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Glimpse of a visit to Anna Hazare's village in 2005

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Abstract

The article is a reflection of the contribution of Anna Hazare to the society through his holistic effort in his native village. The lead author was a part of the team of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Lucknow who went on an exposure visit to the native village of Anna Hazare.

Primarily, the visit was to have an exposure regarding holistic development adopted by Anna Hazare. CRS, Lucknow had the provision of an exposure visit on an annual basis & it is in this context that the lead author chose the village of Anna Hazare for the purpose of the exposure visit.

Keywords: Anna Hazare, Geographically, Lucknow, CRS

Introduction

Geographically, Ralegan is surrounded by small hillocks on the north-east and on the southern sides.

After gained freedom still a large number of villagers are facing the question as to what, precisely, they should do if they want to develop their villages. Many young men and women are also asking this question that they want to do something in their life but what should they do? They are searching for a proper direction. Many people believe that village development means a good building of the Gram Panchayat, a double storied building for the village credit society, surfacing of village roads and piped water supply in the village. But all this is not real development. Ultimately, the human beings for whom we construct these buildings in the village should undergo change. Their thoughts and actions have to be brought onto the right track. Until a human being realizes that besides living for oneself, one has a duty towards one's neighbor, one's village, one's society, and one's country, no real development can take place of the village people, or of the village or the country.

An effort for such real development has been made collectively by the people of Ralegan Siddhi. Programmes like ban on consumption of alcohol, eradication of unsociability, tree-plantation, family-planning, and water harvesting and water conservation. community gohar-gas plant, agricultural development, irrigation by sprinklers, drip bi-valve irrigation, solar lights, solar heaters, solar pumps, windmill, community marriages, co-operative well irrigation schemes, construction of a building worth Rs. 15-20 lakh by *Shramadaan*, Grain Bank, improved horticulture, and many other schemes have been successfully implemented in this village.

Dr. Antia of the Foundation for Research in Community Health, Bombay, came to know of this development taking place in Ralegan Siddhi. He, along with Dr. Ramesh Awasthi and Dr. M.W. Uplekar, visited this village many a time. On behalf of their Foundation they had deputed two of their women health workers in Ralegan for one year with a view of providing health care training. Dr. Antia, with a deep feeling for the country, felt the need to undertake a proper economic study of Ralegan's development. He discussed about it many times with me and through his efforts this study was undertaken. How more and more people can be inspired to start the work on the lines of Ralegan, has been the desire of Dr. Antia. Through my frequent meetings with him I have noticed a deep social commitment in him. This study was carried out in 45 months. Shri Dashrath Panmand has put in a lot of hard work. They have put the results of the study in a book form so that it can be useful to others.

About Anna Hazare

Anna Hazare was born on 15th January 1940 in a small village, Bhingar, near Ahmednagar. Anna's father Shri Baburao Hazare worked as an unskilled laborer in Ayurveda Ashram Pharmacy. Anna's grandfather was in the army and was posted at Bhingar when Anna was born. He died in 1945 but Anna's father continued to stay at Bhingar. In 1952 Anna's father resigned from his

job and returned to his own village i.e. Ralegan Siddhi. At that time Anna had completed his education upto 4th standard and had six younger siblings. It was with great difficulty that Anna's father could make two ends meet. Anna's aunt (father's sister) took Anna to Bombay. She was childless and she offered to look after him and his education.

Anna studied upto the 7th standard in Bombay. He took up a job after the 7th standard in consideration of the economic situation back home. Anna's father at Ralegan had to work as a daily wage laborer and found it difficult to sustain his family. April 1960 he appeared in Army recruitment interviews and was selected to join the Indian Army.

For his initial training he was sent to Aurangabad. After training he was posted in Punjab as a truck driver. Being far away from home and separated from all his friends, Anna felt lonely. He also had bouts of depression and the feeling of aimlessness in life. He had once resolved to end his life and even wrote a suicide note. On second thought, he however realized that his suicide may affect the marriage prospects of his younger sister. Therefore, he decided to postpone implementation of his resolution till his sister got married.

