CHAPTER VI

Evaluation of Each Scheme from the Point of its Utility to The Village
In the past several decades not much has been done to ameliorate the lot of rural Indians and prepare them for the 21st century. Rural development in India has gone haywire and the much needed transformation however still remains a hope. It is mostly because of corrupt bureaucracy, flaws in planning, low capital investment, population boom and lack of independent rural development authority, which are some of the many reasons. We have paid only lip service to the concept of self-reliant villages. Schemes are drawn and implemented but they do not give good results. The crux of the schemes drawn should be that it should be of utility to the village. The schemes should not only solve the problems but also the felt needs of the target should also be met.

In the last chapter, schemes undertaken by Anna Hazare for the upliftment of Ralegan Shindi were studied in detail. Here evaluation of the schemes from the point of view of its utility to the village is done.

The images of poverty are same in almost all the villages. However at Ralegan Shindi one notices the striking contrast to this depressing and pitiable image. The over all benefit it has derived from the schemes under taken is that the standard of living of the people has increased considerably.

Every villager has two meals a day and has enough clothing. Every one has a pucca house and the slogan of the government of Roti, Kapada and Makaan for the deprived, has become a reality. Nobody buys food grains from outside since the village has surplus food grains. The farmers are seen
driving around on mopeds. 70% of Ralegan Shindi’s people have at least one plot of irrigated land and although 30% still have to benefit from irrigation the village has surplus food grains.

In what was once an arid waste in this perennially drought zone of Maharashtra, in a decade, has been transformed into a rich green verdant place. The sight of lush clusters of diversified agriculture in a village where drought had played havoc, a village now surrounded by fields of successful grass land cultivation, irrigated by water from a lift irrigation is by no means a small achievement. This is a small but successful challenge which also has suggested a method of breaking out of the cycle of drought, meriting consideration.

The catalytic phenomenon of crippling droughts show what happens when people ignore ecology and environment. Nature has made it as plain as daylight that, the man made phenomena that causes severe droughts are, the absence of the management of the two resources without which life itself is not possible: LAND AND WATER.

Drought does not only mean lack of rainfall. It means more importantly the exhaustion of soil moisture and the depletion of underground water reserve. Nature did not plan it that way but man did. What nature made and man unmade was a system whereby forests and vegetation would absorb rainwater like sponges and let it seep gently in the ground and from where it would as if by release mechanism raise the water level of wells or ponds all the year round.
But because of massive deforestation and loss of vegetal cover the sponges have disappeared. Rain water hits the ground or catchment areas and instead of being absorbed just flows away.

Even more serious is the problem of water management for irrigation and the heavy investments that have gone into large surface irrigation projects have proved to be wasteful. Not only have many large projects suffered from heavy costs and time over runs, but in several cases they have submerged good cultivable land. Also the loss of water is very high in the form of evaporation, seepage and carrying.

What Anna Hazare feels is that because water runs off or evaporates and does not percolate or recharge the already depleted underground water reserve, it makes agriculture more difficult in rainless months. He further adds that the tragedy is, rainless years need not cause the agricultural or economic devastation they presently do. And here in lies the crux of the matter. The run off water could be prevented. If the water is preserved underground through basic common sense and relatively inexpensive methods not only drinking water problem is solved but irrigation by wells is possible even if rains fail for a year or two.

Anna Hazare says that one of the greatest failures of the government during the last 40 years has been its lack of commitment and inability to institute an integrated and comprehensive scheme of land and water management coupled with anti-poverty measures. He further adds that the
government should be committed to ecology and at least some fundamental drought proofing activities have to be undertaken in an organised fashion. He also called for increased vegetation and conserving rain water in order to keep underground water tables charged.

In the light of the above facts Anna has been successful in creating awareness amongst the villagers regarding natural resources. He brought to their notice that ecology could not be ignored and there could be economic growth only if the natural resources viz land and water are protected.

The village Ralegan Shindi and its environs today are a testimony to what a dedicated voluntary agency, enthusiastic people, far sighted programmes can do in seemingly impossible conditions. It has also provided the much needed alternative to present irrigation strategy based on big dams.

