

# Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

RNI No.TNENG/2013/52428 | Volume 14 | Issue 1 | January 2026 | 12 Pages | For Free Circulation Only | www.msdstrust.org



**PUBLISHED BY: P.N.SUBRAMANIAN**  
on behalf of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani,  
391/1, Venkatachalapathi Nagar, Alapakkam,  
Chennai 600 116 and printed by him at  
Express Press, Express Gardens, No.29,  
Second Main Road, Ambattur Industrial Estate,  
Chennai 600 058. Phone: 044 42805365  
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## FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

In an age of constant noise, opinions, and emotional overload, tolerance has become one of the most essential yet endangered virtues. We live in a world where differences—of thought, belief, culture, or lifestyle—are often met with impatience rather than understanding. Yet, tolerance is not weakness; it is strength. It is the ability to coexist without needing to control, correct, or conquer.

True tolerance begins with the recognition that every human being carries a unique story. People act from their experiences, fears, values, and limitations. When we cultivate tolerance, we learn to respond with maturity instead of reaction. We stop expecting everyone to think like us, behave like us, or agree with us. In doing so, we create space for peace—both within ourselves and in society.

Closely linked to tolerance is the art of letting go. Holding on to resentment, anger, or the need to be right only burdens the mind. Letting go does not mean ignoring injustice or accepting wrong silently. It means releasing the emotional weight that keeps us trapped. It means choosing calm over conflict, growth over grudges, and wisdom over ego.

A let-go attitude allows us to move forward without being chained to the past. Many of life's struggles persist not because situations are unbearable, but because we refuse to release our attachment to how things "should" have been. Acceptance, in this sense, becomes liberation.

In families, workplaces, and communities, tolerance and letting go are powerful tools for harmony. They help relationships survive differences and allow individuals to heal without bitterness. The world does not need louder arguments; it needs quieter understanding.

This is also why the changemakers featured in *Conversations Today* matter. Many of them lead with quiet resilience—working across divides, listening before reacting, building consensus instead of conflict, and focusing on solutions rather than blame. Their journeys reflect a lived commitment to tolerance and the ability to let go of ego, credit, and resentment in service of something larger than themselves.

Ultimately, tolerance is the foundation of humanity, and letting go is the foundation of inner freedom. Together, they teach us a simple truth: peace is not found in changing others, but in changing how we hold life within ourselves.

As we step into this year, may we choose patience over prejudice, compassion over confrontation, and peace over pride. If each of us learns to tolerate with grace and let go with wisdom, this year can become not just another passage of time, but a shared opportunity for healing, harmony, and hopeful new beginnings.

*Marie Banu Rodriguez*

### EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh  
Marie Banu Rodriguez

# BEGINNING THE NEW YEAR WITH CLARITY

As a new year begins, the human mind naturally turns toward hope, renewal, and fresh intentions. We speak of positive thinking, resolutions, and better ways of living. Yet, from the perspective of **Ramana Maharshi**, true positivity does not arise from forcing optimistic thoughts or suppressing difficulties. It arises from clarity—clarity about who we are and how the mind works. For Ramana, the new year is not merely a change in the calendar, but an invitation to turn inward and begin again at the level of awareness itself.

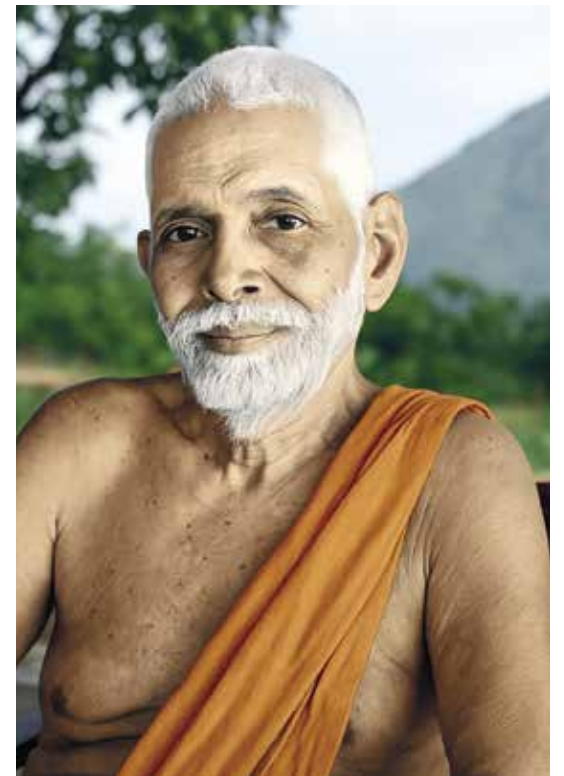
Ramana Maharshi did not encourage positive thinking in the modern sense of replacing "negative" thoughts with "positive" ones. He saw both as movements of the mind, equally transient and equally incapable of bringing lasting peace. Instead, he pointed to something more radical and enduring: freedom from compulsive thinking altogether. In his teaching, the mind is described as a bundle of thoughts, all rooted in the fundamental 'I'-thought. When this root is examined, the entire structure of mental agitation begins to loosen. What remains is not forced optimism, but a natural quiet confidence grounded in the Self.

At the start of a new year, many people resolve to think better, act better, and become better. Ramana's teaching gently reframes this effort. He suggests that the problem is not that our thoughts are insufficiently positive, but that we are overly identified with them. Joy and sorrow, hope and fear, success and failure—all rise and fall in the mind. When we mistake these passing states for our true identity, we are inevitably tossed between enthusiasm and disappointment. Positive thinking, when rooted in such identification, becomes fragile. It collapses when circumstances change.

