

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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6 COVER STORY

THE BEGINNINGS OF RURAL FMCG

About Sahrudaya Foods in Pune, Maharashtra

Changemakers



3

Walking with Health and Hope in the Nilgiris

Listening, trusting, healing—Astitva's walk with Nilgiri communities toward dignity.

Profile



9

The Quiet Force of Change

About Dr. Noble's four decades of service, dignity, and grassroots change with HUT.

Chit Chat



12

"I strongly believe that empowering women farmers can transform the agricultural landscape."

An exclusive interview with
Dr. S. Jayashree, Founder & CEO of
BioVersion Agri Services

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

In a world increasingly dominated by instant gratification, digital distractions, and relentless competition, the virtues of positive thinking and core life values often feel like quaint relics of a bygone era. Yet, in truth, these inner compasses are more essential now than ever before. While skills can build careers and knowledge can drive innovation, it is values—and a positive mindset—that shape character, sustain relationships, and lead to lasting fulfillment.

Positive thinking is not about ignoring life's challenges or wearing a mask of forced cheerfulness. Rather, it is about approaching situations with resilience, hope, and the belief that solutions exist even in adversity. A positive thinker is not someone who never experiences failure or sadness, but someone who refuses to be defeated by them. This mindset fosters mental well-being, strengthens decision-making, and promotes emotional intelligence.

Scientific research increasingly supports what many of our grandparents intuitively knew: optimism is linked to better heart health, lower stress levels, and greater life expectancy. But beyond the personal benefits, positive thinking is also contagious. In families, schools, and workplaces, an encouraging presence can uplift entire communities. It inspires cooperation, reduces conflict, and builds trust—elements critical to both productivity and peace.

Equally important are the core values that define how we live and interact with others. Honesty, compassion, respect, responsibility, humility, and perseverance are not just moral ideals—they are practical tools for navigating life. Values guide us in making ethical choices when no one is watching. They help us build meaningful connections, earn trust, and contribute to the collective good. In times of crisis, it is often values—not resources—that hold families and communities together.

The tragedy of modern life is that in our pursuit of success, we often neglect these fundamentals. Children are taught how to win but not always how to lose with grace. Students prepare for exams but are seldom encouraged to cultivate integrity or empathy. Professionals climb the ladder of ambition, sometimes at the cost of kindness or fairness. But without a strong moral foundation, achievement rings hollow, and progress loses its purpose.

This is why *Conversations Today* features changemakers who exemplify the spirit of positive thinking and uphold values that drive meaningful social change. Through their actions and stories, they remind us that it is possible to live with purpose, lead with compassion, and build a better world—not just for ourselves but for others.

We urge our readers to take inspiration from these stories and, in turn, become an inspiration to others. Let us choose optimism over cynicism, empathy over indifference, and integrity over expedience.

Marie Banu Rodriguez

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu Rodriguez

LIVING BY THE INNER LIGHT: VALUES FROM THE TALKS OF RAMANA MAHARSHI



Ramana Maharshi, the revered sage of Arunachala, rarely offered prescriptive teachings or rigid moral codes. Instead, he gently guided seekers inward—to the source of all thought, emotion, and being. Yet, within his deep silences and deceptively simple answers lie profound lessons on how to live with values that are not imposed from the outside, but arise naturally from self-awareness.

At the heart of Ramana Maharshi's teachings is the practice of Self-Inquiry—asking “Who am I?” This enquiry, he said, is not merely a philosophical curiosity, but the most direct route to liberation. As the mind turns inward and rests in its true nature, there arises a spontaneous stillness, free of ego, judgment, and fear. From this stillness emerge the foundational values that guide a meaningful life: compassion, humility, honesty, contentment, and non-attachment.

Ramana often said, “The world is nothing but a reflection of the mind. When the mind is quiet, the world is at peace.” Thus, the cultivation of inner peace is not an escape from responsibility but a powerful value in itself. A mind free from agitation sees clearly, acts wisely, and causes no harm. This is the essence of ahimsa, or non-violence—not just in action, but in thought and speech too.

In his conversations with visitors from all walks of life—scholars, seekers, householders—Ramana Maharshi repeatedly emphasised truthfulness (satya) and simplicity (aparigraha). To live truthfully, according to him, is to align every word and deed with the deeper truth of one's being. Pretension, pride, and falsehood, he said, stem from the mistaken identity with the ego. But when the ego drops away, truth flows naturally, like fragrance from a flower.

Simplicity, to Ramana, was not merely about material renunciation. It was a value born of inner clarity. He lived in the most basic of surroundings, ate simple food, and wore the barest clothing—not as an austerity, but because he needed no more. He encouraged seekers to shed the clutter of wants and live with contentment (santosha), seeing that the joy we seek outside already exists within.

Detachment (vairagya) was another value Maharshi gently pointed toward. Not through forced withdrawal, but by understanding the impermanence of all things. He did not ask people to abandon families or duties, but to see through the illusion of possession and control. “Let what comes come. Let what goes go. Find out what remains,” he would say. In this awareness lies the key to both freedom and responsibility.

Perhaps the most powerful value Ramana Maharshi embodied was compassion. Though he spoke little, his presence radiated unconditional love. He saw no distinctions—human, animal, saint, or sinner. To him, all were expressions of the same Self. This universal vision dissolves judgment and fosters an all-encompassing kindness that needs no instruction.

In today's noisy world, where values are often shaped by trends or convenience, Ramana's teachings offer a gentle but profound alternative: live by discovering who you truly are. When the Self is known, values are not practiced—they become who you are. That is the silent revolution Ramana Maharshi invites us into.

WALKING WITH HEALTH AND HOPE IN THE NILGIRIS



“We listen. We try to understand. And it’s our women leaders from the community who make the biggest difference—they bridge the gap with empathy.”

High up in the misty hills of the Nilgiris, where winding paths lead to quiet tribal hamlets and tea estates, a quiet transformation is underway. It begins not with fanfare, but with footsteps—steady and intentional—of a group called **Astitva**, a public health NGO that believes in healing not just bodies, but entire communities.

Born in 2020 amidst growing concerns about the lack of healthcare in remote tribal villages and plantation areas, Astitva didn’t arrive with ready-made solutions. Instead, it came with questions. What do the people need? What is missing? How can we walk with them? And most importantly—are we listening enough?

“We never assume,” says Nivetha Sakthivel, Astitva’s passionate Program Manager. “We go out there, speak to people, conduct need assessments, and truly listen. The community leads us.”

That ethos—of listening before acting—has shaped Astitva into more than just a health initiative. Today, its work spans health, nutrition, adolescent well-being, and awareness building. The team views health not in isolation but as a foundation

for life—because when people are healthy, they can study, earn, and live with dignity.

Their approach begins at the roots: regular health screenings, nutritional support, and early interventions before problems escalate. But what truly sets them apart is how they do it. Astitva’s health workers are not outsiders. They are the daughters and sisters of the very communities they serve—women and young people who understand the language, the customs, and the challenges firsthand.

