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It is important to take care of the Planet

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev in Conversation with Kavita Chhibber

At The Isha center we are very focused on keeping the surroundings green, but behind the Ashram in Coimbatore there is a large part of the mountain that has been stripped off all the trees. It seems there was an illegal furniture factory and for years someone used those trees to make furniture. In the early 90s we planted about 1-2 million trees on that mountain slope and now those trees have attained maturity.

However it was in 1998 that I heard certain UN agencies say that by 2025, 60 percent of Tamil Nadu would become a desert. I knew there was ecological degradation and that was a big concern. This land has sustained thousands of generations, and hearing that piece of information caused grave concern.

When I traveled around Tamil Nadu, I realized that the landscape was changing so rapidly that it would turn into a desert much before the projection of 2025. I saw thousands of palm trees with their crowns having fallen off. Palm trees can survive even in a desert but in Tamil Nadu they were losing their crowns because of the exorbitant exploitation of ground water.

In Coimbatore city about 15 years ago one had to just dig 125-150 feet to find water for a well, and now one has to go 1400-1500 feet down to find water. Earlier the rain water was scarce, now it's in excess and so the degeneration was happening rapidly. Then as part of global warming system the southern peninsula is seeing a very excessive level of rainfall. On one day 1.3 meters came down flooding Bombay, for example. This is happening in many parts of the country, and without vegetation, excessive rain can accelerate the desertification process because the top soil runs off.

I saw that Tamil Nadu had a green cover of about 16 to 17 percent and we needed to raise it. For that we needed at least 114 million trees at the least to be planted in about 6-8 years time so that by the next 15 years we would have about 30 percent green cover.

When I mentioned that this is what I wanted to do everyone was unsure if it could be done. I pointed to them that the population in Tamil Nadu is 62 million. If each person planted 2 trees we will actually have 120 million trees instead of the 114 we needed.

Each time there is a problem, we think someone else will solve it for us. We prefer to be bystanders, even though we know that we are responsible for a particular problem. We can't change government politics or international issues overnight, but we can collectively start at a local level.

Last year we planted 850,000 trees. This year till now we have planted over 2 million. We have close to 1, 040 nurseries and while we are not close to our target of 25 million trees, at least this is a start. What has been most encouraging is the enthusiasm with which people have responded. Even a laborer earning daily wages to survive is willing to forgo one day's work to help plant saplings. All the work is being done voluntarily-we are not paying anyone.

The problem in Tamil Nadu is that too much land has been put under the plough, and to convince farmers to make 10 percent of their land a green land is tough unless the saplings planted turn into food giving trees. Right now it costs us about 40-50 cents per sapling, but to get saplings that will bear food the cost sky rockets to 5-6 dollars per sapling. And then finance becomes a problem. We need support in that area.

The well to do who have caused the problems with their cars and air conditioners have not stepped forward to help. They do need to step forward because this is the most basic step towards social responsibility.

We are being asked by 10 other states for help but again it is the same thing-they are not even starting by planting a few trees themselves, in a few cities or even start creating awareness.

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(Best viewed with Internet Explorer)

Recently Isha volunteers planted 2000 trees in Lebanon on a mountain that had been ravaged by warfare. This kind of initiative is happening but sporadically, in a few places. But we need people to understand that if they make up their mind nothing can stop them from reversing the trends that will destroy the planet if we don't pay attention at our earliest. Planting trees in the world may not be the solution to all the pressing issues that we are facing globally today but at least this is a start in the right direction.

For more information about Sadhguru, please visit www.ishafoundation.org

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev is an international speaker, author and peace advocate with profound spiritual and cultural insights on health and human potential. He addresses over 500,000 people annually at his public forums. Sadhguru is a realized master and yogi who has practiced yoga since age 13 and authored four books on the essential nature of yoga. Sadhguru has synthesized the science of yoga into a dynamic program that allows people to restore and maintain optimum health and inner balance.

Through his books, columns, articles and interviews aired and published in a host of international media, Sadhguru is considered an authority on yogic science whose teachings help people gain an inner understanding of the issues and events that happen to themselves and the world around them.

Sadhguru is founder of the Isha Foundation, a non-profit organization advancing physical, mental and spiritual health through yoga and self-transformation. The Foundation administers over 100 yoga centers, an ashram, residential complex and medical center in India, and conducts public programs around the world. His humanitarian initiatives for world peace and his outreach programs for Tsunami relief, prisoners, children and Action for Rural Rejuvenation in India are examples of his determination to improve the human condition for all people.

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