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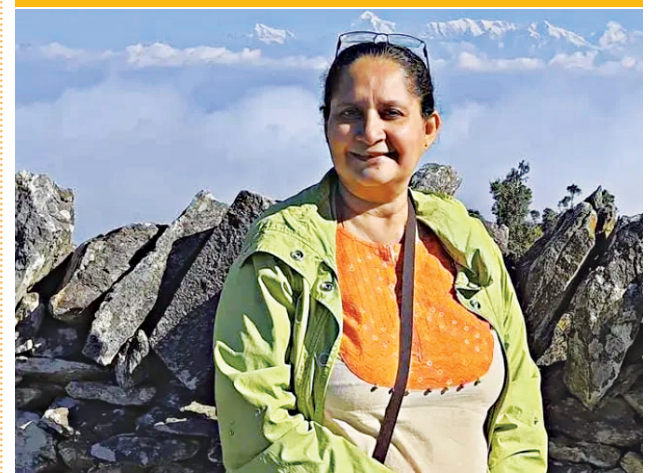


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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

In a world that often seems consumed by self-interest and material pursuits, there exists a beautiful and transformative force – the Joy of Giving. This timeless concept, rooted in empathy and compassion, is a reminder of our shared humanity and the profound impact of selflessness on both giver and receiver.

The Joy of Giving goes beyond mere acts of charity; it is a celebration of the inherent goodness in human nature. It reminds us that we are not defined by our possessions or accomplishments but by our capacity to connect with others and make a positive difference in their lives.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Joy of Giving is its ability to create a ripple effect. A single act of kindness can inspire countless others to do the same. It is a force that builds bridges across divides, transcending boundaries of culture, race, and socioeconomic status. It unites us in a shared purpose: to alleviate suffering, spread happiness, and build a more compassionate world.

This spirit of giving is not limited to grand gestures or material wealth. It thrives in the smallest of deeds – a smile, a kind word, a helping hand. It is about being present for someone in their time of need, offering solace, and sharing in their joy. It is about acknowledging the interconnectedness of our lives and recognizing that our well-being is intertwined with the well-being of others.

The Joy of Giving also teaches us the value of gratitude. When we give, we become acutely aware of the privileges we enjoy. We learn to appreciate the abundance in our lives and develop a greater sense of contentment. It reminds us that our wealth is not measured by what we have but by what we can give.

Moreover, giving is a powerful antidote to the feelings of isolation and loneliness that can pervade our modern lives. It fosters a sense of community, as individuals come together to address common challenges and uplift one another. It reminds us that we are part of something greater than ourselves, and that our actions have a far-reaching impact.

In a world where cynicism and indifference sometimes dominate the narrative, the Joy of Giving stands as a beacon of hope. It reminds us that, at our core, we are compassionate beings capable of immense love and generosity. It encourages us to look beyond our differences and recognize our shared humanity.

So, let us all take a moment to reflect on the Joy of Giving and how we can incorporate it into our lives. Whether through simple acts of kindness, volunteer work, or charitable contributions, we have the power to make a positive impact.

Let us celebrate the joy of giving not just during special occasions but as a way of life, for in doing so, we not only enrich the lives of others but also discover the true essence of our own humanity.

Marie Banu

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu Rodriguez

Boost Your Immunity Against Information Overloading



Everything in the world has two sides. One is Good and another is Bad. Human has positive vibes as well as negative emissions. Technological convergence has both advantages and disadvantages. Society has two classes – Have's and Have not. Likewise In this modern world, an Information society has two classes; One is Information-rich and the other is Information-poor.

Manuel Castells is a prominent sociologist (1996) defines "An information society is a society where the creation, distribution, and manipulation of information has become the most significant economic and cultural activity. It is characterized by the widespread use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), high levels of connectivity, and a reliance on knowledge and information as key drivers of social, economic, and political change."

Information rich can refer to an individual, organization, or institution with great access to diverse source of information, have extensive resources, networks and capabilities to collect, store, process, and utilize information effectively.

Information poor or information poverty refers to a situation in which individuals, groups or communities are lacking in access to sufficient, relevant, reliable, and needed information due to various social, economic, or infrastructural limitations. Information poverty can lead to reduced opportunities, limited decision-making abilities, and social inequalities in accessing available resources. Information-rich tend to fall on Information Overload or Information flood.

Information Overload is a situation where an excessive amount of information floods toward individuals, organizations or institutions. Here, information can be characterized in terms of quality, quantity, frequency, and intensity of its flow. Psychologically, a person may find difficulties in processing, decoding, and filtering the needed information. It can lead to stress, overwhelm, reduced productivity, and difficulty in decision-making. In the Digital age, rapid growth in

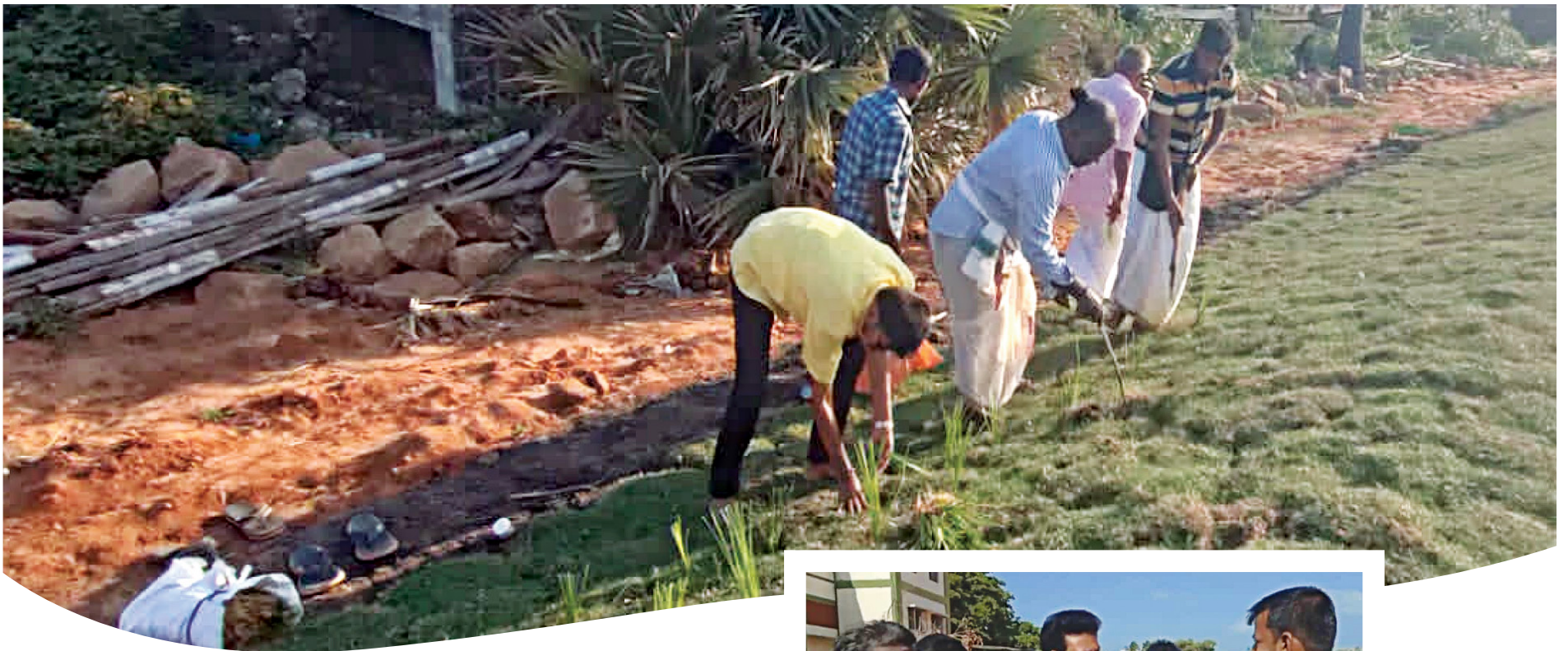
information dissemination through the internet particularly social media waters the information overload.