“This builds trust,” explains Nivetha. “People are more likely to open up when they’re speaking to someone they know.”

Among Astitva’s flagship efforts is **Project Nourish**, which supports mothers and children through check-ups, dietary counselling, and growth tracking. Another key initiative, **Project Enrich**, focuses on adolescent health in schools, particularly for girls. Through engaging sessions on topics like menstrual hygiene and anaemia, the team equips young people with information often shrouded in silence.

Over the years, their work has sparked

change—both visible and internal. Nivetha recalls one moment that continues to inspire her. During a routine health camp, a woman named Mariyammal was found to have symptoms of kidney failure. Despite pressure from her family to try traditional methods, she chose to undergo dialysis.

“Her decision was brave,” Nivetha says. “She trusted herself, trusted us. That shift in mindset—that’s what keeps us going.”

Another time, a young community health worker boldly questioned the local Anganwadi centre for not opening on time. It was a small act—but a powerful one. Astitva’s goal has never been to speak for the community but to nurture voices within it.

But the path isn’t always smooth. Some villages still hold onto beliefs in black magic or avoid hospitals out of fear. Astitva meets these challenges not with confrontation, but with patience.

“We never push,” says Nivetha. “We listen. We try to understand. And it’s our women leaders from the community who make the biggest difference—they bridge the gap with empathy.”

Behind Astitva is a youthful team, energised by their vision and guided by a wise advisory board. Internal communication, Nivetha shares, is a priority. “Whether it’s feedback or a new idea, we always make sure we’re aligned. That’s what helps us grow.”

And growth is on the horizon. Astitva now works with over 2,000 households across more than 40 villages. Plans are in place to deepen their work in schools and to train community members in basic health practices. “If one person understands what anaemia is and how to prevent it,” Nivetha smiles, “they’ll teach five more.”

But for Astitva, impact isn’t measured by numbers—it’s felt in trust earned, mindsets shifted, and dignity restored. They are not here to fix things for people. They are here to walk with them—slowly, consistently, and with deep care.

In the Nilgiris, where the air is crisp and the challenges are steep, Astitva is quietly proving that real change doesn’t come with loud promises. It begins with listening—and with love.

Aatika Kundalam

CAUSE AND EFFECT: ARE WE GETTING THEM RIGHT?

Unlike the chicken and egg story, where we really can't say which came first, there's not much confusion between cause and effect. Or so we think. Are we right though?

Let's look at a few common health-related (apparent) cause-effect pairs. When we talk about weight-loss, that ubiquitous mainstay of the health industry, we may often say, he isn't exercising enough, that's why he isn't losing weight. Not exercising is the cause, and the effect is being overweight. But there could easily be something else going on. Let's imagine how a body carrying excess weight works. In such a case, the knees are carrying more weight than they were built for. If such a person were to force themselves to jog long distances every day, then the knees would come under enormous pressure, and the wear-and-tear would really be prohibitively high. They would surely end up with some short-term or long-term knee injury, and that might be even worse for the person than being overweight.

The body is always and forever geared towards self-preservation, and if it is not allowing the person to exercise in certain ways, it could well be because, in fact, unknown to us, the body is preventing further damage to the person's health. So, in this case, cause and effect are reversed - he isn't exercising enough because he's not losing weight, and not the other way round. The not-exercising part is the effect of the excess weight, not its cause.

From waking up in the morning till we go back to sleep, there are probably many such instances where cause and effect are confused for each other. Take waking up early. I've heard many people say that they are unable to wake up early because they're not getting enough sleep at night or because the quality of the night sleep is not good. But you can reason it the other way around too - sometimes people can't sleep deeply enough if they haven't worked their bodies enough during the day. If this is the case, then waking up early and working throughout the day would definitely improve their sleep quality and duration too. Here too cause and effect reverse positions sometimes.

Cause and effect are often ambiguous in the area of food intake. Is indigestion or some sort of stomach trouble caused because of certain foods? Or is the food causing a problem because the digestive system is not ok? How do we decide this?

There are some general rules that we all know, which distinguish good and healthful foods from those that are detrimental to us. But they could still do with some repetition because in the current society, these general rules are fast being forgotten. Here are some of them:

- Anything deep-fried is bad for our bodies in a two-fold way. One is that the nutritional value of the food is greatly diminished by deep-frying. And another is that the oil itself, in



The custom of sharing something sweet on auspicious occasions has now degenerated to having sweets all the time, in almost every meal, and between meals too. White sugar is associated with weight gain, diabetes, hypertension and a host of other health issues. It really should be avoided consciously.

- Anything cooked in unhygienic conditions is bad for us. One would think that this general rule is too rudimentary to repeat, but then how does one account for the number of people eating at doubtful joints, and roadside places even when they can perfectly well afford cleaner food?

If some food doesn't fall within the range dictated by such general rules, and we fall sick because of eating it, then clearly the food is to blame. But when clean, natural and nutritious food does not agree with us, then it's time to examine which is the cause and which the effect. An extra-sensitive digestive tract often points to underlying problems, and we should pay attention to this aspect. (Of course, particular and personal allergies are exempt from this observation). Surprisingly often, the culprit is neither the food nor the digestive tract, but the intermediary between them, which are the teeth. Permeable gums, cavities and other oral problems cause stomach upsets much more frequently than we realise...

New shoes 'biting' you? Look carefully to see whether the shoes are really the cause, or your feet are developing calluses or corns, or are subtly altered in shape. Not able to work because of headaches? Consider whether it's the work causing the headaches, and not the headaches that are preventing the work from being done. Students not getting good grades in school? Might be a good idea to check if the low grades are the ones de-motivating them from studying. Teachers scolding children because they are not doing their homework? It would be worthwhile to check whether the children are put off from their work precisely because the teacher is scolding them all the time....

Cause? Or effect? Or something else entirely? In every sphere of life, it is worth our time and attention to think about these questions, and figure out the answers as best as we can. Wishing all our readers a pleasant August full of answered questions and unambiguous cause-effect pairs....

large quantities, is bad for us. (Deep-fried food used to be traditionally limited to a few days in the year, like festivals or weddings, but this has changed now, and everywhere we look, there seems to be a glut of deep-fried foods.)

- Anything with white sugar in it - sweets Indian and western, chocolates, sauces, dips syrup, juices, cold drinks, etc - is bad for us.

The author Ramashree Paranandi is a teacher, and a partner in The Organic Farm, Nedumaram, TN. She consults on applications of yoga, natural therapies and music for good health, and often stays over at the farm to recharge herself with pollution-free days spent amidst natural surroundings. An MA in Yogashastra enables her to apply the knowledge of the ancient texts to contemporary situations.

THE POWER OF PURPOSE



Success is meaningful when it extends beyond ourselves and uplifts others. “I believe in the power of one individual to make a difference — how one life, when lived with purpose, can touch and uplift countless others. My passion to serve society stems from this belief. True personal growth, to me, isn’t just about financial success or career milestones. It’s about achieving inner balance, living intentionally and acting with empathy,” says Mr PSN Murthy, Founder of Lakshitha Trust in Hyderabad.

