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**AT A GLANCE**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This is earth, a planet filled with rich biodiversity, with over a million species who have all peacefully coexisted for billions of years. This blue planet is also the home to us, humans, who have been awarded with the higher powers of reasoning and intelligence. In our quest to understand the mysteries of life, we have tried to comprehend the workings of nature. But with all the advancement in knowledge, came the power to control and exploit. The Industrial Revolution marked a major turning point in the Earth’s ecology and humans’ relationship with the environment. In just the past 3 centuries, the planet's ecology has worsened drastically; more than it ever was, in the last billion years! The result of all our progress – crowded cities, exploitation of nature and its elements, poverty, food crisis and most importantly imbalanced lifestyles.

Foreseeing the doom of the modern civilization, His Divine Grace Srila A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness prophesized the need to adopt an ecofriendly lifestyle. For demonstrating the principles of Eco living, Srila Prabhupada, stressed on developing farm communities as they present the only sustainable way of leading a life which is physically, mentally, socially, economically, spiritually and environmentally friendly. He said, “The Krishna consciousness movement is therefore establishing various farms to show how to be happy and content with minimum necessities of life and to save time for self-realization, which one can very easily achieve by chanting the maha-mantra—Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.”

To fulfill the dream of his spiritual master, Radhanath Swami, the spiritual mentor at ISKCON Chowpatty, envisioned a farm community in India highlighting the importance of living in harmony with nature, and inspired his followers to serve the society by setting up a model farm community - Govardhan Eco Village.

**OUR VISION**

Govardhan Eco Village (GEV) illustrates ‘Simple Living & High Thinking’ – a principle which is so succinct, yet profound, and formed the basis of life in the bygone age of wisdom. Life in the Vedic times was focused on Service, but not on exploitation; this was the cardinal rule of living and the very essence of people’s dealings - with each other and that with Mother Nature. Earth, called as Bhoomi Devi, is the consort of Lord Vishnu. So living in harmony with mother earth means to honor her and live a way that replenishes rather than exploit her and then utilize what ever resources she gives us, by her grace, in the service of Lord.

**ACTIVITIES OF GEV**

Govardhan Eco Village, is a farm community spread over a scenic landscape of 63 acres at the Galtare village, situated 110 km North of Mumbai. Since its inception in the year 2003, Govardhan Eco Village has made steady progress in organic farming, cow protection, rural education, women empowerment, rural development, alternative energy and several other aspects of sustainable living.

The purpose behind Govardhan Eco Village is two fold one is to present a sustainable community model and second is to educate people in the field of traditional sciences including Yoga and spirituality. For any system to be sustainable it must be replenishing the source. The modern industrial systems, with little or no concept of recycling, only deplete the natural resources proving detrimental to nature. On the other hand, the Vedic lifestyle emphasizes on harmony with nature and its elements and advocates closed loop lifestyles that replenish nature. The fundamental principle of vedic lifestyle is a lifestyle based on Goraksha – cowprotection and Krshi – agriculture. The sacred ancient scriptures hail the Cow as the Mother and the Bull as the father. The Cow provides us with milk and the Bulls supply us food grains by tilling the land, thus facilitating agriculture. And the fresh green grasses that are produced as the output of farming act as fodder for the cows. Thus we see a wonderful harmony between Cow-protection and Agriculture, creating a sustainable natural cycle.

**GOSHALA**

The Goshala at Govardhan Eco Village was started in 2003 with only 9 cows & bulls. Today the number has risen to 62 and is expected to reach 100 in the next few years. Cow protection is the foundation of what GEV represents. We believe that Cow protection is not just about protecting them from slaughter, but giving them respect and love and making them happy from the moment they are born till they naturally leave their bodies. Cow protection is about expressing our gratitude for the wonderful gifts that Cows have given to human society. Cows bless us with milk, the miracle food that nourishes our entire body. Ayurveda, the most ancient and versatile medical science in the world, describes Cow urine as highly medicinal, and which can be utilized to make many medicinal products like Health Pills, tonics, Eye drops, Nasal drops, Pain Balms etc., all of which have been demonstrated at Govardhan Eco Village. Cow dung, which is highly antiseptic, is being used to manufacture many chemical free lifestyle products like Bathing Powder, Tooth Powder, Insence sticks etc.

**ALTERNATIVE ENERGY**

Cow dung can also be used to produce electricity using Biogas plants. At Govardhan Eco Village we demonstrate this utility in our 30 cubic feet Biogas plant that produces Biogas for cooking and electricity generation. When cow dung is mixed with water and fed to a biogas plant, it undergoes anaerobic digestion producing methane gas. And after digestion the left over slurry rich in nitrogen and other elements is a top grade organic fertilizer.

