

THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ‘GRAMGEETA’ : SOME OBSERVATIONS

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Abstract :

Sustainable development meets the needs of the present generation without hampering the ability of future generations. The views on sustainable development gained wide recognition after 1987. Prior to that in 1955 Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj, one of the Marathi poets wrote a poetry collection ‘*Gramgeeta*’. It is purely based on the theme of sustainable villages. He used the ancient poetry form *owe* for making the poems. Like the modern scientific textbooks, he made 41 individual chapters covering various aspects of rural development in India. At that time there was less urbanization in India as compared to Europe and western countries. In the present paper an attempt is made to find a correlation between the conceptual writing in *Gramgeeta* and goals of sustainable development. Original Marathi text of ‘*Gramgeeta*’ is used as a primary source material for the present study. With his foresightedness Tukdoji Maharaj addressed several environmental concerns related to the village and also came forward with the possible remedies to it. *Gramgeeta* works as a Bible for rural development with a sustainable view. Most of the sustainable development goals mentioned in the agenda 2030 were already addressed in *Gramgeeta*. Though these solutions are on a local scale they are based on the theme ‘Think globally and act Locally’. It's quite amazing that a poet addresses almost all environmental concerns of the present era before 70 years, i.e. just after Indian independence.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Gramgeeta, RashtrasantTukdojiMaharaj,Sustainable Village

Introduction :

The earliest literature regarding the concept of sustainable development dates back to 1713, where the concept meant ensuring the forestry sustainability realized by only cutting re-grown timber to maintain the soil fertility. As per the western environmentalists, the environmental issue was first mentioned in the book ‘*Silent Spring*’ written by Rachel Carson in 1962. At that time, the concept was still in the initial stage and only non-formally described in literature. The concept of sustainable development originated with the environmental scope in the 1980s. The earliest formulations can be found in the 1980’s World Conservation Strategy for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources presented by the UN Environment Programme, the World Wildlife Fund, and the International Union. This concept proposed three basic factors – social, ecological, and economic – which have been continuously developed until today. The formulation of sustainable development was defined as: For development to be sustainable, it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and non-living resource base; and of the long-term as well as the short-term advantages and disadvantages of alternative actions.

The concept of sustainable development gained wide recognition in the international scientific community after the famous report ‘Our common future’ (G.H. Brundtland, 1987) was published by World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. ‘Our common future’ opened by declaring: ‘The Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives. Yet each community, each country, strives for survival and prosperity with little regard for its impacts on others. Some consume the Earth’s resources at a rate that would leave little for future generations. Others, many more in number, consume far too little and live with the prospects of hunger, squalor, disease and early death.’ Sustainable development was defined by the Commission as: ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet own needs.’ ‘Our common future’ also recommended several critical actions aimed at reversing the unsustainable trends, such as change the quality of growth, meet essential needs, ensure a sustainable level of population, conserve and enhance the research base, manage risk, and include environmental and economical considerations in decision-making. This concept emphasized two kinds of balance: current generation and the future generations; rich and poor in the same period. The current generation should consider the impact on the future generations if the over-consumption cannot be prevented in time. ‘Our common future’ established the benchmark for the future discussions on sustainability and left a large space for various interpretations.¹

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". The SDGs were set up in 2015 by

the United Nations General Assembly (UN-GA) and are intended to be achieved by 2030. They are included in a UN-GA Resolution called the 2030 Agenda or what is colloquially known as Agenda 2030. The SDGs were developed in the Post-2015 Development Agenda as the future global development framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals which ended in 2015.

These 17 Goals of sustainable development can be enlisted as follows -

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.
10. Reduce income inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by regulating emissions and promoting developments in renewable energy.
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.²

Materials and Methods:

Sustainable Village is the concept which makes a smoother way towards achieving the sustainable development goals. In Ancient Indian Philosophy we find many facts which are having close relations with sustainability. More Specifically, Literary works in Marathi language have many references to Conservation Ethics. Such links can be found in *Abhangs* of Sant Dnyaneshwar, Sant Tukaram, Sant Eknath etc. The Concept of Environmental Criticism emerged after 1970's. Before that in 1955 Rashtrasant Tukdojee Maharaj wrote a poetry- book '*Gramgeeta*' which is based purely on the concept of all round development of an Indian village. In the present paper an attempt is made to find a correlation between the conceptual writings in '*Gramgeeta*' and goals of sustainable development. Original Marathi text of '*Gramgeeta*' is used as a primary source material for the present study.