At 53, Murthy made a decision that surprised many — he walked away from a stable career to dedicate himself to serving society. For him, passion wasn’t something to be shelved until retirement. He often questioned the idea of waiting until old age to give back. “I must be healthy to pursue my passion in the truest sense,” he adds, emphasising that meaningful work requires not just time, but energy and intention too. His voluntary retirement wasn’t a leap of impulse — it was a deliberate step towards a life of deeper purpose.

Having held positions like the Deputy General Manager of SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India), Mumbai and Founding Team Member of MUDRA Yojana, a Government of India project launched in 2015 to enable collateral free loans for small and micro enterprises, Murthy was aware of the impacts that financial support could have on the underprivileged. “For this section, financial support implies that one essential need gets addressed, without being compromised in the order of priority for short of income. In the families of drivers, security personnel, maids, etc every time there is a financial crisis, education is stopped, and in the case of girls, they are just married off early. Our support, therefore, means a lot to them,” he asserts. His thoughts and beliefs motivated him to engage in different social work activities. In 2002, he began to support education of girl children from poor families. “I just got

started. It was all only informal back then. But I was amazed that I was able to support the education of two girl children every year. I wanted to make this impact bigger and therefore decided to engage my network,” he shares.

Murthy soon managed to mobilise resources from many donors and routed them through the trust to support eligible candidates. The trust was formally registered in 2012 and, to this day, remains largely a one-man effort. With support from his father, he personally handles everything — from communication and application review to scrutiny and final shortlisting. A few dedicated volunteers

the work continues to touch lives across the country. Just last year, over 100 students from nine different cities received support through the trust, amounting to nearly 17 lakh rupees.

What makes this effort even more remarkable is the anonymity at its core. Murthy has never met majority of the donors in person, and the donors never see the beneficiaries. No one knows each other personally — the trust operates purely on the basis of shared purpose. “It is all only word of mouth till now,” he smiles.

Some students receive one-time assistance, others are supported for a brief period before they move on, and a few

vast majority of them remain unaware of it. The same holds true for several other schemes as well,” he observes.

Mr. Murthy conducts awareness programmes to help this segment of beneficiaries understand and access such government initiatives. He is an Honorary Advisor to a leading NGO implementing the Reserve Bank of India’s “Centre for Financial Literacy (CFL)” Project and is a Master Trainer since 2013. He also serves as an Honorary Advisory Board Member of the Sharada Educational Trust in Bangalore and mentors several grassroots NGOs to enhance their local impact and institutional effectiveness.

Murthy runs the PAVI Life: Journey to a Balance Life blog platform, which promotes individual social responsibility, self-awareness, mindful living — and explores how these values contribute to a stronger sense of community. Through thought-provoking articles and personal reflections, Pavilife encourages readers to lead intentional lives and make meaningful contributions to the world around them. “Things really are that simple — if only we care to pause and notice. In my home, there are two corners reserved for any extra groceries, fruits or vegetables. Our maid knows she can take anything placed there, without hesitation and without needing to ask. I also make it a point to offer snacks or water bottles to courier personnel and security guards whenever I can. These are small, simple, entirely doable acts—but they create a quiet, lasting impact on our shared sense of connection and community,” he says persuasively.

Murthy’s life stands as a quiet testament to the profound change one person can bring—through purpose, empathy and the unwavering belief that even the smallest acts of kindness can ripple far beyond their origin.

Shanmuga Priya.T

Murthy also runs the PAVI Life: Journey to a Balance Life blog platform, which promotes individual social responsibility, self-awareness, mindful living — and explores how these values contribute to a stronger sense of community.

also step in, visiting applicants’ homes to verify the genuineness of each request, ensuring help reaches those who truly need it. He has established an effective system to ensure transparency in every transaction of the Trust. In fact, there is no direct cash delivered to the beneficiary students. All transactions are digital and the fee amount is deposited in the account of educational institutions.

To make the effort more meaningful—and to foster a sense of accountability among beneficiary families—the Trust encourages them to contribute a small portion of the total educational fee. “We release the amount in installments, each time after the candidate’s family makes a small contribution. It’s our way of ensuring that education remains a priority for everyone involved,” explains Murthy. Now, nearly two decades since he began,

continue to receive long-term support from the Trust, depending on their needs and circumstances. A source of pride for Mr. Murthy is the success stories that have emerged from his support, with 18 students securing meaningful employment through Lakshitha.

Besides education, the Trust also focusses on financial literacy by conducting sessions in colleges and universities. In spite of a volley of government schemes out there, there is limited success in reaching out to the intended beneficiaries due to lack of awareness. “When I go to educational institutions I see students unaware of something as basic as savings account. Further, among the many schemes being rolled out by the government, it is worth mentioning that there is one specifically for street vendors—but unfortunately, a

THE BEGINNINGS OF RURAL FMCG



Inspiration often comes from the most unexpected places. A daily frustration, a passing comment or even personal passion can ignite ideas that lead to something bigger. The key is to stay curious, open-minded and willing to act when that spark appears. “Entrepreneurship doesn’t always start with a business plan — sometimes, it begins with a moment of insight that refuses to be ignored. For me, it is the nutrition rich, traditional snacks that rural women effortlessly made. In many ways, these recipes are more than just snacks - we need a better term for them,” says Ms Kalyani Chavali, Founder of Sahrudaya Foods in Pune, Maharashtra.

Kalyani grew up in Pune, in a family of computer engineers. She graduated in Chemical Engineering from the Institute of Chemical Technology in Mumbai and simultaneously attended many start up events during her college days. “Somehow the variety of ideas kept me hooked to these events,” she adds. A childhood incident that forced her to give up on bike and use public transport stayed with her. But more than the incident, she was shocked at the conditions of these buses operated by Pune Mahanagar Palika.

“They were not punctual mostly and there was no way to track these buses. When I went to complain, concerned officers mocked at me and asked me to find a way to reduce their losses. They also handed me a copy of their budget book and I suddenly realised that their challenges and struggles were real. With Mr Ritesh Agarwal building OYO at that time, I began to see entrepreneurship as a potential problem solver in many situations,” she shares.

Kalyan collaborated with her friend who imported and sold bottles from Korea — both of them together made and sold fire extinguisher bottles to textile industries but this opportunity was more finance intensive and their families were not convinced about exploring this field. In due course of time, in the last two years of graduation, she engaged in full-fledged research on flame retardant cotton fabric, that would not catch fire for about 6-7 minutes. “As you know, there is a lot of gap in translating research to commercial products. I was just not happy about it here and decided to pursue my Masters from Finland. But then, Covid happened and my life changed forever,” she laughs.