Ramana offers a different foundation. He reminds us that peace is our natural state and that happiness does not need to be created—it needs to be uncovered. From this standpoint, the new year is not about acquiring something new, but about removing what obscures our inherent clarity. As attention turns inward through self-enquiry, the grip of habitual thought patterns weakens. This inward turn allows a deeper positivity to emerge, one that is not dependent on outcomes or external validation.

This approach is especially relevant at the threshold of a new year, when expectations often run high. Plans are made, goals are set, and the mind projects itself into the future. Ramana did not discourage planning or responsible action, but he warned against living psychologically in the future. For him, the future exists only as a thought in the present. When the mind is anchored in awareness rather than anticipation, action becomes more effective and less anxious. Positive thinking, then, is replaced by present-mindedness—a steady engagement with what is, rather than what might be.

Another key insight Ramana offers for the new year is the importance of letting go of regret and self-judgment. Many people carry the weight of the past into the present, replaying failures or missed opportunities. Ramana's teaching cuts through this burden by questioning the identity of the one who regrets. When the sense of a fixed personal self is examined, the emotional charge of the past loses its hold. What remains is learning without self-condemnation and responsibility without guilt. This creates a clean inner slate—far more powerful than



any symbolic "fresh start."

Ramana also spoke of surrender as a path to inner freedom. At the beginning of a new year, surrender does not mean passivity or resignation; it means releasing the compulsive need to control outcomes. When actions are offered without attachment to results, the mind becomes lighter and more resilient. This inner posture naturally fosters a positive outlook—not because everything goes according to plan, but because one is no longer defined by success or failure. Such positivity is steady, quiet, and deeply rooted.

For those navigating uncertainty—whether personal, social, or global—Ramana's teaching offers reassurance without false comfort. He did not promise that life would become easier, but he showed that our relationship to life can become freer. When the mind rests in its source, challenges are met with clarity rather than panic, and effort is guided by discernment rather than fear. This is positive thinking in its truest sense: not denial of difficulty, but freedom from inner resistance.

As the new year unfolds, Ramana Maharshi's message invites us to begin anew, not by polishing the mind's narratives, but by questioning them. Each moment becomes a fresh beginning when attention returns to the Self. From this ground, positive thinking is no longer a technique to be practised, but a natural expression of inner stability. Hope becomes quieter, confidence more grounded, and joy less dependent on circumstances.

In this spirit, the new year can be welcomed not with pressure to improve, but with openness to understand. As Ramana taught, when we know who we are, right thinking, right action, and quiet optimism follow effortlessly. The year ahead, then, becomes not a project to manage, but a space in which awareness can deepen, and life can be lived with greater ease, clarity, and trust.

*Reflections inspired by the teachings of  
Sri Ramana Maharshi*



## LIGHTING THE PATH OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN

In the crowded lanes surrounding construction sites and labour settlements, childhood is often interrupted by uncertainty. For thousands of children of migrant labourers, access to education, nutrition, and safety remains fragile at best. It is within this gap that Diya Ghar was born, an organisation committed to ensuring that every child, regardless of economic status, begins life with dignity, care, and opportunity.

Founded in 2016 by Saraswathi Padmanabhan, Diya Ghar began with just five children. Nearly a decade later, it serves over 1,600 children across 31 centres in Bengaluru and Chennai, impacting more than 6,800 children in total. “I have always believed that the early years define the trajectory of a child’s life. If we invest well at this stage, we don’t just change one child, we change an entire family’s future”, Saraswathi shares.

A trained Montessori teacher and counsellor, Saraswathi brings both professional expertise and lived empathy to the organisation. Her diverse academic background, spanning accounting, auditing in California, and studies at BITS Pilani and California State University, has helped Diya Ghar evolve with both heart and structure. The organisation is supported by a committed board of trustees - Shyamal Kumar and Aparna Ponnappa, they come from leadership, corporate and social impact backgrounds, who help guide its strategic direction.

### A Community-Centred Model of Care

Diya Ghar focuses on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for children below six years, an age widely recognised as critical for cognitive, emotional, and social development. Using the Montessori method, Diya Ghar creates nurturing, stimulating learning environments within the communities where migrant families live and work.

Beyond education, the centres provide nutritious meals covering 70% of daily nutritional needs, healthcare through quarterly medical camps, childcare essentials, and safe transportation. “Education cannot happen in isolation. A hungry or unwell child cannot learn. Our model addresses the whole child”, Saraswathi explains.

The organisation also runs after-school programs for alumni, offering tutorial support and partial school fee sponsorships to ensure children remain in the education system. As a result, over 800 children have transitioned to primary schools, with 9 out of 10 continuing their education over the past two years.

### Stories That Reflect Impact

Rukmini’s story is one of quiet resilience. Once confined to a blue tent, caring for her younger brother while her parents worked on a construction site, she found her world expand when both siblings enrolled at Diya Ghar. Her curiosity blossomed into



confidence, and her parents, once hesitant, now champion their children’s education.

Similarly, little Nagarathna, who once played amidst dust and sharp tools at work sites, today explores Montessori activities with joy and safety. “We may not know what she will become, but we know she now has the freedom to dream,” says a Diya Ghar teacher,

### Growth, Recognition, and the Road Ahead

Diya Ghar’s work has earned national recognition, including the Most Sustainable NGO of India Award (2024), the GuideStar India Platinum Award, and Silver Certification from Give for 2025–

2026. Financially, the organisation is supported by a balanced mix of institutional and individual donors, reflecting growing trust in its mission.