Info-rich and info-poor are two contradictory topics that relate themselves in the common lane; availability, accessibility, and handling of reliable information. Too much of anything is good for nothing. People who are info-rich, struggle to make informed decisions. For them, it is harder to extract meaningful insights from the flood of information. Rich with poor quality, unverified data develops an unhealthy diet of information consumption. On the other hand, Info-poor has less or no access to essential information. This is reflected in their ability to make limited informed decisions. They are excluded from the decision-making process for societal development.

Of course, the democratization of information is essential. Making essential information available to everyone is fundamental to bridging the gap. So people can access, manage and utilise it in making informed decisions. At the same time, there is a need for expertised personal assistance is needed in an individual's information-seeking behaviour. Media, information, and digital literacy skills will be recommended to those individuals and organizations to handle the information overload effectively.

Integrating media, information, and digital literacies along with the main ingredient called Ethics of Journalism at all levels of formal and informal education to society may reduce the risk of information obesity. Before believing any kind of information, one should clear the mist on their lens to see the real picture. Most of the surprises are unusual like heavy rainfall in the month of May, working from home throughout the year, etc. Even though the surprises are unusual, in another term abnormal. Developing critical thinking and the ability to filter facts from false will create and boost immunity against the abnormality in the information ecosystem.

Arul Selvi Azhagiri



INSPIRING STORIES FROM LOCAL PRODUCTS

Inspiration has the potential to transform individuals and societies. It can spark action, creativity, and personal development, leading to positive changes in various aspects of life. “It keeps you curious and always prepared for life-long learning. I began to realise it as a valuable tool for personal and collective betterment,” admits Mr V C Sreeram Nath, Founder and Secretary of Rameswaram Vetiver and Environmental Foundation.

Hailing from a farming family in the culturally, historically significant town of Thiruvarur in Tamilnadu, Sreeram aspired to be a journalist. He was exposed to heritage thoughts since childhood and this fostered a sense of connection. He saw his responsibility in knowledge transfer and preservation of native ideas, practices. Drawing inspiration from Dr AP J Abdul Kalam and Mr Varghese Kurian, he always envisioned building a brand for a locally developed product. “The glow of goodness that Kalam sir talks about and the success of building a brand for the cooperatives from Anand village in Gujarat leave the same legacy. The clarity on greater cause, the achievement defying all odds and their perseverance are lessons for life and I chose to be led by the energy from this inspiration,” adds Sreeram.

He studied BABL in Trichy and settled in the same city running an Amul outlet for

over fifteen years. He also owned a personalised gift centre and managed his father’s coffee shop, adding in his elements of interest like the cassette unit, book shelves for the customers. “Kalam sir visited our coffee shop once and I helped with his selection of cassette. I also started a book shop in an auto to take Kalam sir’s books to rural students. I tried everything to be associated with his thoughts,” he exclaims. Kalam sir’s death came in as a shock and Sreeram came to Rameswaram in his auto. He liked the ambience of this town and immediately decided to shift here. His first venture in Rameswaram was a coffee shop right opposite to the Kalam Memorial. It was during this time that Sreeram got to learn about the magical, versatile and perennial grass native to the region – Vetiver.

While the coffee shop had to shut down during the pandemic, Sreeram kept his learning on Vetiver alive and explored a variety of sources to learn more about this grass, its applications and uniqueness. He appreciated this as a plant gifted by nature for the society. “It can purify all five elements of nature from the Natarajar statue in the renowned Chidambaram temple. I saw its applications in soil erosion control, natural pest control, livestock forage, perfumery, medicinal uses and also the cultural uses. Have you



not seen vetiver used in homams to purify the air around us?” he points out.

Drawn into the versatility of this native grass, Sreeram began to share his knowledge in all his social circles and the social media pages became very active with discussions on vetiver. Soon, a senior scientist from the Central Institute of Medicines and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP) saw his posts and invited Sreeram to their research lab. “I was surprised to see five varieties of vetiver. I learnt their variety of applications and wanted to cultivate all these varieties in Rameswaram,” he recalls. Soon, he founded the brand Rameswaram Vetiver and enrolled seven farmers from the region. His team managed to bring around five acres in Palkulam village under vetiver cultivation since the inception in 2021. Now that the cultivation was successful, CIMAP offered him a distillation unit under the aroma mission to encourage value addition processes. “Right from the beginning CIMAP has been very supportive. Be it the provision of one lakh saplings or the machinery, they knew why this was important and also understood my efforts to build this as a local brand. We formed clusters and continued production,” adds Sreeram.

His marketing of vetiver has been touched by various aspects and fully informed by the ecological benefits, cultural significance. “We have supplied vetiver to Adyar river in Chennai too. Water purification using vetiver is an age old practice and its deep, extensive, fibrous roots allow sediment retention,

erosion control and enhances wetland ecosystems. As a low maintenance plant, it is an eco-friendly choice for sustainable landscaping,” he elaborates. His latest achievement with his brand is the establishment of the stall at

Mandapam railway station through the central government scheme ‘one station one product’. With a minimal rent of one thousand rupees, this scheme intends to promote local products and assured the right leverage Sreeram looked forward to within the town.

The foundation has been regularly organising meetings headed by Mr. M. Muruganandam, Founder and Managing Trustee of Rameswaram Vetiver and Environmental Foundation & Chairman of Excel Group; and declamations on vetiver, its wide applications, especially in arresting soil erosion. The latest in the series was held in Dhanushkodi where farmers also convened on ways to promote vetiver cultivation.

As the base oil for perfumes and many cosmetic products, its commercial applications are also being promoted to bring more farmers into the foundation.

Sreeram envisages to develop Rameswaram Vetiver as a brand open to all and this vision has enabled the development of buy back platform without any investment in land. “My vision is guided by vetiver’s significant role in carbon sequestration and sustainable ecotourism. Working for this on Kalam sir’s land, adapting Kurien sir’s principles gives me a sense of uniting with them. The soil revolution that vetiver promises and has demonstrated over ages needs wider recognition and our foundation is determined to take this farther,” he says with conviction.

Shanmuga Priya.T

G20 through the lens of ESG

The pride and responsibility of hosting the G20 event created an air of suppressed excitement in September, peaking on the three days when the visitors were due to arrive in Delhi. The logo of G20 under India's presidency was seen everywhere, adding a touch of colour to leafy green avenues and vibrant business areas.

