

THE SPEAKING TREE

A TIMES OF INDIA PUBLICATION

<http://www.speakingtree.in>

PUNE, SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 2011 NUMBER OF PAGES: 8 PRICE ₹ 2.00

BRIEFLY



First Temple

Goebekli Tepe in Southern Turkey and other sites in the Middle East are changing ideas about how itinerant bands of hunter-gatherers settled into village life as farmers -- a turning point referred in history as the Neolithic Revolution. But 11,600 years ago -- 7,000 before the Giza Pyramid was built and much before Stonehenge in England -- it appears that a great limestone temple was created at Goebekli Tepe without the aid of wheels or draft animals.

Archaeologists excavating what could turn out to be the world's first temple say that it suggests the human sense of the sacred -- and the human love of a good spectacle -- may have given rise to civilisation itself, rather than any post-Ice Age global climate change and the discovery of agriculture that led to cessation of the nomadic life as hunter-gatherer.

— National Geographic



A quiet revolution is taking place in Phaltan, a small *taluka*, 100 km south-east of Pune. Leading the charge is environmentalist, social activist and spiritualist Anil K Rajvanshi. A pioneer of the reverse flow from the US back to India, in early 80s, he gave up a well-paid professorship at the Institute of Solar Energy, Florida, and chose to settle in Phaltan to pursue a dream: to change the landscape of the rural poor. Thirty years on, the dream is becoming real. His dream child, the NARI Centre for Sustainable Development (NCS), an NGO for sensitising corporations, R&D experts and leaders of civil society to the problems of rural India, was inaugurated in Phaltan on April 12, 2011. "With their resources, reach and technological expertise, big businesses can help improve rural life. The NARI Centre, a model of sustainable development, is the product of this belief," says Rajvanshi. The focus is on innovation, particularly technological innovation that is directed to rural needs. For example, the centre developed indigenous technology for fermentation of sweet sorghum juice, solar distillation of ethanol and finally for its use as a cooking and lighting fuel in new and improved stoves and lanterns.

Beyond Business

Rajvanshi explains that the role models of rural people are the urban elite. "I'm trying to get this class involved in rural uplift in a manner that is sustainable. The ashram is an attempt in that direction." Young corporate executives -- the future CEOs of the country -- and active members of civil society, will, through lectures, workshops and project participation, be persuaded to set an example of simple living and high thinking. The centre's simple mantra is: Technology with spirituality for sustainable rural development.

Looking back on years of hard work, Rajvanshi reminisces: "When I first came and settled here, the place was so badly connected that I had to take a bus and go all the way to Pune to make a phone call! Fresh from the US, I had job offers from IIT Bombay, IIC Bangalore and from the Tatas, but I had come with a certain idealism and arrogance that I'm going to change

Green Gyan

SAKINA YUSUF KHAN takes you to Phaltan Ashram where corporate leaders and future CEOs learn the art of simple living and high thinking

India. I soon realised that change is not going to come about so easily. The government may put in a lot of money, but unless corporations, who provide the goods and services, are sensitised to the needs of the rural poor, real development will remain a dream. Phaltan aims to translate that dream into reality."

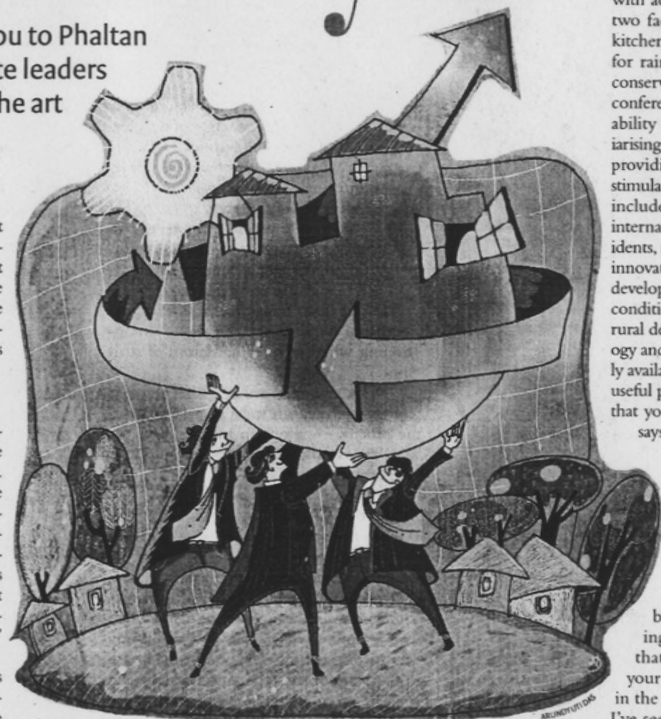
Problems And Solutions

It provides a forum for professionals from different fields to collaborate and generate solutions for rural India. "The key word here is experience. The rural setting of the centre will hopefully inspire participants to think about rural problems and come up with possible solutions. For only if you see things for your self, will you feel strongly about them, and only when you feel strongly will you want to make things better," says the committed green-tech guru.



Business schools have begun to endorse the belief that experiential learning is important. Debashis Sanyal, dean, School of

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—ANIL K RAJVANSHI



Business Management of Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai, says: "Only real-life exposure and training out there can make good managers". Management experts are convinced that building EQ or emotional quotient is as important as IQ. And they are all for promoting SQ (Spiritual Quotient) as well. The Mumbai-based SP Jain Institute of Management and Research has compulsory courses on management that include insights from the *Bhagavad Gita* to familiarise students with ethics and values. According to S Sriram, director, Mumbai Business School, this helps build the ethical foundation of students

and develops a sense of life beyond business. IIM Ahmedabad's Shodh Yatra, an exploration-based course that takes students into remote villages, is part of the hardship familiarisation exercise. It is reported that an increasing number of students are demanding such intense real-life training sessions. XLRI, Jamshedpur, encourages students to spend three nights in a village, interact with villagers and get to know their problems from first-hand accounts.

"This is exactly what we are trying to do," says Rajvanshi. Phaltan aims to give participants this sort of exposure. The NCS will soon run a month-

long internship for students of the Manipal Institute of Management. They will be made conscious of the lack of basic amenities, poor resource utilisation and non-sustainability in rural areas. The centre is spread over 900 sq m with accommodation for 20 students, two faculty houses, a well-equipped kitchen and dining room and facilities for rainwater harvesting and energy conservation. It will be hosting regular conferences and workshops on sustainability and rural development, familiarising participants with rural India and providing them an intellectually stimulating environment, which would include meaningful interaction with international and local experts and residents, so that they can come up with innovative solutions and business and development plans best suited to local conditions. "We believe that the key to rural development is modern technology and research which convert scarcely available resources and materials into useful products. It makes life simple, so that you can focus on higher things," says Rajvanshi.

Spiritual Quotient

Spirituality figures high in the centre's philosophy. "We are all for simple living", says Rajvanshi, "and you can live simple only if you are spiritual. When you become spiritual you stop trying to impress others and when that happens, you start reducing your greed, because greed is rooted in the human tendency to show off. I've seen it in my own case. When I returned from the US, I was a hard-core consumerist, greedy and aggressive," he says. Today, he's very different. The family hasn't bought a big ticket item in 15 years. He moves around in his 1984 car, wears khadi and when clothes get worn-out, they are used as dusters. With such a spartan lifestyle, it is hardly surprising that the centre he set up should be called an ashram -- the Phaltan Ashram. As Rajvanshi puts it: "What's an ashram? It's a place to learn -- a place to learn higher things and that's exactly what Phaltan is all about."

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