In June 2025, Diya Ghar expanded beyond Bengaluru with seven new centres in Chennai, serving 280 children, a step towards its next milestone: reaching 5,000 children across India every day.

“Our dream,” Saraswathi says, “is simple but powerful, that no child’s potential is limited by the circumstances they are born into.” At Diya Ghar, that dream continues to be built, one child, one centre, one small step at a time.

*Aatika Kundalam*

# WHY WE ARE THE WAY WE ARE?

This is a question many of us ask when we introspect, compare ourselves with others, or wonder why we are unable to achieve what we truly want. For some, it is a question to explore, to understand how human beings operate.

My quest to answer this began with a desire to understand myself and eventually, to understand others better. When we understand this essential aspect of human beings, we become much better at establishing excellent relationships with ourselves and others, we tend to understand others better, and hence we are in a position to nurture the relationship. Please note that having this knowledge or understanding alone will not improve your relationship; understanding the nuances and taking action to foster, on a consistent basis will.

## What makes us what we are?

Our experiences mould us, especially the situations we face and the kind of parenting we receive in our early years. If we survived difficult situations by becoming rigid, controlling, or overly cautious, we may continue using the same strategies even when they no longer serve us. We carry many of our patterns from childhood without even realising it.

While most of who we are, comes from our childhood experiences, it doesn't mean we cannot change the way we are. For that to happen, we need to understand the patterns we have. For this to happen, it needs moment-to-moment or deep introspection, or a combination of both. Meditation can help because it slows down our mind and increases self-awareness. Over time, deeper introspection can even reveal memories and emotional patterns from childhood.

## Why do two people react completely differently to the same situation?

It is also because of how they think. If they have different thought process, what might look absolutely right thing to do for one person may even look like the worst thing to do to the second person. This difference in thought process is also because of the same reasons.

Many patterns repeat so frequently that they become automatic. Sometimes, even when others point them out, we fail to notice them - because we've been living them for years. Such patterns which we have but we are unable to see are often called Blind Spots.

## Building our identity

It is all such patterns that we have developed over our lifetime that has made us what we are and have provided our identity. It can be hundreds and thousands of patterns in each area and different situations of our life. If we get to know these patterns, we can change them, and gradually evolve our identity.

The results we get in life are often a reflection of our identity - how we see ourselves, what we believe we deserve, and what we repeatedly practice. If we can change our identity, we can change our results. To



achieve goals we currently struggle with, and to reach outcomes we haven't imagined yet, our identity must evolve. One way of doing it is to identify our patterns.

## A few examples of patterns

If in our childhood we have always pleased people to get something, we must have become a people pleaser in life.

If our parents always compared us to those around us, we probably compare ourselves to others, and self-doubt may always be running in the background.

If, during childhood, your parents, teachers, or people around you always suppressed your emotions with scolding or beating, you are probably someone who suppresses emotions and is unable to express them, though there is an internal drive to do so.

I got to know my patterns, then what? Knowing our patterns gives us the opportunity to replace them with new patterns. Just like how we replace unhelpful or so-called bad habits with empowering habits, we can also replace our patterns. Because they are ingrained patterns, it takes consistent effort to

recognise when we are entering them and to use a new pattern that will empower us.

## How We Can Change Our Patterns?

The first step, as I mentioned, is to be aware of yourself. The more aware we are moment to moment, that is when we tend to recognise our patterns.

For example, people who are obese, especially, might notice that whenever they are stressed or feel anxiety, they think of food and start eating food. It is not hunger that is driving their craving for food. It is a pattern. Once you understand this, and every time you have a craving for food, think of what triggered that. And to change that pattern, instead of having food, either replace it with water or do something else that engages you. It will be very difficult at the start to do this, but as you keep identifying the pattern and replace it with a new action, the old pattern will slowly be replaced with a new pattern, and as a benefit, you will become fitter and healthier.



**S Ravi Kanth Reddy**  
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# THE CAMEL: NATURE'S QUIET INTELLIGENCE

In conversations around climate resilience and sustainable food systems, solutions are often sought in laboratories, technologies, and complex interventions. Yet, sometimes, the most profound answers are already walking beside us — quietly evolved, deeply intelligent, and largely overlooked. For Mr. Venkat, the camel represents one such answer.

“Camels are not just animals of survival,” he says. “They are animals of wisdom. Everything about them — how they eat, how they conserve energy, how they give back to the land — is a lesson in sustainability.”

## Built for scarcity, not excess

Camels have evolved to survive where most life struggles. Their bodies are designed not for abundance, but for restraint. Unlike other mammals, camels can slow their metabolism during periods of scarcity, conserving both energy and water. Even their blood cells are uniquely oval-shaped, enabling circulation to continue smoothly when the body is severely dehydrated. “The camel doesn’t fight the desert,” Mr. Venkat explains. “It cooperates with it. That’s the difference.”

Their humps, often misunderstood as water storage, are actually reserves of fat — energy that can be drawn upon when food is unavailable. This allows camels to retain muscle strength even during long periods of deprivation, something most livestock cannot do.

## A journey shaped by climate change

Camels did not originate in deserts. Fossil

records show that their ancestors evolved in North America nearly 40 to 50 million years ago, as small forest-dwelling creatures. Over time, climatic shifts pushed them to adapt — growing larger, hardier, and better suited to open, arid landscapes.