Observations :

About Rashtrasant Tukdojee Maharaj and *Gramgeeta*:

Tukdoji Maharaj was born on 30th April 1909, in village Yawali situated in Maharashtra state of India. He received spiritual initiation from Samarth Adokji Maharaj of Warkhed gram. He was a great orator and a musician who composed more than 3000 bhajans in Hindi and Marathi. He has also written many articles on Religion, Society, Nation and Education. His early life was full of Sadhana both spiritual and yogic exercises. He spent much of his early life in the deep forests of Ramtek, Salburdi, Ramdighi and Gondola.

Even though he was formally not much educated, his metaphysical spirit and potentiality was of very high order. His devotional songs permeate the full spirit of devotion and moral values. His Khanjedi, a traditional musical instrument, was unique and his style of playing it was unparalleled. He was bachelor, however, his life was dedicated for the services of the masses irrespective of caste, class, creed or religion. He was determined to re-define socio-spirituality and revitalize and awaken the nation. In 1941 he performed individual civil resistance i.e. satyagraha and he took part in the mass upsurge of the 'Quit India' movement in 1941. He strongly opposed the inhuman repressive measures, adopted at that time by the British rulers. He was arrested in 1942 and was imprisoned in Nagpur and Raipur Central Jails. After the dawn of Independence, Sant Tukdoji concentrated on rural reconstruction. He established the 'All India Shri Gurudev Seva Mandal' and developed many programmes for integrated rural development. His paternal name is Manikdev Banduji Ingale. His activities were so impressive that Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of India at that time, bestowed the title of 'Rashtra Sant' on him. Rashtrasant Tukdoji used to work in person with the villagers in road construction, village-sanitation and other activities. His writings

both prose and poetry, are full of devotion and the spirit of humanity. His nobility was of very high order. His selfless devotion and dedication are bound to teach the lessons for the generations to come. *Gramgeeta*: an epic on Indian village life is a book of poetry authored by RashtasantTukdojiMaharaj. The poetry book is composed of Owee. Owee, is a poetic meter used in Marathi poems for "rhythmic prose", generally used in narrative poems. Owee literary means strung together. It can also be spelled as owi or ovi. Owee is one of the oldest Marathi song genres still performed today. It has been in use since the 13th century in written poetry; however, oral traditions of women's owee pre-date the literary owee. While literary owee is used by the Varkari saints in bhakti (devotional) literature, women's owee is passed via the oral tradition through generations of women, who sing them while working or for pleasure.³

The book 'Gramgeeta' was published in 1955 and is later translated by others in English, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, and Sanskrit. This book is an ideal reference for developing a sustainable village community. This book has 41 chapters. The book is purely based on the theme of upliftment of Indian villages and its ethics is closely related with the concept of sustainable development. Chapters 11 to 15 are related to 'GramnirmanPanchak' in which he focuses on 5 different aspects of rural development. StefaniaGiannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO quotes "We are increasingly asking if what people learn is truly relevant to their lives, if what they learn helps to ensure the survival of our planet. Education for Sustainable Development can provide the knowledge, awareness and action that empower people to transform themselves and transform societies."⁴This type of education for sustainable villages was started by RashtasantTukdojeeMaharaj in the 1950s and 1960s.

Discussion :

Urbanization is the root cause of most of the environment problems. If the villages are self sustained then the villagers will not move towards the cities. The densely crowded cities create a burden on natural resources like land and water. Problems of air pollution, noise pollution and solid waste management were also at the peak. To tackle all the environmental hurdles, sustainable villages are the only solutions we have in our hand. If the villages are planned properly the unnecessary migration will stop. Thus villagers can be developed physically, mentally and emotionally; so that there will be peace and harmony among humanity. That is the core value of *Gramgeeta*. Tukdojee Maharaj has keenly observed the village. He knows the merits and demerits of Indian villages. Therefore he appeals to the villagers, youths and even politicians to look after the smooth functioning of the village. There were no proper drainage systems in the village at that time. He wrote in *Gramgeeta*,
*rastesarvghaninibharle / aajubaajusdabkesatachale /
ekheekam n nibhetethale / Shaharaaveen //
'Khedyakadechala' mhanta / pariekhee soy nasepaahata /
gharekasleehudecheetatvtaa / dukarkhode, khuraade //*⁵(Chapter 12, Owee 3,4)

Mahatma Gandhiji called as father of India. He appealed to the Indians to 'Go towards the village'. This slogan is quite popular but TukdojiMaharaj raised some questions against his appeal. He wrote that if you are telling that citizens should move towards the villages we should also think about what facilities we are providing to the villagers. If we thoroughly observe the villages, we find that there are no proper arrangements for garbage disposal, sewage management and the houses are also not properly planned. The roads are dirty, somewhere we see waterlogging. The villages are depending on cities for their day-to-today needs. The houses are compared with pigpens.

