

HUMAN AND NATURE

Nature is like our real mother who never harms us but nurtures us. Walking in the lap of nature early in the morning makes us healthy and strong and it also keeps us away from many fatal diseases like diabetes, permanent heart attack, high blood pressure, liver problems, digestive problems, infections, brain problems etc. Is.

Nature is the origin of our life. We cannot imagine life without nature. Our basic needs like air, water, food etc. are all obtained from nature. Nature is our mother; who gives us life. Nature itself sustains us. We have to serve nature in the same way as nature serves us selflessly. It is our responsibility to keep nature green, clean and healthy. We should plant more and more trees. We should not misuse water. We must control global warming. To live life on earth, we have received nature as a precious and precious gift from God. Nature makes our life easier by providing all the resources available for daily life. We should thank our nature for nurturing, helping and caring for us like a mother.

Protect Planet Earth

■ G L KHAJURIA

It would be most pertinent to recall the following apt observation by UNESCO on environmental crises imperfect understanding of the natural mechanisms which make possible the maintenance of life on earth: disregards of unintentional effects of technology, in particular, the various forms of pollution: poor management of soil forest & water, unbridled consumption of fossil fuel: and the uncontrolled urbanization: the relegation of population to a marginal position : and the crushing of the traditional culture place in the relations between the man and environment.

Wild is the synonym with forests. Forests are where adventures being, fears lurk, the night hold hands with the day and men get lost. Trees are among primitive man's first deities.

Not the last though, for even today in India the banyan and peepal trees are worshipped. Sir J C Bose, rigged up sensitive instrument to claim of the USA based lie-detector expert who said plants "wince" when brine shrimp are killed in hot water.

The environment (The forest, its wildlife, biosphere, eco-system, air water & soil) through legislations and enactment has been fortified and more stringent rules framed, yet it is not being honored insofar as its practical sanctity is concerned. There have been mushrooming of forest mafias, hunters and poachers who clandestinely are on this most heinous criminalization. There is ruthless decimation of forest under the influential shadows.

The environment has mercilessly been disturbed from "Mountainous Himalayas" down-below gangetic valley in (North-South) and Assam to Rajasthan (East-West). Such scenarios are "world-wide" with no exception. Though in today's world, every country is constantly endeavoring, "Afforestation Schemes" with new names and claims, yet on its fast track result being ecological imbalance. Too much is too much, less said is overdone.

The globe (Mother Eath) is as big as it was where as population growth is heading at sputnik speed uncompromising with the only bio-sustaining globe. The Mother nuclear, plants, river-valley project,refineries mines,petro-chemical intermediates, as bests and its derivate, air ports, the drugs and chemical units, the smoke emitting factories, and foundries and many more its associates.

The fresh mountainous regions have been deforested and replaced by tarred roads and concrete structure.

The air pollution coupled with the noise and river pollution are manmade hazard which in one way or the other is mounting threat to the environment.

The emission of poisonous gases into the air by industrialization is directly hitting the "Ozone layer". "Ozone-layer"- A protective shield (ring) encircling the globe offers protection to the bio-diversity from the ultra-violet rays of sun which in the existing ever-increasing warming may Jeopardize the whole earth. Ozone (O3-the three oxygen atoms)compared to oxygen (O2) is the only ring which under the global warming and C.F.C (CholoroFloro Carbon) emissions from refrigerators and air-conditioners is thinning this protective layer with soaring temperature year after year.

"Environment protection" is the call of hour not for India but globally and ever country must rise from slumber and give utmost contribution that afforestation so that the unforeseen climatic changes we are witnessing today do not occasion to arise, else every living creature shall face the impending catastrophe.

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The origin of Goddess Chandan Shashti

■ SATISH MAHALDAR

Shashti or Shashiti (Sanskrit: literally "sixth") is a Hindu Goddess worshipped in India as the benefactor and protector of children. She is also the god of plants and fertility, and is believed to bestow children and aid in childbirth. Shashthi is fair and beautiful like the champak flower; young, adorned with ornaments, merciful and benevolent. Kashyap Samhita by Acharya Brihadjeevika composed during the Kushan period.

The worship of Shashti is prescribed to be performed on her sixth day of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar and on the sixth day after the birth of a child.Infertile women who wish to conceive and mothers who want to ensure the protection of their children worship Shashti and seek blessings and assistance. She is especially worshipped as Maya is her sixth form of Prakriti and sister of Lord Surya.