Kalyani assisted a senior faculty from her college who was researching on vitamin D deficiency in rural women in villages near Pune. She stayed at Vigyan Ashram for a brief period which soon developed into a long term bond. Covid was not a big threat in this part of the country. The village life, the nearby hills, the treks — all of it gave her a fresh perspective and a renewed sense of purpose. It was here that she met Reshma Thai, a local woman who often made moringa chikkis and flaxseed laddus using ingredients easily found in the region. “These snacks immediately caught my attention,” she recalls. “They weren’t just delicious — they were rooted in the land, made from ingredients like

moringa, which almost every household had. Growing up on rice or wheat-based snacks, this was something entirely new and exciting for me. What fascinated me more was how these treats were prepared according to seasons or specific needs — like during floods when staple food was scarce. I couldn’t stop thinking - why hadn’t they turned this into an additional source of income for their families?” she adds.

She noticed that most of the women in the village not only managed their homes but also worked on farms — they were the real breadwinners of their families.

Tapping into the potential of these traditional, nutrient-rich snacks could be a game-changer for the local economy. That realisation led to the birth of Sahrudaya Foods in 2021, right after Kalyani completed her graduation. Her decision surprised many — especially her parents, who were baffled when she turned down a scholarship to study in Finland. But it was her participation in the Startup India contest that gave her the confidence to take her idea seriously and build something meaningful from what she had discovered.

Sahrudaya Foods began its operations in Maval Taluk — far from the city, but close to the women Kalyani wanted to empower. She chose to be where the roots were, working directly with the local community. In the early days, Kalyani spent time developing the products and placing them in nearby retail stores. Along the way, the support of retail shop owners proved invaluable — they guided her on essentials like FSSAI compliance and the importance of value-driven packaging. “It was learning and building at every step,” Kalyani recalls. “I thoroughly enjoyed the process, and seeing the women around me also cherish this journey was deeply satisfying.” There were challenges too, especially retention of human resources as the enterprise was reliant on them.

Many of the women Kalyani worked with had three on average, which meant they often took long maternity breaks or had to step away from work whenever a family emergency arose. The irregularity made building a consistent team challenging. “There were times I broke down and cried to my mother, who is also the Co-Founder of Sahrudaya Foods,” Kalyani shares. “I was pouring my heart into this for them, but they didn’t always prioritise it the way I did. That’s when I learned one of the hardest truths — you cannot impose your dream on others.” She now leads a team of 17 women working full time in this effort.

Kalyani soon began to expand the vision for Sahrudaya Foods. While many rural women already

knew how to make traditional items like papad, pickles and snacks, there was a noticeable gap when it came to standardisation and quality control. Without this, their products struggled to reach wider markets. Recognising this as a major hurdle to their economic potential, she set out to systematise production processes, ensuring consistency and quality in every batch. Her efforts soon gained momentum with incubation support from IIM Bangalore and her association with the Buddha Fellowship network, both of which gave her the confidence to dream bigger. “I want to bring together one million rural women,” she says, “and prepare them to evolve our traditional snacks into full-fledged FMCG products.”

She laments that our traditional snack recipes are not preserved and there is little data available to help in standardisation. The moringa chikki, for example, was explored by her in 2021 but standardised only now. Vitamin C is essential to enhance absorption of iron in moringa but it is highly unstable, hence the team has worked really hard to make it stable and add to the nutrition profile of the product. “It is not only about nutrition, when the season changed, products lost their shelf life too. We studied all these changes to standardise each product,” she explains. Now that every raw material is standardised, women with limited/no literacy continue to work with the help of color and number coded systems to observe all relevant parameters and report if there is any concern. “Our struggle has now made way for any woman, literally any woman, to work in the making of these products,” says a proud Kalyani.

Sahrudaya Foods is now working with more than 160 women from Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Assam and is expecting a turnover of up to 40 lakh rupees this year. Training in packaging, selling and standardisation has also enabled 78 women to set up their own businesses. Beyond entrepreneurship, women are also encouraged to invest in gold and savings plans, helping them build a practical understanding of financial management and long-term wealth creation.

Kalyani now wants to focus on market linkages to promote online and social media reach of the products. “This is the time to focus on linkages because we have done all the ground work to make replication easier, women can launch new products easily, thus enhancing product options for the customers,” she adds.

Shanmuga Priya.T

A DECADE OF FARMING:

A TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY ROOTED IN THE PAST

I was born in what was once called Mambalam — now bustling T. Nagar in Chennai — in a humble yet charming tiled house. It stood on a spacious two grounds of land, an 800 sq. ft. house with iconic Mangalore tiles and a sprawling open space. That space wasn't just a backyard — it was a living classroom. With four coconut trees, two mango trees, one Narthangai (citron), one Sathukudi (sweet lime), one papaya, and a lone Murungai (drumstick) tree, nature was both companion and teacher.

Those childhood memories remain vivid. Climbing the mango tree, lying on its branches, and selling papayas to Anbazhagan Pazhakkadai on Ranganathan Street — each activity built a connection with the earth. We didn't have a compound wall, but planted Aduthoda to keep goats out — a lesson in natural fencing long before sustainability became a buzzword.

My father, a school teacher with deeply rooted values, made farming experiential for us. He would take my sister and me to the paddy fields in Chromepet, where we learned firsthand how rice was cultivated. We savored curd rice with *More Milagai* while dipping our feet in the cool flowing water of the irrigation channels — experiences that no classroom could replicate.

He once gave us a square meter each to grow coriander. It wasn't just a contest — it was a nurturing exercise in patience, observation, and care. I don't remember who won, but I've never forgotten that plot of soil or the pride of nurturing something from seed to leaf.

Looking back, I often wonder why I once envied friends who replaced their tiled homes with modern concrete ones. Our modest house had a soul, shaped by my father's vision of reuse and repurposing. He would collect stones, bricks, and road litter to build compound walls and a bathroom — long before "upcycling" became fashionable. He taught me the essence of not discarding, a value that shaped my mindset and defined my journey.

From Engineering to Sustainability

In my engineering college days at REC Trichy (now NIT Trichy), those seeds of sustainability sprouted into meaningful projects:

1. Bullock Cart Innovation

(1974): Aiming to reduce the burden on animals and improve road safety, I redesigned a traditional bullock cart. Using roller bearings and lining the wheels with repurposed rubber from tubes, I hoped to reduce friction and cushion the load. Though not perfect — the rubber



didn't cover the entire wheel width — it was a significant step towards Appropriate Technology. I was honored with a consolation prize by Dr. Ramaswamy, then Director of IIM Bangalore.

2. Wind-Powered Water Pump:

Alongside my friend Kanagaraj (who later became an Air Vice Marshal), we built a wind turbine that successfully drew water from a well in our campus. It was a small but significant testament to how technology could be harnessed for rural benefit.

Awakening Through Contradictions

My stint in Dubai and frequent visits to India brought with them a sense of pride in the country's visible growth — the "Green Revolution," plastic bags, bottled water. These once symbolised progress to me. But conversations with friends and deeper introspection revealed a troubling contradiction. The very things we celebrated — plastic, overconsumption — were beginning to destroy the balance we once cherished.

