

**E**ver thought what's common between Baba Ramdev, Jaggi Vasudev, Gyalwang Drupka, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, or Balbir Singh Seechewal besides their being the spiritual gurus?

They all have taken up the cause of preserving the environment. And they are not only preaching but actually working on the ground level to make the difference.

So be it walking bare feet on snow-capped mountains to educate people in remote areas of the Himachal about preserving environment, mobilise people to save the Ganga, provide money and employment to farmers for practicing organic farming or simply exhorting people to plant trees for sustainable environment — the gurus are going all the way to inculcate a sense of care for environment among people. And undoubtedly, people are responding to gurus' call.

Recently when Gyalwang Drupka, who heads the 800-year-old Drupka lineage (one of the oldest Buddhist sect) kicked off his 400 km *pad yatra* (march on foot) from Kardang in Lahul Valley till Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir to educate people about how to live in sync with the environment, thousands joined him to support the cause he was propagating.

"Many aspects of metro culture and swanky living are still alien to the people living in remote parts of Himalayas. To me they are the real caretakers of the environment. However, what's a cause of worry is that with tourism being promoted in these areas at a rapid pace, the areas are getting polluted too. Like the use of plastic is on rise and plastic is a major concern for mountain ecology," said Drupka guru.

"Tourism is also important to development. So our *yatra* is just to educate people about the benefits of using cotton and cloth bags and educate them to say no to plastic. We also distributed eco-friendly bags among people as a gesture to encourage them shift towards more eco-friendly products," added the guru, whose *yatra* would conclude in the later part of this month to kick off the ceremonies of Hemis festival in

# Green gurus

Spiritual leaders are now spearheading campaigns at grassroots level to preserve the environment. ASRP Mukesh reports



(Top) Site of Baba Ramdev's organic food garden (Left) Gyalwang Drupka heading the *pad yatra* (Right) Sri Sri Ravi Shankar with his followers



Ladakh in early August.

So what is making the gurus render spiritual teaching in the back-ground and take up the save environment cause?

"No religion teaches you to live in isolation away from environment. The essence of all the religious teaching over the ages has been to live in close harmony with nature and mankind. However, with abrupt developments and people's growing greed, Mother Nature has totally

been destroyed. If we don't act now, there will be no better tomorrow for the next generation. It's time to teach everyone how to lead a balanced life," said his holiness.

Agreed yogic guru Jaggi Vasudev of Isha Foundation, "We have all seen the devastating consequences of deforestation and global warming across the world in the form of floods and hurricanes. One of the simplest ways to counter these effects is to return to the nature." Vasudev has

been one of the pioneers of "environment spiritualism." At present, he is leading a massive plantation campaign — *Project Green Hands* in Tamil Nadu. "The aim is to focus on and spread a simple message — 'Trees give life, protect them,'" he remarked.

The plantation drive had started two years ago and since then there has been a gigantic increase in the green cover in Tamil Nadu. Said Vasudev, "Two years back, the green

cover of Tamil Nadu was around 17 per cent but today it has increased to 33 per cent. Till now we have planted over 114 million trees and are now lot of youths are constantly associating with us."

Another yoga guru who has been guiding people towards healthy eating and living has taken up the task to clean the Ganga. Baba Ramdev, the co-founder of Patanjali Yog Peeth in Hardwar has been spearheading a campaign under Ganga Raksha Manch to purify the mighty river from its source in Gangotri to Ganga Sagar in Bay of Bengal.

"We are also opposing unplanned industrialisation along the river. The campaign has managed to mobilise nearly 700,000 youths at the district level," said he while launching the campaign sometime back.

Protection of environment and sustainable living is what even Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of the Art of Living has been promoting for quite some time. Sri Sri has also been campaigning against global warming and agri-pollution by promoting "organic farming", plantations and traditional farm technologies.

"The only way to curb the environmental risk is to check pollution and for this we need to spread awareness. Still many are oblivious of the climate threats we are confronted with. They are immune even to changes in the cycle of seasons. They have to be educated," remarked one of his disciple about their save environment campaign.

And to see how environment can be conserved by infusing new life in dead natural elements, one must follow the efforts of Balbir Singh Seechewal. By his sheer will and hard work, Seechewal managed to revive almost dead Kali Bein river in Punjab. Known as *Rodda wala Baba* (saint of the roads) for his missionary zeal to make pathways and connect people, Seechewal is now mobilising people to venture on other green projects like eco-farming. Talking about his initiatives, he says, "The environment can be saved only by the common people. And its only spiritual leaders who can spearhead the green activities for people connect with them easily."

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