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[A partnership between Aban, India and Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel]

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***“The wilderness and the desert will rejoice, and the desert will shout for joy and blossom” [Isaiah 35:1; The Holy Bible]***

Greetings to each and everyone of you aspiring students of ABIDAT!

Education and research are the twin foundational stones of civilization's edifice. These ensure that the building up of nations continue on the right path, especially in a constantly changing scenario. Innovation and adaptation are keys to true progress and necessitates that every challenge or constraint can be turned into an opportunity for a way forward. Agriculture in this sub-continent is both a livelihood and lifestyle for millions of Indians. Consequently, strengthening the farming sector unwaveringly leads to the fortification of the country, which has been proven through the metamorphosis of the nation from a food-deficit to a food-surplus nation. The contribution of the agriculture sector towards the national GDP has increased to 19.9% in 2020-21 from 17.8% in the preceding fiscal and the sector is projected to grow at 3.9% in 2021-22. However, the pitfalls that have become so starkly evident in the unsustainability of large swathes of farming area and communities, warrant a fresh look at the problem areas and development of unique solutions.

Aban India in collaboration with Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel have together conceived ABIDAT – an Institution which endeavours to assist students/scholars to develop a specialized understanding and appreciation of the complex phenomena in the known and unknown spheres, such that they will be able to realize their full potential to solve the problems of drylands and desert ecosystems.

ABIDAT offers an interactive mode of teaching and learning, stimulating the passion towards research to look for sustainable alternatives and surmount the existing challenges in agricultural production systems in general, with a focussed view on rainfed and arid ecosystems, which is the need of the hour. ABIDAT seeks to build human capacity that yearns to serve farming community.

To begin with, ABIDAT offers a PG Certificate in Dryland Studies (PGCDS) program with a 1 Year (2 Semesters) duration. Thus, ABIDAT envisages that its graduating students would be a 'Scientist-cum-Development Specialist' with an aptitude for practical solutions required by the dryland and desert farmers. This will enable the candidate to keenly analyse a specific constraint or a set of limitations and recommend or work out suitable solutions. Additionally, he or she would be able to convey to a Team of Scientists, the potential answers or thrust areas for research. Most of all, it is anticipated that he or she would be eminently employable, besides being competent to become an entrepreneur, which could resulting in employment generation.

In these times of uncertainty, it may yet be propitious for those who choose to believe that 'the sky is the limit', there is always light at the end of the tunnel. Further, instead of focusing only on enhancement of productivity, extending a broader and holistic support is the need of the current times. Hence, considering the risks, which are dynamically emerging under the climate-change scenario, along with the threat to the soil by way of degradation, biodiversity loss, groundwater depletion, farmers' health hazards, unstable food and nutrition security, will necessitate proactive steps towards building the long-term health of both, ecosystems and the populace.

I welcome each of the prospective scholars to join hands with us, with a sense of commitment and integrity to serve the nation(s) and fulfil the vision of the Institute: *“To transform lives through sustainable and holistic rejuvenation of fragile dryland and desert ecosystems”!*

May each of you be empowered to achieve the goals of your life even as you venture through the portals of ABIDAT!

[Thomas Abraham]