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CONTRIBUTION OF ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), TIRUCHIRAPPALLI FOR THE PROMOTION OF ENVIRONMENT IN THE SHEPHERD ADOPTED VILLAGES

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Introduction

Environmental History is essential to promote value education and self-awareness. It's mandatory in each and every educational institution to think about the protection of environment in all the aspects within the campus in particular and overall, in general. In this regard in 2017 University Grants Commissions, New Delhi, announced made compulsory implementation of module syllabus on Environmental Studies for undergraduate course of all branches of higher education in universities and colleges as per directives of the Supreme Court of India, University Grants Commission with the help of an Expert Committee has framed eight units module syllabus for Ability Enhancement Compulsory Courses (AECC - Environmental Studies) under Choice Based Credit System. In this line there is Temple of Learning in the heart of the Rock fort city of Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu is popularly known St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli took a decision to launch an innovative extension programme through SHEPHERD in the year 1985-86. SHEPHERD is the expanded ellipsis of 'Science and Humanities for People's Development'. It is the institutional supported programme activity by the youth who impart their subject knowledge and skills towards the betterment of the neighbourhood communities.¹ While camping in the villages the students engaged in out-reach programme kindled youth towards the educational, socio-cultural, empowerments of youth and women as a part of environmental issues.²

Structure of the SHEPHERD Programme

During the eighties the Jesuit Madurai Province has been articulating the idea of making higher education socially relevant in the context of the long history of St Joseph's College, its autonomous status and the service it has rendered to the nation that has no parallel. It was at this time that the UGC in its *Policy Frame on Higher Education* recognized *Extension* as the third important element of higher education. Meanwhile, the *United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia*, UBCHEA (New York) came forward support youth-based innovative outreach activities. The management of St. Joseph's College on its part came up with the concept of 'option for the poor'.³

Meaning of Extension

Extension Education is helping people to help themselves in changing their behavior in a desirable direction for overall development in an individual, in his family, in his community and their by his nation.

Aim of Extension

- ** To create a sense of social concern in the minds of all the students and to inspire them to dedicated service to the needy.⁴

These efforts culminated into the community of the management and staff of St Joseph's College going for an appropriate outreach in the form of neighbourhood ministry. It was intended to foster community-based partnership development activities involving college youth, teachers and rural people. The idea was formulated to achieve application of knowledge, concerned citizenship, and promotion of leadership. The department of Science and Humanities for People's Development, SHEPHERD, was founded in 1985-86 with the objective: to orient the youth as agents of social transformation. This objective is to be realised through the strategy of service-learning outreach by the college youth through partnership development with rural communities.⁵ Accordingly,

- Students apply knowledge and skills to help rural communities develop themselves.
- The students in turn assimilate the ethos and value systems of the communities.
- The partnership is nurtured through utilizing local resources.

Twenty-five years on, the SHEPHERD Programme is concentrating its outreach activities on education, environment, skill training, healthcare, participatory citizenship, and community adoption. In the outreach process the college youth derive support and assistance from government officials, elected representatives, NGOs and local communities.⁶ Thus the student community is playing an effective liaison between the rural people and all the development agencies. The communities provide with the ideal platform of social laboratory in which to mold the youth. It leaves a lasting impression in their attitudes. They are formed to be men for others as they become persons of influence in their own vocation after completing their studies. No wonder the community service component is part of the curriculum of all students of St Joseph's College. In order to achieve an integrated community development, the students take up targeted activities concerning education, school supporting programmes, environment, health and hygiene, civic organization, liaison with agencies, skill training, infrastructural development, and herbal popularization.

The programme is unique in that it is a grass-roots outreach programme by college youth. The adopted communities are living in the 73 rural hamlets of Tiruchirappalli, Karur and Pudukkottai districts. The programme receives immense support from the Professors, Government Officials, Banks, NGOs and

the like. The entire outreach is supported mostly by contributions from the students and the college management. As per the wishes of the college Governing Body (2002) the concept of 'immediate neighbourhood ministry' was given serious emphasis. Accordingly, the urban hamlet of Devadhanam was adopted primarily for educational activities. Today more than 70 school children are organized daily for the evening study and tuition activities.