Every person knew it was an honour to host this world event, but there was some puzzlement about what it would achieve. Snippets of conversations from fruit vendors and rickshaw drivers gave me the impetus to analyse the impact of this G20 for myself.

My aim in this article is to condense the major G20 declarations in the context of the Environment, Social and Governance framework. I referred to the various articles and websites of the Indian government as well as world bodies as my points of reference.

A detailed read of these sources would serve better, for anyone wishing to acquire a deep understanding of the G20 meetings this year.

The Environment: 80% of the responsibility

The Delhi Declaration of the G20 starts with a statement of responsibility: 'We are One Earth, One Family, and we share One Future.'

This is encouraging, given these countries' accountability for the state the planet is in and the opportunity they have to implement solutions. Together, they contribute 80% of greenhouse gas emissions and represent over 80% of global gross domestic product. Their proportion of energy demand is the highest, as is their share of forest areas.

Apart from accountability and opportunity, their risk also seems to be the highest. A UNESCO report says that the G20 countries are home to almost half of the world's youngest. World bodies and eminent scientists regularly point out that two or three decades hence, as the dire consequences of climate change are felt more keenly, today's children, adolescents and youth will be the ones facing scarcity of food, water or clean air.

The deadline of irreversibility is fast approaching, and it is welcome news for the entire world that this G20, for the first time, has placed the environment top of the agenda with some specific actions being decided.

Renewable energy, a positive step forward

One such indication of active participation by G20 countries is their endorsement for tripling global renewable energy capacity. This has changed in just a few weeks. When the Climate and Environment ministers met on 28 July 23, they were unable to achieve consensus on this point, a move welcomed by bodies such as the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and the International Energy Agency (IEA).

India is taking a lead in this area. Though the per capita rate of electricity consumption is one of the lowest, its large population and their expanding aspirations mean that demand for power is high and will only go up. Globally the third-highest emitter of annual CO₂ emissions, the country has determined that 50% of its energy demand will be supplied from



renewable energy sources by 2030.

Current developments bear out the likelihood of the target being reached. Indian scientists have achieved the blending of 10% of ethanol with fuel five months ahead of schedule in 2022, and are now aiming to double the blending ratio by 2025.

Extensive capacity, one of the largest in the world, has been built for green hydrogen, solar power and wind power and the country uses a high proportion of biofuels as an alternative energy source.

For other countries to similarly benefit from the use of biofuels, India proposed the Global Biofuels Alliance along with the other producers, Brazil and the United States with an objective to increase the use of biofuels significantly by 2030. The ambition of the alliance is to develop technology that will change the traditional sources of bio-fuel such as sugarcane, replacing these with waste, residues and non-food crops.

The downside, fossil fuels

While more of bio-fuel is being proposed, a big disappointment to world watchers in the environment space was the lack of a consensus to reduce the use of fossil-fuels.

The countries acknowledged the need to peak emissions before 2025 to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and said that global greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced to 43 percent by 2030

relative to the 2019 levels. However, there was no mention of stopping the use of oil and gas, while reducing coal was only mentioned in passing.

Water resources

The G20 statement focussed on all aspect of water resource management as well as survival of the oceans. On drinking water, a notable contribution is a best-practices compendium which covers areas such as technology used to improve drinking water security, groundwater management, water use efficiency improvement and methods to make water infrastructure climate-resilient. The document includes not only a description of projects but also lessons learned and contact details for others who may want to adapt these solutions, making it a useful reference for practical improvements and achievements.

On the oceans, Indonesia last year initiated the Ocean20, aiming to deliver actionable policy recommendations and strategies to spur investment and growth in the ocean economy while protecting, restoring and regenerating it. At this G20 meet as well, the Group committed to action to protect the ocean and address the pollution crisis, particularly chemical and plastic pollution.

Land use

The New Delhi Declaration agreed to by the member states lists all the commitments of this Group. With



respect to land and related issues, the stated goals are to restore at least 30% of all degraded ecosystems by 2030 and prevent further degradation; to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030; reduce land degradation by 50% by 2040 and protect and maintain forests. As mentioned earlier, the bulk of forest land is in the G20 countries.

In another aspect, Prime Minister Modi informed the delegates that natural methods of farming are being actively embraced to improve soil health and human lives. Echoing this global concern for the climate, a group of institutional investors managing over USD 7 trillion in assets urged the G20 group in August this year to align agricultural subsidies with their climate and nature goals by the end of the decade. This welcome development by large finance companies is in complete consonance with the Save Soil Movement. A key recommendation of this movement is that subsidies given to farmers for improving soil health are one of the main means of addressing the climate crisis.

Social Inclusion and Governance

As the agreement says : “We affirm that no country should have to choose between fighting poverty and fighting for our planet. We will pursue development models that implement sustainable, inclusive and just transitions globally while leaving no one behind.”

Working with the community

Promoting a circular economy with its tenets of reuse, recycle and reducing consumption through the

transition to sustainable lifestyles, is one of the corner stones of the G20 declaration. In another first, it mentions the decoupling between economic growth, environmental degradation and primary resource consumption thus focusing on reducing environmental impact while supporting growth. In support, developed countries have agreed to fulfil their commitment of 100 billion dollars for climate finance for the first time.

Joining hands across nations

A historic takeaway of India’s presidency of the G20 Summit is the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of the Group of 20 (G20). Another major announcement was on the India-Middle East-Europe shipping and railway connectivity corridor. Both these developments will support enhanced connectivity and economic integration across different nations, thus leading to more widely spread economic progress.

Regulatory actions

The G20 has pledged to take increased action to prevent and combat environmental crime and put greater emphasis on the promotion and respect of human rights.

In more specific areas, a regulatory framework is aimed to be created for deep-sea mining to ensure effective protection for the marine environment. A Green Credit perspective is being proposed, to provide an incentive for performance rather than the current disincentive based Carbon Credit mechanism. An Extended Producer Responsibility

(EPR) framework will promote eco-design and ensure waste treatment is responsibly carried out.

Green Development Pact

A few days’ reading of the achievements and areas of open discussion at G20 showed me that these are far too many and complex to try and put down in a brief article of this nature. My research did not make me much wiser, but it did give me an overall impression. With the G20 countries having recommitted to meeting environment targets, there are rays of hope and these are brighter than they were a few months ago.

In summary, the G20 has adopted the Green Development Pact, which summarises actions to tackle the environment crisis through international cooperation in five pillars: Lifestyle of Environment (LiFE), Circular Economy, Climate Finance, Accelerating Progress on SDGs, and Energy Transitions & Energy Security; each of which was covered in detail during this summit.

There have been a number of sparklers and some damp squibs in the G20 declaration this year. The positive aspect is the focus on outlining a way forward that balances economic resilience and growth with transitioning to a cleaner economy.

It remains to be seen which of these declarations will sustain and support the endeavour to make the world Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, fulfilling the vision of “One Earth. One Family. One Future.”