In the meantime, some events gave a new direction to his life. During the Indo-Pak war of 1965, he was driving a military vehicle somewhere on the western front when he saw a Pakistani plane flying low overhead. He and his colleagues jumped out and took shelter in the nearby bushes, lying flat on the ground. The truck was blown off, all his colleagues were killed but Anna miraculously escaped unhurt.

Once again he had a miraculous escape when he was posted in Nagaland. One night, underground Nagas attacked the military post and killed all the inmates. By providence Anna had gone out to answer nature's call at that time and hence he was the lone survivor. These two events had a deep impact on Anna's mind. He realized that his life was not to be wasted. God had considered his life to be precious; otherwise he could have been killed along with his colleagues.

When these thoughts were churning in his mind, he came across a small booklet titled "Call to the youth for nation building" by Swami Vivekananda in a book-stall at the New Delhi station.

Vivekananda's thoughts gave meaning to his life and he decided to devote the rest of his life working for the society.. His thoughts started developing and in 1970 he firmly told his parents about his decision not to get married. He urged his parents to go ahead and arrange the marriage of his younger brothers. The new found desire to live beyond his narrow self interest later drove him to seek voluntary retirement from the Army and come back to serve his own village.

He wanted his native village Ralegan Siddhi to improve, but did not know how and where to start. He used to come to his village on vacation and spend endless days sitting on the rocks at the outskirts of the village. Having spent most of his life in Bombay and in the Army, he did not have many friends in the village. Moreover the people of Ralegan who had known him as an angry young man from the days when he used to sell flowers outside Dadar station were unaware of the transformation that had taken place in the personality of Anna Hazare.

In 1971 Anna was transferred to Bombay. From Bombay he started visiting the village regularly. From 1971 to 1974 his interaction with the village people increased. He also spent about Rs. 3000 for giving a face-lift to the Padmavati temple with a coat of oil paint. He also developed good relations with the village youth.

In 1974 he was transferred to Jammu. In 1975 he completed 15 years of service in Army, a statutory requirement for being entitled to a pension. He sought retirement and finally in August 1975, he got relieved from the Army and came back to Ralegan Siddhi for good.

From then on Anna began living a life of a sort of renunciate, devoting himself to working in his own village. His work in Ralegan Siddhi has been described in other chapters of this book. He started staying in the Yadav Baba temple and eating with the hostel boys. On 19th November 1986 he received Indira Priyadarshini *Vrikshamitra* award from the hands of Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. On 15th January 1987, he was felicitated by Ahmednagar Municipal Corporation and later on, also by the Pune Municipal Corporation. In 1989 the Maharashtra Government honored him with Krishi Bhushana award and in 1990 he was honoured by the nation with the award of Padmashree.

Anna has been a deeply religious person. His philosophy is a mix of Hindu spiritualism and thoughts of modern Hindu thinkers like Vivekananda, Gandhi and Vinoba. Some sayings which he often quotes in his lectures are listed below. These quotations give an idea of Anna's mode of thought, which has made a direct impact on the development in Ralegan Siddhi.

- Over every huge tree that we see over ground, there always is a seed that had submerged itself into the darkness of the soil.
- Ban on consumption and sale of alcohol lays the foundation of rural development.
- It is impossible to change the village without transforming the individual. Similarly it is impossible to transform the country without changing its villages.
- If villages are to develop, politics have to be kept out.
- Education without spirituality cannot help development.
- Money alone does not bring development, but it certainly corrupts.
- In the process of rural development, social and economic development should go hand in hand.
- The work of social transformation is neither easy nor impossible.
- The ultimate goal of all politics and social work should be the enlistment of society and of the nation.
- Books alone cannot prepare future citizens; it requires cultural inputs to do so.
- Educational institutions are not enough to make good citizens; every home should become an educational centre.
- Indulgence causes disease whereas sacrifice leads to accomplishment.
- One should not accept anything free; accepting charity makes one lazy and dependent.
- When the person learns to see beyond his self-interest, he begins to get mental peace.
- One who performs all worldly functions and still remains detached from worldly things is a true saint.
- Salvation of the self is a part of salvation of the people.
- It is experience that gives the direction but it is youth that gives the drive to every plan.

