

Respecting nature and water...

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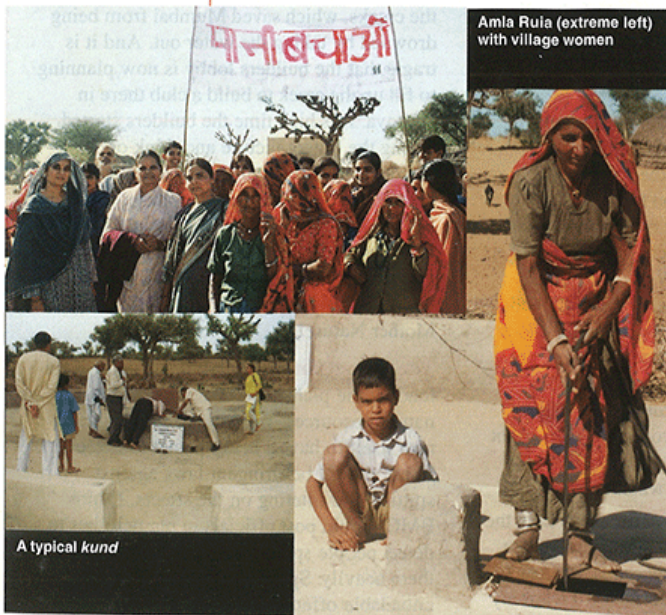
In city or in village, water needs to be saved

Recently as I was talking to Amla Ruia, wife of Ashok Ruia of Phoenix Mills, what struck me was the not so apparent similarity between the two different projects she is involved with. One, in the heart of Mumbai city and the other in a remote Ramgarh Shekhavat village in Rajasthan. Through the former, she is trying to instill in school children, the value of rain harvesting, water conservation and the greatness of nature and through the latter she has repaired and constructed over 100 drinking water *Kunds* (tanks) in the last four years with the help of Ramgarh Vikas Trust. "We supply material to the villagers who are willing to provide labor and masonry," says Amla.

"The design of the *kund* helps collect filtered fresh rain water and also helps water to remain fresh and potable all year round. Not only the drudgery of carrying daily supply of water from long distance is done away with, the availability

instructed to keep the *kund* and the catchment area clean all the times. The availability of water has also encouraged tree plantation.

Back home, tucked away in a quiet corner on the side of Hanging Gardens in Malabar Hill in Mumbai is Shantivan, a sanctuary of green – herbal and tropical plants. The one and a half acres of municipal land was retrieved from antisocial elements seven years back by Amritlal Gosalia, a dedicated environmentalist and naturopath. Though it was made a herbal garden, the transformation into Shantivan happened only a couple of years ago. "It happened," says Amla, "maybe due to divine intervention". The place is child friendly and provides peace and tranquility helping children and even adults come close to nature and divinity." There are nature trek, 'river of life', waterfalls, amphitheatre, glass bridge, acupressure path, place for yoga, reading and painting and varieties of herbs and plants for children to feel, appreciate and learn. Children are



Amla Rula (extreme left) with village women

A typical kund

of water also leads to better hygiene and health. Above all is the relief one gets seeing the smiling faces of the women." Another important aspect was to select sites in areas with high fluoride content or with saline water. Both cause damage to the health of the villagers. The villagers are



Children at Shantivan

shown how water is collected, waterfalls are created and how the water returns to the tank. They also learn the finer aspects of gardening. "We tell them stories and how to respect nature by giving back to it what one takes, by not destroying it and by keeping the environment clean." No wonder some of the letters written by school children who enjoyed nature trail reflect this. A thank you note from J.B.Petit School children says, "Shantivan brought us closer to creation. We will now remember to treat nature with more respect." Rima Sheth, who is associated with Shantivan says that assistance can be offered to schools to start and run nature clubs. Now that 'Environment' is being considered to be included in the regular school curricula, this is a thought in the right direction.

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