Karuna Luthar



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

Ms. Marie Banu Rodriguez

Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Contact Persons:

Director, Chennai
@ 9884700029

Dr. Madhuri. R
Head, Coimbatore,
@ 91-9840222559

Dr. Agyeya Tripathi
Head - North & NE India
@ 91-8058662444

Mr. Sandeep Mehto,
Head - Hosangabad,
@ 91-96696 77054

CSIM also facilitates **Social 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

HARMONY OF HEARTS



At Akshara Vidyashram, a school nestled in Cuddalore, education was not confined to textbooks and classrooms alone. It was a place where the joy of giving thrived, where children learned that the most valuable lessons were often learned beyond academics. This year, the school has partnered with CSIM (Centre for Social Initiative and Management) to celebrate the "Joy of Giving Week," a week dedicated to spreading love and kindness.

The Founders of the school, Mr. Ramani Shankar and Mrs. C.K. Vijayalakshmi, are known for their passion for social causes, and when CSIM proposed the idea, they welcomed it with open arms.

Akshara Vidyashram is a unique institution, home to around 300 children, with 25 percent being NRI children. It is a place where diverse cultures and backgrounds come together, making it the perfect environment for nurturing empathy and compassion.

When the children were oriented about the upcoming Joy of Giving Week, they were excited, although they had no idea just how deeply it would touch their hearts.

On the 9th of September, a remarkable event took place at the school. Mr. Shankar, the founder of Tribal Welfare Society, arrived with his spouse Mrs. Anuradha and four Narikurava children- Rajkumar, Sanjai, Thilothama, and Anushka. Shankar is a man

whose dedication to the cause of tribal welfare had earned him the prestigious Ashoka Award. He spoke passionately about his advocacy work and the challenges faced by the Narikurava communities.

The Narikurava children, with bright eyes and dreams in their hearts, shared their ambitions with the Akshara children. They spoke of their longing for the facilities and opportunities that Akshara Vidyashram provided.

As Shankar narrated the history of the Narikuravas, tracing their evolution through the Maratha period, a profound silence fell upon the audience. Tears welled up in the eyes of a few Akshara children as they heard about the struggles faced by the Narikurava families.

We sensitised them on the power of giving. "All of you must be having more than one pen or pencil in your bag, right? Do you know that these Narikurava children long to have a good pen and a notebook? We have too many and do not realise the value if it?" I said.

I added saying how even small acts of kindness could make a significant difference in the lives of those less fortunate. Remembering our founder Shri. P.N.Devarajan's words "Each one; Reach one!" I encouraged the children to contribute whatever they could during the Joy of Giving week.

The children sat in quiet contemplation, their thoughts racing as they tried to process the stark contrast between their own lives and the challenges faced by the Narikurava children. In this moment of silence, the seeds of empathy were sown, and the spirit of giving began to take root. The children, moved by the stories they had just heard, started talking quietly amongst themselves.

Gnanashree stepped forward with a pencil in hand and asked me: "Can I donate this?"

"Of course, yes!" I replied.

Rajkumar, one of the Narikurava children, was overjoyed as he received the pencil from her. His eyes sparkled with gratitude, and he held the precious pencil tightly, lest it be lost in the crowd of offerings. To him, this simple pencil represented not just a writing tool but a symbol of connection and friendship.

Raj Kumar's smile, as he clutched the gifted pencil, illuminated the hearts of all who witnessed the moment.

The line began to form, each student eager to contribute whatever they could—pencils, sketch pens, scissors, and more. It was a line fuelled not by obligation, but by genuine compassion and a desire to make a difference.

Haritha, her heart brimming with kindness, reached into her school bag and pulled out her lunch box filled with snacks. She offered it to Seetha, her gesture of sharing going beyond stationery to provide a simple pleasure in the form of a snack.

In this spontaneous act of giving, barriers dissolved, and bonds were formed. It was a beautiful demonstration of the power of compassion, showing that even the smallest acts of kindness could create ripples of joy and hope.

As the Akshara children continued to line up, their offerings growing, the Narikurava children were not just recipients of stationery; they became recipients of love and friendship.

Gnanashree's pencil was just the beginning of a story of empathy and kindness that would continue to unfold in the days to come.

Shankar extended an invitation to the Akshara children, inviting them to visit the Residential school for Narikurava children at Eraiyur.

"I would like to visit the school along with my parents," said Sahidhya instantly to Pradeep Kumar of CSIM.

The following week, two Akshara School buses were filled with 40 excited children, parents, and teachers along with sports items, stationery, uncooked food, and clothes as gifts.

As the buses from Akshara arrived at the Residential school, they were met with an unexpected and heart warming welcome. The Narikurava children, with bright smiles on their faces, approached the Akshara children, parents, and teachers, each carrying a hand-made bead chain. These colourful tokens of appreciation were a gesture of gratitude and friendship, a symbol of the connections that were beginning to form.

Sudha of CSIM ensured that the Akshara children sat with the Narikurava children in pairs. This thoughtful arrangement allowed for meaningful conversations and interactions to take place. They played with their new friends, sharing their lunch

boxes without inhibition. It was a beautiful sight—a celebration of the true joy of giving.

The conversations were eye-opening for both groups of children. The Akshara children learned about the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the Narikurava community. They listened to stories of resilience and determination, gaining a newfound appreciation for the Narikurava way of life.

On the other side, the Narikurava children were curious and eager to learn about the world beyond their community. They asked questions about Akshara school, hobbies, and aspirations. It was a moment of exchange, where barriers dissolved, and bridges of understanding were built.

Jothi, CSIM's Senior Manager remarked, "This is the true 'joy of giving'. It's not just about material things; it's about sharing love, compassion, and friendship."

Pragathi and Kavya, thoughtful and compassionate children from Akshara, felt a deep sense of connection with the Narikurava children. They approached Akshara's Vice Principal with a request, "Can we stay back for an hour more to spend time with the Narikurava children?" The Vice Principal, moved by the spirit of empathy and learning, agreed wholeheartedly.

As the hour passed, the bonds between the Akshara and Narikurava children deepened. They discovered that beneath the surface differences, they shared a common humanity, dreams, and the universal desire for friendship.

Akshara parents and teachers, observing this beautiful interaction, were filled with pride and gratitude. They realised that the Joy of Giving Week programme had not only touched the lives of the Narikurava children but had also transformed their own children into empathetic and compassionate individuals.

The day at the Narikurava learning center was a testament to the fact that true learning extended beyond the confines of classrooms. It was about opening one's heart to new experiences and perspectives. It was about the joy of giving, not just material possessions, but also the gift of time, attention, and friendship.