The crucial task before Anna was however to stop the run off of whatever rain water was available. Thus at Ralegan Shindi, building contour trenches to store rain water, construction of percolation tank, digging of new wells, nullha bunding, were carried out. Every drop of water was stored.

This coupled with lift irrigation made the village, which a decade ago suffered from severe drinking water shortage to say nothing of agriculture, since most of the villagers were doing bootlegging and distilling illicit liquor for survival, expect a record harvest of 172 million
tonnes in 1988-89, which led to the selection of Mr. Annasaheb Hazare, the man behind this for Gentleman magazine’s "MAN OF THE YEAR" award for 1988. The award is in recognition of the resilience of the country's agriculture despite last year's unprecedented drought and the pivotal role of the farmer in the national economy.

Thus the issue is not the short term relief measures (which are also important) but the long term plans for drought proofing. Since the whole issue of drought hinges on water, a long term drought proofing plan was aimed centrally for reducing the dependance on erratic monsoon, a feature so characteristic of this region. This could be done in three ways by extending artificial irrigation, checking running off of rain water and introducing a cropping pattern that does not require large quantities of water.

As for the cropping pattern, water intensive crops like sugarcane were strictly avoided, thus advocating optimum and social use of water. During drought, when relief schemes mushroomed, there were concentrated efforts by Anna to take up drought proofing and engineering water conservation projects which he undertook on war footing.

As for the rise in agricultural produce the use of improved agricultural techniques, fertilizers, good variety of seeds, pesticides coupled with good irrigation (the total acreage of irrigated land went up from 70 in 1976, to around 500 after the wells came into operation and an additional 500 acres due to lift irrigation) were the major reasons.
Successive drought had dampened the spirit of the villagers. It had made them miserably poor but today Ralegan Shindi stands as an oasis of prosperity.

The view that human race is endowed with the divine right to ruthlessly exploit planetary resources for its own short term benefits could no longer hold good at Ralegan Shindi. The greening of Ralegan Shindi by planting trees was successful. The environmental and ecological balance could be maintained by planting about two and a half lacs of trees. Just a quite resolution by villagers to cover the barren hills and wasteland with greenery was successful. Trees that could conserve water and act as fuel and fodder suppliers were planted to the advantage of the villagers. The poor got the benefit of this scheme. The decision to control grazing of animals on war footing also gave impetus to the afforestation programmes. Voluntary control on grazing also helped in balancing ecology and saving the much needed vegetal cover.

Since the water problem had been solved to a great extent the villagers turned to growing vegetables. Now ladies fingers (Bhendi) is being exported to Gulf countries. Though Ralegan Shindi never came in direct contact with an outside country, the export of Bhendi is no small achievement for the village taking into account its background of drought, water scarcity, ignorance and poverty. This instilled in them an ambition for progress since export of vegetables was definitely a milestone in the development of Ralegan Shindi.
The transformation of the village is however the result of one man’s thinking, one man’s planning, one man’s inspiration but however the development has come about through self-help and cooperative efforts of the entire village. No outside help was involved. Cooperating in work and in all activities of life was very successful, which characterised itself by self sustaining, self-generating self perpetuating all the schemes. It had thus passed the true test, that is, it had survived, grown, spread and become permanent.

That with sympathetic counselling, expert guidance and some financial assistance, the villagers were led to recognize their most immediate and acute problems, to think about them, formulate plans for their solution and put these plans into action. Anna thus encouraged self help through the schemes which were the key stone of village development.

The assets of the village were its hands, "SRAMADAAN", for all of it was the voluntary efforts of Anna Hazare and the villagers. Through "sramadaan" the villagers could build a percolation tank, a boys hostel, lift irrigation and also could under take afforestation programmes.

What Anna Hazare did was utilization of one and all the government schemes effectively. He acted as a catalyst between the government and the villagers. Anna’s programmes though directed towards the task of village upliftment embraced all aspects of governmental activity in the field. The government, Anna says, merely indulges in introducing
schemes on paper and no concrete steps are taken to implement them. Anna Hazare says that most of the villagers are not even aware of the schemes. Again the government ignores the essential human needs of the local people which remain unfulfilled. These needs were fulfilled by Hazare knowing that any attempt to bring improvement of upgrading the village life by governmental edict or command would fail.