The idea of sustainability hit home hard. I embraced the Three Rs — Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and added a Fourth R — Refuse, as taught by Swamiamma Prabhavananda of Gnananda Niketan. Drawn from Sanatana Dharma, it meant consuming only what one truly needs.

Practicing Minimalism: A Personal Revolution

As the son of a poor school teacher, I had grown up with only three shirts and three pants. Yet, today, we measure success in wardrobes overflowing with rarely worn clothes. The post-COVID world brought clarity. I began adopting a

minimalist approach:

- I stopped buying new clothes.
- Donated what I didn't wear regularly.
- If I had to buy something, I gave away two in return.
- Altered and reused my son's old shirts, supporting a local tailor in the process.

It wasn't about sacrifice — it was about realigning with values I grew up with. My father had shown me that nothing is waste. Following his path, I began reusing lumber, old bricks, limestone instead of cement, discarded tyres, and even broken solar panels.

Yes, in today's language, I became a "Porukki" — one who picks from the discarded. But I wear that title with pride. Because in what others throw away, I see life, potential, and purpose.

A Journey Still Unfolding

A decade of farming didn't just reconnect me to the land — it reconnected me to my roots, to my father's lessons, and to my inner compass. What began as memories under a mango tree matured into conscious choices that touch every aspect of life.

In a world chasing more, my journey has been about less. Less waste, less consumption, fewer possessions — but more meaning, more purpose, and more love for the earth that raised me.

This isn't just a journey of farming. It's a transformational journey of the self — one that began in a tiled house in Mambalam and continues in every reused brick and every mindful moment.

P.N. Subramanian



THE QUIET FORCE OF CHANGE

In the ever-shifting landscape of India's development sector, stories of sustained, grassroots transformation are both rare and instructive. Among these is the journey of Dr. G.D. Noble Chandrasekharan, a social worker, educator, and changemaker who has dedicated over four decades of his life to empowering the underprivileged. As the founder and president of Human Upliftment Trust (HUT), Dr. Noble has created more than just an NGO; he has fostered a living movement that is deeply embedded in the needs, voices, and aspirations of the rural and urban poor across Tamil Nadu.

"My passion is to serve the needy and the unreachable," says Dr. Noble. With warmth and humility, he recounts his early years, born in Tuticorin, raised in Nagapattinam, and later educated in Tiruvalluvar University, where he completed his Master's in Social Work in 1983. He was recruited by World Vision India to manage a tribal development project in the remote Pachamalai Hills. That assignment defined the arc of his professional life.

"In those days, we worked with the Malayali tribes. There were no basic facilities, not even clothing norms as we understand them today. We focused on education, women's empowerment, and child welfare," he says.

Over time, his responsibilities grew, leading him to oversee 15 projects across Tamil Nadu under World Vision's umbrella. This included initiatives in community health, special homes, district-wide development, and extensive child sponsorship programs.

Yet, after decades of service in a global NGO, Dr. Noble sought to channel his learnings into a homegrown initiative. In 1997, he founded Human Upliftment Trust (HUT) in Tiruvannamalai. What began as a humble attempt to serve a few marginalised families has grown into a multi-location NGO with a transformative footprint in over 50 villages, spanning Chennai, Tiruvannamalai, Tuticorin, and even the Nellore district in Andhra Pradesh.

At its core, HUT is driven by the vision: *A just, participatory and pluralistic society*. The Trust aims to build the capacities of marginalised communities by promoting equitable access to education, health, livelihood, and human rights. "We believe in being facilitators, not providers. Our aim is not charity, but empowerment," he affirms.

One of HUT's major strengths is its multi-pronged approach. Its work is organised around adult education, child health promotion, early childhood development, women's economic empowerment, rural technology transfer, and youth leadership development.

Funded by international donors such as KNH Germany and Samaritan's Purse Canada, their vocational skill training programs have provided hands-on training to over 3,200 youth, many of whom were school dropouts. "We don't just teach them skills in a vacuum. We assess

their interests and embed them in real world environments, be it tailoring, beautician work, carpentry, or mechanical servicing," he explains recalling the story of a boy trained under HUT who now owns a thriving mechanic shop opposite Albert Theatre in Chennai.

Another focal point is women's empowerment through microcredit and entrepreneurship. HUT has facilitated financial assistance to over 6,500 women through SHGs (Self-Help Groups), enabling them to start petty businesses and become financially independent.



"We trained women in business skills, helped them access loans, and monitored their growth. Today, many of them are self-reliant and role models in their communities," he says.

In the domain of education, HUT runs child sponsorship schemes and school reintegration programs. "Many of these children come from families that see no value in education. We work with both children and parents to change that mindset."

The Trust also operates child care centers, non-formal education setups, and has federated community groups to monitor dropout rates and school quality. The organisation's mission is to "capacitate the rural poor to become active facilitators, effective enablers, and

community leaders." The approach is deeply participatory: every project begins with community consultation, followed by planning with team members, and collective decision-making.

"We function as a flat structure," he notes. "Whether it's the field coordinator or the director, we sit together to plan, execute, and evaluate. We review our progress every three months and reflect on what needs to change," he adds. This open leadership style has roots in the training Dr. Noble received from World Vision India, including international workshops in Bangkok and Sri Lanka. His model of leadership is built on visibility, mentorship, and humility. "I believe a leader must be a role model. What I say, I must do," he says.

The Trust is supported by a dedicated Board of Trustees, composed primarily of women, including Mrs. P. Jaisha, Mrs. M. Selvi, Mrs. D. Bhavaneswari, and others, with a deliberate reflection of HUT's gender-progressive values. With field offices in Chennai, Tiruvannamalai, and Tuticorin, and a modest team of 20 volunteers and five core staff, the Trust has built a robust network of grassroots change agents.

Despite its grassroots nature, HUT is no stranger to policy dialogue. Dr. Noble is an honorary member of various committees, including the Child Welfare Committee in Pondicherry, and is frequently invited to evaluate projects by other NGOs.

Today, HUT continues to evolve. It is exploring entrepreneurship training programs, engaging with government skill-building schemes, and collaborating with organisations like CSIM (Centre for Social Initiative and Management). "We are shifting toward sustainable models. We don't want people to depend on aid forever. We want them to become changemakers themselves," he affirms.

Amid all this, Dr. Noble draws strength from his family and faith. "In difficult times, I rely on prayer, meditation, and time with my grandchildren. These small things fuel me to keep going," he says.

In a sector often fraught with bureaucracy, short-term projects, and donor-driven agendas, Human Upliftment Trust stands out for its consistency, clarity of purpose, and authentic community engagement. It is an example of what social work can achieve when it is rooted in empathy, sustained by professionalism, and guided by lived experience.

For Dr. G.D. Noble, the journey is far from over. At 66, he remains youthful in vision and tireless in action. "As long as I am here, I will do good for the people," he says. And that, perhaps, is the most powerful form of upliftment a life, dedicated wholly to lifting others.

