

## Qualities of good environment

All life forms want a comfortable and happy life. In case of human beings, it is a sum of two things, personal happiness, and better environment.

Personal happiness can be obtained from a variety of ways. Basically, one becomes happy when one is contented or at peace with oneself. We have discussed this in Section 1.

Environmental happiness is what I call community or nation building. It is the enabling environment which makes you feel happy to live in, work in and just be a part of it. This environmental happiness also gives us a sense of belonging, makes us feel proud of our surroundings and gives us a sense of ownership. If we create a happy environment for our work and living, then we will make this country a great place to live. Each one of us should therefore work towards improving our immediate environment so that it becomes nice and cheerful. Then we will be proud to be a part of it.

Long ago (mid 1990s) I visited a hut (tin shed) of a farm laborer called Sidhram in the village of Vinchurni near Phaltan. The evidence of poverty I saw in his hut shattered me and propelled me to look at solutions to make the lives of the rural poor better. He had a broken kerosene hurricane lantern for light; the broken glass chimney had become black with soot. He cooked food in a few beat-up aluminum utensils and mostly survived on *bhakari* (sorghum or bajra bread), *chutney* (made up of green chillies and some spices). He cooked his meal on a three-stone wood stove and ground the chutney on a flat stone grinder. He had a few clothes which he washed every day, and a thin mattress with a worn-out sheet that also doubled up as a pillow. These were his total possessions.

Anytime I think of a rural household, the image of Sidhram's hut and its belongings comes in front of my eyes. His case may be one of extreme

poverty but most of the rural population in India lives in similar conditions.

In fact, it should be a matter of shame for all of us that even 72 years after independence, 60% of our rural population (100 million households) live in poverty. They lack the basic amenities of life that we take for granted. For example, they live in one-room huts with nearly non-existent electricity; cook on primitive biomass cookstoves which produce tremendous indoor pollution; lack potable water and toilet facilities. Somehow modern technology has not touched their lives. According to the latest World Bank report, 33% of the world's poorest live in India and has the maximum number of malnourished people in the world.

Unless and until the rural poor are brought into the fold of middle-class existence the overall environment of the country cannot be improved.

However, our development model must be very different than the present one which is unplanned, haphazard, and based on corrupt practices. It should be based on high tech, decentralized energy sources and more green spaces.

India is a land which produced the greatest philosophical thought thousands of years ago. That thought could not have been created in a society which was based on chaos that we see today. India of ancient times must have been a beautiful country with great environment, abundant food, and water and only such an environment was conducive to produce the great philosophical thought.

It is my dream that all of us should work to produce a great and enabling environment so that India can again show world a new way.

This section contains articles outlining possible solutions on how to improve our environment.

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