Shashti is depicted as a motherly figure, often nursing or carrying as many as eight infants in her arms. Her complexion is usually depicted as yellow or golden. The Dhyan Mantras (hymns depicting the divine iconography that Shashti's devotees should meditate on) describe her as adorning herself with sacred garments and jewellery, placing auspicious twigs on her knees, and beautiful appearance. She is described as a beautiful young woman who has done a lot of work. Her cat (mṛṅṭra) is the vahana (mountain) on which she rides. Old depictions of Shashti say she has the face of a cat, while other sources describe her as having the face of a bird.

In Kushan period representations between the 1st century AD and her 3rd century AD, she is depicted as a Skanda-like figure with her two arms and her six heads. A significant number of Kushan and Yaudhya coins, carvings and inscriptions made between 500 BC and 1200 AD often include her six-headed Shashti on the reverse of the coin and her six-headed Skandhas on the obverse. is depicted. Shashti is also depicted in the Vrishni triad of the Kushan period in the Mathura region surrounded by Skanda and Vishakha.

In the Yaudiya images, she is shown to have her two arms and six heads arranged in two tiers of three heads each, while in the Kushan images, the central head is It is surrounded by five female heads, sometimes attached to a female torso. A terracotta figurine of her from the Gupta period (320-550 CE) of Ahichhatra shows the goddess with her three heads in the front and her three heads in the back. The folk cult representation of Shashti is a red stone the size of a human head, usually placed beneath it. A banyan tree that can often be seen on the outskirts of the village. Banyans are sometimes decorated with flowers and scattered with rice and other offerings. Shashti is also commonly represented by planting a banyan tree or small branches in the soil of a family's garden. Other common representations of the goddess include the Shaligrama her stone, the earthen jug, or the Purna her Gata (a water jar lined with coconut and mango leaves), usually placed under a banyan tree .

Most scholars believe that Shashti's roots go back to Hindu folklore. References to this goddess appear in Hindu scriptures as early as the 8th century BC and her 9th century BC, in which she is associated with her children and with the Hindu god of war Skanda . Early texts consider her to be Skanda's adoptive mother, while later texts identify her with Skanda's consort Devasena. In some early texts where Shashti appears as Skanda's servant, it is said that she causes illness in her mother and child and therefore needs to be propitiated on the sixth day after her birth. However, over time, this malignant goddess came to be seen as a benevolent savior and giver of children.

The story of Shashti is narrated in the chapter entitled 'Shashti Devupakyanam' added to the texts of 'Brahma Vaivarta Purana' and 'Devi Bhagavata Purana'. King Priyavrata, the son of Swayambhuva Manu (ancestor of



humankind), and his wife Malini performed Putrakamesthi Yagna (fire offering to obtain a son) in an attempt to conceive, but it took 12 years. After the pregnancy, the unborn son was handed over to Malini. Priyavrata carried his son's body to the crematorium. On the way, he saw a celestial woman dressed in white silk and jewels riding in a celestial chariot.

She declared to Priyavrata that she was Devasena, daughter of Brahma and wife of Skanda. She further stated that she was a Shashti, the chief of the Skandha matrikas ("mothers"), and that she had the power to bestow children on her devotees. She took the child in her hands, revived her infant, and then began to take her child and depart for the heavenly abode. Priyavrata stopped her goddess, praised her and begged her to return her son. The goddess agreed on the condition that Priyavrata initiate and spread her worship in all her three worlds: heaven, earth and underworld. She returned the child to the king, named him Subrata, and declared that he should be famous as a great, virtuous, and learned ruler. Priyavrata worshipped Shashti on the 6th day of every month, her 6th day after her birth and her 21st day, and decreed that every occasion would be auspicious for a child. She was worshipped in the form of a Shaligrama stone, a Purna Ghatra under a banyan tree, or her image painted on a wall.

DEPITION:

She is depicted holding a sword and shield in her lower hands while the upper holds Kalasas. Her vahana is a black cat. She is shown seated on a large lotus. In her golden look, has a child seated on her lap symbolizing her powers to protect new born from evil powers and disease. She wears a prominent crown that associates her with Mother Goddess.

