

SAMRAKSHAN TRUST

ANNUAL REPORT
2003-04



A Year of Consolidation and Introspection



VILLAGE AGRAA, VIJEY PUR SUBDIVISION
DISTRICT SHEOPUR
MADHYA PRADESH, INDIA

Registration number
2872 of additional book IV, Vol. no. 2777
dated 19/8/1999

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PART 1 ABOUT SAMRAKSHAN

Vision and Mission

'Samrakshan' in Sanskrit means protection or conservation. Samrakshan works for conservation of biodiversity and promotion of equitable and sustainable livelihoods for remote rural communities subsisting in or around biodiverse areas of India. Samrakshan believes that to be sustainable and equitable, nature conservation must be based upon participation of the community in efforts to protect and regenerate the natural resource base, such that they can share equitably in the gains accruing from conservation.

Forest-dependant local communities compete with wild flora and fauna in drawing sustenance resources from forests. The focus of Samrakshan's work is on engaging the communities in activities that promote efficient husbandry of locally available natural resources. Samrakshan promotes conjunctive use of available resources to raise agricultural productivity by improving the water regime, introducing sustainable irrigation and boosting soil productivity, thereby improving livelihood security of the natural resource dependent poor while simultaneously contributing to biodiversity conservation.

The Kuno Initiative

This, the very first of Samrakshan's field interventions, is located in the villages surrounding the Kuno wildlife sanctuary in district Sheopur in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Samrakshan has been working since 1999 with the predominantly tribal villages that were displaced from Kuno sanctuary as a consequence of the ambitious lion reintroduction programme of the Government of India. During 1999-2001, Samrakshan focused on assisting the displaced villagers in accessing rehabilitation benefits through information dissemination and intensive liaison with government agencies. From 2002 onwards, Samrakshan has been working with the villages surrounding the sanctuary on livelihood security, education and health, with special focus on building strong community institutions for soil and water conservation, sustainable agriculture, cultivation of medicinal plants, and revival of indigenous health traditions.

Target Area and People

Samrakshan's field office is located in village Agraa, 26 km from the nearest town of Vijeypur, and the villages we work in are linked to Vijeypur by a fair weather road. Our interventions are spread over around 20 villages (comprising nearly 1400 families, or about 7,000 people) that have been relocated from the nearby Kuno wildlife sanctuary and resettled around village Agraa. Over 90 per cent of the population of this region belongs to the Sahariya Scheduled Tribe, and our interventions focus especially on households (tribal and non-tribal) that have faced serious disruption of livelihood due to displacement.

The Sahariya tribals, who have been the prime focus of Samrakshan's interventions in this region, have historically inhabited the belt along the Rajasthan-Madhya Pradesh border. Traditionally almost completely dependent upon forests for survival, livelihood security of this group has become threatened increasingly with the decline in forest area in their range. The Sahariya traditionally engaged in subsistence agriculture to supplement products and income obtained from the forest. It has been argued that a large proportion of the Sahariya are only first or second-generation cultivators, whose exposure to improved agricultural techniques is limited. Over time, however, the community's dependence on agriculture has been rising with decreasing access to forest based livelihood sources.



Approach: Working through Community Institutions

Samrakshan believes that poverty alleviation initiatives must be implemented through appropriate institutions that are community based and fully participatory. This is critical for allocation of scarce resources towards development of social infrastructure in a manner that generates maximum social returns, and to keep tab on the end uses of the infrastructure so created. This also helps to fine-tune the development strategy in line with specifics of the particular village in question, keeping in mind local conditions such as soil, rainfall, topography, forest type, landholding pattern, social structure, crop regime and so on. We have learnt that for the alleviation of chronic poverty, it is not sufficient to provide the poor with just forward and backward linkages related to their livelihood (for instance, access to credit). Indeed, a very important input relates to **linking the poor sideways** with others who share their concerns, and with whom their relationship is non-exploitative and based on mutual trust.

This is the crux of the argument for **building institutions of the poor**. These institutions would then lead the process of collective introspection, participatory planning, training, capacity building and exposure, and implementation of community and self-help based solutions. Such institutions can help the people break the “culture of poverty”, re-establish their faith in their own ability to raise themselves to a higher level of 'functioning' and 'being', and reclaim the spaces lost to them in the course of their marginalisation

