DRI campus that reaches out to farmers in the villages of the self-reliance campaign situated in Uttar Pradesh helping them to increase both farm and non-farm income through improved sustainable agricultural inputs both on-farm and in farmers' fields and through training in various disciplines.
3. Arogyadham: The Ayurveda & Naturopathy Campus at Chitrakoot is the key centre for maintaining good health among the villagers. Within the 45 acre campus are:
 - a) Out-patient Department with modern diagnostic equipment
 - b) In-patient Department for 40 patients
 - c) Maternity & Pediatric Centre with operating theatres and a neo-natal pediatric wing.
 - d) Yoga & Meditation Centre.
 - e) Fully equipped Naturopathy Centre
 - f) Ayurvedic Research Centre for Ayurvedic Herbs and Preparations
 - g) Modern Dental Unit
 - h) Ayurvedic Research Library
 - i) Medicinal Herbal Garden
 - j) Ayurvedic Doctor for Outreach programme
 - k) Herbal Remedies Kit (Dadi Ma Ka Batua) for treating common ailments
4. Udyamita Vidyapeeth - A production-cum-training Centre that consists of a complex of over 19 industrial sheds, 4 hostels and an administrative block to impart training to villagers in various income-generating skills. The Centre is actively involved in the self-reliance programmes and has innovated vertically integrated Self-Help Groups and the concept of one village-one product.
5. Surrendra Paul Gramodaya Vidyalaya - A comprehensive primary, secondary and high school situated in Chitrakoot

- that serves 1,200 students from in and around Chitrakoot.
6. Parmanand Ashram Paddhati Vidyalaya - A residential co-educational school for 125 scheduled caste children located in Ganivan.
 7. Ramnath Ashramshala - A residential co-educational school for for 200 tribal children located in Chitrakoot.
 8. Krishna Devi Banwasi Balika Awasiya Vidyalaya - A residential girls school for 120 girls from tribal families.
 9. Gurukul - A unique experiment that houses 250 children with retired couples in groups of 25 children that inculcates values in the children and helps them to study and grow in an inspiring atmosphere.
 10. Chitrakoot Ras Shala: The in-house Ayurvedic pharmacy that caters to the medicinal needs of Arogyadham and also markets 35 Ayurvedic preparations.
 11. Gramodaya Darshan Park: A permanent exhibition where all the innovations and interventions used in the self-reliance campaign can be seen in working models as also other innovations that could be used in villages.
 12. Govansh Vikas Avam Anusadhan Kendra: The Gaushala in Chitrakoot in engaged in maintaining pure Indian breeds, research in cross-breeding of Indian cows, and also an Artificial Insemination (A.I.) programme for improving the livestock yield and bullock performance in the villages in the self-reliance programme.
 13. Resource Centre: Controls the inputs of the Samaj Shilpi Dampati - the graduate couples that live in the village and serve as the catalyst of change in the self-reliance campaign. They are the nodal point through which all interventions of DRI flow to the villagers in the self-reliance campaign.
 14. Educational Resource Centre: Innovates new educational aids for schools and adult literacy.
 15. Ramnath Goenka Smarak: A public bathing ghat for the people of Chitrakoot on the banks of the holy *Mandakini* river with separate enclosures for men and women.
 16. Ram Darshan: a unique museum to inculcate the social values and ethics embodied in the concept of Ram Rajya, using paintings, bas-reliefs and dioramas to depict socially relevant scenes from Lord Rama's life.
- As the SSDs work together in social development activities, almost all men and women of the localities are motivated to

participate in various development programmes and activities. Thereby, most of the families of the villages are involved in serving the people of their locality without any discrimination. Even the children started imitating their mothers engaged in social work. In this manner, the families are automatically developing as basic models of society. The enthusiastic cooperation of the people to accomplish this unprecedented task of rejuvenating social consciousness in family life has given a boost to the plan of sending young couples in all selected clusters of villages.

A corollary of this experiment is that the methodology employed will allow the couples will be able to manage both community and change in the most practical manner. These Samaj Shilpi couples, by living in the village itself, and sharing the villager's joys and sorrows, over time, become natural leaders of the community.

Conclusion

The couple has to devote at least five years to serve among people of their cluster of villages. During these five years the couples are entrusted with the responsibility of making the villagers and the cluster of villages socially and economically self-reliant.

‘Samaj Shilpi Dampati’ or the ‘architects of social change’ or agents of rural development. These are all the synonyms for

the couples that are dedicated to the reconstruction of the society and the Nation. Under the unique concept, initiated by the Deendayal Research Institute (DRI), these selfless and dedicated couples are bringing social change through India's own paradigm of development – self-reliant villages. The SSD act as a nodal point for all interventions by DRI units. The success of the self-reliance campaign is directly linked to the success of the Samaj Shilpi Dampati.

Reference

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