PUJA:

Goddess Shahsti is associated with Skanda, God of War. Indeed she is also known as Skandamata and as an extension of Mother Durga. Although having rural origins or a folk-goddess, Sasti is worshipped on the sixth - shashti day following a child's birth. This is when the father pays respects followed by the mother on the 21st day. On this day, partial fast is observed.

Pujas are conducted to a figureless deity planted under a Kadamba tree. Usually this is a stone in the size of a human head decorated with flowers. Traditional offering is that of a hand-fan. Food offerings are fruits only. A black cat is also revered on that day. Otherwise it is symbolized in the deity stone. Women who have lost their children, those suffering miscarriage, quick with child and sickly children pray to Goddess Shashti.

BRAHMA VAIVARTA PURANA:

This is one of the major eighteen Puranas. It describes the creation of the universe - Brahma Khanda, Prakriti Khanda - description and histories of goddesses, Ganesha Khanda - life and deeds of Lord Ganesha and the final part to Lord Krishna. This Purana was written in Bengal and recited by the sage Suta in the Naimisharanya forests. In Krsna Janma Khanda, the final part, it declares Krishna to be the supreme God. It also devel-

ops the life of Radha-Krishna, thus deviating from the Bhagavata Purana. In Prakriti Khanda, Goddess Shahshti is depicted as the sixth aspect of Parama Prakriti - universal female energy

It recommends that Shashthi be appeased through ritual worship and on the sixth day after birth of a child, failing which Shashthi may be provoked and harm the infant.

The genealogy of goddess Shashthi is narrated in the Brahmavaivarta Purana which recounts the story of the sudden appearance of Goddess Sashthi who introduces herself to King Priyavrat as the daughter of Brahma and the wife of Kartikeya. The king is pleased with the goddess for bringing his son back to life and undertakes the task of establishing her worship in his kingdom. N.N. Bhattacharya records the development of the goddess as follows:

In the Puranas Shashthi was...conceived as the sixth part of Prakriti and the wife of Skanda-Kartikeya. When Skanda was born, various kinds of terrifying phenomenon occurred.

The gods having heard of thepower of Skanda, advised Indra to kill him without delay. Indra sent the Divine Mothers to kill the child. But when they met Skanda, they were full of affection for him and became his protectresses. When Indra saw that his plan had failed, he led a huge celestial army against Skanda. The gods were defeated and surrendered to him. Indra then hurled his thunderbolt at Skanda.... A number of female spirits came into being when Skanda was struck with the thunderbolt. By Skanda's blessings they became the protectresses of children.

Shashthi is fair and beautiful like the champak flower; young, adorned with ornaments, merciful and benevolent. Kashyap Samhita by Acharya Brihadjeevika composed during the Kushan period states that

Revati pleased Skanda by practicing penance, was accepted by him as his sister and given the name Shashthi-the sixth one. The other five being Skanda, his three brothers - Guha, Kumar, Visakh, and the fifth Nandikeshwar. Skanda blessed Shashthi to be as powerful as her brothers. ThusShashthi is variously conceived as the mother/sister/consort of Skanda-Kartikeya. However her association with the sixth day, children and childbirth is universally accepted.

The origin of Goddess Shashthi is variously represented in literature; Brahma giving a description of Matrutaks to Narada said that the most worshipful among them was Shashti Devi. She is the one who looks after the infants in all Lokas. She is a great ascetic and a devout of Vishnu and a consort of Kartikeya.... She is always motherly, merciful and a savior. She always comes in dreams of infants whether they are on land, water or horizon. Shiva reportedly fashioned twelve Grahass, five male and seven female, to assist Skanda. The female Grahass are recognized as the Sapta Matrakas. Gradually, several mother goddesses worshipped around the fifth century AD came to be identified with the seven mothers, and soon they were collectively identified as a single goddess Revati. Revati is identical with goddess Shashthi, who is also Devasena, the beloved consort of Skanda. Revati is associated with the annihilation of the demon Dirghajeevi in course of which she took the forms of a female eagle, a female jackal and Jataharini- a destroyer of progeny.

In the Kushan era the goddess is depicted as two-armed and sixheaded. Several coins, sculptures and inscriptions that were produced from 500 BCE to 1200 CE picture the six-headed goddess.

She is shownsurrounded by Skanda and Vishakha. The central head is surrounded by five female heads. Shikha Sarkar points out that till date, only two images of Mother Shashthi, dating back to the 12th century AD, have been found in erstwhile Bihar.