— Bhavadharani K



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Contact Persons:

Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS). It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship.

CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises

– for-profits and non-profits to facilitate them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. www.csim.in

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Accounting and Audit for social enterprises, CSR projects, and NGOs through Social Audit Network, India (SAN India). For further information, please contact: **Ms. Latha Suresh** Director, SAN, India @ 92822 05123. www.san-india.org

CSIM also facilitates Social

THE MOST IMPORTANT MUSCLE IN HUMANS

Which is the most important muscle in humans?

Those of you who might be biology students or who might be aware of the human musculoskeletal system might say the name of a muscle you are aware of, like the thigh muscle, calf muscle, biceps, or triceps. We humans are creatures of habits – habits of mind and habits of body. The habits of mind are also like the muscles that we build. Just like how a muscle keeps growing if we keep using it more every day, the “habit muscles” also build as much as we use and as consistently as we use them. If you stop using it after a few days, it remains dormant and weakens until you start using it again. It takes effort again to build it.

I agree that “habit muscles” are important, but there are many habits that we can build, so which is the most important “habit muscle” then?

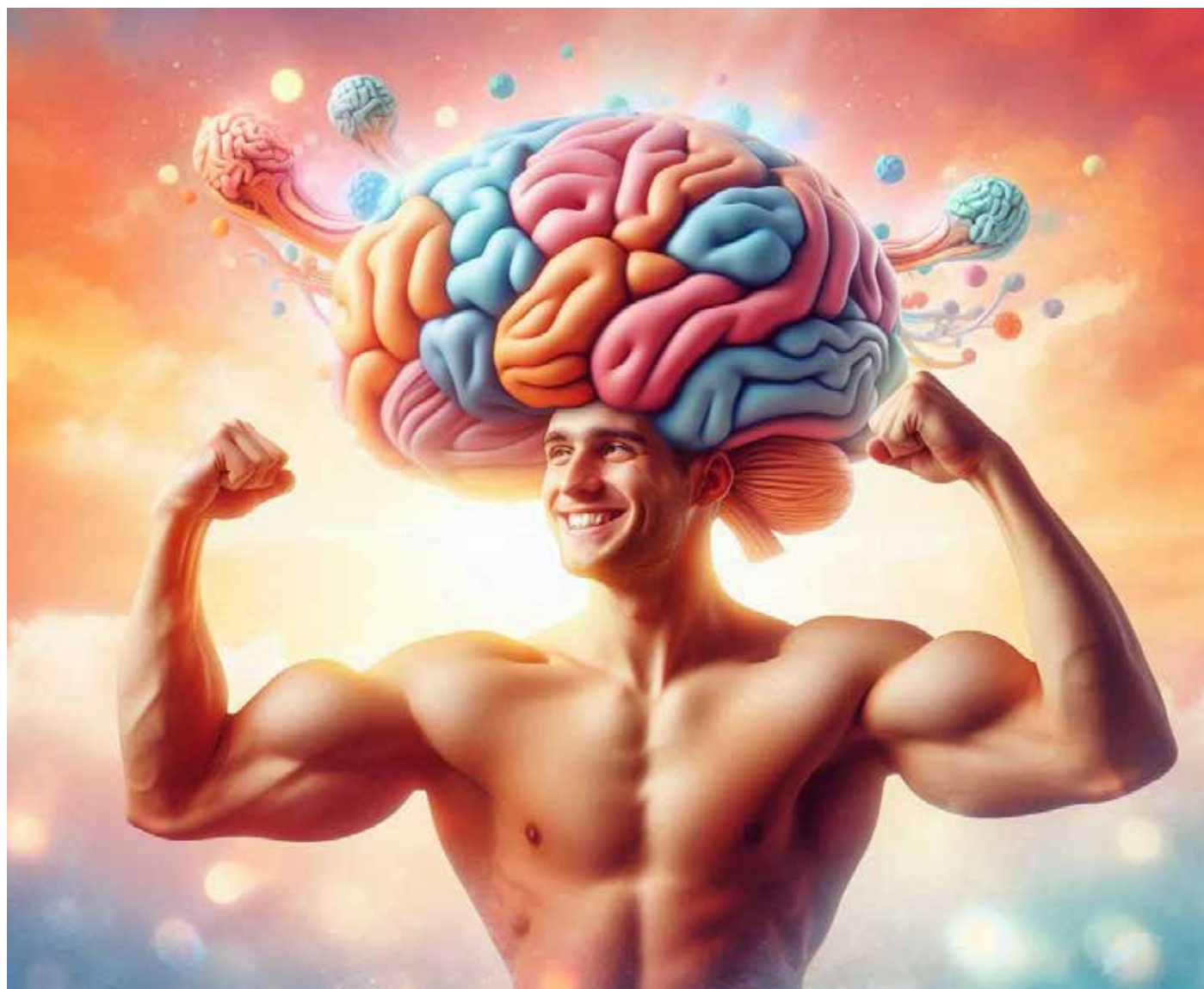
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No matter which type of goals we have, what ambitions we have, what works we do, in this knowledge and information era, we are bombarded with too many distractions, from mobiles, television, what we see, what we hear, and our workplace – literally almost everywhere. We keep coming across things that are more enticing and attractive. For example, you decide to go on a jog every day. One evening, a friend pings in and says there is a good movie they are going to and wanted to check with you if you can join. Though somewhere you know that going to that movie might hamper your jog the next day, out of the interest you have in the movie and the opportunity to hang around with friends, you agree to that.

The expected happens, you get back home late. Either you cancel your alarm, as skipping one day of jogging will not deter you from your goal, or you continue snoozing until it's too late for a jog and you skip it. This happens for a day and then for another day, and eventually you will have a new healthy habit wiped off completely from your mind, until you get triggered, like watching a fit person, seeing your belly growing or watching your weight increase. Sometimes we even avoid such triggers so that we don't feel guilty about skipping a good habit. These are the kind of cycles we go through in our lives, and these keep us from growing and achieving our goals. Now, how to stop this cycle? This is where the most important “habit muscle” matters, and that is **Self-Discipline**.

What is Self-Discipline?

Discipline is taking necessary action at the right time and place, whether you like it or not. So, when you set a goal for yourself to build a new habit, irrespective



of what is happening around you, you should take the action consistently without fail, whether you like it or not. If you see the toughest of all professional endeavours, they train you in self-discipline. So, as an individual, the more control you have over your emotions and your ability to do things regardless of your feelings is the key factor that defines your growth. This one factor of Self-Discipline can make an enormous difference, even though you are far inferior to others in your field who have many more skills and abilities than you. This is also one reason successful people became successful – because they continued to work on their goals and consistently made efforts in the direction they wanted to grow.

How to build the Self-Discipline Muscle?