Samrakshan's major initiatives

Samrakshan works in the areas of

- **Agriculture improvement** including seed improvement, soil improvement, protection of crops, mixed cropping and improved methods of cultivation, handling, storage and marketing. We are working on a pilot project for crop security with a group of small and marginal farmers hand-picked from around 10 villages, who are being encouraged to adopt locally appropriate techniques of sustainable agriculture to develop their farms as models which others can then emulate.
- **Natural resource management** to improve soil and water conservation regime in this extremely dry and arid region, necessary for securing livelihoods of the local community. Under this initiative, Samrakshan has undertaken participatory drought relief and drought proofing activities, including field bunding, agricultural field fencing and construction of various water harvesting structures.
- **Formation of institutions of the poor** as the preferred instrument for planning, implementing and monitoring all our village and sub-village level interventions, and for generating savings for promotion of micro-credit and self-help practices.
- **Primary education** aimed at imparting literacy as well as life skills and values like self-help and self-reliance: Our education project targets the population of 10 villages through 5 small primary schools, called Asha schools, run by young men drawn from the local community, in villages that are so far un-serviced by the network of government schools
- **Cultivation of medicinal plants** for income generation and revival of indigenous health practices, with training and technical help from organizations like BAIF, Pune. For this a two-pronged strategy has been adopted. First a nursery is being established to conserve the local herbs and to assist the village in cultivating these species on a larger scale, so that local use as well as sale of medicinal plants can be revived and then increased. Second, we are attempting to revive dying knowledge of indigenous medical practices and promote use of medicinal plants for home remedies, through intensive documentation of these practices, establishment of an Ayurveda clinic, and training of selected women and men as indigenous healers.



The Samrakshan Team

Field Team

S. No.	Name	Designation	Work Profile
1.	Syed Merajuddin	Team Leader	Overall coordination of all programme activities
2.	Ritesh Pandey	Coordinator	Agriculture initiative (farmers' mobilization and on-farm technical support)
3.	Er. Shailendra Pathak	Coordinator	Soil and Water Conservation initiative
4.	Dr. Balram Rajee	Coordinator	Arogya indigenous health practices initiative
5.	Priyanka Gaur	Coordinator	Asha education initiative
6.	Ramlal Adivasi	Village level worker	Agriculture initiative
7.	Rajesh Kushwah	Village level worker	Organizational administration and accounting; logistics support to community institutions
8.	Dayakishan Kushwah	Village level worker	Soil and water conservation initiative
9.	Roshan Adivasi	Village level worker	Arogya indigenous health practices initiative
10.	Santosh Kushwah	Teacher	Asha school teacher at village Ladar
11.	Naresh Adivasi	Teacher	Asha school teacher at village Ladar
12.	Maniram Adivasi	Teacher	Asha school teacher at village Durreddi
13.	Shrilal Kushwah	Teacher	Asha school teacher at village Durreddi
14.	Baisram Adivasi	Teacher	Asha school teacher at village Jakhoda

Head Office

Asmita Kabra Asmita is a founder-trustee of Samrakshan, engaged in the planning, coordination, documentation, fundraising, networking, and advocacy aspects of the organization's work in Madhya Pradesh. She is a lecturer in Economics at the University of Delhi, and is involved with the Kuno project in an honorary capacity since its inception, specializing in issues relating to rehabilitation and sustainable livelihoods.

PART 2 HIGHLIGHTS OF 2003-04

This year, we focused on reviewing the work we had done over the past few years, and decided that we needed to spend time on building and strengthening systems, building our own as well as community capacity in various fields, and introspect collectively. This was important for us, so that progress made in the past few years could be taken forward in the future with greater force and direction. Thus, 2003-04 was a year of "Introspection and Consolidation" for us. This theme was reflected throughout the year in nearly all interventions taken up by the organization.

Sustainable Agriculture: Training, capacity-building and credit support The Pilot Project for Crop Security

- To propagate sustainable methods of organic farming among tribal farmers, a pilot project was initiated in 2003 with 10 farmers selected from 10 different villages to demonstrate techniques of sustainable dry-land agriculture using a methodology derived after careful study of similar exercises being carried out by other organizations.
- Samrakshan initially provided the seed fund for this initiative, but over the year, the farmers were also encouraged to generate their own savings by forming a self-help group.
- The members of this *Bajra Kisaan Samooh* (the Bajra Farmers' Group – the name chosen by this group for itself) were provided assistance with procuring high quality indigenous seeds from the Agriculture College, Gwalior, for the monsoon and winter crops.
- Samrakshan assisted them in practices like boulder fencing and bunding of fields, application of organic farmyard manure and better techniques of sowing, all of which resulted in significant gains in farm output for the group members.



Village level Intervention for Crop and Food security

In village Agraa, Samrakshan continued with the village level intervention initiated last year for collective food and crop security.

- The tribal households in Agraa were encouraged to form a fully participatory Village Development Committee (VDC), which has been engaged in regular savings and credit activities for generating its own resources.
- Samrakshan assisted the members of this VDC with developing and implementing methods of accounting and bookkeeping, to foster independent functioning of this institution.
- Credit support was provided to individual member households for procuring irrigation through open wells, creating a common crop protection wall, and purchasing bullocks to break out of their traditional dependence on influential tractor owners.
- As a result of these interventions, in the year 2003-04, the tribal households in Agraa cultivated not just its traditional rain-fed monsoon crop, but also an impressive winter crop of wheat, mustard and black gram. Farm output and productivity showed significant improvements over the previous years this year.