The students belonging to the twenty-four disciplines are serving in 96 neighbourhood communities with an overall population more than 75,000 from seven development blocks viz., Manikandam, Manapparai, Andanallur, Thogamalai, Kulithalai, Viralimalai and Thiruverumbur located in the three districts of Tiruchirappalli, Karur and Pudukkottai. Each department is entrusted with a cluster of villages i.e., three separate villages for one department (1st year to 3rd year). Students of each class is allotted one village. After the completion of one class its outreach targets, the juniors (1st year students) continue the process of choosing another set of prioritized targets in the same village. The eighteen disciplines of the college as follows:

- Department of Business Administration
- Department of Biochemistry
- Department of Biotechnology
- Department of Botany
- Department of Chemistry
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Commerce (Honours)
- Department of Commerce Computer Application
- Department of Computer Science
- Department of Counselling Psychology
- Department of Data Science
- Department of Economics
- Department of Electronics
- Department of English
- Department of History
- Department of HRM
- Department of Information Technology
- Department of Mathematics
- Department of Physics
- Department of Software Development
- Department of Statistics
- Department of Tamil

- Department of Visual Communication
- Department of Management Studies (JIM)

SHEPHERD, the Extension wing of the college is well-organized and forms mandatory activity under Part-IV of all UG/PG courses. This seems to have strengthened the relations between the college and the surrounding village communities.⁷ The communities are located in 15 to 35 kms. from the College, with mostly poor and illiterate background with seasonal jobs. These villages lack basic facilities like roads, transport, water and education. With the good will and cooperation of the people of the adopted villages the students work with them for their development.

Environmental History

Environmental history is a study of eco-system and nature in historical perspective based on the creation, usage and impact on human society. It is different things to different people like cultural history, constitutional history, political history, social history and economic history. Environmental history is an interdisciplinary project of many scholars in the field trained as geographers or historical ecologists. *For environmental historians, the term environment refers to the natural and human-created surroundings that affect a living organism or group of organisms' ability to maintain itself and develop over time. Ecology deals with the relationships between these organisms and their surroundings. In the case of humans, it also includes social and cultural patterns. Ecological history is therefore somewhat broader than environmental history, but the two terms are often used interchangeably.*⁸

Education has been recognized as one of the essential component for ensuring sustainable development. A skillful education can play a crucial role in changing the attitude and behaviour of individuals and in motivating them to take appropriate actions to conserve the environment. Education can play a major part in the required transformation into more environmentally sustainable societies, in concert with initiatives from government, civil society and the private sector. In this paper the author explains the responsibility and role of an educational institution towards the protection of environment and also highlights the contributions of St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli in preserving and protecting the eco-system in the adopted villages as a part of curriculum.

Inclusion of Environmental Education in Higher Education

In 2014, the Government of India launched "Swachh Bharat Mission", a nation-wide environment awareness campaign with an aim to accomplish the vision of "Clean India". This mission has successfully achieved its objectives and displayed India's commitments towards a clean, green and healthy India. In fact, "Swachh Bharat Mission" is also a part of environment awareness activity. While the quantitative impact of EE in creating environmental leaders is hard to

measure, some environmentalists are seeing a huge change in the awareness levels through education while others are not convinced that education is generating anything beyond general nature lovers. Surroundings, whether of man or of any other living organism; includes physical, social and cultural conditions that affect the development of that organism or physical, chemical, biotic and cultural conditions, and their ramifications, collectively comprise "the environment".⁹

In the service villages of SHEPHERD, the local youth and women association members expressed their willingness to grow more trees in the community land. Initially the students took a survey of the environmental status of each village and made the people realize through cultural programmes, video shows and awareness campaigns regarding poor cultivation, lack of water and degradation of environment. Based on the interest of the people the students of St Joseph's college took the initiative towards environmental protection and sapling planting in various villages.¹⁰