When you go to a gym and there is one specific set of muscles that you want to build, do we work on all muscles or only those specific set of muscles? We work on the specific set of muscles that need

improvement. Similarly, if you want to build your Self-Discipline muscle, focus on how much Self-Discipline you are maintaining in your life now. Before even thinking of starting something new, observe where you already have Self-Discipline issues in your life. Check all areas of your life – health, finances, relationships, career, learning, business, creativity, etc. Understand where you are not being Self-Disciplined. Ensure that you start building your muscle, starting with the areas you've identified.

For example, you notice that you have planned to save 10,000 rupees every month, but you are unable to do so. Though you had a plan, why can't you do that? That is because either your plan is not good, or you are not sticking to your plan. If it's the latter, that is a Self-Discipline aspect you need to work on. Similarly, for health, you might have taken a gym membership intending to workout at least 5 days every week, and you are not doing that. That is again a Self-Discipline issue. No matter how you feel

about it, ensure you stick to your decision. Likewise, understand other areas also and list out all aspects where you need to work on your Self-Discipline. Start one by one and ensure that you are doing them without fail.

Once you can resolve the Self-Discipline issues in your existing lifestyle, then start slowly integrating new habits. As you have already trained your Self-Discipline Muscle, embracing a new habit will not be a challenge.

Self-discipline is the most essential factor that will empower you to break any shackles, build any habits, and achieve any goals. So start working on it.

Share your insights, learnings, queries and any progress you made from the realisations you got from reading my articles.

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CHAMPIONING SYSTEMIC CHANGE FOR A GREENER TOMORROW

As the climate crisis deepens and its effects ripple across geographies and sectors, the call for systemic change has grown louder. Yet, amid global summits and carbon pledges, it's often the quiet, ground-up movements that offer the most transformative potential. At the intersection of climate education, policy engagement, and regenerative business practices stands Hari Prasanth, a social entrepreneur redefining what it means to act sustainably—and more importantly, regeneratively.

Hari is the founder of Beyond Sustainability, a climate-focused startup based in India that works with corporations, educational institutions, and communities to build climate resilience through systems thinking. Since its inception, Beyond Sustainability has engaged with over 170 organisations and reached more than 8,500 individuals through training, workshops, and consulting. But the numbers are only part of the story. At its core, the organisation seeks to embed climate thinking into the DNA of how society functions—whether in classrooms, boardrooms, or community gatherings.

Hari's journey into climate action was sparked in 2016, when he watched *Before the Flood*, a documentary that presented climate change not just as an environmental issue but as a human story of loss and urgency. That moment catalysed a deep commitment to environmental problem-solving, which he later grounded in the Japanese concept of Ikigai—one's reason for being. For Hari, climate change wasn't just a crisis; it was a calling to reimagine systems of learning, production, and governance.

This clarity led to the creation of Beyond Sustainability, which deliberately moved away from the mainstream narrative of harm reduction to embrace a regenerative model. "Conventional sustainability is about doing less harm," Hari says. "But regeneration is about actively repairing what has already been damaged."

The startup operates through three service verticals:

1. **ESG Management**, which includes materiality assessments, ESG policy design, governance frameworks, and sustainability reporting aligned with GRI and BRSR standards;
2. **Carbon Strategy and Management**, offering footprint assessments, carbon reduction plans, pricing models, and support for disclosures like CDP and SBT;
3. **Sustainability Integration**, guiding organisations through sustainable procurement, risk analysis, impact assessments, and corporate sustainability ratings.

One of their early landmark projects involved creating a net-zero roadmap for an industrial cluster of 50 companies. Despite a lean team, the project was

completed through on-ground engagement, precision assessment, and participatory planning. "We wanted to demonstrate that systemic climate action is possible, even with limited resources, when purpose leads the way," Hari shares.

Education is another cornerstone of Beyond Sustainability. Hari and his team design and deliver climate literacy workshops for students, professionals, and policymakers. These sessions are tailored to the audience's context and often follow Bloom's Taxonomy to ensure structured learning. Whether it's simulating carbon pricing models, exploring circular economies, or dissecting environmental policies, each workshop aims to make sustainability actionable.

"Sustainability education isn't about dumping data," says Hari. "It's about connecting with people's realities, giving them tools to act within their sphere of



influence."

These sessions are often conducted in both English and regional languages, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. "A lot of climate jargon doesn't translate easily," Hari admits. "But if you can link it to someone's lived experience—like a failed monsoon or a high electricity bill—it suddenly makes sense."

Hari's perspective is global, shaped by academic research and fieldwork. While studying at the University of Twente in the Netherlands, he led a project on peatland restoration and carbon credits. Peatlands, which store more carbon than forests, are critical to global climate health. But when drained or disturbed, they become net carbon emitters. The Dutch project explored how farmers could be financially incentivised to protect these ecosystems through carbon and water credits.

"The lesson was clear," says Hari. "Regenerative action is most successful when ecological logic aligns with economic benefit."

He also draws attention to a lesser-discussed but increasingly important

issue: the environmental cost of digital infrastructure. With India emerging as a global data hub—especially in cities like Chennai and Bengaluru—the carbon and water footprint of AI and cloud computing is growing. "Every data query, every video stream, every backup has a carbon cost," Hari warns. "Tech is not climate-neutral by default. It must be made so, intentionally."

Beyond Sustainability works with tech companies to audit their digital infrastructure and explore sustainable alternatives. Hari sees this as one of the frontiers of climate action—ensuring the digital economy doesn't undermine ecological goals.

Despite working extensively with businesses, Hari admits that corporate transformation is still a challenge. Many companies perceive climate action as an expense rather than an investment. To counter this, Beyond Sustainability builds sector-specific case studies demonstrating return on investment through risk mitigation, consumer trust, and operational efficiency.

Sometimes, peer benchmarking proves more effective than policy mandates.

"When a client sees a competitor gaining investor confidence or stakeholder goodwill through sustainability, it becomes a powerful motivator," Hari notes.

While much of the climate conversation revolves around institutions, Hari believes individual behaviour remains a powerful lever. He identifies four key areas for action:

1. **Food choices**—reducing meat consumption can drastically lower one's carbon footprint.
2. **Transportation**—using public transit, carpooling, or cycling significantly cuts emissions.
3. **Consumption habits**—embracing minimalism, thrifting, and renting infrequently used items reduces waste.
4. **Digital usage**—managing data storage, streaming habits, and app usage lowers energy demand on server farms.

"A favourite example I use is the electric drill," Hari says. "It's used for ten minutes in its lifetime. Why buy it when you can rent it? It's about smart access, not ownership."

Looking ahead, Hari envisions scaling Beyond Sustainability's impact through AI-powered tools for climate risk assessment, regional language education modules, and collaboration with city planners to embed regenerative principles in infrastructure. "We've shown it's possible," he says. "Now it's about replication and partnerships."

In an era of climate fatigue and policy inertia, Hari Prasanth's work stands out not just for its scope but for its spirit. Through Beyond Sustainability, he is building pathways between knowledge and action, between purpose and policy. His message is clear: climate leadership isn't reserved for the few—it's a responsibility we all share.

Bhavadharani

“I strongly believe that empowering women farmers can transform the agricultural landscape.”