Marie Banu Rodriguez

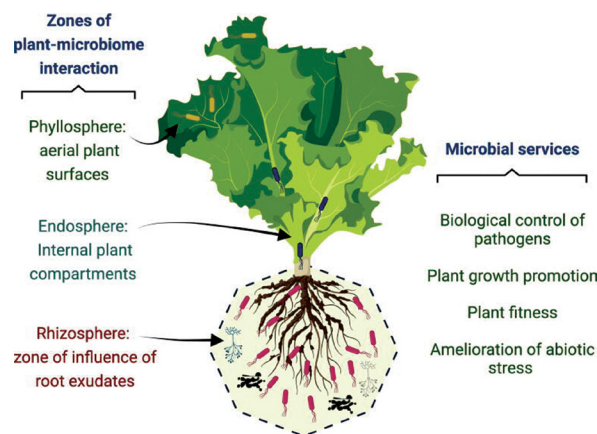
OF CATS, COWS, COOPERATION AND MORE



In an article I was reading, I came across these words - recruitment, services, promotion, drives. Did you think the piece was about marketing, HR, and related fields? Well no, it was about plant interactions with their environment! Plants routinely do all these activities too - they select and recruit specific microorganisms to live on and around them, while rejecting other candidates, they engage microbial services for activities such as biological control of pathogens, growth promotion and abiotic stress amelioration. They have periods when they recruit aggressively - recruitment drives I think we can call them, and they also promote certain species over others differentially, depending on their needs and contexts at the time. (Santoyo, G; 2022)

Recent research is bringing to light more and more examples of complex interactions across plant species, between species and their abiotic environment, and between groups of species in Nature. We are just about beginning to understand these incredibly intertwined interactions, and how crucial they are in maintaining an ecological balance. As our understanding grows, so does our awareness that it is in fact quite damaging to us to interfere with these cycles - disrupting them has far-reaching and irreversible negative consequences for the entire system. One such example I came across just yesterday was on Netflix, in a documentary on the Okavango Delta. It described how hippos help the entire huge Okavango delta survive and thrive by forging channels for the flood water to spread. If there were no hippos, thousands of hectares of land would stay dry, the entire landscape would change, and this would impact the survival of every one of the diverse communities calling this place home.

But we don't have to look as far away as Botswana's delta to see how species interact with each other, and with the environment, to shape and sustain it. Cows on a farm fertilize and micro-plough the land, setting the stage for multiple plant species and microorganisms to grow. Birds ride along on the cows, satisfying their hunger by eating any insects they may find on their rides'



skin, and providing the cows with a dry-cleaning service, so to speak. Earthworms create labyrinthine tunnel systems underground, which become the lifelines supplying air and water to myriad communities. These are some of the very common interactions we see on farms.

But I came across a couple of unusual ones recently. Lately we have been troubled by pigs at our farm, and we have been wondering how to stop them from coming in, because they dig up plants and make very large and deep holes in the ground. Last week, the rains filled up these holes with water, and I was again wondering what to do about the pigs and their digging, when I saw our tuxedo cat Coco approaching one of the holes very carefully and stealthily. Time seemed to stand still as he advanced one paw at a time, in absolute, utter silence. I couldn't even see what he was stalking, but then out of the blue he pounced with unbelievable speed and suddenness, and the next moment he had a large toad in his mouth. And triumph in his bright eyes, I might add - the hunt had been remarkably swift and totally cruelty-free. After he'd had his well-earned meal, he went back to the water-hole, and drank a little water too. Now, we have a great deal of difficulty making

Coco drink water, he just won't have any from the water-bowl kept for the cats and dogs, so the sight of him drinking water voluntarily really made me feel thankful to the pig who had made this mini-pond. Then, looking around, I saw that water from this little pond was following a certain path - it was in fact making a natural bioswale. (If you remember, we spoke of creating bioswales in farms for easy and natural irrigation, in the May 2023 issue <https://csim.in/conversations/ConversationsToday-May2023.pdf>) The water was flowing down paths of least resistance, covering a great deal more ground than a straight man-made channel ever could, and enriching the water reserves of the land in the process. Pigs contributing towards human irrigation needs... who would have thought of that!

I've also seen some sort of alliance between cats and cows, in which cows make a certain sound that probably means 'hey, there's a big snake here!', and all the cats in the vicinity go streaking towards the cowshed for a juicy meal, and protect the cows in the process. I've seen dogs and cats become fast friends, so much so that a particular cat will leave her kittens with only a certain dog-nanny when she needs some alone time, because she knows the kittens just adore their canine babysitter. Our dogs also routinely chase away cats from 'outside' while fawning over, and licking, the resident cats and kittens in the most affectionate way. And of course, humans cannot survive in an open organic farm without cats and peacocks - without them we probably would have suffered a hundred snake-bites by now!

In order to be a truly multi-life organic farm, it is most important to appreciate and foster the interrelationships between species throughout the ecosystem, starting from the soil systems to the treetops and beyond. When the natural inter-species interactions, a million of which we don't even know exist, and which research is just uncovering, are in place, each species survives and thrives as it should. Interfering with these cycles is reckless and unnecessary - in the long run, it does immense harm. Using lethal pesticides to remove a few species from a tract of land messes up the whole complex, intricate, awe-inspiring dance of life. Instead, if we can just stand back and marvel at it, we start realizing what is really meant by 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam' - This Universe is One Family.

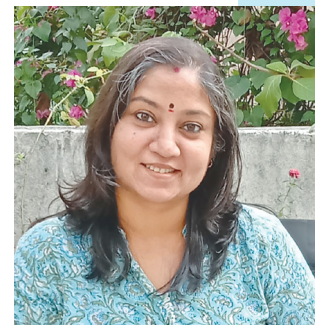
[Reference: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jare.2021.11.020> 'How Plants Recruit Their Microbiome: New Insights into Beneficial Interactions']

Ramashree Paranandi

The author Ramashree Paranandi is a partner in The Organic Farm, located near Nedumaram, TN.

She consults on all aspects of the farm and often stays over for long stretches to enjoy pollution-free days with the other farm creatures. When in Chennai, she writes, teaches and sings. She can be reached at

aramashree@eltconsultancy.org



Affordable, Innovative and Scalable WATSAN Solutions



Water and Sanitation issues in many remote areas are still very unsettling. They tend to affect the observers in many ways but not all of them manage to give back strategically, intending to account for the reality of all those in the last mile. “Like Robert Chambers says, we must put the last first and then design programs for their needs. I attempted just that,” says Mr Chandrasekaran.J, Founder and CEO of the company WATSAN (an acronym for Water and Sanitation) Envirotech Private Limited in Chennai.

He is an expert in plastic technology with an experience of over two decades in designing, prototyping, and manufacturing various products in metals, plastics, and other diverse materials. Having held various positions in different companies in Bombay and Baroda, he moved to Chennai to stay connected with his extended family. “We were all in good positions but missed each other so came back to the city and wanted to settle as a joint family. I moved from Mumbai to Chennai with other family members too joining me to be a joint family. I worked with various multinational companies in Chennai looking after design, manufacturing and other activities. On weekends I used to go along with a few friends to look out for old temples,” recalls Chandrasekaran.

Drawn to ancient temples, he explored their stories and spent weekends in photo documenting them. He also referred them to archaeologists and in the middle of all those processes met Mr P.N.Subramaniam, Managing Trustee of MSDS, who joined WATSAN as its Co-Founder.

Chandrasekaran and his team of volunteers worked rigorously to clear vegetation around these old temples so that people could come back, but the cycle became repetitive. Also, the volunteers were not a reliable support as the work demanded consistent work. So, he tried to mobilise funds from all his volunteer groups and then engaged local populations in temple cleaning works. While the team managed to cover around 35 temples in a year, he did not feel content as temple restoration was the final answer to ensure that they were in use and properly maintained.

He along with ASI (Archaeological Survey of India) retired Superintending Archaeologist Dr T Satyamurthy, PNS and few more members co-founded the Rural Education and Conservation of Heritage (REACH) Foundation in 2016, in Chennai and restored over thirty temples. Today, REACH has evolved as an official authority to assess heritage impact and approve new constructions in Tamilnadu. REACH has trained over 1000 amateurs in Tamil epigraphy through renowned epigraphist Shri S. Ramachandran. REACH also conducts heritage tours for enthusiasts on a regular basis. Today, REACH has evolved as an official authority to assess heritage impact and approve new constructions in Tamilnadu.