Around three million years ago, camels migrated across the Bering land bridge into Asia and later into Africa and the Middle East. Two species survived: the single-humped dromedary of hot deserts and the double-humped Bactrian camel of cold steppes. While camels vanished from North America, they became indispensable elsewhere — shaping trade routes, pastoral economies, and food systems.

“Camels have already survived multiple climate changes,” says Mr. Venkat. “That alone should make us pay attention.”

## Eating what others cannot

One of the camel’s greatest strengths lies in its diet. Camels consume a wide range of plants that other livestock avoid — thorny shrubs, saline-tolerant bushes, bitter herbs, desert grasses, and medicinal plants. Acacia, saltbush, cactus, neem, moringa, turmeric, and wild desert shrubs all form part of their natural forage.

“This is where the magic begins,” Mr. Venkat notes. “The camel doesn’t eat selectively for taste. It eats intelligently — what the land offers, what the body needs.”

This diversity allows camels to thrive in ecosystems where grazing pressure must be minimal and competition with human food crops avoided. In doing so, they convert marginal vegetation into nourishment without degrading fragile landscapes.

## Milk shaped by the desert

Milk from camels, Mr. Venkat believes, is one of nature’s most underappreciated foods. Rich in immune-supporting proteins, vitamins, and essential minerals, it is naturally low in lactose and fat. Across cultures, milk from camels has long been valued not just as sustenance, but as functional nutrition.

“What people don’t realise,” he says, “is that milk from camels reflects the camel’s diet. When camels feed on diverse, medicinal plants from the desert, that intelligence transfers into the milk.”

He pauses, then adds quietly, “Had my mother, my two close friends consumed milk from camels that had diverse diets from the desert, it could have saved them.”

It is a deeply personal statement — not framed as scientific certainty, but as lived belief shaped by loss, observation, and conviction. For Mr. Venkat, milk from camels represents not a miracle cure, but a form of nourishment aligned with nature rather than industrial processing.

## Waste that heals the land

Even the camel’s waste plays a regenerative role. Camel dung is dry and fibrous, making it an excellent organic input that releases nutrients gradually into the soil. Camel urine, traditionally used in small quantities in arid regions, contributes nitrogen and supports soil fertility where chemical fertilisers are neither viable nor sustainable.

“In nature, nothing is waste,” Mr. Venkat says. “The camel understands this

instinctively.”

In regenerative agriculture, such closed-loop systems — where animals, soil, plants, and microbes work together — are increasingly recognised as essential for long-term sustainability.

## Why camels matter now

Despite their ecological and cultural value, camels are often excluded from mainstream livestock policy and agricultural planning. Grazing lands are shrinking, indigenous breeds are neglected, and knowledge systems around camel-rearing are disappearing.

Camels require less water, less fodder, and less intervention than cattle, yet continue to provide milk, manure, and livelihoods even under extreme conditions. In a warming world, this resilience is not optional — it is vital.

## Learning from quiet intelligence

The camel does not dominate its environment. It adapts, listens, and responds. Its body, behaviour, and contribution reflect balance rather than excess, cooperation rather than extraction.

“As humans, we keep trying to outsmart nature,” Mr. Venkat reflects. “But nature has already solved many of the problems we are facing. The camel is one such solution — ancient, patient, and still waiting for us to notice.”

In paying attention to such quiet intelligence, we may yet rediscover ways of living that nourish both people and planet — without leaving either depleted.

—Shanmuga Priya. T



# THE GLOBAL JOURNEY OF VETIVER



For nearly four decades, Richard (Dick) Grimshaw has worked at the intersection of soil, water, policy, and people, advocating a technology that is modest in appearance yet transformative in impact. Vetiver grass does not announce itself with spectacle. It spreads quietly, roots deeply, and works patiently. Grimshaw's role in shaping its global journey has been similarly understated. He did not set out to create a movement or a brand. "I was looking for something that worked," he says. "Something farmers could use, afford, and manage themselves." That insistence on practicality—on solutions that survive real

conditions rather than ideal assumptions—has guided both his career and the evolution of the Vetiver System.

Grimshaw's understanding of land and livelihoods was shaped early by field experience rather than theory. Trained in agriculture and land-use planning, and working across Africa and Asia, he encountered first-hand the limits of conventional conservation approaches. By the early 1980s, as watershed programmes expanded, he grew increasingly dissatisfied with hard engineering solutions—earth bunds, concrete structures, and rigid designs that were costly, poorly maintained, and often

ineffective. "We were spending enormous sums on structures that failed within a few seasons," he recalls. "They looked good on paper, but they didn't survive farmers' realities." The search for alternatives was not ideological; it was driven by repeated failure on the ground.

That search led him to vetiver grass through the work of agronomist John Greenfield. The idea of replacing earth bunds with grass hedgerows initially seemed counterintuitive, and Grimshaw admits he was sceptical. Yet he authorised trials, insisted on documentation, and

watched results emerge from the field. Vetiver hedges, when planted correctly on the contour, reduced runoff, trapped sediment, improved infiltration, and stabilised slopes—without the recurring costs and maintenance burdens of conventional structures. "That was the moment I realised we had something fundamentally different," he says. "Not a structure, but a living system." From that point, vetiver moved from the margins into serious consideration within soil and water conservation.

