

MRS. SHASHI TYAGI

Recipient of the Award in the field of Constructive Work - 2017

Born: July 12, 1947

Mrs. Shashi Tyagi is a straight forward, simple, devoted social worker and an educationist. She along with her husband late Mr. L. Tyagi from Banwasi Sewa Ashram in Uttar Pradesh shifted to Jodhpur, Thar Desert region where their journey of constructive work started in 1980. Padyatras, conducting surveys and working on issues that adversely affected the people and community of the region viz. substance abuse, caste and gender discrimination, pardah system, women seclusion, poor health, illiteracy, water scarcity, etc. were initiated by sensitizing and mobilizing the community. To carry the work in a systematic way the couple founded Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (well known as GRAVIS) in 1983 in Gagadi village, Jodhpur. Water security and watershed development constituted the most important part of GRAVIS work, with the guidance of Mrs. Tyagi, Secretary of GRAVIS.

The objectives are to * Work for vulnerable and most needy groups * Develop self-reliant rural communities * Community involvement and sustainability * Blend traditional wisdom with modern sciences * Facilitate networking and linkages. Some of the areas of work include:

- Watershed development and management
- Agriculture and afforestation
- Animal Husbandry Women Empowerment
- Primary Education
- Healthcare
- Rights of the mine workers

GRAVIS works in the northwest region of Rajasthan across six districts viz. Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Nagaur, Jaipur and Barmer covering around 1200 villages and serving about 1.2 million people.

Village Development Committees: GRAVIS helped formation of community based organizations called Village Development Committees (VDCs). It has around thirty per cent women representation. Mrs. Tyagi and her GRAVIS team guide and facilitate the VDCs to address pertinent issues, ensure people's participation and implement developmental programs initiated by Smt. Tyagi as well as those introduced under government schemes.

Watershed development and management: GRAVIS used both traditional as well as modern scientific methods for conserving and storing rain water. The traditional ones are Khadin (bund construction), Taanka (rainwater harvested for drinking water), Naadi (village pond) and Beri (percolation well). Constructing khadins resulted in soil moisture retention and two fold increase in crop yield. Emphasis was also laid on farming development. Mrs. Tyagi's inputs have supported commercial cultivation of vegetables and watermelons in the desert region. GRAVIS engages itself in training programs and creating awareness on water and soil retention in the catchment areas and commercial farming activities.

Also the major problem of access to drinking water in the desert region was adversely affecting the lives of the women and young girls. GRAVIS initiated construction of taankas for each house, especially for people with no access to village water supply system. A taanka generally meets the requirements of a family's water supply for 6-9 months and for the other months families rely on wells or naadis (village ponds). This helped in reducing the drudgery of the women and girls could go to school. GRAVIS makes the facility available on two conditions i.e. the taanka must be in the name of the woman in the family and the girls in the family should be sent to school. Till date 6,635 taankas have been constructed and have benefitted over 10,000 families. This model is widely

accepted and replicated in the region.

People were made aware of the importance of water storage and its effective management, and public partnership helped achieve the results. This has eliminated migration from the village and has increased revenues from the fields.

Afforestation and Seed Banks: GRAVIS helped in developing village forests, pastures, gochars (grazing land), and arid horticulture units. This benefitted not only the humans and animals, but also helped growing the non-cultivated plants of this region, viz. Sources of fodder, firewood and Ayurvedic medicines. Seed banks have allowed villagers to stock seeds to meet crisis situation, and women also use this facility to provide seed loan.

Horticulture: To encourage vegetable and fruit cultivation, and to ensure a balanced diet and prevent malnutrition; Mrs. Tyagi initiated horticulture. GRAVIS resources and expertise help the rural people in their development.

Farmers' Associations / Clubs: To increase awareness of farming practices in the arid conditions; knowledge exchange through workshops, training and exposure visits are conducted. Around 75 Farmers' Clubs are formed, which has facilitated in improvement in crop cultivation, expansion and livestock management. Kisan credit cards are issued to the farmers.

Mrs. Tyagi gives importance to community involvement for creating a sustainable and self-reliant society. Once water was available to the communities, GRAVIS could expand its activities in other areas like education, women's literacy, health, forming women's self-help groups, strengthening vulnerable groups like old age people and mine workers, etc.

Women Self Help Groups (SHGs): GRAVIS helped formation of over 1650 SHGs comprising around 19,500 members. Interventions include leadership development, capacity building, micro finance, girl child education and health care. Embroidery, tailoring, general provision shops are some of the livelihood activities carried out by the groups. They are also trained to be Pashu Sakhiyas for animal healthcare, nutrition and overall care.

Education: Children's education and especially, girl child education is close to Mrs. Tyagi's heart. She started primary school educational programme. Till date, GRAVIS has set up 98 schools in the Thar Desert, out of which 46 are handed over to the government or the community. So far 7200 children are enrolled in primary education. The curriculum mainly focuses on village related topics viz. environment, health, hygiene, life skills, peace, etc.

Serving the Mining Community: Realizing the challenges faced by the mineworkers, Mrs. Tyagi has been regularly campaigning and sensitizing mineworkers on their living and working conditions; developing synergies between mine owners, workers and the government authorities for their healthcare and children's education, etc. Around 1,50,000 mineworkers are covered and benefitted from health camps. Mrs. Tyagi advocated the rights of the silicosis infected victims. GRAVIS has set up 9 schools for the mine worker's children, and helped in prevention and control of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, on a large scale.

Healthcare: A 50 bed GRAVIS hospital in Tinwari, in Jodhpur, was set up in 2000. In addition to providing healthcare services, it also identifies and links patients to other hospitals for major and minor surgeries and illnesses. In 2003, an eye care unit was set up to treat glaucoma, night blindness. So far over 19,000 surgeries have been carried out. Village youth are trained to be Village Health Workers and eye care workers.

Human Resources: Youngsters were motivated and their efforts are systematically and productively channelized. Many of the earlier trainees are now working with GRAVIS and some have set up organisations. GRAVIS has a work force of over 175 full time and 400 part time people, working across its 15 field centres and with 10 local NGO partners across Thar.

Awards and Associations: Mrs. Shashi Tyagi's services have been well recognised by awards at

various levels viz. •Anadi-Kamal Award presented by the Voluntary Health Association of India
• Ram Krishna Jaydayal Dalmiya Award. She is on the board and an advisor for several national and international organisations. Smt Tyagi has been invited to many organisations and universities in Norway, France, Italy, the US, UK, Germany, Finland, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to present the GRAVIS model of Gandhain work. For the last 20 years, Mrs. Shashi Tyagi is also actively engaged in Sarvodaya Vichar Exams.

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