While the temple restoration work continued as a hobby through REACH, Chandrasekaran also began work on water and sanitation in rural villages. “All our privileges evade as we move closer to remote areas where people are deprived of even the basic amenities. And I saw that the water purifier

companies also stopped with tier one cities. There was need and scope to reach those left behind in the remote parts,” he points out, understanding this as a huge opportunity with social benefits. Watsan’s first product was an eco-friendly water filter that was the most affordable in the world and also had the longest life.

“It is a simple clay candle with nano pores, called Terafil, that filters all pathogens, heavy metals, turbidity, colour and odour. These terafil candles are so designed to prevent any turbid or solid or metal complexes from entering the collection vessel at the bottom,” explains Chandrasekaran. Recognised by the Jal Sakthi Ministry, this filter does not require electricity, maintenance. There is no leakage at all as in conventional purifiers and no chemicals are involved in the process. “No replacement of membranes is needed. A simple rinse wash is all it needs. It is this simplicity that has helped us reach out to more than 4,00,000 houses without any trader. We still have 600,000 villages in the country without access to clean drinking water. This is a huge customer base to work for,” he adds.

Watsan’s real success is not in taking these filters to the villages, but in educating the rural people about water, good-bad salts, and the notion of selective dissolved salts as against the regularly quoted total dissolved salts. “What could be as dangerous as pathogens is the fluoride and arsenic

contamination. We have developed add on nano materials to remove these specifically dangerous salts which can simply be added to these filters. Regionally, relevant information on water and its salt content were key factors that helped people see the relevance and importance of our filters,” he explains.

Alongside water, Chandrasekaran also got to see the need for toilets in remote rural areas and wanted to pursue the development of a toilet using discarded landfills from the fiber glass industry. “These are just buried underground so using this durable and high strength material as a building material can reclaim land and also solve sanitation issues in the last mile,” he elaborates.

Much like an adult lego kit, these toilets are not literally constructed but manufactured to be monolithic, light weight, non-corrosive and easy to install in just two days’ time.

These modular toilets emerged to be the right fit for all concerns that underlined the reach and use of toilets in far fledged regions. WatSan recently received the National Award

from the Minister of Petrochemicals and Fertilizers, for innovating and piloting the manufacturing of ready-to-fit toilets. Having reached to over 100 schools, anganwadis, WatSan enrolled SHG women to mould the walls. “In every village, a group of 10 women are trained to do this construction which needs nothing more than a day of sunlight to complete curing. It is then completely theirs,” he asserts.

Intriguingly, WatSan’s products can be used in any weather and disaster situations. The purifiers, for instance, are used in flooded areas, camouflaged for the border areas, and are also adapted with temperature sensors to ensure that jawans can drink clean water easily at any point of time during the year. Closely working with premium institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology, Department of Science and Technology (DST), Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR-IMMT), Central Industry for Petrochemicals Engineering and Technology (CIPET), WatSan took the risk to bring into life innovative ideas that remained on papers with patents.

“We got the license and bridged the critical need for large scale manufacturing. Ours is a social enterprise and our marginal profits at scale have encouraged us to reach out to different remote areas,” he says, determined to reach out to the remotest places in our map.

Shanmuga Priya.T

How one couple created a forest in the desert



A barren piece of land in the middle of a desert. The harsh climatic conditions of Rajasthan, one of the driest states in India. And a couple's determination to transform this space into a thriving eco system for everyone. This is a magical tale of how a barren piece of land now hosts several wild animals, birds, a thriving forest, a self sustaining pond, and much more!

In the heart of the sprawling desert landscape of Rajasthan, Gaurav and Varsha Gurjar, native to the land, embarked on a transformative journey that would not only redefine their lives but breathe new life into the arid sands. Driven by a deep-rooted connection to their homeland and an unwavering commitment to environmental rejuvenation, the couple found themselves drawn to a seemingly desolate and challenging piece of land in Sangasani village, nestled just kilometers away from the city of Jodhpur.

However, theirs was no ordinary aspiration; their goal was to rewrite the narrative of desert landscapes and demonstrate the resilience of nature through their ambitious project—Maruvan, “the forest of the desert”, that would flourish amidst the harsh terrain.

“We wanted a challenging piece of land,” says Gaurav and challenging is what they got. The land they chose appeared unforgiving and inhospitable. Flood-washed soil, and saline terrain created a hostile environment. To add to everything, the native flora had been invaded by the encroaching Mexican mesquite brought in by the Maharaja of Jodhpur in the 1930s. Called *baavliya* (“the mad one”) this invasive species of plant had inadvertently disrupted the delicate balance of the local ecosystem.

Yet, rather than discouraging them, these very adversities fuelled the Gurjars' determination. With a shared passion to restore the land to its former glory and resurrect its once-vibrant indigenous plants, they embarked on the audacious journey of creating



Maruvan—a living testament to the power of human perseverance and ecological revival.

Gaurav and Varsha, inspired by the nuances of nature, conceived Maruvan as a testament to the fact that “all jungles don't look alike.” Recognising the intrinsic beauty of native landscapes, they envisioned a desert forest that defied convention—a landscape painted not in lush greens, but in earthy browns, harmoniously blending with the desert's natural palette. With an average annual rainfall of around 320mm, the climatic conditions of the region provided the canvas upon which this distinctive ecosystem would take root and flourish.

Gaurav's prior experiences working on diverse parcels of land, where he would meticulously dig trenches to a depth of three feet and introduce organic matter, akin to a swift surgical intervention, marked the early stages of their journey. However, the arid expanse of Maruvan required a distinct approach. The ecosystem, a fragile tapestry of life, could not

withstand the impact of heavy machinery. The quick “surgery” method that found success in more urbanised settings proved incompatible with Maruvan's untouched wilderness.

Maruvan's unique context, characterised by a pristine landscape and the absence of chemical agriculture or urban influence, prompted the Gurjars to chart a new course