Anna utilized individual centered Gandhian methods for bringing about moral pressure on the people. When the high school was started in Ralegan Siddhi, and the state government was not ready to sanction grant to the school,

Anna quietly started his fast outside the *Zilla Parishad's* office. When the village people came to know of it they also joined him in hundreds. The state government had to yield to their demand. In another instance, when a couple of families continued to leave their cattle free for grazing in spite of explaining to them the importance of stopping open grazing and of taking up massive tree plantation programme, Anna and some youth members went on fast for two days to make the people understand the seriousness of the ban on open grazing.

Today Anna has almost acquired the stature of a saint. He donated his land for the hostel building. He gives his pension money to the village fund. A confirmed bachelor, he lives in the village temple with a bare minimum of personal belongings. He eats simple food normally cooked for the hostel boys. Both his parents and brothers stay in the village but they are no different to him than any other family in the village. This moral authority growing out of his selfless life has made him an unquestioned leader of the village.

Social Development

Campaign against Alcoholism

In Ralegan, Anna saw that the village temple was in a dilapidated condition. Even some of the wooden pillars and beams had been pulled out and burned as firewood in the liquor stills. This temple had been constructed years ago in the name of Yadav Baba, a saint who preached and also breathed his last in Ralegan Siddhi. Yadav Baba has almost been looked upon as a village deity. Anna started the work of reconstruction of the village temple with Rs. 20,000 of his provident fund and gratuity. This act of Anna moved the villagers. People came forward and offered contributions in cash and kind to the tune of Rs. 90,000. A youth group was formed to supervise the construction work.

Whenever old and young people gathered in the temple, Anna used to tell them about the need to have a ban on liquor in the village and to close down the liquor stills if the village had to make any progress. Finally, one day a village meeting was held in the temple and it was decided to impose a total ban on making, selling and drinking of liquor. The villagers took an oath in the name of Yadav Baba and also decided on a code of discipline to implement it. The person who started the first liquor still was also the first to close down his business. Even today one sees him in the temple and, though older to Anna Hazare, he touches Anna's feet.

Implementation of total ban on sale and consumption of liquor was not an easy task. All those involved in making and selling of liquor were helped to find alternative vocations. The habitual drunk arts were persuaded, warned and the incorrigible ones were given a public beating. Still, there were some known goondas who defied the village unity. After a few instances of public punishments the village remained free of alcoholism. Gradually the opposition died out and Anna's selfless moral Leadership rose to mobilize the entire village.

After the people of Ralegan took an oath in front of the village temple to implement the ban on sale and consumption of alcohol, the change was achieved in three stages - some people gave up drinking alcohol after realizing the evil effects of excessive drinking, some of them required heavy persuasion and the third category yielded under social pressure when some of them were given physical punishment in public. After the full achievement of this campaign the village youth started fighting the other social evils.

Collective Marriages

Most rural poor get into a debt-trap as they have to incur heavy expenses at the time of the marriage of their son or daughter. It is an undesirable practice but has almost become a social obligation. Ralegan's people have started celebrating the marriages collectively. The feast is held together where the expenses are further reduced by the *Tarun Mandal* taking the responsibility of cooking and serving the food. The vessels, the Loud-speaker system, the *mandap* and the decorations have also been bought by the *Tarun Mandal* members belonging to the oppressed castes. From 1976 to 1986, four hundred and twenty four marriages have been held under this system.