"When planted correctly, vetiver does three

things at once," Grimshaw explains. "It stops erosion, improves water infiltration, and stabilises land—without demanding constant attention." Over time, its applications expanded well beyond farms to highways, railways, riverbanks, embankments, landfills, and wastewater systems. Vetiver proved unusually tolerant of extremes—acidic soils, salinity, and heavy metals—conditions under which few plants survive. Its biological discipline, rather than technological complexity, became its strength.

As interest spread, the need for coordination became evident. In the mid-1990s, Grimshaw founded the International Vetiver Network as a non-profit, knowledge-based platform. The decision was deliberate. The network would not own vetiver, commercialise access, or control its use through restrictive intellectual property. Instead, it would document experience, disseminate research, and connect practitioners across disciplines and geographies. "We made a conscious choice to enable rather than control," Grimshaw says. Manuals, training guides, conference proceedings, and case studies were made freely available. Country networks emerged organically, bringing together scientists, engineers, NGOs, farmers, and entrepreneurs. The emphasis remained on end use rather than institutional ownership. "We allowed a thousand flowers to bloom," he reflects. "Some failed. Many succeeded. What mattered was what worked."

Despite its effectiveness, vetiver has never scaled as rapidly as some advocates hoped. Grimshaw is candid about why. "Most small farmers are not interested in conservation unless it improves their income and their way of living," he says. "That's not a criticism—it's reality." Changing land-use practices is rarely a technical challenge alone; it is social, economic, and generational. Low-cost, self-managed technologies also threaten entrenched interests. Vetiver reduces dependence on fertilisers, pesticides, and expensive engineering works, placing it at odds with input-driven business models. Grimshaw contrasts this with the Green Revolution, where fertiliser companies actively supported new crop varieties because they expanded markets. "Vetiver does the opposite," he notes. "It reduces inputs. That makes some people uncomfortable."

He has seen this resistance play out in subtle ways. In China, research demonstrated that vetiver could reduce stem borer infestation in rice, significantly lowering pesticide use. Yet some extension workers, aligned with pesticide suppliers, showed

little interest in promoting the technology. Similar patterns appeared in infrastructure and remediation projects, where low-cost biological solutions challenged established contracting practices. Such barriers, Grimshaw argues, explain why adoption is often slow and uneven. Yet he remains unfazed. "This is not a technology that burns bright and disappears," he says. "It settles in." Where vetiver takes root, it tends to persist.

From decades of experience, Grimshaw identifies a small number of conditions that consistently determine success. Demonstrations must be unmistakably effective—what he calls "galloping horse demonstrations"—sites so well designed and maintained that their impact is visible even to someone passing by. Poor planting, low-density hedges, or inferior plant material undermine confidence and slow uptake. "Quality is not complicated," he insists. "Good planting material, correct design, and some care in the first year. That's all." Access to affordable planting material is equally critical. Vetiver cannot scale if farmers are expected to pay prohibitive prices per slip. In Europe, plants may cost several dollars each; in India, slips cost about one US cent; in the Philippines, two to three cents. Only the latter makes widespread adoption feasible.

Community involvement and training form the third pillar. Vetiver works best when people understand not just its primary function—erosion control or slope stabilisation—but its secondary benefits: mulching, pest control, groundwater recharge, fodder, thatch, and income diversification. In several contexts, farmers adopted vetiver initially for these secondary uses. "Conservation followed naturally," Grimshaw explains. Finally, he places great faith in committed individuals. Across continents, the

most effective programmes were driven by one or two people who believed in the technology and stayed with it. "These people are absolutely essential," he says. "They carry the work forward when institutions move on."

Water has become central to Grimshaw's thinking. While soil conservation was the entry point, water quality and water security now define many applications. Vetiver fits naturally within watershed management, from degraded upper catchments to polluted urban lowlands. "Every particle of sediment carries contaminants," he says. "If you control sediment, you improve water quality." Vetiver is now used to stabilise riverbanks, protect embankments, treat sewage effluent, rehabilitate landfills, and reduce agricultural runoff. Its role in climate adaptation—absorbing intense rainfall, buffering floods, improving infiltration, and supporting groundwater recharge—is increasingly visible. "We are only beginning to understand its full relationship with water," Grimshaw reflects.

One of the International Vetiver Network's most significant contributions has been its insistence on knowledge as a public good. Decades of research and field experience are available openly. "Knowledge should not be a barrier," Grimshaw says. Certification, where it exists, is framed not as gatekeeping but as recognition of demonstrated competence. Looking ahead, Grimshaw is less concerned with rapid expansion than with deep integration. The future, as he sees it, lies in embedding vetiver into farming systems, infrastructure planning, and river basin management rather than promoting it as a standalone solution.

Agriculture under climate stress remains a particular concern. Rising temperatures, degraded soils, erratic rainfall, and chemical overuse demand approaches that are regenerative, affordable, and locally manageable.

"Vetiver is not the answer to everything," Grimshaw says. "But it is one of the few tools that communities can use themselves, without waiting for permission." That autonomy, he believes, is vetiver's quiet power. In the end, his measure of success is not visibility or scale for its own sake, but independence. "This is not about a plant," he reflects. "It's about giving people the ability to solve their own soil and water problems. Once they have that knowledge, they don't need us anymore. And that, to me, is success."

Marie Banu Rodriguez



# VRIKSHAAYURVEDA

## Reviving an Ancient Science for a Regenerative Future

As we step into a new year, it is customary in our tradition to begin with an auspicious thought—one that aligns knowledge, action, and purpose. In that spirit, it is only fitting that we turn our attention to Vrikshaayurveda, one of the most profound yet forgotten gems of India's agricultural wisdom.