In village Barrer, the VDC formed with Samrakshan's support successfully implemented the village livelihood plan.

- An expenditure of over Rs.200,000 was made in soil improvement, nallah treatment, field bunding and provision of improved indigenous seeds for the monsoon and winter crops.

- All activities were implemented through the VDC, which maintained proper books of accounts and records for each expense.
- A bumper crop of Bajra was harvested in October-November 2003; however, performance in the winter crop fell way below expectations and potential due to problematic intra-village dynamics.

Soil and Water Conservation: Consolidation and capacity building

The Samrakshan soil and water conservation (SWC) team consolidated its own capacity during the year through training programmes and systematic watershed planning for its target villages. Cadastral maps and topographical sheets were obtained, delineation of watershed areas and detailed surveys and mapping of nallahs were completed, and designs and cost estimates prepared for various water harvesting structures.

Medicinal Plants Cultivation: A new initiative

Samrakshan launched its medicinal plants project during 2003-04 with technical assistance from a range of esteemed organizations and individuals, with the twin objectives of augmenting farm incomes and reviving indigenous health traditions.

- A nursery-cum-demonstration plot was set up at Samrakshan's field centre in village Agraa. Planting material for medicinal plants as well as vegetables, trees and other useful plants is being developed at the nursery.
- A demonstration vermi-compost unit has been set up within the nursery, and other methods of producing farmyard manure and compost have been demonstrated on the nursery.
- A herbal medicine garden is being developed next to the nursery to disseminate information and planting material for species useful in producing herbal home remedies.
- Samrakshan launched the *Sanjeevani* medicinal plants cultivation programme in May 2003 with around 20 farmers, who have been provided with training and planting material for selected species of medicinal plants to be cultivated on their agricultural fields.

Women's mobilization: Self-help groups in 3 villages

- This year, Samrakshan launched its women's mobilization initiative in villages Paira Adivasi, Ladar and Agraa, where a total of 10 SHGs were set up to promote small savings and foster credit management among the members.
- The Samrakshan team received intensive training in the concept and practice of SHGs at MYRADA in Karnataka.
- The groups have already begun loaning out small amounts among their members, and our team is now concentrating on capacity building among group members to set up sound processes of documentation, accounting and bookkeeping.



The Education Initiative

- Continuing the Asha education initiative into its third year, we consolidated the 7 Asha schools being run earlier by Samrakshan into 3 schools, all of which function out of government school buildings that are presently lying unutilized.
- The schools cater to 11 villages and 265 children, out of which one thirds are girls.
- This year, 33 children from the Asha schools appeared as private candidates for the Class 5 examination held by the MP State Education Board. Thus, children who had so far been deprived of primary education got linked effectively to the formal education network and are now ready to join government schools as students of Class 6.
- Samrakshan continued to innovate with interesting teaching methods in the Asha schools, and organized activities like nature walks, indoor and outdoor games and small inter-school sports sessions to enliven the routine of our students.
- The annual Bal Mela (Children's Festival) of the Asha schools was organized on February 29, 2004, and the daylong event generated much enthusiasm among children through participation in plays, songs, dances, recitation and painting sessions.
- An educational society called Adharshila Shiksha Samiti was registered under the relevant state laws of Madhya Pradesh, such that the Asha schools now have formal government recognition and can conduct examinations for students of Classes 1 to 4 in the coming academic year.

PART 3 PARTNERSHIPS AND VISITORS

Donors

The following organisations supported Samrakshan over the past year:

- UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme
- Sir Ratan Tata Trust, India
- ASHA for Education, USA: Silicon Valley chapter
- The Whitley Awards Foundation, UK
- The Barbara Delano Foundation, USA
- Association for India's Development, USA: Portland chapter
- The Global Greengrants Fund
- Trustees and various individual donors



Technical Support and Training

- A 3-member team from BAIF, Pune visited our field office to provide technical support for cultivation of medicinal plants
- The entire field team visited the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Gwalior for exposure to dairy farming.
- The agriculture team visited and otherwise interacted with KVK Gwalior on various occasions for inputs relating to kharif and rabi crops.
- The agriculture team attended a training organized by AFPRO at Gwalior
- A joint team from the head office and the field team visited MYRADA, Chitradurga for a 4-day training in women's mobilization and micro-credit
- Shri RP Agrawal and Shri Moiuddin from SRIJAN visited us to train the field team in soil and water conservation methods
- Accounting systems for the field office as well as for the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) supported by Samrakshan were strengthened with technical support from our Chartered Accountants, Kumar Narang & Company, Delhi

Visitors

The field team benefited greatly from visits by the following persons last year:

- James Minter of the Washington DC chapter made a site visit as volunteer for ASHA for Education, USA
- Anirudh Mookerjee of the Wildlife Trust of India made yet another visit to help us with photo-documentation of our work

