



Save Soil Movement :- Soil is Base of Life

(*Himansuman, Parul Gupta, Aavdhoot B. Dharmadhikari and Himanshi Jhalora)

Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, Rajasthan College of Agriculture,
MPUAT, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 313001

*Corresponding Author's email: himansuman.bhalothia@gmail.com

The '[Save Soil Movement](#)' promoted by the Isha Foundation founder Shree Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, is a campaign on deteriorating soil health. He went about this by embarking on a 100-day motorcycle trip that began in March 2022, and visiting 27 countries to stress the need to protect soil health and urge governments to take steps for it. Save Soil is a global movement to address the soil crisis by bringing together people from around the world to stand up for Soil Health, and supporting leaders of all nations to institute national policies and actions toward increasing the organic content in cultivable soil. An effort to make governments in 192 countries to bring out a policy that there should be 3% – 6% organic content in soil in agricultural lands, as this was a responsibility to future generation. Lack of organic content turns soil into sand which leads to: food crisis, water scarcity, loss of bio-diversity, climate change, loss of livelihood and conflict and migration. The movement was not only about allocating large financial resources, but aimed to "raise consciousness" about the precarious soil health. Since Independence, India had worked to improve food security and though successful, caused soil quality to deteriorate.

- ❖ World's Largest People's Movement
- ❖ Supported by over 3 billion people
- ❖ 100 days lone motorcyclist
- ❖ 30,000 KM
- ❖ 74 Nations onboard

So, now along with issuing soil health cards by the government the focus is necessarily on five things: how to make the soil chemical free, how to save the organisms that live in the soil, or soil organic matter, how to maintain soil moisture, how to increase the availability of water to till it, how to remove the damage that is happening to the soil due to less groundwater and finally, how to stop the continuous erosion of soil due to the reduction of forests.

This will ensure global food and water security, mitigate climate change impact and protect biodiversity by halting further species extinction. Ensuring that our soil is rich and fertile is key to avoiding an ecological disaster. Sadhguru shares 2 causes and 4 effects of soil degradation – a crucial aspect of the planet's degrading ecological situation.

Causes of Soil Degradation

1. Industrialization of Agriculture:- Since we started a very mechanized and industrialized kind of agriculture, the organic content in the world's soil has gone down significantly. For any soil to be agriculturally potent, it must have a minimum organic content of 3 to 6%, but in many parts of the world, it is well below 1%. 62% of India's soil has less than 0.5% of organic content. Why has this happened?

When we grow one ton of crop, it means that we have removed one ton of top soil. What are the means to put it back? We were putting it back naturally when there were

animals and trees on the farm because green litter from the trees and animal waste are the only ways to put back organic content into soil. People think that a tractor will do the job. A tractor will plow the soil, but it will not enrich the soil as animals and trees would.

2. Meat Consumption and Cattle Grazing :- Right now, fifty-one million square kilometers of land is being farmed in the world. Out of this, forty million square kilometers are used for raising animals and their feed, which is 75%. If you bring down your meat consumption by 50%, twenty million square kilometers of land will become available for regenerating the soil. We can regenerate that soil within eight to ten years' time.

The 4 Effects of Soil Degradation

1. Human Health Deteriorates: India's soil condition is so bad that the nourishment levels are going down in a disastrous way. Particularly for Indian vegetables, their nutritional value has dropped by thirty percent in the last 25 years. Everywhere else in the world, doctors are telling people to shift from meat to vegetarian diets. But in India, doctors are advising people to shift to meat. When the world is making an effort to shift from meat consumption to vegetarian ways of living, we who largely lived as a vegetarian nation, are trying to shift to meat because there is not enough nutrition in the food that we consume. This is simply because we have not taken care of the soil. The micronutrient content in the soil has gone down so dramatically, that over 70 percent of Indian children below three years of age are anemic today.