Banishing Dowry

The evil practice of dowry given at the time of marriage is well known even to the village people. But this evil cannot be banished by individual action. Ralegan people do not accept any dowry at the time of their son's marriage. However, they cannot extend the same rule in the case of daughters of Ralegan i.e. no dowry will be given in their daughter's marriage. Till such consciousness to banish dowry reaches other villages it is bound to remain only a one-sided affair for the people of Ralegan.

Untouchability

The people of Ralegan have largely succeeded in eradicating social discrimination on the basis of caste. The dalits have been integrated into the social and economic life of the village. Obviously the initiative for this had to come from the upper castes and the leadership of the *Tarun Mandal*. The people of all castes however responded very well to this process of social integration.

Fighting Superstitions

Goddess Padmavati is the village deity of Ralegan. During the annual village festival of goddess Padmavati, the people used to bring goats to the Padmavati temple for sacrifice. After the sacrificial killing of the goat and ritual of offering it to the goddess the people had a feast at their homes with meat and alcohol freely served to relatives and other guests. During the pooja rituals some persons would start dancing vigorously pretending that they were possessed by the goddess. The villagers would ask questions about their problems and seek remedies from these persons (often called *devarshis*) supposedly blessed with divine powers. This entire drama gave rise to many superstitious practices. People used to trust the *tantra-mantra* or the ash given by this person even for treatment of well-known infectious diseases. These practices were not peculiar to Ralegan Siddhi but the people of Ralegan, especially the *Tarun Mandal*, decided to put an end to it.

As a first step they told the people that if sacrificing a goat and offering it to the goddess pleased her then why should the sacrificial goat be taken home for a feast, let it remain with the goddess to make her happier. As a result, the practice of sacrificing animals at the temple stopped. Secondly when some people got "possessed" by the goddess and started dancing, the one who started first was beaten up by the *Tarun Mandal* members. He immediately started behaving normally; since that day no one in the village has ever got possessed by the goddess! Exposure of these practices has brought about a dramatic change in the beliefs of the people of Ralegan.

The people contributed their voluntary labor for the implementation to every project of community or group benefit. This has resulted in socialization of costs along with the socialization of benefits. From the benefits, every beneficiary contributed 10-25% of the surplus to the community fund from which many other schemes old cordon benefit were undertaken.

As a result, a sense old personal involvement and attachment has developed among the people for all community assets. Therefore, people take care of such assets. Whether these are common toilets, water taps the hostel building or the fruit bearing trees on common lands.

A sense of social obligation and sharing of benefits has also been built into every program. This consciousness has been demonstrated by the people of Allegan in the form of running the grain bank, self-imposed restriction on growing water intensive cash crops, growing fodder and supplying it to neighboring villages, helping oppressed caste families to get out of their debt trap and contributing towards the resettlement of people affected by the Kukdi Canal construction.

Nyaya Panchayat

Squabbles over sharing of water, straying of cattle into other's fields for grazing, and land disputes are very common in villages. Usually, these fights result in people filing complaints with the police and spending a lot of money in bribing the police or paying the lawyers. The people in Ralegan resolved that all such disputes would be settled at the *Gram Panchayat* level where the *Gram Panchayat* acted as a *Nyaya Panchayat*. As a result of increased social awareness and deeper community feeling, disputes are rare and all disputes have been amicably settled at the village level itself. From 1976-1986 not a single police case had been filed from this village at the police station.

Democratic Functioning

Collective decision making and election by consensus are the basic principles of democratic functioning in Ralegan. All public offices in *Gram Panchayat* or village co-operatives are considered as offices of responsibility and not as opportunities for gaining power and making money. Hence all the elections to the village level bodies are held in the *Gram Sabha* and as far as possible, by consensus. This practice has put an end to political factionalism that has vitiated the public life in almost every other village.

Even at the time of Assembly and Parliamentary elections the *Gram Sabha* holds a meeting to discuss the merits and demerits of each candidate as well as of their parties. These are discussed and then "whom to vote for" decided at the individual level. The usual campaigning by shouting through loudspeakers, taking out processions, etc, is not encouraged.