Students of SHEPHERD Extension Department organized environmental awareness programme on the title of "Clean environment - Green environment" in five villages. They provide awareness in all the schools in Balasamuthirappatti and Neithalur located in Thogamalai block, Sethurappatti and Kothamangalam in Manikandam block and Keerikalmedu in Andanallur block.¹¹ Sapling-planting, social forestry, door to door distribution of saplings, raising nurseries, giving cultural programmes on the importance of environment, production and distribution of fuel efficient *chullas*, screening films on environment are being carried out.

Soil is a natural resource of inestimable value to man, as all the food comes directly or indirectly from it. It represents the uppermost layer of the earth's crust and provides organic as well as mineral matter for the growth of plants. The *organic matter or humus* is derived from the decomposition of plants and animals, whereas the *inorganic or mineral matter* results from the sub-aerial denudation of rocks. The soil-formation process is, however, a very slow one and it may take, for instance, one thousand years to form a layer of soil, 2.5 centimeters thick. This period of time varies from place to place, depends upon the nature of the parent rock, climate and vegetation.¹²

The students of the SHEPHERD conducted community meetings and meetings for the youth and the member of women group to create awareness on the importance of sapling planting, prevention of soil erosion, water shed management, soil and water analysis and conservation techniques. These meetings have led to organizing programmes such as community tree planting, intensive training for the farmers, exposure programmes and nursery raising in 20 villages.

Under the programme entitled 'Each family one tree', 430 saplings were planted in 20 villages. To motivate the rural people the students' conducted exhibitions.

documentary film shows, cultural programmes etc. A total of 50 women were chosen from five villages in Tiruchirappalli district were be given three-day training at the famed Anglade Institute of Natural History, Shenbaganur, on environment awareness and they would join over 250 students in disseminating the virtues of sustainable development and preserve nature in rural areas. Part of the National Environment Awareness Campaign, the identified women self-help group members from the villages of Pothavur, Kavundampatti, Pillur, Alundur and Ammapettai were taught about conservation of flora and fauna and such other eco issues at the institute under the SHEPHERD Extension Programme of the St Joseph's College (Autonomous).¹³

Nursery Raising

The availability of saplings at the village level is scarce. Sometimes people have to go to distant places for purchasing saplings. To avoid this difficulty, SHEPHERD identified people from the village who are interested in training to raise nurseries. The training in raising nursery was given to the college students and to the people in the village. During the training instructions on the ratio of sand, red soil and manure, quality of polythene bags, quality and variety of seeds to be planted were given. The ways to maintain the nursery was also given with the help of District Forest Department.

Village level nursery was developed in three villages viz., Pallapatti, Kamanampatti, Archampatti during the year 1994-1995. Totally around 10000 seedlings i.e., timber, fruit, shade, fodder and medicinal variety were raised jointly by the students and the villagers. Those seedlings were used for planting in common lands in the villages and distributed to individual farmers.¹⁴

Promoting 'Green Shola'

'Green Shola' is a unique programme undertaken in the SHEPHERD service village in the year 1995. This programme is primarily to create green cover in the dry area. The following are the objectives of the programme:

- To create awareness among the villagers on the existing environment situation
- To utilize the public and private waste lands for community tree plantation
- To introduce a variety of trees for agro-forestry
- To encourage collective and individual responsibility in growing trees¹⁵

Community Saplings Plantation

In order to promote the awareness on environment consciousness among the village community the Extension Department of St. Joseph's College made massive tree plantation in all the villages. In two villages namely Keelapudupatti and Perumampatti community tree plantation programme was promoted with the help of local youth and members of women association. This was the beginning of the massive tree plantation in the adopted villages. They jointly prepared the

land, did the fencing, budding and pitting etc. The seedlings were collected from the Central Nursery at Nagamangalam and Nature Club. A total of 285 saplings of ten varieties were planted in one acre of community land in the two villages. Saplings distributed by the SHEPHERD Extension Department, mostly beautified all the adopted villages.¹⁶