The village temple is the "Heart" of Anna’s movement. He used Religion as a force for bringing people together on a common platform. The village temple was used as a platform from where for the last one and a half decade he did more for humanity and its proper understanding single handedly with the only aim of reducing the sufferings of the villagers. The temple was used more for spreading the message of socio-economic values than religion. Hazare strongly believed in karma, selflessness, self sacrifice and advocated it for the upliftment of the village. The best service to God, says Anna, is the service to humanity. Thus man making was the mission in Annas life and out of dust he sought to make the villagers of Ralegan Shindi into worthy men. His new gospel was "Man Making", which he successfully did from the temple.

What happens at the village level when the criminalisation of politics reaches a stage where people have to reason with the fact that their elected representatives are either well known local criminals themselves or have been elected with the help of such people? The answer is that the common villager learns to live with the criminals and accepts their excesses. With criminals increasingly acquiring the respectability of elected representatives the morale of the honest villagers falls down.
Criminal elements have important say in the implementation of welfare oriented programmes such as distribution of land, grains, water, loan cum subsidy schemes and employment works. They also influence the award of contracts for roads, check dams, tanks and other construction works. As a result chances of diversion of developmental funds including those specifically meant for weaker sections have increased.

These all were curtailed effectively by Anna Hazare by keeping politics away from the village scene. Elections are unanimous for Panchayats or Gramsabha or any other cooperative society, thus creating proper environment for freeing the village from homogeneous influencing centres like caste, kinship and individual families. The evils of elections and electioneering also have been removed. Today at Ralegan Shindi there is no politics or group factionalism.

What we observe today is that there is an uneasy feeling of social injustice. Those disadvantaged socially and economically have been the victims of exploitation. The past is very much with us but what is more startling is that we are embracing them instead of shying away from them. Our commitment to development, our belief in equality, our adherence to secularism are not being followed. Even after 40 years of independence the plight of Harijans still persists. The benefits of developmental schemes have not reached them. Promises galore to improve the lot are made, but little has been done to improve them, still Harijans continue to wallow in degrading poverty.
Today at Ralegan Shindi there are no caste rules. The Harijans share the prosperity generated by the villagers. There are no misgivings about Harijans and with Anna’s efforts the welcome change has provided a necessary anchor in the present stormy social times.

Even more remarkable has been the social transformation which has been brought about. The people of the village have been awakened by stopping inhuman customs and rituals. For believers and non-believers of religion alike, goat sacrifice or any other form of sacrifice involving any living thing evokes protests against such practices. No action is however taken despite protests, since it involves religious sentiments. Animals are however sacrificed at Jatras or village annual festivals. The uninterrupted celebrations are not merely the signs of conflict between those who oppose it and the religious sentiments of the people, but the event signifies resistance offered by the society as well as the state to such inappropriate rituals and inhuman customs of our Indian society. It is however irrelevant to ask whether this bloody act has the sanction of tradition or religious scriptures but there seems to be no remedy for such ills like sacrifice of innocent animals. In a climate where respect for religious sentiment is being confused with a blanket sanction for crimes committed in the name of religious tradition the stopping of goat sacrifice at Ralegan Shindi by Anna Hazare at the annual festival acquires special significance. Ills like superstition were removed. Anna says that reinterpretation of religious myths has been a sound instrument in propagating unjust practices. Anna Hazare has
been successful in placing on record an essential voice of dissent by forming the "Aandhha Shraddha Nirmulan Samiti". Thus the people of Ralegan Shindi have been lifted out of ignorance that, disease and famine had to be fought successfully by the villagers themselves and this was realised by the villagers.

Social transformation in the rural areas can only take place if there is an increase in the level of education and a free flow of information. Regarding education Hazare has been assertive. At Ralegan Shindi the school is run on military lines. "It is there where I learnt some discipline" says Anna. Instead of just formal education emphasis is laid on physical education, developing every students' personality, thus going beyond the routine. Functional literacy and Adult education have helped the illiterate in identifying numbers, letters and to write their names.

