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“If You Have Weak Soil, You Have Weak Human Beings”: Sadhguru During Interaction with Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

6 June 2020, Coimbatore: Hon’ble Jal Shakti Minister Shri. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Sadhguru, Founder, Isha Foundation connected online for a live interaction on World Environment Day, in a conversation that explored exciting ecological solutions that could potentially reshape how humanity engages with the planet. The latest episode of ‘In Conversation with the Mystic’ examined some of the most dire ecological challenges including desertification of soil, water shortage, waste management, food and nutritional security as well as progress on projects like Cauvery Calling, Namami Gange, Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan and Har Ghar Jal.

The Union Minister began by asking Sadhguru what is the one change Indian citizens can bring in their lives to impact the environment. “People are living in different types of conditions,” said Sadhguru, and went on to explain how rural citizens and urban citizens can contribute differently as change agents. “Large mass of people are living in rural India. For them, best thing is minimum 10% of their land they must make it into trees. Without that, they can’t save their soil; without keeping the soil rich, you can’t preserve water. The greatest reservoir on the planet is soil; 39 inches of topsoil is very, very important for us. The entire life process, from worms to insects to human beings, all are surviving because of this topsoil.” Stating that in urban India citizens need better awareness on the real ecological challenges, he said that if citizens become conscious of their footprint and how much waste they generate and discard, this in itself “ is the greatest thing they can do right now.” He also called on citizens to “pool ourselves into a solution” and look beyond individual acts of change, which may be well meaning but will not address present day challenges. “Right now, everybody wants to do their own

thing. Instead of doing things for our satisfaction, it is time we all pool ourselves into a solution. The time of doing things for personal satisfaction is over.”

Responding to the Minister’s query on how we can move beyond “expressions of concern and hope” and implement “concrete action”, Sadhguru said that waste management has immense potential to address several issues. He spoke of the need for waste treatment to become a lucrative economic activity. Citizens must be prepared to pay for the sewage they discharge just like they pay for utilities. “Treatment industry must be separate from the polluting industry” to become a profitable business. He suggested setting up affordable treatment units in individual homes that will discharge 50-70% treated water which is good enough to grow vegetables and fruits around the city. “Fortunately, Nature is made like this, what is our waste is somebody else’s food. What you think is dirty water is nutritious water for the plants.” Only if we make filth into wealth, will waste management be sustainable, he said.

Sadhguru spoke at great length about soil distress, the most critical challenge on the planet and in the country today. “India’s soil is at great risk right now,” he asserted adding that water shortage was only a consequence of weak soil. “Health of the soil and our health are not different. If you have weak soil, you have weak human beings. If you have rich soil, you have very strong human beings.” Only if 30-40% of the land is covered with trees can soil be organically rich and retain water, he said. Quoting scientists backing the Trillion Tree Campaign which he is part of, Sadhguru said that it has been scientifically established that planting one trillion trees on earth will absorb 50 years’ worth of gigatons of emissions from the air in 15 years.

He also spoke about Cauvery Calling, a movement to enable farmers to plant 2.4 billion trees on their own farmlands in the river basin for economic gain and soil restoration that will enhance the river basin’s water storage capacity. Asserting that every river basin in the country can do this, he explained that a river is a system, not an isolated entity. If we don’t save tributaries, we cannot save a river as “the river is only a confluence of all the tributaries coming in.” Only 4% of Indian rivers are glacier-fed while the rest depend on rainwater. “The rainwater that comes in 50-75 days, we must hold it for 365 days. That is all we have to do,” he said emphasizing that rivers will flow only with adequate trees and trees will only grow with rich soil.

Sadhguru also briefed the Union Minister on the progress of Cauvery Calling and said, “This year, 1.12 crore plants will go on farmers’ lands,” with a near 100% survival rate

because the farmer will gain economically from keeping the tree alive. The Karnataka government has increased its incentive for tree planting and has announced Rs 125, up from the earlier Rs 100, for every tree a farmer plants. He said 70 lakh trees will be planted in Karnataka and 40 lakh in Tamil Nadu this season. Trees are “standing money” for farmers who will not migrate as happens when short-term crops fail, he said.

The ‘In Conversation with the Mystic’ series is a one-on-one format where Sadhguru speaks to influencers, policymakers, business leaders, celebrities, youth icons, sportspersons and community leaders on a range of subjects.

If you would like to know more about this, please write to mediarelations@ishafoundation.org.