Women's Status

The women were asked in an informal group meeting as to what Ralegan's development has meant to them i.e. how have their lives changed. They replied, "Earlier the men used to drink, waste their money and at home the women and children did not even have enough for their basic needs; they had to go hungry. Besides, the women were harassed both at home and outside. At home they were shouted at, beaten and reprimanded for trivialities. The men were drunkards, paid no attention to agricultural or domestic chores and used to pick fights and create scenes on the streets. We had to work hard

at home, in the fields and take care of our drunkard husbands as well".

As a result of the developments that have taken place in Ralegan, their druggery has reduced. Water sources close to their house, gober gas plants and smokeless chulhas have made their life easier though they are still found to be working much more than the menfolk. Their workload has to some extent, increased due to larger number of milch cattle to be looked after. But now the men are also taking greater responsibility in looking after the agricultural operations and at times even the children. Construction of public latrines and bathrooms has also been a great relief to women.

Many more girls are now going to school, and even seeking higher education. In 1971 only 12.33% of the girls were literate. In 1981 this figure went up to 24.24%. Literacy figures were not available for 1986 but in 1986-87 there were 200 girl students in Ralegan schools and 2 girls were doing the Diploma in Education and 4 others were studying in the twelfth standard in colleges outside Ralegan.

Due to increased social consciousness and improved economic conditions, health problems of women were now better taken care of. A case of wife battering was reported to the *Tarun Mandal* by the neighbors; the husband was pulled up and publicly admonished.

Watershed Development

The village is located in a drought prone (rain-shadow) zone with erratic rainfall between 200 mm and 850 mm per year. According to the 1971 census only 55 acres of land were irrigated. During that period most of the rainwater was wasted as run-off also taking the valuable top soil with it and rendering the cultivable lands poorer in productivity.

In the year 1972 like most parts of Maharashtra, Ralegan experienced the worst drought in living memory, when almost every able bodied person in the village worked on relief works. It was during this year that the Tata Relief Committee (TRC) also started relief work in 6 villages of *Parner Taluka*, including Ralegan. The work was later extended to include five more villages. In 1972 the TRC constructed a community well in the village and also started constructing check-dams with assistance from the Catholic Relief Society under its "Food for Work" program. In all 11 check dams were constructed in the village under this program.

In 1975 a percolation tank was sanctioned by the government in the eastern watershed area with a storage capacity of 114.2 lakh cubic feet of water. Construction of tank did create over 1 lakh mandays of work over a period of one and a half years. However the basic objective of water harvesting was not achieved since all the accumulated water used to rapidly seep away through the previous base of the bund (embankment wall).

It was in 1975 that Anna Hazare started his work in the village. Realizing the importance of water harvesting he pleaded with the district authorities about the need to undertake repairs of the percolation tank built at a cost of Rs. 4.35 lakh. After a lot of effort the Zilla Parishad agreed and in 1983-84 the massive repair work of providing impervious foundation to the tank was completed costing another Rs. 3.9 lakhs. The villagers could see the results immediately as the seven wells in the downstream got charged giving enough water even during the summer.

Under Anna Hazare's leadership the people of Ralegan had started participating in the implementation of every village

level development program through *Shramadaan*. Anna himself, and his *Tarun Mandal* volunteers supervised every program to ensure that quality of work and construction standards were maintained so that maximum possible benefits were achieved with minimum wastage. Seeing this enthusiasm of the people of Ralegan, Shri Anil Lakhina, the then Collector of Ahmednagar district announced COWDEP (Comprehensive Wasteland Development Program) for Ralegan and the Agriculture Department also selected Ralegan for *Krishi Pandhari* (Farm training and visits) scheme as a corollary of the COWDEP. Soil Conservation and the Social Forestry Departments also joined in to strengthen the soil conservation and watershed development efforts.