Dr. Jayashree shares with Marie Banu her interest in agricultural research

Dr. S. Jayashree, PhD, is an environmental microbiologist and Founder & CEO of BioVersion Agri Services, with operations in Coimbatore and Chennai. As COO of Kiana Agriculture, Netherlands, she champions sustainable soil and human health. Renowned for her pioneering research on Vetiver (*Chrysopogon zizanioides*), she has led transformative government-funded projects empowering tribal women in the Nilgiris through eco-based livelihood innovations. Her Indian patent on Vetiver's anti-venom properties was granted in 2024.

With over 35 national and international publications, her research spans phytoremediation, anti-cancer and anti-termite studies, and alternative substrates for mushroom cultivation. Dr. Jayashree has received multiple accolades, including the Outstanding Researcher Award from Nehru Group of Institutions. A former teacher turned scientist-entrepreneur, she has represented India globally in conferences across Istanbul, Shanghai, Dubai, and more. She serves on academic boards and reviews for reputed journals, continuing her mission to blend science, sustainability, and social impact.

In an exclusive interview with Marie Banu, Jayashree shares her interest in agricultural research.

What initially inspired you to work in agriculture and related research?

I have always been passionate about life sciences. My journey began as a schoolteacher at Chinmaya Vidyalaya in Coimbatore, where I taught students from LKG to Plus Two for over 13 years. While teaching gave me immense satisfaction, I felt a constant urge to explore beyond the classroom and do something that could create a real impact. The turning point came when a student's father, Professor Lakshman Paramahansa Swami, visited one of our science exhibitions. Recognising my enthusiasm for science, he encouraged me to pursue higher research, particularly a PhD.

I registered for a PhD in Environmental Science, specialising in Microbiology. During this phase, Professor Swami introduced me to the Vetiver plant, which became the focal point of my research due to its soil-restoring properties. This experience transformed me from a teacher into a researcher, giving me the confidence to innovate for agricultural development.

What led you to focus on Vetiver and its applications for farmers?

Vetiver fascinated me because of its ability to transform contaminated soil into rich, organic soil. While conducting soil analysis in the lab, I observed how the presence of Vetiver improved soil health and texture. I firmly believed that research shouldn't remain confined to the lab—it must reach the land. This belief led me to conduct workshops for farmers in 2007. At that time, digital tools like WhatsApp didn't exist, so we sent handwritten letters to invite farmers. We managed to bring together around 60 farmers, and the workshop created significant awareness. One of the participants, Mr. Pandian from Sivaganga district, embraced Vetiver cultivation and has since become a role model for other farmers. Seeing this impact convinced me that my research could make a real difference in the lives of farmers.



What inspired you to develop your eco-friendly agricultural product, the Eco-Box?

The Eco-Box idea was born unexpectedly during my collaboration with international scientists, Dr. Metin Turan from Turkey and Dr. Sanam from the Netherlands. We were conducting field trials for an organic fertilizer product in places like Gujarat and Ooty. While working with the potato farmers' association in Ooty, I noticed heaps of discarded plastic nursery trays used for cabbage saplings. When I asked what they did with this plastic waste, they said they simply buried it in the ground. This struck me as a serious environmental issue. I discussed the problem with my friend and thought—why not design nursery trays and pots made from organic fertilizer? This way, the container itself would enrich the soil as it decomposes. We began experimenting and created small biodegradable cups using organic fertilizer and natural tree gum. The results were excellent, with the pots lasting for 60 to 90 days and supporting strong plant growth. We have filed a patent for this innovation. As the pot decomposes, it releases nutrients into the soil, enhancing plant growth and soil fertility. Farmers no longer need to worry about disposing of plastic trays, which often harm the environment. We've also developed two versions of the Eco-Box—one made with heat-press technology that lasts for up to six months, and another without heat-pressing for shorter durations.

To commercialise the product and introduce other eco-friendly innovations, I have founded BioVersion Agri-Services. I believe there is a strong potential demand once farmers realise the environmental and economic benefits of switching to biodegradable alternatives.

What challenges have you faced in your journey from research to entrepreneurship?

The biggest challenge has been bridging the gap between research and real-world application. During my PhD, we made many discoveries, but due to a lack of awareness about intellectual property, we missed patenting several innovations, such as floating technologies for water-based cultivation.

I have learned the hard way that innovation alone is not enough; it must be protected and strategically marketed to have a wider impact. Another challenge is changing the mindset of farmers who are used to quick results through chemical fertilizers. Convincing them to

adopt organic practices that take time but ensure long-term benefits requires persistent effort.

How do you see the role of women in agriculture and agri-entrepreneurship?

Women have always been the backbone of agriculture, but their voices have often gone unheard. In Gujarat, I observed a refreshing change—women farmers were asking more questions and taking the lead in adopting new practices, especially organic fertilizers. They are naturally detail-oriented and more willing to experiment with sustainable techniques. I strongly believe that empowering women farmers can transform the agricultural landscape. Women entrepreneurs can introduce innovative products, create awareness, and build community-based farming networks.

How can agriculture balance profit with ecological sustainability?

The key lies in patience and understanding nature's timelines. Today, many farmers expect faster yields, which pushes them toward heavy chemical usage. This not only harms the soil but also affects long-term productivity. Profit and sustainability can coexist if farmers see themselves as entrepreneurs.

By cutting out middlemen and selling directly to consumers or niche markets, farmers can earn better margins while maintaining organic practices. Government support and collaborative research efforts are crucial to creating farmer-friendly technologies that combine profitability with ecological balance.

What role will technology play in shaping the future of agriculture?

Technology will be a game-changer. Drones, AI, and IoT devices are already transforming how farming is done, from precision spraying to monitoring soil health. At the recent Agri Intex in Coimbatore, I saw cutting-edge machines that can drastically reduce labour and increase efficiency. When computer science innovations and biotechnology come together, India can move from being a follower to a leader in global agriculture. These technologies can also attract the younger generation, who are tech-savvy but often hesitant to enter traditional farming.

What is your vision for BioVersion Agri-Services?

My vision is to build a platform that combines research-driven innovations with sustainable farming solutions. We aim to promote eco-friendly products like the Eco-Box and bring international collaborations into the Indian agricultural ecosystem. I want BioVersion to become a bridge between scientists, farmers, and entrepreneurs—helping farmers transition to organic practices while ensuring that sustainable products reach mainstream markets.

What advice would you give to students interested in agriculture and life sciences?

My advice is to choose the right mentors and institutions, and to stay patient. Agriculture is not a quick-profit field, but it is deeply rewarding and can generate wealth if approached with an entrepreneurial mindset.

The younger generation is often in a rush to earn, but agriculture requires a balance of passion, patience, and innovation. I also believe the government needs to give more recognition and structured career paths for agricultural researchers, similar to engineers and doctors.

When I travel abroad, I feel respected as a scientist, but in India, the same level of recognition is often missing. We need to change this narrative and make agriculture a career of pride and innovation.