Both show her as a goddess with a child on her lap mounted on a black cat looking up at her Veneration of the Goddess Shashthi starts with a woman getting married. The Shashthi Vrata is performed by married women to invoke the blessings of the goddess Shashthi to obtain the glory of motherhood and longevity of children. According to Sukumari Bhattachaji the twelve forms of the goddess worshipped in the twelve months are: Chandan,

Aranya, Kardama, Lunthana, Chapeti, Durga, Nadi, Mulaka, Anna, Sitala, Gorupini and Ashoka. (66) However in popular practice shashthi worship is observed only in eight months on the 6th day of the bright fortnight. Celebrated in the month of March, when the Ashoka tree starts blooming, Asoka Shashthi gets its name from a young girl Ashoka, found beneath an Asoka tree and raised by a sage. The Shashthivrata katha does not make any reference to the Padma Purana but the striking similarities between the young Ashoka of Asoka Shashthi Vrata Katha and Ashoka Sundari of the Padma Purana cannot be ignored. Ashoka Sundari is born when Shiva and Parvati encounter the wish-fulfilling tree and Parvati asks for a daughter, to give her company when she is alone in Kailash. The wish is instantly granted. She is called Ashoka Sundari. In the vrata katha narrative a benign sage finds an infant lying beneath anashoka tree. He takes the child. While in deep meditation it is revealed to him that Asoka, a beautiful, lotus like child was birthed by a female deer. In the absence of the sage the mother deer would come and nurse the infant. She grows into a beautiful young maiden and the sage does not want to leave her alone in the hermitage when he goes out. Therefore, he decides to find for her a suitable husband. However all his efforts are in vain. Tired and irritated, the sage vows to marry the girl to the first person he sets his eyes upon the next morning. He is overjoyed to find a prince at his doorstep the next morning. He requests the prince to marry his daughter Ashoka and take her away with him. While bidding farewell, the sage gives her some ashoka flowers and seeds.

He instructsher to drop the seeds on the way to her new home so that the row of Ashoka trees that would grow would link her marital home to the hermitage. He asks her to come back to him using the ashoka tree path if she is ever in trouble. He also asks her to eat the ashoka flowers on the day Of Ashoka Shashthi that is the sixth day in the bright fortnight in the month of Chaitra and forbids her from eating rice on that particular day. As the years passed, Asoka prospered in her new home, she gave birth to eight sons and a daughter. Eventually the sons married and daughters in law began to care for Ashoka. One day while Ashoka was observing the Ashoka Shashthi Vrata, the daughters in law gave her the ritual gruel to eat. Unknown to anyone a grain of rice had fallen into the pot. Next morning Ashoka woke up to find the entire household dead. Unable to understand the reason behind this predicament and weeping profusely she ran along the Ashoka tree path to the hermitage. There the sage went into meditation and revealed to Ashoka that goddess Shashthi was angered by her consuming gruel with a grain of rice that had fallen into it unknown and unnoticed by anyone. He gave her sacred water to sprinkle over the dead ones to bring them back to life. Ashoka ran back and did the same. Her family was restored and she narrated to them all that had happened. They were surprised. The entire kingdom came to know about the incident and started worshipping goddess Shashthi. The king ordered everyone to worship goddess Shashthi .

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Rural Youths Empowerment for Sustainable Development

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India is a young country and rural youths constitute about 41 per cent of total population of India.Youths are the building blocks of the country. They are considered as the greatest asset of any nation as they decide the future of the nation. They are full of innovative ideas and enthusiasm. Their importance should be acknowledged and their commendable contribution should be appreciated. The youths fill the country with energy and zeal and boost the country in many ways. Development of any nation depends on the development of its youths. Youths are more creative, energetic and innovative. It is highly important for any nation to encourage and support the young generation. Rural youths have indomitable energy and enthusiasm for the rural change. Migration of rural youths in urban areas in search of employment has risen fastly. This has resulted a decline in workforce in the agricultural sector in rural areas. The advent of free market has been able to generate employment opportunities in the private sector which requires highly skilled workers. A majority of rural youth may not meet the criteria of private sector for a variety of reasons, like lack of advance technical expertise, inadequate trainings etc. The globalization process has brought certain changes whose implications for the rural society and the rural youths need to be thoroughly understood.