The strategy adopted was of checking the run-off water by contour bonding, constructing check-dams so as to hold the water within the watershed area. Land shaping and land grading were strengthened by massive tree plantation and pasture development program. About 3,00,000 trees were planted by 1986, covering an area of about 102 hectares to provide fodder and meet the fuel requirements of the village. Having planted trees on the roadside, on bunds of check-dams, on boundaries of individual fields, on community lands and wastelands in the village, the tree plantation has now extended to the barren hills which surround Ralegan village. This massive drive of tree plantation has earned Anna Hazare the national award of Indira Priyadarshini *Vrikshamitra*.

Ralegan has successfully experimented with the idea of "social fencing" for protection of trees. Having understood the critical importance of trees for getting out of the cycle of environmental degradation and drought the village people adopted a ban on open grazing of cattle. A couple of households resisted and flouted the ban. Anna Hazare along with some members of the *Tarn Manual* commenced a 'fast' and as a result even these deviant families submitted to the collective will of the people.

Rising of nurseries has been taken up in a decentralized manner taking advantage of government schemes wherever possible. These water conservation and environmental regeneration programs have made Ralegan Siddhi an oasis in the drought prone *taluka* of Parner. But the people of Ralegan are not insensitive to the existing disparities.

Utilization of harvested water

Anna Hazare often says that it is not the water in fields that brings true development, rather it is water in the eyes (ie. compassion for the fellow beings) that brings real development. Therefore the emphasis was on distribution of benefits especially in such a way that the poorest are chosen as the first beneficiaries. Water resources created by community effort were therefore shared by the people through water supply co-operatives. Five such societies have been formed to extend the benefits of irrigation to the maximum number of people. According to a rough count by the *Gram Sevak* in 1988 there were 40 new wells dug to reap the benefits of water harvesting. The total area irrigated by well water has gone up to 700 acres. By 1991 there were 87 private and 7 community wells in Ralegan.

To supplement this effort a lift irrigation scheme was taken up in 1986 under which water from the nearby Kukdi Canal was lifted to bring another 500 acres under irrigation benefiting 103 farmers. For all these irrigation schemes the labor component was provided by the beneficiaries in the form of *Shramadaan* and the Bank of Maharashtra extended

a helping hand by providing loans. Wherever possible the benefit of subsidy under various Government schemes was also taken.

Drinking Water

Prior to the watershed development program there were only two wells which used to sustain the village during the summer months. People had to walk 2-3 Kms to fetch water. Even in the worst drought however, as one well in the village never dried up, drinking water was never supplied to the village by tankers. By 1986 there were eight bore wells installed in the village. A motor pump on one of these bore wells supplies piped water to different clusters of houses by rotation. Another motor on a bore well near Padmavati temple supplies piped water to the boys' hostel. No one has to walk a long distance anymore for water and there is no crowding for drinking water.

Water Management

Ralegan has also experimented with drip and bi-valve irrigation in a big way. Papaya, lemon and chilies have been planted on a plot of 80 acres entirely irrigated by the drip irrigation system. People who have dug private wells in their fields have been persuaded not to raise water-intensive cash crops like sugarcane. However groundnut and onion have been allowed to some extent. When the villages around Ralegan were facing acute shortage of fodder, the people of Ralegan demonstrated a unique sense of social commitment by producing more fodder instead of taking cash crops and supplying it to neighboring villages at prices lower than the market rates.

Within Ralegan all those families who have benefited from extension of irrigation contribute 25% of their increased incomes to other community based projects so that the benefits are shared. The Ralegan people have also monetarily contributed towards rehabilitation of those farmers who were divested of their lands for construction of the Kukdi canal as well as the dam which feeds the canal, once again demonstrating the human face of development.

