



Mumbai and Delhi is not Bharat, so is the case with USA where New York and Washington may be iconic city but they do not represent the whole of America. After participating in Ekal annual meet at Cincinnati, I got an opportunity to visit a place in rural Central Virginia State, which is around 100 miles from Washington DC the Capital of the USA.

It was a pleasant surprise to be there, and get introduced to the gentleman named, Sri Aron Heintz who took us along the project and detailed the concept and working of the Twin Oak community, Virginia. "Our beliefs are diverse, but we all practice cooperation, nonviolence, and equality. We govern ourselves by a form of democracy with responsibility shared among various managers, planners, and committees," said Sri Aron Heintz. This is an excellent example of coexistence, which is also a Hindu way of living.

We use a trust-based labour system in which all works are valued equally. Its purpose is to organize work and share it equitably, giving each member as much flexibility and choice as possible. Work is not seen as just a means to an end. Rather we try to make it an enjoyable part of our lives.

Most people prefer doing a variety of works, rather than the same job day in and day out. Every one work about 45.5 hours a week, including domestic chores that is often not valued as "real work" in the mainstream culture. Over half of the works done are non-income activities ranging from caring for children to milking cows to networking. They particularly seek to open work areas to women and men that are not easily accessible to them outside the



community because of lingering prejudices about what "women's work" or "men's work" should be.

Twin Oaks community supports itself primarily through the manufacture of handcrafted hammocks and other casual furniture items and tofu and soya foods business. They have book-indexing services too. The community is also developing other industries, which will diversify economic base, produce more goods that are basic and services, and provide satisfying work to the people who live here.

There are approximately 90 adults and 15 children residing in the campus and the land encompasses over 350 acres which includes creeks, woods, hilly pastures and farmland.

Twin Oaks as Eco-village: Twin Oaks fits the contemporary definition of eco-village in numerous ways. In many ways, past and present we have tried to consider what might be sustainable for

the long term. Conservation of resources/energy efficiency takes many forms. In some ways, the manner they live is inherently more resource efficient than the way most people live--shared vehicle fleet, shared equipment, shared living space, etc. We do a lot of recycling. We also reuse and salvage a lot of stuff including through dumpster diving. The heat for most of the buildings is done with locally harvested firewood. Besides passive solar heat for some of the buildings, they also have a number of solar water heating installations and some photovoltaic (electricity) units.

Right from the early years of Twin Oaks the community naturally (in fact organically) grows much of the food they eat, though it is not certified as organic, except for tofu business.

The community avoids a luxury economy and many of the pitfalls of the class system and of economic privilege.





The earning and facilities shared among community members frees up energy and resources in the group to pursue other activities, especially ones more closely tied to the values mission of the group. Since the group is collectively taking responsibility for covering the basics of life like rent, food, etc. this is much more efficient than each person in the group spending their life energy to provide those things for themselves. Therefore, there is extra time, money etc. leftover for people in the group to spend on other activities that are important to them. For example, Twin Oaks sets aside a certain amount of money and labor hours each year devoted to members to do political activism in this way, doing activism work counts as part of weekly work quota. They have also sent people to seed-saving workshops, and given hours for a member to write a book about growing food.

By collectivizing their resources, the group have access to more resources than each individual could alone may have. For example, at Twin Oaks, members have access to an outdoor sauna beside a pond, a fully-equipped woodworking workshop, free yoga classes in homes, etc. It is highly unlikely that any one of them would have these in lives otherwise, but

community living made it possible here because the group has had the resources and chosen to provide them for members.

People have a higher level of interdependence and engagement in each other's lives being financially or otherwise connected. It is also true. For many people, this vastly improves their quality of life. Of course, it brings up challenges as well, but again for many people this is well worth the trade-off. The extent to which those challenges can be resolved with some level of skill, could lead to a proportionate deepening of relationship and of the strength of the group structure.

Sharing income acts as a general-purpose insurance policy. All insurance schemes are simply arrangements for pooling risk so that the individual members of the pool do not have to keep as large a reserve of cash on hand. Income sharing allows members to insulate themselves from financial risks (loss of health, loss of job, loss of property) with a much smaller per capita cash reserve than an independent person.

Sharing income frees up individuals to do less income-generating work than they would need to do if they were living independently



as long as the group as a whole is doing enough income generating work. Utility maximization comes in by allowing more specialization (social efficiency) and personal flexibility this one way. Examples: One member is a talented programmer (easily monetized skill set) but terrible cook, another is a talented cook and handy person (less easily monetized skill set). The programmer can spend more time programming without worrying about keeping fed and keeping their domestic machinery functioning, the cook and handy person can spend time cooking and fixing things around the house without worrying about earning money. As far as personal flexibility goes, if your finances are not directly and solely dependent upon your earning money, you can more easily take vacations or take time off when you need it as long as the group will carry you.

In addition, Mr Heintz says, sometimes we broaden the definition it's not just about income-sharing, but resource-sharing in general. We collectively own our vehicles, our houses, and over 500 acres of land there are benefits to these that go beyond just having one bank account for many people. ■

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