"However development can not take place without the use of technology" says Anna. The introduction of solar street lights and water heaters at the boys hostel, windmill, smokeless chullhas, have all helped in taking science to the village. It has also demonstrated the capabilities of science to the villagers – to show to them that such things are possible.

Great attention was also paid towards, health, animal husbandry, hygiene, sanitation etc. This, Anna says is also essential in rural development as it promised advancement in both wealth and welfare of the beneficiaries themselves.
His object was to jerk the villagers out of their old groove, convince them that improvement was possible and kill their fatalism. He thus had to pull the villagers out of unhealthy and uneconomic customs and teach them a better way of living. To prove this, he modernised the age old customs too by organising group marriages. Now at Ralegan Shindi all the marriages of the rich, poor or Harijans are celebrated in groups. So now nobody has to beg or borrow money for the marriage. Needless expenditure is also avoided and nobody has to spend more than Rs. 1000 per wedding. The usual fights generally witnessed during weddings over food and other arrangements are also avoided.

With a view to improve living conditions in the village they have developed manure pits. Gobar gas units which were introduced checked the burning of cow dung. He had provided an alternate supply of fuel. The cow dung which came out of the gobar gas unit is well rotted dung and is a rich form of manure.

A definite departure from the usual custom has been the uses of human waste as manure. Its chief value was that it had awakened the people. Anna had jerked the villagers from their sheer religious susceptibilities and conservatism and now full use of human excreta is being made.

Bio-gas plants that were introduced not only provided the proper collection of human waste but its gas was used for cooking and the residue as manure.
Thus with the introduction of gobar gas units and bio-gas units the fuel requirement of the village was solved to a great extent reducing the pressure on ecology.

The following realities and reports that appear often about miseries, poverty, sufferings, drought, inefficiency, failures, social problems, approprious rituals and inhuman customs have their solution in a dedicated voluntary agency which could be looked up to for enlightenment in seemingly impossible conditions.

The most disturbing aspect of the one promising EGS "Employment Guarantee Scheme" in Maharashtra is the failure to provide employment to the growing number of rural people needing jobs. However, it has stood as a buffer against utter penury in the face of droughts.

Again the EGS has also been marred by corruption. Many of those who are responsible go scot-free because of many loop holes. However it has served more as relief in times of need. The work however is of poor quality. Many schemes introduced under EGS have floundered because of this problem. Because of the poor quality of work, crucial rural assets like roads, percolation tanks did not serve any purpose.

In the village Ralegan Shindi which was also drought prone, a percolation tank was built under the EGS scheme. Rs. 9 lacs were sanctioned but because of the poor quality of work it developed huge cracks and the water just flowed away. Finally the villagers with the guidance of Anna Hazare
undertook the work themselves and got Rs. 2 lacs sanctioned from Mr. Anil Kumar Lakhani the then district collector of Ahmednagar and again rebuilt the tank by sramadaan.

Again Rs. 5 lacs were sanctioned under the EGS and the people of the village built the boys hostel themselves and a building valued at Rs. 12 lacs was constructed through sramadaan.

For the lift irrigation also labour was provided as sramadaan. The social forestry programme was also organised at community level.

The lesson to be learnt from the above experience is that it is not enough to absorb as many idle hands as possible; but labour must be employed most productively. It is not a matter of planning the schemes but also of involving the entire community in its decisions. At the heart of the problem is therefore the creation of village jobs to social equity. This alone would usher in, village development which sustains livelihood. Because the villagers had a stake in all the above programmes - as distinct from works where they are merely employed temporarily - the programmes have been successful.

The overwhelming message to be derived from the above is that any rural employment programme has to be structured around the specific need of the community it is supposed to serve. Indeed the presence of voluntary agency like Anna Hazare is a prerequisite for success. Such an agency alone could decide the schemes to be undertaken which has to
benefit the entire community. Voluntary participation and decision making at the local level in the choice of activities was the approach.

Like all other activities the farmer also requires credit. That agriculturist cannot carry on his business without outside finance is a fact proved by history and evidenced by the poverty and indebtedness of the person engaged in the business of agriculture.