He strictly speaks on the misbehavior by villagers. He wrote-
*konihousene gharbhandhale / maargaavarichotevaadhale /
konaachechhapparpudheaaale / gadeekaaheejaaanaa //
kaheenee saandpaaneesaachavle / machhar, jantu ativaadhale /
rograayeenee bejaarzaale / shejaareesagle //*(Chapter 12, Owee 13,14)

Intentionally encroachment on the road was done by some villagers. Some villagers are not maintaining the drainage system. Sewage water is flowing on the road; due to that mosquitoes will grow. These mosquitoes will cause communicable diseases and neighbors badly affected by it. Some are throwing solid waste on the road, which is highly objectionable.

*sadkefhale, sheng tarphale / kujke soap maargeech taakle /
aajubaajuspaahunifekle / dhobartyavreemaaualeene //
gaavcheegaavvishtenevyaaple / aadkoneghaneenebharle /
thayeethayeukeerdeesaachale / gaavvedhalegodreenee //.....
viheereekoneebaandhuntheveelyaa / tyaaapunhanaaheedurustkelyaa /
dhumaaryaaghankaritacheegelya / sadlaapaanyaatpaachola //*(Chapter 12, Owee 19-23)

There is no proper management of solid waste. By confirming that nobody is watching us, somebody is throwing rotten fruits, groundnut shells etc. on the road. Toilets are not properly managed, thus its smell is very annoying. Old buildings and Wells are not taken care of. They are not repaired. Leaves of trees are rotten in the water bodies. Tukdoji Maharaj says, rich people in villages are doing such things. For achieving the sustainable development goals we should follow the rules strictly. But in practice we see that it is not happening. Rich countries are not at all obeying the concerned treaties while poor countries are blamed for the phenomenon like global warming.

Political leaders who run the village administration are not taking care of the village but they are giving soft corner to their relatives to break the rules and behave as per their wish. This thought is reflected in the following owee.

*gavateelpanchzople / kaymhanaavenaatlag, mitraaaple /
mhanoneetyaanee dole laaveele / gaavzaaledongar he // (Chapter 12, Owee 26)
hesaglecheedurustkaraaya / shahanyaaneejaavekhedyaakadeyaa /
aadarsh gram haacheepaaya / raashtrachaasemhanunee // (Chapter 12, Owee 28)*

He appeals that the wise people should go to villages to make it correct because ideal villages are the structural base of a good nation. Ensure the health facilities for all villagers.

In the 1950s he gave emphasis on preparation of organic manure from human waste and encouraged organic farming. He also suggested making the green manure from some flowering shrubs. He warned the villagers not to burn the fuels, instead you make the organic manure from cattle dung.

*mhanoneesarvgaavaachemalmutra / jamvoneezaakaavejaanoneetantra /
tyanegaavaacheejameensarvatra / khatvoneedyaavee // (Chapter 12, Owee 67)*

He insists that everything used in the village should be prepared in the village itself. Each villager has to work. Villages should not depend on the city or foreigners for anything. This principle boosts the concept of self sustainability of the village, As all the basic needs of the villagers are satisfied by the villagers only then no modern amenities and related issues will enter in the village. Nowadays villages are using the things which are made by the corporate world but due to that the traditional knowledge system and interdependence of the villagers has collapsed. They are getting many things from the outside world which are not as required for villagers. The corporates advertise rigorously to buy such things for us as a symbol of status. Tukdoji Maharaj appeals that villagers should prepare and buy the things in the local market. It will sustain the local ecosystem as well as the commercial setup of the villages. This ethical perception is quite similar to the thoughts of deep ecologist David Pepper. Here he speaks about the sustainable development goals of inclusive societies and justice for all.

*tyanchyasukhachemukhyasaadhan / sarvtopareeswaavlanban /
sharaavaree n rahtaavlanban / kaamkaraavesarvaanee // (Chapter 13, Owee 10)*

Each village should prepare their own bricks and pottery. Agricultural implements are to be made in their own village as per requirement. Each house should have its own drainage system along with a backyard garden. Necessary vegetables would be grown in these backyard gardens. Trees should be planted in a systematic way. Thus he ensures sustainable consumption and production patterns.