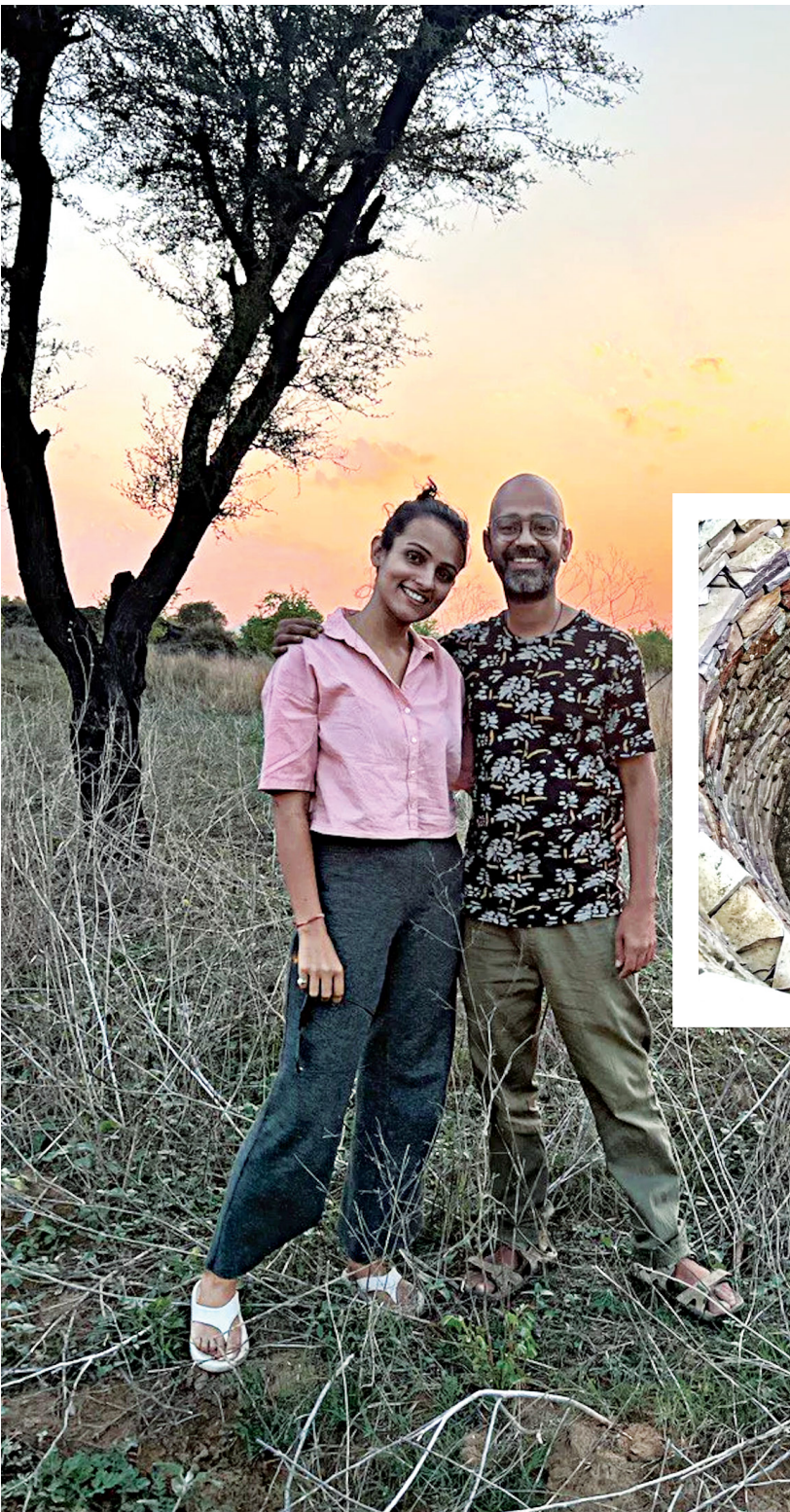
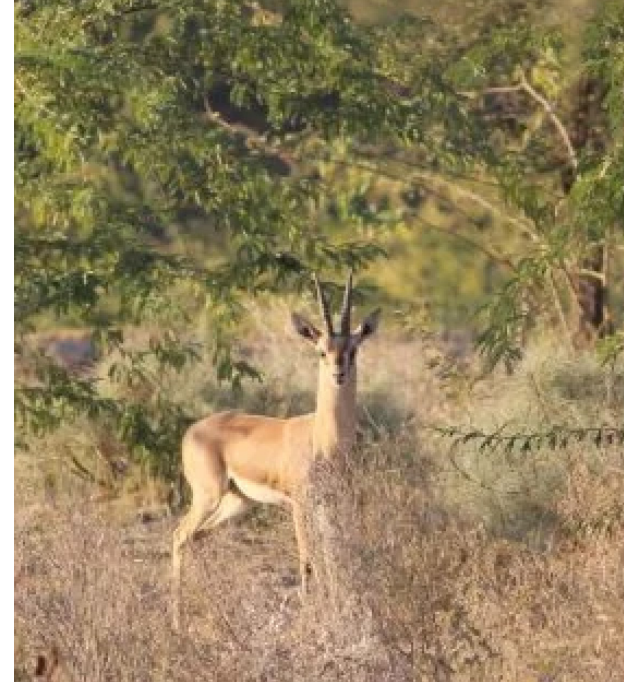
Recognising the inherent resilience of native grasses and millets that already flourished on the land, they pivoted their strategy. This marked a turning point—an evolution from traditional methods to a symbiotic partnership with the natural order.

Upon some research, they found a type of local grass called *Daab* (*Desmostachya bipinnate*), especially used by the weaver bird population to build their nests, and attempted to restore it.

Successful in their attempt, there is now a large weaver bird population that inhabits the land. Removing and replacing a single specie of grass made such an impact.

Delving into history with an ardent desire to restore Maruvan's former glory, Gaurav and Varsha meticulously studied ancient temples, orans (land protected by community laws), step wells, and *bawadis* (traditional water reservoirs) that once adorned the region. They delved into Rajasthani miniature art and folklore, which armed them with insights into the regions once thriving ecosystem and helped them piecing together a vivid tapestry of the land's historical biodiversity.

Maruvan's formidable challenges extended beyond its barren appearance, into the complex issue of water scarcity—a fundamental concern in arid landscapes. Inspired by the works of Anupam Mishra, the Gurjars embraced the art of water harvesting, seeking innovative ways to harness and manage this precious resource. “It was all experimental and observational,” says Gaurav.



Their rigorous research culminated in the creation of a pond, a central component of their intricate water management system. This pond not only acted as a reservoir but also nurtured a self-sustaining ecosystem, with carefully selected plants thriving on the moisture it provided. Along with that, they also built an open shallow well, whose functionality extended beyond its physical form. Positioned strategically to capture runoff rainwater and benefiting from a nearby seasonal river, the well's capacity is bolstered during the monsoon season. Excess water is intelligently channeled into the pond, allowing it to seep horizontally into the well, further enriching its reserves.



With a depth of 22 feet, the well ensures a substantial retention period, preventing excessive salinity and sustaining Maruvan's water supply. While at first the harvested water was enough for 8-9 months, today Maruvan's water supply is entirely self-sufficient.

Gaurav also shared that they plant their saplings and vegetation based on the presence and absence of the seasonal rains. "The amount of area and the number of trees to be planted are decided after the monsoons."

In crafting this aquatic haven, which went

on to become a cornerstone of sustenance and rejuvenation, standing as the singular source of sweetness amid the vast expanse, the Gurjars drew inspiration from the wisdom of tradition—Rajasthan's age-old open ponds, known as "naadis," that integrated wells within their depths. These wells, nestled within the cool recesses of the pond, acted as temperature regulators. During the heat of summers, as most of the water from the pond would evaporate, what remained, cocooned within the well's sheltered confines, became a lifeline. Taking cues from this timeless practice, the Gurjars artfully constructed their own "naadi" within Maruvan.

Naadis are conceived with a keen understanding of hydrodynamics, their depths carefully calibrated to preserve every droplet. Some are excavated deeper, others with a more shallow disposition, all meticulously orchestrated to preserve the most precious resource—water.