Ancient India was not short of scholarly works on agriculture. Texts such as Brihat Samhita, Arthashastra, Krishi Parashara, Kashyapa Krishi Sukti, and Viswavallabha collectively reveal a civilisation deeply attuned to soil, seasons, plants, and life itself. Among these, Vrikshaayurveda stands out as a foundational text that treats plants not as inert inputs but as living beings.

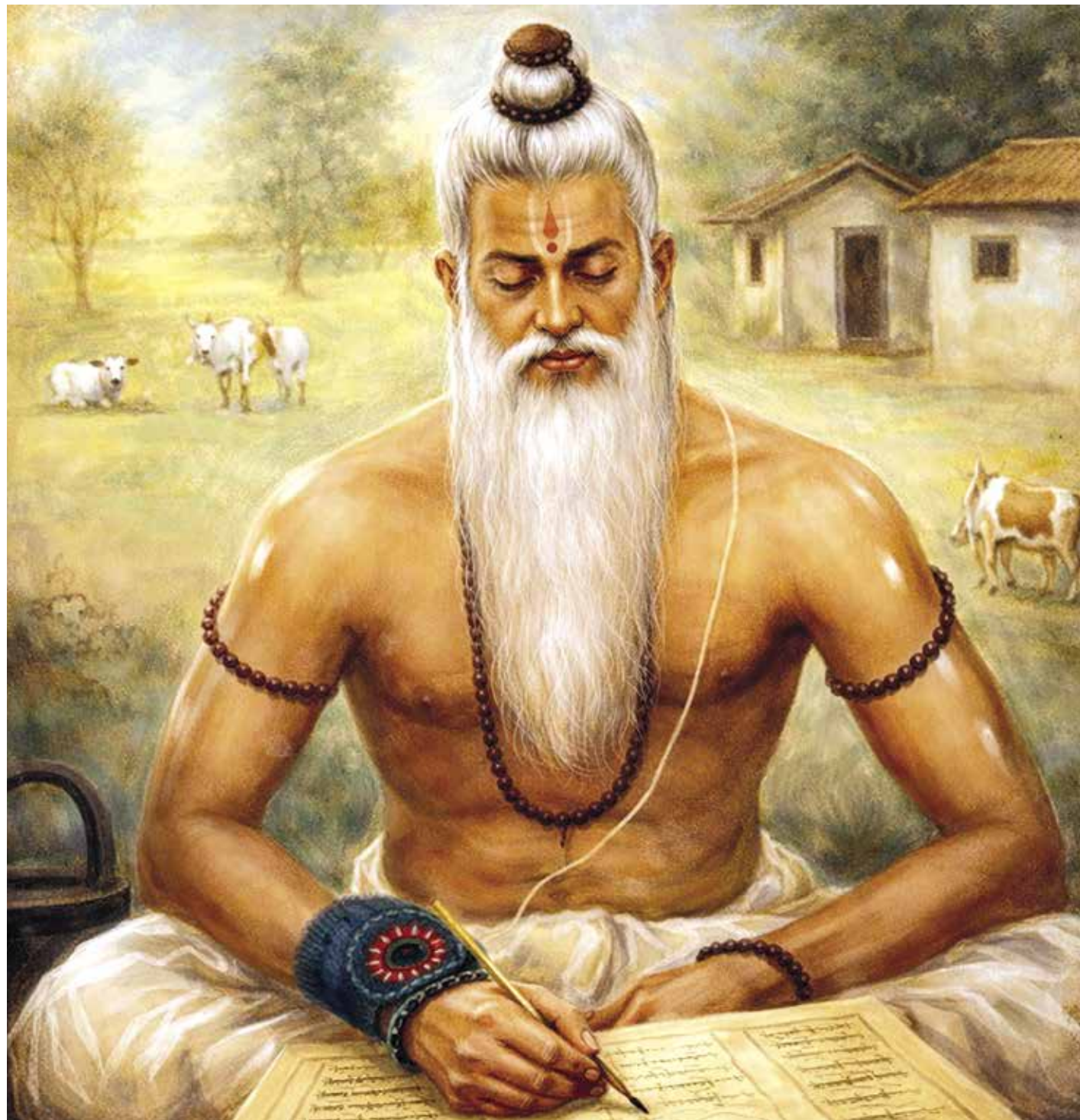
The origins of Vrikshaayurveda go back nearly 5,000 years, when Rishi Parashara articulated this science of plant life. He was no ordinary sage—he was the son of Maharshi Shakti, grandson of Vasishtha Maharishi, and the great-grandson of Vyasa Maharishi. Around 1000 CE, the scholar Surapala compiled and systematised these teachings, ensuring their transmission across generations.

The word itself explains its depth. Vriksha means tree, and Ayurveda means the knowledge of life. Together, Vrikshaayurveda is quite literally the science of plant life. What makes it extraordinary is its holistic worldview. Just as Ayurveda recognises the balance of Vata, Pitta, and Kapha in human health, Vrikshaayurveda applies the same tridosha principles to plants—and even to animals—acknowledging that all life is governed by the same natural laws.

In today's context, this wisdom is more relevant than ever. The world is urgently seeking alternatives to intensive chemical farming, which has degraded soil, polluted water, and weakened food systems. The shift toward organic methods and regenerative natural farming is no longer optional—it is essential. Vrikshaayurveda fits seamlessly into this global need, offering time-tested, ecologically sound solutions rooted in observation, balance, and respect for nature.