*shramdaanaachesaptaahghevonee / rastedurustkaraavesarvaanee /
shoshakkhadde, moryakaronee / saandpaaneethambvaave // (Chapter 13, Owee 66)*

For making the bondings in between the people he suggest the community working weeks (*shramdansaptah*). He says such type of *shramdansaptah* must be arranged to maintain the common toilets and bathrooms to stop the sewage coming on the road.

*sadkaancheeyadutarfachaana / sarvaaneekaraavevruxaaropan /
dholethevaavemadhamadhaatun / kacharatyaattakavaya // (Chapter 13, Owee 71)*

Trees are to be planted on both the sides of roads. Dustbins are to be arranged in between to throw the garbage properly.

Each village should make all necessary things for their lifestyle. It may include all agriculture grains, clothes, chairs, toys, kitchen utensils and even a soap for washing. Villagers should buy the things made from small-scale industries installed in their own village.

Sound environment includes the grounds to play, gardens to walk and breath, a library to read the books and much more. In Gramgeeta Tukdoji Maharaj wrote that, the villagers should maintain the grounds, gardens with variety of trees, wells, guest houses, library with newspaper and entertainment facilities etc. Here he not only speaks

about the physical environment but also the psychological well-being of humanity. He speaks about biodiversity among plants. He objects the caste- discrimination and advice to take common meals.

*ekasaava sunder baag / tyatmanswaastyaacheheesaaveang /
prasannatavaadhaaya nana rang / vrux, velee, latakunj //
tyaatkridanganepaalne / baalakyuvkaancheeprasannvatee mane /
jaateepaatecheevisroneeradgaane / sahbhojnechaalvaavee //
gaveevishraamgruhasaave / ज्यातपाहनेउत्साहेबारवे /
sarvaasmuktdwaarthevaave / utaravinyasathee //
tetheasaavee sunder vihir / paneepinyaasthandgaar /
vachaneasaaveudbodhak, sundar / bhinteevarsarvatra // (Chapter 13, Owee 97-100)*

For taking care of the cattles we should encourage the traditional knowledge of veterinary science. The persons in villages who are having knowledge of such things should be encouraged to treat the cattles. For that purpose the village doctors and nurses should be trained. This approach shows that he is thinking seriously about the health issues not only of humans but also other animals too. It links with the ecosystem conservation as well as the stable economic stand up for the villagers.

*guradhoraancheeaushadhejaantee / saahyadyaavetyaagraameenapratee /
anubhutnuskhelokgeetaadeekeete / sangrahtyaanchakaraava. // (Chapter 13, Owee 108)*

Folklore is the cultural heritage of a village. Gramgeeta insists on collecting and preserving the folklore of the village. It will conserve the cultural heritage of the local community.

The fifth goal of sustainable development is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. In Gramgeeta it was written that both the men and women should be given a freedom to make them happy. Girls should be educated in separate girls schools. He says that whatever the males are getting it should be given to females also but he never gave consent for co-educational schools.

*maazemhanneshrotyaate / je jesukhaaselpurushaate /
mahilaansaaaveabhinpanete / swaatantyasukhasaadhan // (Chapter 20, Owee 107)*

In the present era, we found that rich people are wasting food while some poor are not getting the food for their nourishment. Many districts of India and abroad are facing the problem of child malnutrition. Second sustainable development goal is to end hunger and achieve food security. In the 1960s Tukdoji told us not to waste food while eating.

*haasyavinodjareeasala / tareeasleelata n yaaveeprasangaala /
uchishtkan n paahijetaakila / bhojanprasangee // (Chapter 14, Owee 87)*

Do not spend unnecessary on extra resources. Use the resources crucially. One who does not care about his future, will destroy himself as well as make beggar to his future generations. This is not development. Why should we do it? Such questions are asked by Tukdojee. This is a very close aspect of sustainable development goal 2, which is end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture..

*Pudheaplakaroneenaash / bhikeslaaveemulaabaalns /
Naheekonaachaavevikaas / aisekaasyaakaraave // (Chapter 16, Owee 104)
Aakarepruthveeasovishal / nadyaparvtaaneemahaprabal /
Pariaamcheegaavcheemul / ghatakvishalpruthveecha // (Chapter1, Owee 50)*

His views are focusing on the theme 'Think globally, Act Locally'. Villages are the local governing bodies which take initiatives for sustainability. He says though the earth is very huge, surrounded with rivers and mountains, our village is the prime factor of giant Earth. Thus we have to start to work from the grass root.

It's quite amazing that the environmental problems we are facing today on a grand scale are discussed in *Gramgeeta* in an honest way. Thus *Gramgeeta* is not only a form of poems but the embedded philosophy of nurturing a village and its environment in a scientific manner.

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