In their quest to align Maruvan with the rhythms of nature, Gaurav and Varsha observed animal behaviours as well. They found that the deers of the region were unwittingly sowing the seeds of future forests. The deers would select a spot for themselves, delicately scratch the earth's surface, release urine and faecal matter. As the monsoons arrived, these designated sites would undergo a remarkable metamorphosis, evolving into vibrant centres of biological activity. The seeds encased within the expelled waste material find themselves in a rather nurturing network, as the microbial life provided by the urine and faeces fostered tremendous growth. Consequently, the seemingly mundane act of excretion paradoxically assumes the role of an inadvertent sowing endeavour.

The narrative extends beyond the realm of deers to unveil a captivating dimension of collaborative symbiosis. Specific seeds, which remain dormant under conventional circumstances, gain new life once ingested by birds. As the seeds of these plants traverse the intricate digestive tract, they go through a reconfiguration of sorts, leading to their accelerated sprouting upon release.

Source: The Stories of Change

"Understanding the connection between emotions, food, and health is essential."

Gauri Sarin shares with Marie Banu the benefits of living without medicine

Gauri Sarin is a notable social entrepreneur with a diverse journey. After graduating from XLRI in 1992 and gaining five years of corporate HR experience, she ventured into entrepreneurship, specializing in HR consulting and talent management. Around 2012, she shifted her focus to social entrepreneurship, actively participating in projects aimed at creating positive societal change. Her journey began with empowering urban women entrepreneurs and culminated in the founding of "Sahaas for Women" in 2016, dedicated to empowering rural girls aged 14 to 20. Gauri's foray into rural development through Bhumijaa for women foodpreneurs devoted to Organic/natural and local foods broadened her perspective, leading to the creation of the "Living Without Medicine" platform to benefit more people. Now, she has facilitated one LWM platform per city and aims to have one per country very soon.

This platform educates people on holistic living and the therapeutic potential of food. Gauri Sarin's journey exemplifies her commitment to empowering individuals and fostering positive change through innovative social initiatives.

In an exclusive interview, Gauri Sarin shares with Marie Banu the benefits of living without medicine.

Could you explain the concept behind "Living Without Medicine" and how it fits into your social entrepreneurship journey?

Certainly. "Living Without Medicine" emerged from the need to bridge the gap between traditional healing practices, holistic living, and modern healthcare. We wanted to show people that the right food and lifestyle choices could play a significant role in preventing and even reversing non-communicable disorders.

Our approach was to foster a sense of community and trust among individuals who were interested in their own well-being. We created a platform where people could access a wealth of knowledge from experts, non-experts, and individuals who had personal experiences with holistic living. This community-based approach helped people understand the importance of their own health.

We offered programs like "Taking Charge of Health," which guided participants in transitioning from allopathic medicine to holistic wellness practices. We also provided insights into emotional well-being, as we recognised that emotional conflicts and stress played a substantial role in health issues.

Additionally, we launched a program focused on Ayurveda to empower individuals with knowledge about this traditional healing system. Our goal was not to push people away from modern medicine but to empower them to make informed choices about their health.

Now, we're expanding our efforts by building a learning platform that covers various alternative healthcare approaches. Despite limited funding, we're committed to making a positive impact on people's health and well-being through education and community support.

Explain the significance of helping individuals make informed decisions about their health through your initiative.

Absolutely, it's crucial. Many people tend to "hospital shop" or "doctor shop," trying various methods to address their ailments without truly understanding their options. Our initiative aims to provide them with well-informed choices. Now, when it comes to transitioning from conventional treatments like medication or insulin for a long-standing condition such as diabetes to a natural way of life, it's not a one-size-fits-all approach.

There are several factors to consider. Firstly, the stage of the disorder matters; there are different stages of the condition, and reversing it quickly is easier in the early stages. However, in more advanced stages, even the best of Ayurvedic treatments might face challenges. So, the transition depends on the individual's specific circumstances.

There are typically three categories of people in this context. Some quickly embrace alternative methods, while others prefer to try a combination of conventional and alternative approaches. Then there are those who require more time to understand the benefits of alternative medicine fully. It's important to note that Ayurveda and other alternative therapies are highly personalized, as they consider each individual's unique constitution.

Over the years, Ayurveda has faced challenges and changes in its practice and education. However, it's gradually gaining recognition and credibility, thanks to initiatives like ours and support from organizations and leaders in the field. In the transition process, it's essential to become part of a supportive community, understand the various practices available, and select the right approach for your

specific needs. This might include Ayurveda, Siddha, or other forms of natural healing. We emphasize a holistic approach that also includes lifestyle changes, yoga, and pranayama for emotional well-being



because emotions and physical health are closely connected.

Food is another critical factor. Ayurveda teaches us that the food we consume can directly impact our mental state and overall health. For example, consuming hot and spicy foods can affect your mind's focus and lead to aggression. So, understanding the connection between emotions, food, and health is essential.

How can someone in their early twenties transition into a healthier lifestyle?

Young adults today face various health challenges, and it's essential to address them early on. One significant aspect to consider is the impact of modern medicine, particularly on gut health. Many medications, such as pain relievers and antibiotics, can affect the gut microbiome, which, in the long run, can have adverse effects on overall health.

So, if you're in your early twenties and looking to transition to a healthier lifestyle, here are some steps to get started:

Avoid Over-reliance on Medications: One of the first things to understand is that not every ailment requires medication. Sometimes, allowing your body to heal naturally is the best approach. For example, if you have a mild viral infection or other non-serious conditions, consider fasting or consuming light, easily digestible liquids until you recover. This gives your body a chance to cleanse and heal.

Know the Basics: Familiarise yourself with the basics of healthy living, as passed down through generations. Many of the traditional practices, such as those in Ayurveda, have valuable insights. Listen to your grandparents' wisdom and apply it in your daily life.

Avoid Processed Foods: Youngsters often fall into the trap of consuming processed and junk foods, which can be detrimental to health. These foods are typically high in preservatives, additives, sugars, and salts. Instead, opt for whole, unprocessed foods.

Cook Simple Meals: Learning to cook simple, home-cooked meals is an essential skill. Focus on incorporating plenty of vegetables into your diet. Ideally, make half of your plate vegetables, and if possible, choose organic produce. Also, vary your vegetable choices to get a wide range of nutrients.

Incorporate Nuts and Seeds: Regularly include nuts and seeds in your diet. These are rich in essential nutrients and healthy fats. Consuming a variety of nuts and seeds, such as pumpkin seeds and chia seeds, can provide numerous health benefits.

Don't Fear Good Fats: Healthy fats are crucial for your well-being, so don't avoid them. Ghee, butter, and other natural fats can be a part of your diet.

Explore Millets and Local Foods: Millets are nutritious grains that have gained recognition for their health benefits. Explore traditional and local foods, as they often provide excellent nutrition.

Practice Yoga and Pranayama: Incorporate yoga and pranayama (breathing exercises) into your daily routine. These practices can help improve emotional well-being and overall health.

Emotional Well-being: Pay attention to your emotional health. Practices like Sudharsan Kriya and other healing techniques can be incredibly beneficial. Don't underestimate the impact of emotions on physical health.

Avoid Overthinking Achievements: While it's essential to set goals and strive for success, remember that inner well-being is just as crucial. Avoid putting too much pressure on yourself for achievements and focus on leading a balanced, healthy life.