Educational Development

Education is considered a necessary input for development. But the educational system in our country has always been biased against the poor. Today it helps the urban elites in maintaining their control over power in every sphere of the country and peoples' lives. In Ralegan Siddhi the primary school (upto 4th std) was started as early as in 1932 understandably with one teacher and one room. India gained Independence and two Five Year Plans went by with the Second Plan specially acclaimed for its high success (11% growth rate). But even till 1962, for Ralegan primary school it was still the same dilapidated room with one teacher.

Under Anna Hazare's leadership the people of Ralegan decided to break away from the vicious circle and use education as a meaningful input into integrated development. The *Tarun Mandal* started a *balwadi* in 1976 so that the children get an early start. They also started paying attention to the functioning of the primary school. Soon they realized that the school was not providing any education to the children. They informed the *Zilla Parishad* (which runs the school) that the village had decided to close down the government school and run an alternative school on its own. The *Zilla Parishad* authorities realized the gravity of the threat - that this move on the part of villagers might rock their

entire structure. They immediately transferred all the teachers and sent for the best teachers from all over the district and instructed them to work in co-operation with the *Tarun Mandal* and Anna Hazare. Under constant vigilance of the people of Ralegan, the primary school is now working very well.

The people also decided to start a high school in the village itself to ensure proper education to the village children during the formative years and also that more girls could also avail of education. A local body under the name of Sant Yadav Baba Shikshan Prasarak Mandal was registered and the high school was started in 1979. Anyone who has worked in the field of education knows that it is not possible to run a private school without government aid unless it is exclusively for the rich who can pay high fees and lump sum donations. There was another high school in a neighboring village only about 2 kilometers from Ralegan. On this ground the state authorities refused financial grant to the Ralegan high school. The villagers ran the high school with their own money for one year and then resorted to a mass dharma outside the *Zilla Parishad*. The state education minister had to announce the grant to the school as a special case in consideration of the determination of the villagers to have their own school for better education.

The desire of the people for good educational facilities was also amply demonstrated at the time of construction of the hostel for school boys coming from neighboring villages. The grant for the hostel building under NREP was released like most government programs - only two months before it would lapse on account of the year ending. The village people offered *shramadaan* and worked round the clock to utilize the grant of Rs. 4 lakhs within 2 months. The completed building is now evaluated at around Rs. 16 lakhs. Now some residents of the neighboring villages who have shifted to Bombay have also sent their children for studying in the Ralegan high school. The school has become so famous that children from far away villages also seek admission here in large numbers. Thus, during the period 1975 to 1985, educational facilities were created in the village in the form of a big room for a *balwadi*, a new building for the government primary school, a building for the high school run by Sant Yadav Baba Shikshan Prasarak Mandal and a hostel building. There was a large component of people's involvement in creation of these facilities in the form of *shramadaan* though, of course, government grants were taken wherever possible. Not a single rupee has been taken as donation from any funding agencies or individual philanthropists.

In the *balwadi* the average enrollment from 1976 to 1986 was of 50 children, whereas in the primary schools, from 1975 to 1978, on an average 73 children entered the first standard. Of these only 15 passed out of the 4th standard. From 1979 to 1985, on average 55 children entered the first standard and 39 passed out of the 4th standard. In the high school, from 1979 to 1985 on an average 18 students passed the high school examination. In 1986 there were 80 children in the *balwadi*, 201 in the primary school and 353 were studying in the high school. Thirty-six students including 6 girls were pursuing higher education including professional courses, after passing their School Secondary Certificate (10th standard Board) examination from Ralegan. Two girls were doing their D.Ed. (Diploma in Education) course to become teachers, four of them were in 12th standard, where like the boys they were also doing different courses in Science, Commerce, Industrial Technical Institute (ITI) and also two

of them were in the Co-operatives Training Institute at Ahmednagar.

