

Piplantri an Ecofeminism Success Story

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ABSTRACT

To research how a small dessert village Piplantri transformed into an oasis. The paper covers the environmental, economic, political, social, and cultural aspects that contributed to the transformation. It demonstrates how the optimum use of government funds and knowledge of medicinal plants and the ecology of the village helped people undertake the transformation. The paper also includes the impact of the work both internationally and nationally and how the model is being duplicated in other such areas. Along with the ecosystem, the project has also transformed the mindsets of people in rural Rajasthan about many social evils specifically female foeticide and infanticide.

Keywords: Earth and environmental sciences; Environmental Effects on Ecosystems; Ecofeminism; Green economy; Piplantri

I. INTRODUCTION

Piplantri is a village located in the Rajsamand district in Rajasthan State, India. The village was plagued by marble mining in the surrounding area, the forest was cleared for the same which led to the reduction in the water table making the village land dry and the village people parched. But this story turned into an inspirational story about eco-feminism because of the actions of the village sarpanch Shyam Sundar Paliwal and the villagers. The villagers started planting trees on the occasion of the birth of a girl child, making the region greener and also celebrating the birth of a girl, something seen as a burden in India, especially in rural Rajasthan. The movement also provided livelihood to the villagers, improving the economy of the village. The government named this idea, the

Piplantri model and this model has now been adopted both nationally and internationally. (Dore 2021)

II. Methods

Interview with Shyam Sundar Paliwal (ex-sarpanch of Piplantri) and various articles on previous research conducted on Piplantri.

How was the village transformed?

Rajsamand district is one of Asia's largest marble markets and mining is widespread in the district. Piplantri, a small village in the district, was hard hit by the effects of marble mining. There was large-scale cutting down of trees, illegal dumping of waste, reduction in the water table, and scorching of the land; which led to water scarcity and food insecurity. A life claimed by dehydration following the water

scarcity in the village was Kiran's (Sarpanch Shyam Sundar Paliwal's daughter). To mourn his daughter, Shyam Sundar planted a plant in her memory, but he didn't stop there. He made it his mission to make his village cleaner and greener. He started a campaign to plant 111 trees at the birth of a girl child in the village, a way to celebrate the birth of a girl as well as regenerate the village environment. Along with the plantation, he launched a program called the "Kiran Nidhi Yojna" under which the panchayat opens a bank account in the name of the girl child and an initial sum of Rs2100 is deposited. The entire village collectively provides Rs21,000 for the girl, Rs10,000 is taken from the family and the total sum of Rs31,000 is put in a fixed deposit which can be broken when the girl turns 20. The parents have to sign an affidavit affirming that they will not practice female foeticide or marry their daughter before the legal age and will educate her. This empowers the girls and makes them independent. (Kumar, Tendulkar, and Khemariya 2021)

An annual tree planting celebration takes place in August where all girls born in the preceding 12 months are honored. On the occasion of Raksha Bandhan (Hindu festival), all the girls in the village tie a rakhi (holy band) to the trees and in exchange ask the trees to protect the environment by bringing rain and protecting the soil from erosion. 11 trees are also planted when someone in the village dies. Shyam Sundar educated people about the economical advantages of plants, plants like Sheesham (Indian rosewood), neem, mango, banyan, peepal (sacred fig), amla (gooseberry), and bamboo are now planted. A plant for processing gooseberry and aloe vera has also been set up in the village. Gooseberry is used for juice, which is very popular locally, aloe vera is used both for juice and gel, and bamboo is used for furniture. Aloe vera plants were initially planted by the villagers to keep termites away from fruit-bearing trees, more than 2.5 million aloe vera plants were planted for this purpose. Villagers were unaware of the market aloe vera had, but when they realized this, they started

processing and marketing it in a variety of ways. Many products started being made in the village itself, as mentioned above. Many steps have also been taken to conserve water, they include: trapping water runoff, and building ditches, bunds, and dams. (Rawal 2022)