In the very nature of things Ralegan Shindi was often isolated and remote from the normal opportunities of obtaining credit. The village money lender was the important source for borrowing. But after Bank of Maharashtra opened its branch at Ralegan Shindi the pace of development became quite fast. Community wells, lift irrigation, loan for buying cows, bullocks, agricultural implements, in fact everything which agriculture requires were offered by the bank. Thus the bank played a very crucial role in the development programmes. In short capital/credit which is required both for productive and non productive business needs of the cultivators, was available at the bank. The risk of this production operation like drought, accidental break down of farm machinery, unsuspected defects in seeds and manures, infectious plant disease and unexpected destructive pests is now shared by the bank. The villager no longer has to go to the village Mahajan who used to charge exhorbitant rate of interest.
No other village of the same size in India has so many facilities like high school, hostel, bank, medical centre, cooperatives, grain bank, gobar gas units, bio-gas units to name a few. The wind, sun and water have all been tapped successfully. Thus Ralegan Shindi has become an inspiration to thousands of villages which are still struggling under the yoke of backwardness. Initially the progress was very slow. However success with the first improvement developed individual pride and group satisfaction and led towards the desire for further improvement. That after a couple of years, successive improvement in agricultural production, water supply, health measures, education and other opportunities completely transformed the village life not only in its physical amenities and improved economic status but also in the mental attitude and behaviour patterns of the villagers. Helplessness was replaced with determination, apathy with ambition and indifference with pride and accomplishment.

Scores of villages in the vicinity of Ralegan Shindi and from other parts of Maharashtra like Dhule, Kolhapur, Satara district have adopted the same development strategy. Many more are on their way.

Mr. Sharad Pawar the chief minister of Maharashtra was so impressed by the success of development programmes adopted by Ralegan Shindi that he has sought the assistance of Anna Hazare at the grassroots level of the development programmes of the state.

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In states like Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra many voluntary organisations have done commendable work. Jay Prakash Narayan’s movement in Bihar made a deep impact on the social fabric of feudal society. Mahatma Gandhi’s village development programmes were directed towards eradication of poverty. Vinoba Bhave engineered Bhoomaan Movement. Vilasrao Salunke’s "paani panchayat" which ensures equitable distribution of water resources has become quite popular. The Gonda project in Beed district started by Nanaji Deshmukh which changed the living conditions of the people belonging to the backward area. The shetkari sanghatnas led by Sharad Joshi in Maharashtra and by Tikait in UP and Bihar also cannot be ignored. They have been fighting for the farmers welfare, especially in getting remunerative prices for the agricultural produce. However the benefits of the cooperative movement also cannot be ignored. In Western Maharashtra the cooperative sugar factories have not only strengthened the social fabric but also generated wealth for capital investment within the region. Dr. Kurien’s milk cooperative dairy experiment at Anand or the cooperative dairy at Waarna have improved the standard of living of the people there. The cooperative spinning mills have generated employment where as the cooperative credit societies have helped in getting credit to the rural poor in rural Maharashtra.

However the above voluntary agencies were active only in their specific fields. As against that, Anna Hazare’s model village which has created an impact not only in Maharashtra but also all over India embraced all the developmental activities. The change in the village life has
been thought to be brought about by concentrated efforts and
an integrated approach making, an assault on all facets of
rural life in the village, through a single multipurpose aim
of upliftment of the village, Ralegan Shindi. Anna looked
upon the developmental programmes as an approach to local
development, as a part of the bigger scheme of planned
national development. As a process it involved a sequential
and interdependent progression of changes – economic, social
political and psychological. Anna wanted to stimulate the
local potential for growth in every field and direction. The
promise was of reciprocal advance in both wealth and welfare,
not on the basis of outside charity but by building the
latent vitality of the beneficiaries themselves with the
minimum of outside help.

Today Ralegan Shindi is self sufficient. A sense of
pride and glory prevails everywhere. Now Ralegan Shindi is
being identified with the "National Movement For Rural
Development". As the people of Ralegan Shindi affirm it is
not only their economic progress of which they are proud of
but it is their flowering into complete human beings of which
they are proud today.