As per the United Nations, youth is defined as a person in 15-24 years of age group whereas the census of India treats

people in the age group of 15-29 years as youths. According to Baizerman (1991), in the third world countries youth have not been able to play a vital role in the developmental process and has remained a marginalized group. The participation of the rural Indian youth can be more impressive if more attention is paid on them. Mass media does not pay more attention on rural youths. Due to their proximity to institutions like universities, colleges, institutions of mass communication, political centres and by virtue of being an integral part of modernisation process like developing a rational outlook, adopting different sub-cultures and promoting cosmopolitanism, the urban youth continuously remains in the limelight. Rural areas are slow in their socio-economic development, slow pace of modernisation, industrialization, overpowering presence of powerful but retrogressive social institutions, inequitable distribution of land and most significantly and underutilisation of human resources. The stereotype of rural youth is gullible, conservative and he himself tries to fastly change but cannot escape from the adverse impact of the aforementioned problems.

The latest information should be reached to the rural youths of the remote areas. There has been a sustained campaign by the market forces to increase their rural marketing operations as three-fourths of the consumers live in rural areas and more than half of the national income is generated in rural areas. It has been observed that mostly television is the forte of the market forces and continuously promote con-

sumerism which stimulates unrealistic desires in the rural youths. The political processes at the village level are intertwined with the operational aspects of the existing social hierarchy. It has been observed that rural youths are encouraged during elections campaigns but the number of elected representatives from this segment is very low. Thus, despite their sincere efforts in the democratic processes they have a long way to go in holding positions. Decentralisation of political power has not resulted in major changes in the social structure of villages.

Present era is an era of information. Communication network has combined the world into a cyber-frame. The transaction in all the sectors is now being carried through computers. The rural youths in this field are left behind their urban brethren.

The urban youths have access to computer education while the exposure of youth to computers in rural areas is still limited. The 1990s witness a rapid expansion of television networks. The cable and satellite television made a mark in India and television emerged as the most effective medium of entertainment. It plays a key role in dissemination of information and entertainment even in the far-flung areas. In some of the rural areas still the rural youths miss the opportunity to view the informative programmes. Even in some of the down-trodden rural areas still the youths lack the information through print media. The latest information should be reached to the rural youths of these remote areas. Now-a-

days social media is playing a major role in dissemination of information in the rural areas.

It has been observed that increasing population, overexploitation of biological resources, construction activities and changing consumption has led to the loss of bio-diversity. For all this rural population cannot be held responsible for excessive consumption as it is the youth of urban areas whose consumption levels reached new heights leading to enormous pressure on the natural resources. The industries release untreated effluents contaminating the water reserves which will expose the nearby rural population to waterborne diseases. The toxic wastes of the industries are dumped in the waste lands on the outskirts of the urban areas or nearby villages which poses a serious impediment to the wasteland development projects. Watershed development is a major agricultural activity. It is the youth of village who take the responsibility in the success of watershed projects like construction of check dams and water tanks.

The educated rural youths can prevail on the rest of population to take steps to preserve ground water resources. Joint forest management is another dimension of environmental protection. The youth in the villages can be mobilised to take care of illegal felling of trees and make social forestry programme successful.

In rural areas gender discrimination is very high. Less literacy rate and traditional thinking of the people are the major reasons for the inferior status to the rural

women. It has been observed that a large number of women representatives are chosen in the Panchayats. Despite their success the rightful ascendancy of women is questioned by the male dominated society and the position of rural female still remains secondary in various aspects of life. Rural female youths in many cases have to marry below the stipulated age because of family pressure and obsolete norms of the community. The higher death rate of the rural female youths indicates the lack of availability of proper medical facilities during pregnancy and delivery, poor diet and lack of care of their family members towards their health. Early motherhood combined with lack of proper education and inadequate physical and mental maturity compound the problems of women. There is need to motivate the rural female youth to take part in her decision making. With the implementation of employment generating schemes, efforts should also be made to sensitise the rural youths on various social issues.

The mass media, whose influence on society is quite significant, should be prevailed upon to increase the focus on developmental issues and social concerns. In order to avoid the rural migration government should encourage the rural based industries. More employment should be generated in the rural areas during the off season of the year. Development in rural areas can stop the rural migration and may reduce the pressure on the urban areas.

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