



Endow next generation with nature

As narrated in this column last week, the "do I really need it?" philosophy of a potter enlightened the author in such a way that he gave up a habit of nearly 40 years — plucking a few leaves and crushing them in his hands. Read on to know more about his encounters...

Following my conversation with Karimbhai at Jessore in the Balaram sanctuary area, the question "do I really need it" formed a guiding principle in my relationship with nature. We should nurture it and with this, I am reminded of the fact that the largest number of chabutras is in north Gujarat.

I tend to wonder about this kind of culture, at a time and a place where there was not much food or entertainment for oneself, during a period when there was no irrigation but only

rainfall. There are institutions, common property institutions, which people have developed without any outside intervention, collecting 30 to 40 kg of grain from households to feed the birds every day.

In fact, Ahmedabad itself has a number of societies with these bird-feeding platforms. On the road leading to Parimal garden, there is a small tea stall and a chabutra right on the pavement. I was talking to my students as we took a walk in the city during a course I teach. I asked them to find out who maintains it, who feeds the birds, who fills the water? As it turns out, it was the chaiwala and the people sitting around who would do all that. Now imagine, when people do not have enough for themselves, they still provide for nature. Actually, they do not provide for na-

ture, they let nature touch their through the feeding of the birds.

I get up every morning listening to these birds. At lunch, the first roti goes to the birds, every day for many years now. I don't give them anything; in fact, they give me something. And the attitude that these birds have! Some will not eat unless I place the food where they are. The meal must come to them. At least it seems to me that way. So many birds come in: mynas, dugglers; and there are even squirrels.

What I am trying to say is that this culture, which provides for the enrichment and nourishment of nature, even when it does not have enough for itself, is one that is not of yesteryear.

We cannot say it was alright at one time and not today. On the contrary, it is all the more necessary today. With the great onslaught of urbanisation, I feel that small places have been left behind. So let me conclude by stating what, in the contemporary context, a few things we can do are. Many special economic zones (SEZs) are being developed in Gujarat. The farmers are compensated for their land, but what



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MINDS ON THE MARGIN

about nature? Can we not make it obligatory for people, anybody

for that matter, to provide at least one per cent of their land as a nature reserve, which will be accessible to others at no fee, and for the conservation of the biodiversity on that plot. So let us ensure that we believe that nature has been very kind and generous, and that every industrialist, every urban authority and every SEZ voluntarily agree to place one per cent of their land as an institute conservation area.

For a person with 5,000 hectares of land, giving 50 will not be a large offering. He will be blessed by his grandchildren, who help him build the conserve. And he will be blessed by the grandchildren in the community. So let us not wait for an incentive from the state. It is but a small individual venture.

TO BE CONCLUDED....