

## MY INTRO TO LIFE

15<sup>th</sup> February 2012



Feb, 2012. It's been 10 years since we started working as 'Ecological consultants'. Today if I think of past, what was the trigger that ignited the wish to be in this field ? As I remember, I always admired animals, wildlife since childhood. But the love for animals is not enough to work for nature. It could have remained just as a hobby or maybe I would have continued to work as a volunteer for NGO like 'WILD' I was associated for 4-5 years.

I should say I was destined to join the Diploma course by Ecological society in July, 2001. I had been planning to do the course since it's beginning, but best period for me was 2001-02. The evening classes at Aksharnandan were becoming more & more interesting as Gole sir started taking subjects like History of civilisation, effect of surrounding on human behaviour & development, changes occurred due to industrialisation, evolution of man from hunter-gatherer to agriculturist. Though we have learned few of

these subjects during schools, it comes as an eye-opener when Sir used to link the human development to environment.

The sessions on 'Environmental economics' were a kind of shock treatment. They were very interesting when one hears them from Gole sir and we all felt that 'oh yes, this is so true'. But the subject is also little difficult to digest n explain, it's like one understands clearly in class but you cannot explain it to others or write it down in your own words. So, we had even requested sir to take revision of Economic classes. It took more than 3 years to digest this subject after actually working for land & restoration. After each lecture, I could understand the failure of current economic system, hype of technology, and that it have actually made human life miserable... really ? When I heard his sentences, firstly it started a thought process, how this could be true, what is the definition of development, or happiness, are we on a right track, or there should be some change in life. I am sure each student must be getting a shock of life that all those years of education, working, were actually going in a very wrong direction. Then ??? When we learn this it creates lot of frustration & again thinking starts, what next ? How we can avoid the ill effects on nature due to our development or even turn around to a better life ? If the life that we are leading & aiming is damaging nature so much then what could be the best alternative ?

These first 2-3 months gave a real understanding of life, a perspective to look at Nature, & realisation of the wrong direction of technological development.

This re-introduction to life created many questions. Here the dilemma always remains that 'Is the easy, technologically advanced modern life giving us peace of mind ?' 'Are we able to cope up with the fast changes & urban life style ?' 'Are we not forcing ourselves to earn more for more physical comforts ?' 'If the comforts that we gain could sooth our mind then why we feel the crave of going to calm village settings for peace ?'

We were also fortunate to have Prof Mahajan to teach us about Earth's evolution, & plants. He is a wonderful teacher & adorable human being. The basic knowledge about plants, their interaction with soil, growth, species in different ecosystems was taken in detail by Mahajan sir. All the love & knowledge about plants acquired in later years during field work was due to his teaching.

After this, was time for learning the life support systems. The natural resources, interrelations, food chains, energy patterns, laws of nature, thermodynamics, various ecosystems. Here it was important to know about variety in ecosystems & biodiversity of India, the various components, stresses due to human development, and finally the measures to bring it back to the healthy state, 'Ecological restoration'. So, this is the cure for weakened resources & systems in nature, 'To restore the land for sustainable future that considers man's basic needs & protection of biodiversity'. So, it is the co-existence which was actually the way of life of our ancestors that we have now lost totally in modern, over consumptive lifestyle.

Learning about restoration, its techniques was possible due to the Field stations on which Gole sir have worked for years, the Panshet forest & Wetland restoration and the Phaltan grassland restoration, the open laboratories. Visionaries like Gole sir think ahead of time which is actually not understood by masses.

While learning the linkages of Man – Nature, I was becoming more assured that this is the field of my liking & would like to work in any way for ecology. Again, it was Gole sir who triggered a new stream of work in our minds. It was Dec 2001, people had started purchasing land in countryside areas, & developing these lands for farm houses, cultivation was becoming popular. But this was not at all in tune with nature. Few of them also wanted to do some things on land for nature, birds, so planted trees. But this process of ‘conventional land development’ even though aimed for nature was neither in a planned manner nor proved good for Nature. So, sir had suggested that we should contact the land owners & give them ways to conserve nature on their land. This initiated our business in this field of ecological management in Jan 2002. At every step of our work, we would constantly remember the teachings of Gole sir, Mahajan sir & Gole madam that helped us to take this non-conventional work ahead.

Throughout these 10 years of ecological land management work at ‘oikos for ecological services’, we have always been supported by all the three ‘Gurus’ very positively & still seek their help in work.

The course basically gave me a perspective to look at life differently. It developed a balanced & neutral outlook towards technology, its use as a tool, its limitations. And most importantly it developed a thought process ‘how much is enough and what is right or wrong’. So I could analyse each small & large decision in life based on its real need in my life. This really reduces our dependence on market, technology, modern amenities. Most balanced view is, technology is a tool, it should not become our life. Today when we travel to remote parts, in hilly villages, I always feel that in India technology have erupted suddenly out of nowhere & changing lives of thousands. Our people are not competent enough to accept the change & use this tool wisely.

As quoted by Gole sir, each person should become a ‘Conscious consumer’, only then will the problems of environmental degradation reduce to some extent. So, at personal level I always try to become one who can make difference between the need & greed. I felt very happy when my parents shared the same view & tried to change few things in their lives & thoughts. It is important that the eco-friendly actions by us influence other people, only then this movement will increase. And when one is proud of doing an eco-wise practice, people tend to follow. So, simple living should become a status symbol to have large scale change in community.

Similarly, we try to follow the ‘decentralisation’ principle in our work. Use local knowledge, local technology, local plants, local resources, materials... though this is against globalisation & world trade, ecologically this is the best practice to achieve.

I now feel that it is our responsibility to take ahead our teachers' thoughts, vision & dreams. The strong thought-base both sirs have created in our mind always keeps me on track when working on land for conservation & restoration. Fortunately, we got good land owners who had faith in us & we could work on many interesting projects.

As rightly said by Gole sir, it is important to change our education to accommodate the eco-perspective. Today the education revolves around increasing wants & needs of people so as to flourish the market economy. Our economy aims at increasing consumption of 'intermediate' goods. This will change if our young generation knows the ill effects of over-population, high speed development & rampant increase in technological development on environment & human health. Sir dreams of starting an eco-school where the subjects will have strong base of ecology & students will learn to take care of their natural resources first.

I am sure that every student who joins the diploma course & understands these connections strongly feels that there should be some change in whole system. What I take from here is we should re-unite & start taking actions in our small group for 'widening the circle', start an eco-movement. There are so many ways that will give us a chance to work for nature & satisfy our souls. Right from policies to everyday living, our eco-group can work together to make a difference. When I think of taking a career in this subject, I immediately imagine different areas of work, like teaching, nursery, best of waste, research in ecology, restoration, resource persons, green architecture, policy advisors, and many more...

In the speed of rampant development, efforts by few like us make no impact on a greater scale. Now what I see ahead as my responsibility is to create examples or models of ideal eco-development, eco-life that can be referred to in future. So it's important to make a start ! I have already made few steps in this direction... I know that one day I will make a better living place for nature & me, though on a small scale...