2. The Organic Matter in Soil Decreases: The 87% of the planet's life, including humans and a multitude of microbes, worms, birds, animals, and trees are living on approximately 39 inches of topsoil. But the level of degradation that has happened in the last 70 years is scary. The amount of biomass in the soil has come down by around 80% in the last 50 years. This is really death of life! If we continue like this, it is expected that by the end of this century, 80% of insect and worm life will be gone. If all the worms die, you have just a few months before everything ends. If all the microbes die today, everything will end tomorrow. What is keeping you alive is microbial life on all levels. The organic content in the soil is going down at an alarming pace because we have a manicured sense of planet. If this soil has to be rich, it needs organic material which can only happen by animal waste and green litter from trees. If all the human beings disappear tomorrow, the planet will become ecologically super rich in ten years. Human beings who are supposed to be the most evolved creatures on this planet have become the deadliest problem for this planet. It is not that the planet is in peril. The planet will survive. It is just that it will become inhospitable for human life.

3. Causes a Vicious Cycle of Flood and Drought: In India, if you just look back at the last few years, wherever there is a flood, within three months there is a drought. This is because the only source of water we have in India is monsoon. Our rivers, lakes, ponds, and wells are not sources of water. They are only destinations for the rainwater. Only four percent of India's river water is glacial water, the rest is all monsoon water.

In the last hundred years, the volume of water that is coming down in the form of monsoon has not changed. It is just that fifty years ago, the monsoons were happening between 70 to 140 days. Now it is happening between 40 to 75 days. That means the downpours are heavier. When the rainwater falls on the ground, it should have percolated down the soil and gone into the aquifers; but because we have removed all the trees, it just flows away on the surface, eroding the soil and creating a flood. This is happening simply because it is all open ground. There is not enough organic activity in the soil to absorb the water. Since rainwater is not retained, a drought is bound to happen after some time.

Soil is the biggest dam on the planet. If it is in the right condition, soil can hold 800% more water than all the rivers put together. But as the organic value in the soil goes down, its ability to hold water also goes down.

4. Lack of Food Can Cause Civil Strife: India has about 160 million hectares of arable land, but nearly 40 % of this soil is labeled as distressed soil. That means in another 25-30 years' time, we may not be able to grow the food that we need in this nation. When there is no water and food, the level of civil strife that will happen will demolish the nation in many different ways. People from those rural areas where water completely runs out are going to migrate in large numbers into urban centers. This is not far away. With no infrastructure, they will sit on the streets, but for how long? When there is no food and water, they will break into homes.

Why Do We Need to Save the Soil ?

Eighty-seven percent of life forms on this planet – microbes, worms, insects, birds, animals, human beings, plants, trees and every other vegetation on the planet is sustained by an average of thirty-nine inches of topsoil. And that is in grave danger right now. In the last forty years, forty percent of the world's topsoil has been lost. The United Nations says we have soil left only for approximately eighty to hundred harvests, which means another forty-five to sixty years of agriculture. After that, we will not have the soil to produce food. You can imagine the suffering that we will unfold in the world. Thirty percent of India's land is already degraded, and 90% of India's states are seeing soil turn to desert. That means nothing can be cultivated there. So, protecting the soil for the future generations of this land is the most important thing.

How Can Soil Revitalization Help the Environment ?

What are the three things we need to do to prevent an ecological disaster?" Sadhguru said, "The three things are, 'Soil, Soil, and Soil.'" This is something that is not being looked at because it is fashionable in the cities to talk about air pollution. I am not saying it is not a concern, but if you take the necessary actions to fix the soil, that action will take care of water also. Air pollution can be fixed in a short time if we are willing to sacrifice our economic exuberance a little. But if you want to fix the soil that you have destroyed, it will take 15-25 years if you go at it aggressively. If you do it without much interest, it will take 40-50 years before you can get the soil to a certain level. If the soil is in a bad condition for that long, that means two to three generations will go through terrible states of life.

The importance of soil revitalization and five methods which we can use to save the soil which are as follows:-

1. Organic Content Builds Healthy Soil
2. Tree-based Agriculture or Agroforestry
3. Reduce Meat Consumption
4. Fruit Diet – Healthy for You and the Planet
5. Building a Conscious Planet

Mr. Sadhguru while delivering his address at the 15th session of the Conference of Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) held in Ivory Coast's capital city of Abidjan recently, said that a deep-rooted people's movement is needed to prevent soil degradation worldwide. He suggested a three-pronged strategy to achieve this objective that comprises providing attractive incentives for farmers to achieve this threshold, facilitating carbon credit incentives for farmers and marking the agricultural produce cultivated from soil with 3-6% organic content level as superior quality.

If the soil strength weakens, our bodies will weaken – not just in terms of nourishment, but in a very fundamental way.