The treatise rests on four fundamental pillars.

1. The first is plant classification, which divides vegetation into four categories: Vanaspathi (fruit-bearing plants without flowers), Druma (plants that bear fruits with flowers), Latha (creepers), and Gulma (shrubs). This classification is not merely academic; it guides cultivation, spacing, nourishment, and care.
2. The second pillar is soil management. Long before modern laboratories, soil was assessed through colour, smell, and texture to determine fertility and crop suitability. These sensory diagnostics ensured harmony between soil and plant, rather than forcing crops onto incompatible



3. The third pillar is seed preservation and treatment. Seeds were treated with natural substances such as ghee, honey, and cow dung to protect them from pests and significantly improve germination rates—an approach both scientific and sustainable.
4. The fourth pillar is plant pathology, which identifies internal and external diseases and treats them using herbal and organic decoctions rather than toxic chemicals.

Among these formulations, one stands out for its potency—Kunapajala. Surapala describes two types of this powerful decoction. One is prepared using mamsa—fermented organic waste from horned

animals such as bones, flesh, and blood. The other is a purely herbal preparation made from selected plant leaves. Both use gomutra and gobar as key ingredients.

Surapala's words are striking in their confidence: "If Kunapajala is sprinkled, even a barren tree will come to life and yield flowers and fruits." Modern research has validated this claim. Comparative studies between Kunapajala and Panchagavya show Kunapajala to be significantly more effective. Often referred to as "liquid gold," it is rich in nitrogen, phosphorus, and beneficial microbes, revitalising soil biology and plant health.

That such a sophisticated science was developed millennia ago is a testament to the ancient world's deep understanding of botany and ecology. Yet, we have allowed

this wisdom to fade from mainstream practice. Rediscovering Vrikshaayurveda is not about nostalgia—it is about reclaiming solutions that the future desperately needs.

In this spirit, we are pleased to announce the launch of a Vrikshaayurveda Decoction Preparation Training on 7 March 2026, during the event commemorating our 25th year milestone. This will be followed by plans to introduce a certificate course, and ultimately, to realise a long-cherished dream: the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for Vrikshaayurveda.

As we begin this new year, let us also begin anew—by reconnecting with ancient knowledge that honours life, restores balance, and points the way toward a truly regenerative future.

*P.N. Subramanian*

# CLOSING THE LAST MILE GAP IN AGRIBUSINESS

Farmers in Uttar Pradesh face multiple, interlinked challenges that continue to constrain agricultural productivity and incomes. These include water scarcity due to depleting groundwater, unreliable canal irrigation, erratic monsoons, weak price realisation despite MSP and mandi systems, over-dependence on water-intensive crops with limited diversification and value addition, uneven implementation of government schemes, etc. "It is all factors together – structural, economic and environmental, that led to agrarian distress across the state. For my age, I sometimes feel that the efforts were all scattered to actually result in desired results," says Mr Mayank Kumar Mishra, proprietor of Making India Herbal Company, who is about to complete his post-graduation in Botany from Varanasi.

Born into a farming family, Mayank closely observed the evolving trends that shaped agriculture in his hometown near Varanasi, including a growing emphasis on the cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants such as Vetiver. This shift coincided with increasing domestic and global demand for herbal raw materials, prompting the Government of Uttar Pradesh, from the early 2000s onward, to actively promote the sector through supportive policies, research institutions and targeted schemes. The establishment of medicinal plant boards, integration with the National AYUSH Mission and promotion of contract farming and cluster-based cultivation enabled a transition from forest-based collection to organised, farm-led production of these plants.

His father undertook formal training with the State Department of Horticulture and began cultivating medicinal plants on their land since 2005; however, despite achieving good yields, there was no significant improvement in income levels. This experience highlighted critical gaps in market linkages, price realisation and value-chain support, indicating the need for stronger institutional and ecosystem-level interventions to effectively promote medicinal and aromatic plant cultivation. "When farmers see challenges and struggles other farmers face, they are not only scared but also demotivated," shares Mayank.

These experiences led to departmental intervention in 2009 through the provision of a 50% subsidy, which helped share cultivation costs and once again resulted in good production outcomes. However, marketing the produce remained a significant challenge, as government support did not extend to market linkage or



procurement, and farmers lacked the knowledge and networks to identify or connect with appropriate buyers. This unresolved gap in the value chain proved critical and within three years farmers were left to manage market risks and sales independently, limiting the sustainability of the intervention. "My father worked as a manager in a company for about six years to hold things together. As a teenager, I gradually came to understand these challenges from my own perspective. The inconsistency and uncertainty of farming was unsettling, but it also compelled me to reflect more deeply on the realities of agriculture and the systemic gaps that farmers faced over generations," he adds.

By 2019, the Government of India, in collaboration with the Ministry of AYUSH, launched an initiative under the Namami Gange Yojana to promote the cultivation of medicinal plants along the banks of the River Ganga in Uttar Pradesh, covering a stretch of nearly 400 kilometres from Kanpur to Ballia. The Forest Department planned plantation clusters at intervals of every five kilometres to support riverbank stabilisation and natural purification efforts. Vetiver, owing to its deep root system and phytoremediation properties, was identified as a key species for this purpose. Ten districts, including Mayank's, were selected for implementation under this project.