**ORGANIC FARMING**

At Govardhan Eco Village we strictly advocate chemical free farming. Agriculture today is all about converting petrol into food with heavy dependence on petrol at every stage. With the rising prices of petrol and depleting oil reserves, the food security of tomorrow is at threat. Organic farming helps us reduce our dependence on oil and also ensures food uncontaminated by toxic pesticides residues. At Govardhan Eco Village, we are constantly striving to bring about a cultural revolution by blending the wisdom of traditional farming practices and the convenience of modern technology. Farming here is completely done employing native seed varieties, which are a rarity today. Using manure and other chemical free alternatives like vermiwash, the requirements for chemical fertilizers and pesticides is completely avoided. Bull-driven ploughing systems are being used demonstrating the utility & importance of cow-protection. Simultaneously some of the modern practices like micro sprinklers, drip systems, pheromone traps are also being employed, creating a perfect harmony of traditional and modern technologies. We understand that the culture of Eco-friendly living has to be brought about by first changing our attitude towards nature, and organic farming is a major step towards this change.

**RURAL EDUCATION**

Education plays a key role in bring this transformation of attitude. Govardhan Eco Village also houses Lady Northcote Hindu Orphanage, a very unique rural school catering to the educational needs of about 50 children. With excellent teaching staff and idyllic setting of peaceful rural surroundings, the school offers the right kind of setup conducive for learning. Sporting in the vast playgrounds of Govardhan Eco Village, all the students are provided wonderful physical training ensuring that the healthy mind stays in a healthy body. Providing farm fresh vegetables and milk, all nutritional requirements of the students are taken care of. And nourishing their inner self, a comprehensive spiritual training is offered to all the students teaching them how to make a life and not just a living. Lady Northcote Hindu Orphanage offers a complete package of academic & spiritual education, training in traditional technologies, moral values and principle centered lifestyle in an atmosphere of love and care.

**RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Community development in rural areas is one of the areas of prime focus for Govardhan Eco Village. As part of this initiative, GEV, in collaboration with BAIF, has been conducting developmental programs for rural and tribal communities in Wada Block of Thane District. The aim of the project is to benefit 500 tribal families over period of five years. The project activities started with 7 tribal villages located around GEV in Galtare in Wada block of Thane District. The overall objective of the program is to improve the standard and quality of living of the poor tribal families through a holistic and enabling program approach. This is being achieved by helping the tribal families to develop productive assets such as a 'Wadi' - an integrated farming system comprising of horticulture, agriculture and dairy or other non-farm enterprises, to enable them to earn substantial and sustainable livelihood over a long term period. Simultaneously, there is need for a thrust to tackle the root causes of poor health and improve the quality of living, particularly of women.

Also with the help of doctors from the Bhaktivedanta hospital, GEV is operating two clinics in Galtare and Hamrapur villages providing free treatment and consultancy to many villagers. In addition to that, they have conducted many health camps in villages around Galtare.

The proposed program thus primarily aims at

* Food Security and Poverty Alleviation
* Improving the health status of the community
* Increasing the asset base of the tribals
* Empowerment of women

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

The Vedic culture protected women as the most precious part of the society. Women, in their role as mothers, take up the major responsibility of imparting the right values in children. The mother is the first teacher and hence the entire value system of the society at large becomes dependent on women. Drawing inspiration from this Vedic model, special women empowerment programs are being run at Govardhan Eco Village. The women in the Farm community have started a cottage industry channelizing their time and energy in a productive way. Some of their major activities are:

* Khakara making
* News paper bags making
* Handicrafts & Bamboo products making

In order to improve the quality of living of the tribal women, the Wadi program is playing a major role. A strong emphasis is placed on organizing women through the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and building their capacities by training and exposure visits. Thus a holistic developmental program is being campaigned by Govardhan Eco Village, improving the quality of lives in rural India, empowering women, enlightening the rural youth and all by creating an awareness about protecting and caring the environment.

**RURAL OUTREACH**

Fulfilling the desire of Srila Prabhupada, the founder acharya of ISKCON, Govardhan Eco Village has been conducting various spiritual & cultural events in the near by villages, rekindling the spirit of Vedic living. GEV is also coming up with a new temple in its campus for Their Lordships Sri Sri Radha & Krishna. Being built completely with Eco friendly technologies, this new temple would be one of its kind in the world.

**NATURAL BUILDING**

To serve our guests and visitors GEV is also coming up with unique earthen homes, which create a perfect ambiance to relax and rejuvenate in a natural and Eco-friendly way. Modern buildings, made from highly processed materials are not only damaging to the environment but also have various toxic effects on us. Traditionally, houses were made from natural materials with little or no processing. Such houses provide extraordinary comfort even in harsh climates and most importantly have a soothing effect on the human psyche. At Govardhan Eco Village we have successfully implemented three types of earthen homes namely

* Rammed Earth houses
* Cob houses
* Compressed stabilized earth block homes

**Cob house**

Recreating the look and feel of a traditional hut, the walls of the cob house is made stacking layers of clay, sand and straw. When dried, these layers form hard stone like walls which can adapt to any climatic condition and can last for even upto 700 years! With a thatched roof made from straw, these houses create the rich nostalgic feeling of a rural setting, amidst the beautiful mango orchids at GEV.