Besides these physical achievements, the major objective that the people of Ralegan wanted to accomplish with the help of education was that of making better individuals. For this purpose emphasis is laid on the physical and moral development of children by regular physical exercises, social consciousness and inculcating moral values. The programs/methods adopted include games, music, *yogasanas*, meditation, recitation of Geeta, *Hari-Paath* discussions with students on moral values and superstitions and involvement of students in programs like "Untouchability Eradication Fortnight", *Gram Swarajya* Camps, Adult Education Program, tree plantation and maintaining the village clean program.

Health

1. The important features of Ralegan's development with respect to quality of life have been as follows:
 - Drinking water* : Water shortage during summer months was earlier a perennial problem in Ralegan, giving rise to gastro-intestinal ailments, diarrhoea, guinea-worm infection and many other water borne diseases. By 1986 there were eight bore wells and everyone was getting piped, potable water supply within 100 meters from their residence, without long queues and daily fights.
2. *Disposal of waste water* : Almost every house has a soak-pit outside the house to take care of the waste water coming out of the kitchen and bathroom. In the entire village one does not come across a single standing pool of waste water. Water from the piped water stand posts as well as from the public bathrooms is directed to plants and trees through cement drains.
3. *Public toilets*: Sets of toilets, urinals and bathrooms have been constructed in the village and one can see people queuing up to use them rather than defecating in the open. Public toilets have been connected to *gobar* gas plants and loose soil in the urinals is changed periodically to be used as organic compost.
4. *Gobar gas plants and smokeless chulhas* : Kitchens in Ralegan are not smoke dens any more. 28 *gobar* gas plants (many more have been added recently) and smokeless *chulhas* in 160 households have saved women from respiratory infections and sore red eyes.
5. *Nutrition*: All children in Ralegan look healthy as they get good, nutritious food at home as well as in schools. Fruits, green vegetables and milk have found a place in people's diet once their economic well-being is achieved. Fruits of trees planted on community lands are distributed in the school. The *Balwadi* children get milk as nutritional supplement from the co-operative dairy in the village. The boys staying in the hostel get nutritious meals from the community kitchen. The grain bank run by the village *Tarun Mandal* sees to it that no family in the village faces food shortage during lean periods.
6. *Mental health*: Men and women busy in their gainful vocations feel a sense of achievement when they get adequate information and guidance to improve their lot and required finance from the bank. The men folk are no more victims of vices like alcoholism and women have no longer to drudge for water or fuel every day. The children are receiving good education in the schools. All this has made its impact on the family life which is more peaceful now. The sense of direction and a feeling of

achievement is bound to have due impact on the mental and physical well-being of the people.

7. *Health care services:* The role of health care services cannot be ignored. There is a sub-centre in the village with an ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) staying there. It has responded well to the demand of basic preventive services by the people. The results are that 100% of the children are immunized; all pregnant women get antenatal care and advice including tetanus toxic injections and Iron supplement. Eligible couple protection rate is so high that there are only 4 or 5 couples who are not coming forward for sterilization operation even after three children. Even this high acceptance of planned family norm has come about without any intensive campaign of PHC employees coaxing people or big industrialists offering lucrative incentives. The sub-centre also caters to curative treatment of minor ailments like minor injuries or common fevers.

Conclusion

The report is a reflection of a holistic development taken up by one of the key reformer of the nation. Through the case study, one can gauge how the nation has moved forward in its stride for development in the field of health, education and social development.

Acknowledgement



Fig 1

This is the photo taken with Anna Hazare during the visit. From left to right, my colleagues at CRS, Lucknow during the visit are Parul, Anjali (with Sanskriti, daughter in her lap who is now 18 years old) and the co-author of the article, Jaya, Mishraji, Myself and Atul.

The lead author thanks all the colleagues for their support during the visit. Special thanks for the program managers of CRS, Lucknow who allowed the visit. The language used by the author at that point of time is retained to have the wring essence of the author two decades ago.

References

1. This is a first-hand account of the visit. However, the following references are given as a support to the readers.
2. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anna_Hazare
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna-Hazare>
Website of CRS, Lucknow