Kitchen Garden

Students of Extension Programme decided to launch Kitchen Garden plan to cultivate vegetables and fruits in the adopted villages viz., Thogamalai, Manikandam and Anthanallur blocks. To achieve this programme in each house a piece of land in the backyard was selected, fenced properly and the soil was treated with farm manure. Multi-variety of hybrid vegetable seeds were produced from Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) and distributed to each family. Each family was asked to utilize the waste water for kitchen garden. Every year a minimum of 300 families were covered under bio-intensive kitchen gardening. Though the students monitor this programme, it is difficult to maintain a complete record of this activity.¹⁷ However the available information collected by the students were based on the personal interest shown by them and the people. Further the students utilized the activity as an opportunity for motivation and learning both for themselves and the people.¹⁸

Bio-intensive kitchen garden was promoted in 20 villages of Thogamalai, Manikandam, and Andanallur blocks. The students motivated the people to cultivate vegetables in their home backyard. The students purchased the seeds from Horticulture Department and elsewhere. It helped the people to get more fresh vegetables and enhanced their nutritional content.

Students of the environment group are taking effective measures with the help of village associations to improve the environmental conditions in the villages by way of planting shade sapling and other greeneries. They distributed saplings to individual houses and gave them training in nursery raising and kitchen gardening. Students of II MA PM&IR (Personnel Relations and Industrial Relations) arranged a grand tree plantation function at MGR & Rajiv Nagar on 31st July 2002. The District Forest Officer Ms. Mitta Banerjee graced the function. More than 5000 multi- variety of saplings were distributed by the students of St. Joseph's College.¹⁹

Community Meetings on 'Tree Care'

Preservation of natural resources is the Fundamental Duty in our Constitution. In order to promote the awareness on the preservation and protection of forests, trees and plants the students of Extension Programme decided to organize a community meeting on 'Tree Care' in all the adopted villages in the year 1994. Prior to the plantation, the villagers were motivated at group meetings and cultural programmes on the need and usefulness of planting multi-variety sapling plants. They were also exposed to environmental issues which threaten the human

community. These were done by the student volunteers. In each village a 'Tree Care' Committee consisting of motivated men and women including youth were formed to take care of the tree growing programme. A guardian called watcher looks after the watering and maintenance of the garden. Youth and Women Associations monitor the entire activity. They also engage in strengthening the fence and mulching the plants periodically. Schools in the villages have grown much plants due to the initiative steps taken by the SHEPHERD Extension Department. Saplings planted by the students are grown well and found useful.²⁰

A group of student volunteers visit the village frequently, especially during week-ends and help the villagers in maintaining the tree gardens. They organize motivation camps and meetings in the villagers and provide necessary technical inputs. During the year 1994-1995, 4,500 multi-variety sapling species were planted and maintained in 5 villages viz., North Ariyavoor, Indira Gandhi Nagar, Soorakudipatti, Pillur, and Pallapatti in addition to 9 villages where the activity has been implemented. A massive tree planting programme in collaboration with the Lions Club, Tiruchirappalli and the District Arivoli Iyyakkam was undertaken in 1995-1996 to create awareness of tree growing.²¹

On the whole, a total of 21,000 seedlings were distributed. Over 600 students were fully involved in preparing the village communities for planting sapling through educational programmes and organizing sapling planting activity. Under this project, SHEPHERD Extension Department selected 8 villages to establish a multi-variety tree garden in the community land.