Through these undying efforts of the villagers, Piplantri transformed from a barren wasteland to the most inspirational story in ecofeminism. The village today has more than 40 lakh plants and the water table has increased by 800-900 feet. The atmosphere has cooled down by 3-4 degrees Celcius. Owing to these improvements, the fauna in the village has also diversified with an increased number of birds visiting the village. The farmers have started to keep cows belonging to the 'gir' (or gyr) breed, buffalos of the 'Murrah' breed, and goats belonging to the 'jamunapari' breed - breeds that require more water and better quality feed. Earlier the farmers were deprived of the opportunity to keep these animals because of the dilapidated state of their village but now with the improvement in the environment, it has become a possibility. These breeds are more profitable and hence have led to the economic development of the village as a whole. The cultivation of several new crops has also started: sandalwood, mango, apple, fig, gooseberry, etc. The environmental improvement has led to economic stability in the village, with individuals benefiting from the developments. There are no mud houses in the village, all the villagers have shifted to solid and permanent dwellings. More and more people can now afford two-wheelers and use them to travel to work or to study. The village has become famous all over the world because of its success story in tackling degradation and converting a polluted desert into a haven. Over 100 tourists visit the village every day, to witness the miracle. "Tourists from countries like Denmark, Canada, and Namibia visited our village and appreciated the work we were doing," said Shyam Sundar Paliwal. It is interesting to note all these transformations have taken place owing

to government schemes and resources, this shows us the extent to which our country can achieve if only the opportunities are used effectively. Hearing about the success of the village, several individual Samaritans have also come forward.

Along with the environmental improvement, the project has also helped improve the situation of girls in the village. The village now has 52% girls, a majority, a rarity in rural Rajasthan. The village has also achieved the goal of 100% women's education, with all the girls in the village enrolled in school. Girls have also started to pursue higher education, Padmshri Shyam Sundar Paliwal said "They have their scooters now, they board them and head to college or for work". Sins like female foeticide and female infanticide have also been completely uprooted. No child in the village is malnourished. Several self-help groups have been created in the village for the processing of plant products like aloe vera. These groups create key employment opportunities for the villagers, especially women. (Paliwal, n.d.)

III. Piplantri model

The Piplantri model has 4 components: daughter, tree, water, and grazing land. Piplantri has been successful in achieving its goal of rejuvenating the village environment and fighting for gender equality while improving the economic and financial condition of the village. Inspired by the success story of Piplantri, other villages in India have started to follow its model of rejuvenation. The government has come forward to ensure this implementation. 46 other villages have been chosen as sites where the Piplantri model will be adopted said Archana Singh the district collector. Work to construct check dams and trenches has already started in some of these sites like the neighboring village of Tasaul. Groups of Block Development Officers (BDOs) also frequently visit the village to learn from the people and take inspiration from the work done so they can implement the same

in other villages of the district. The model has not only gained national reputation but has become internationally famous with the book '111 trees' by Rina Singh which has also been published in Canada and Japan told Mr. Paliwal. All the development work is done through government schemes. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme has been instrumental in the success story of Piplantri which guarantees 100 days of work. Under the scheme, villagers are hired to construct dams, trenches, water tanks, etc. This way the village gets transformed and so are employment opportunities for villagers created. The creation of such alternate employment opportunities diverts people away from their jobs as daily wage workers in the nearby mines, which used to be the primary source of employment for a majority of the villagers, and enables them to pursue profitable and stable careers. This has also reduced the mining operations resulting in an improved environment in and around the village. Integrated Watershed Management Programme is another scheme that has helped the process. A play pump- a water pump attached to a merry-go-round, was also constructed where fresh water was pumped and circulated every time the kids used the swing. This idea was primarily beneficial in inculcating the habit of conservation in kids at an early age.

The government hopes to use these programs and models to make every village in the state like Piplantri. ("Piplantri Model", n.d.)

IV. Conclusion

Piplantri receives the same amount of funds as all the other villages of the district yet Piplantri transformed from a mining devastated town to a desert oasis and the others remained in their destitute state. This is because the people used the funds effectively and for the collective good, keeping personal interests aside. The story of Piplantri also teaches us that environment conservation and economic growth can go hand in hand as when the people of Piplantri started planting more trees and conserving water the

economy of the village improved as did the people's personal wealth. The story of Piplantri also shows us the power of women, and how when given the same opportunities and respect as men, they can bring a positive change in society. As a girl belonging to Rajasthan with a will to conserve the environment, I can personally relate to and understand how big of a victory Piplantri's story is.

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Author

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