**CSEB houses**

On the other hand the houses made from compressed stabilized earth blocks have the look and feel of any modern house, with the same comfort and luxury of any modern urban dwelling. And unlike the red bricks which are made by baking soil, these mud blocks are sun-dried and retain the earths natural property of remaining cool in summer and warm in winter. Thus they offer saving in electricity for cooling and heating systems, reducing the emission of green house gases.

**Rammed Earth house**

GEV also houses a rammed earth house that was built in 2006.

**Facility for Alternative Construction Technologies (FACT)**

GEV is planning to make more models of earthen homes in the campus. The idea behind this is to train several interesting students in traditional building methods.

**Upcoming Radha Krishna Temple & Vrindavan Forest**

The upcoming year, come to Govardhan Eco Village for an experience of a lifetime! Come experience a unique place of pilgrimage. At GEV we are recreating Vrindavan – the holy abode of Lord Krishna, with a replica of its forests depicting the wonderful pastimes of the Lord. Nestled amidst the grooves of these forests, experience Radha kunda, Shyama kunda and many other sacred places of pilgrimage. Govardhan Ashram offers a spiritual haven, away from the hustle and bustle of the mad city, where in you can rejuvenate your body, mind and the soul. Also a gorgeous Radha Krishna temple would manifest in the upcoming year.

Come, experience the Vedic life centered on Cows and Agriculture. Experience the rich ancient heritage of India, in a comfortable setting at Govardhan Ashram. People from various areas of interests and expertise have come together and formed a multi-talented team for the development of the Govardhan Eco Village project. Every construction at GEV is so craftfully made to be in harmony with nature and its elements.

**GOVARDHAN ASHRAM**

**Registrations & Accommodations**

Guests arriving at GEV are given a warm reception at Vrindaseva sadan, our reception center, portraying the culture of Vedic guest reception. Guests have multiple options for stay. They can either choose to stay in comfortable individual rooms at our Bhakta Nivas building or opt for a private cottage at Nityananda Ashram or Chaitanya ashram. In total, Govardhan Ashram houses 21 rooms, each accommodating 4-6 persons.

**Naimisharanya (Amenities)**

With the main emphasis on education and awareness, at Govardhan Ashram we have the Naimisharanya building housing an auditorium, seminar halls, conference hall with projector facility and a library. Naimisharanya is available for the use of corporates for their seminars and official meetings. Naimisharanya is also open for the youth for personality development workshops etc. Devotees can organize their satsang programs in the seminar halls. With regular seminars and educational tours for guests and schools, the Govardhan ashram hopes to create awareness about adopting Eco-friendly lifestyles centered about the timeless Vedic wisdom. Guests can also have their programs in the Govardhan Ashram facility.

**Nursery**

With many medicinal, herbal, flower and ornamental plants, the Nursery at GEV is another major attraction for the visitors. Govardhan Ashram is planning for a Herbal garden with rare medicinal and herbal plants would be an additional attraction for this nursery.

**Wellness center**

Govardhan Ashram also houses a state of the art wellness center with special facilities like Pancakarma, steam bath, massaging etc. Consultancy facility with authentic Ayurvedic doctors is also provided for the visitors.

**Children’s play area**

A special adventure sports area has also been made to entertain our bustling young guests. Several adventure games designed based on Ramayana and Mahabharata will excite the kids giving them a special experience of its kind.

**Swimming pool and Bathhouse**

A swimming pool with a bathhouse facility is also available for our guests for that special relaxing experience. Close to the wellness center, this 4 feet deep swimming pool can be utilized by everyone.

**Packages**

At Govardhan Ashram, the guests can opt for variety of experiences. If you are a nature lover, experience the beauty of rural India, touring the near by villages and get trained in handicrafts and tribal art. Or if you are an adventure seeker, try trekking up the mount Kohoj and spend a night camping on the hill top, along with many other exciting adventurous sports. Experience outdoor sports. There are many more packages that Govardhan Ashram offers that include Spiritual retreats, Meditation retreats, yoga retreats, health retreats education retreats etc catering to range of audience.

**Boating pond**

Govardhan Ashram houses a 1 crore litre boating pond adjacent to the huge mountain Kohoj. Viewing the mountain dressed in green while boating in the fresh waters of this huge pond is a spectacular sight that you can’t miss.

**Education & Training**

If you are looking to experience the rich culture of rural India, get personalized training in vedic cooking, natural building, alternative energy and organic farming. Also get a first hand experience of traditional music and games.

**CONCLUSION**

Thus offering a multitude of facilities the GEV houses under one roof a variety of opportunities for a refreshing experience, all with the intent to reawaken the spirit of Vedic sustainable living. In the scenario where environment crisis is on the rise, Govardhan Eco Village is an example of living in harmony with nature. We invite you to visit us and have a divine and refreshing experience.

Feel free to contact us at contactus@ecovillage.org.in