This Village in Rajasthan Plants 111 Trees for Every Girl Child Born. Thanks to One Man’s Vision.

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Piplantri village in Rajasthan is making news for initiatives that encourage empowerment of women and environment conservation, along with increasing employment opportunities. All this, thanks to one man who dreamt big for his village.

Sociologists, political analysts and intellectuals have for long been concerned about the constantly declining sex ratio in many parts of India in the last few decades. At a time when even stringent legal provisions have not been able to end female infanticide and foeticide, one man’s mission in a village has set an example of reformation.

For the people of Piplantri in the Rajsamand district of Rajasthan, the birth of a girl child meant bad news. Female foeticide and infanticide were not unheard of. This was mainly due to the hefty dowry system prevalent in the village. Enters social campaigner and ex-sarpanch of Piplantri village, Shyam Sunder Paliwal who envisioned a bright future for the girls. He believed that if the parents of newborn girls planted trees and nurtured them for 18 years, they could arrange enough money for the girl’s wedding when she comes of age.

Villagers supported the mission:

He made a good start by collaborating with the government. Initially, Paliwal faced hurdles in the implementation of this plan. But the Piplantri village panchayat had received many awards for the execution of various government schemes and this motivated the villagers to try out this idea too. This is how the scheme works:

To celebrate the birth of a girl child, 111 trees are planted by her parents, grandparents and relatives. The village panchayat takes care of these plants so that the efforts of the relatives do not go waste. Women self-help groups, elderly ladies, grandmothers, aunts etc. take care of its maintenance from time to time. This invaluable work is being done under the Kiran Nidhi Yojna, adopted by Paliwal. Paliwal also made use of the Panchayat at your doorstep programmes to tour the villages and speak to women on empowerment. He got the women self-help groups and Bhamashahs to consider this scheme as unique from the perspective of the safety of girls. As the idea took off, the villagers realised that there was no need to worry about dowry because the trees they plant when a girl child is born will take care of her expenses in the future. (The Bhamashah scheme was started with the objective of bringing financial inclusion and empowerment of women. It is a family-based programme in which a bank account and a Bhamashah card are made in the name of the lady of the house. This empowers her to become the decision-maker in the family.)
Paliwal says, “Analysing the statistics of the village for many years, I have observed that on an average, there are about 120 child births during a year, out of which half or 60 are girls. It has been our effort that our daughters become self-reliant so that parents do not consider them a burden.”

More schemes for girl child:

Planting trees is just one part of Paliwal’s plan to empower girls and women in his village. At the time of the birth of a girl child, Rs 10,000 from the girl’s parents and Rs 31,000 from donors and Bhamashahs are collected and put in a fixed deposit (FD) account. The village panchayat keeps an account of this and on completion of the term, the FD is revised. The panchayat registers the information of the birth of the girl with the registrar. Along with this, all official formalities are completed for the Janani Suraksha Scheme and other beneficial government bond schemes. There is also a letter of oath, known as the Kiran Nidhi Scheme, started by social worker Anna Hazare which Paliwal adopted in his village. Paliwal made many inclusions to the scheme to reflect the changing needs of the times and to ensure the comprehensive development of the girl child, not just at school, but at home as well. This oath from the parents is taken on a stamp paper and includes the following conditions:

- No one from my family will be involved in foeticide.
- The 111 trees planted on the birth, and the girl child will be raised with equal care.
- I will not keep my daughter from getting educated.
- I will not allow child marriage of my daughter under any condition.
- I will spend this money on my daughter’s wedding and/or higher education.
- The trees planted at birth will be the property of the village.

The funds given by the parents and donors would grow to be a few lakh rupees after 18-20 years. This would be useful in the education and/or wedding of the daughter. The saplings planted during her birth would have become trees by the time she comes of age. At approximately Rs. one lakh for a tree, the cost of 111 trees would be Rs. one crore and 11 lakhs. Even if the cost is assumed to be Rs. 25 lakhs, the oxygen produced by the trees and the soil and water held by its
roots are priceless. Environment-friendly measures: The idea of celebrating the birth of a girl child by planting trees is what makes this scheme truly revolutionary. If you travel to Piplantri or any other part of the Rajsamand district, you would notice that there is very little land available for agriculture. This is mainly because of the handicraft industry in cities like Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kota and others that deforestation has taken place after independence. Moreover, Rajsamand’s major white marble mines are located in the surrounding villages of Piplantri like Morwar, Umthi, Gogleta, Aarna, and others. Local representatives had destroyed the forest cover for mines, which has contributed to the drinking water problem. With more vehicles entering the villages, it has not only affected the environment but also the health of the villagers resulting in many ailments, loss in farming and poor wages that forced the youth to migrate to more promising lands, leaving the elderly, women and children behind. It is around this time that Paliwal appeared as godsend and took the initiative to change his village radically. He has set an example for the entire nation.

Rajsamand, situated 67 km north of Udaipur and 350 km south of Jaipur, is a famous tourist destination known for its religious places, historical monuments and industrial regions. With Piplantri panchayat earning a name for itself through environment-friendly initiatives, it is bound to attract tourists with its herbal medicine park, watershed model, gram-swaraj, alcohol-free status, nirmal-gram, and more. First published by The Better India