SHEPHERD Extension Department rendered enormous activities in the village for several years. The Coordinators used to go around the village like native people and villagers are delighted to approach this like their own family members. The saplings which they planted in the village school campus grew mighty trees during these days and made the school campus greenish.²²

Forest Management and Eco-Development (1994-1995)

Under this programme training, demonstration, exhibition, rally, cultural programme and public meeting were organised in the villages with the guidance of SHEPHERD students. To execute these activities the following villages were covered:

- Inammathur
- North Ariyavoor
- Balasamuthirapatti
- Mela Nagamangalam
- Keerikalmedu
- Soorakudipatti
- Poovayeeppatti
- Sivanthanagar

Besides these activities, in the year 1995-1996 some programmes were conducted relating Women and Environment. Under this theme seminar for women leaders, exhibition, rally, cultural programmes and public meeting in the villages were organised. There were six villages namely Andigoundanpatti, Pallapatti, Alathur, Chinnaputhur, Kalathupatti and Melapudupatti selected for carrying out such programmes.

In the year 1996-1997 a scheme called 'Conservation of Medical Plants' was implemented for women leaders, seminar for students and animators of non-formal education, exhibition, public meetings, herbal collection competition, essay, oratorical and quiz competitions were organized in the villages and in schools. To enact such programme Panchayat Union elementary schools were selected in all the villages like Puthur, Archampatti, A. Nadupatti, Alathur and Sethurappatti were selected.

Conservation and Planting of Saplings

Distributing and planting of saplings is very important to avoid global warming at the same time safeguarding all the plants is the responsibilities of the people. In order to achieve this goal, in the year 1998 this scheme launched in the adopted villages by the Extension Programme. To save ground water in the year 1998-1999 a programme called 'Keep Our Water Resources Clean' was organized. Under this theme seminar, exhibition, rally, demonstration, water testing, public meetings and cultural programme was organized for rural people and school students for five villages the members of women's associations, namely Purasampatti, Valiyampatti, Keelapudupatti, Keela Ammapettai and South Paganu in 1997-98 St Joseph's Shepherd Extension Department beautified many remote villages by planting various saplings.²³

Rural Afforestation Programme (1996-97)

SHEPHERD students conducted motivational campaign, training and sapling plantation in 26 villages to improve the environment of the service villages and to create awareness. They planted 6015 multi-variety saplings in 26 villages by covering 6.16 hectare of the community land. SHEPHERD department made such activities to take up community afforestation activities involving rural people, faculty and students. The students performed the activities such as motivational campaign, nursery raising, land preparation, exposure training and sapling plantation. SHEPHERD department adopted the following measures to implement this programme

- Waste land reclamation
- Water shed management
- Soil fertility improvement measures
- Establishment of multi variety nursery at the college farm and at the village

- Organizing exposure programmes for staff, students and beneficiaries to model afforestation programmes
- Providing technical inputs to the rural youth and women.²⁴

CONCLUSION

From the beginning of the inception of the SHEPHERD, the Extension Programme of St Joseph's College (Autonomous) concentrates on imparting environmental consciousness and protecting and promoting environmental awareness in all adopted villages by planting and distributing saplings. It is the need and necessary of the time to do service in the villages to serve towards the development of environmental consciousness in these days. Though all the villages have developed rapidly in the field of education and environment, now SHEPHERD has to focus actively the area which is still lacking behind on the same. Till today most of the adopted villages have not got enough awareness regarding environment, hygienic and social growth. Especially, the people of the villages such as Gowthanayakanpatti, Sooravalippatti, Idaiyappatti, West Paganur and Posampatti and Valiyampatti need awareness on culture and hygienic situation. To improve this, students of Extension Programme may organise some special programmes, such as a series of lectures and discussions health and hygienic besides their regular activities.

With the help and support of students of Department of Micro-Biology and Bio-Technology, the SHEPHERD Department can also take some effective steps to organise medical awareness camps to impart hygiene awareness in all the villages. This will help the villagers to concentrate on the growth of their environment and society along with hygiene and sanitation development. In order to encourage students about the environmental issues, outdoor learning modules need to be designed, like nature camping, expedition, organization of training programmes and workshops, etc. Environmental Education (EE) related activities should be conducted on regular basis. Extension Programme and EE should be made compulsory in all the year/semester of the under graduate degree courses in all the higher education institutions including professional educational institutions.

Endnotes

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