As a class 12 teenager, he was able to grasp the intricacies of the programme, which provided a 50% subsidy covering all expenses and supported the establishment of five nurseries per district, each spread over one hectare, to raise saplings of 11 medicinal and aromatic plants such as Vetiver and lemongrass. Under this arrangement, the land and nurseries remained with the farmers, seeds were supplied by the institute in Lucknow and cultivation was carried out in partnership with the Forest Department. Plantation activities under the programme commenced in 2019. Growing in the midst of all these developments, Mayank was naturally drawn to study Botany in his under graduation. "I was convinced that I



belonged here, so I decided to formally prepare myself," he says.

By August 2020, the nurseries were fully ready with saplings; however, government budgets permitted support of only Rs.6,000 per hectare, while the actual costs borne by farmers were far higher. As a result, the programme failed to meet its objectives and became a major reason for farmers losing interest in what were otherwise lucrative crops. The entire produce from the five nurseries remained unsold. "It was almost a year of hard work, costing nearly Rs.3 lakh per hectare, with no return in sight. We had to do something ourselves," he recalls. It was at this point that he began researching medicinal and aromatic plants more deeply, with a particular focus on Vetiver.

As a student already exploring different networks on social media, Mayank was able to navigate platforms such as Google and Facebook with ease, learning more about Vetiver and the opportunities associated with it. In the process, he also identified a few potential buyers for the produce that was lying unsold with farmers. "I not only learnt that these plants were highly valuable, but also realised that tapping the right market opportunities was the key to surviving in this business. I continued reading about the plants and about marketing them simultaneously," he explains. This research eventually led him to join the Vetiver International Group on Facebook, which proved to be an eye-opening experience. It was here that he truly understood the versatility of Vetiver and the scale of projects in which it could be applied. "I knew I was on the right path and there were no more self-doubts," shares Mayank.

With the resourceful posts from this group, he continued to learn about the applications of Vetiver and other plants. "Vetiver is increasingly used in highway, dam and railway projects for slope stabilisation, erosion control and soil reinforcement due to

its deep and dense root system. It provides a cost-effective, nature-based solution for strengthening embankments, preventing landslides and improving the long-term resilience of large infrastructure projects," he informs.

Soon after, in June 2021, he founded the Making India Herbal Company. Leveraging B2B digital platforms, Mayank developed a website and listed the full range of products grown on his farm. Of the 35 acres under cultivation, vetiver is grown at scale on about 20 acres, while lemongrass, Napier grass, citronella, brahmi, and aloe vera are cultivated on the remaining land. His farm provides employment to around 30 women from local self-help groups and 20 men from the surrounding village. As orders began to come in at remunerative prices, his success encouraged other nurseries associated with the Namami Gange project to market their produce as well. A major breakthrough came when he secured a buyer from Assam and supplied nearly 10 lakh saplings for a single project within just four months. By creating income opportunities for farmers who had earlier lost hope, Mayank emerged as a key resource and source of inspiration in the region.

Today, Mayank's company sells approximately 40–50 lakh saplings every month to a diverse set of buyers, including the National Highways Authority of India. The enterprise has an annual production capacity of about 5–6 crore slips, with a reported turnover of Rs.1.25 crore in 2024–2025. In recognition of his entrepreneurial journey and contribution to sustainable agriculture, he was awarded Farmer of the Year 2025 in December 2025 by the Krishi Jagran Awards, one of India's leading agri-media networks. His journey proves that market awareness is central to building resilience and long-term sustainability in farmer-led agribusinesses.

*Shanmuga Priya.T*

# THE SPRINT 6 APPROACH TO SMART RESTROOMS

In conversations around infrastructure development, sanitation is often discussed in terms of numbers, how many toilets were built, how quickly they were completed, and how much they cost. What tends to receive far less attention is whether these facilities actually work for the people who use them on a daily basis. In this gap between construction and lived experience, dignity, hygiene, and usability are frequently compromised. It is within this overlooked space that Sprint6 Specialized Services has positioned itself.

Founded in 2020, Sprint6 Specialized Services entered the sanitation sector with a clear objective: to address the disconnect between toilet construction and long-term performance. While sanitation infrastructure has expanded rapidly across India, issues such as poor maintenance, lack of monitoring, and inconsistent hygiene continue to undermine user trust. Sprint6 responded by shifting the focus from one-time construction to lifecycle-based sanitation infrastructure, where restrooms are designed, operated, and maintained with sustained performance in mind.

Sprint6's work centres on the belief that dignity in sanitation is not an abstract idea but an outcome of thoughtful design, reliable systems, and consistent upkeep. The company offers a comprehensive range of services, including smart restroom construction and remodelling, toilet cubicles, automation, turnkey project execution, and Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) services. Together, these offerings form an integrated model that treats restrooms as continuously managed environments rather than static structures.

Central to this model is Sprint6's interpretation of the "smart restroom." Unlike conventional facilities that depend heavily on manual supervision, smart restrooms are technology-enabled spaces designed for efficiency, hygiene, and accountability. Sprint6 integrates IoT-based sensors and automated systems to monitor water usage, power consumption, occupancy patterns, and cleanliness levels in real time. This allows for proactive maintenance and timely intervention, ensuring that restrooms remain functional

and hygienic throughout their lifecycle.

Technology plays a supporting role rather than a dominating one in Sprint6's approach. Automated taps, touchless flush systems, occupancy tracking, and resource-monitoring tools are embedded into the design to reduce physical contact, minimise wastage, and improve operational reliability. The emphasis remains on enhancing user comfort and hygiene while enabling facility teams to respond quickly and effectively to issues identified through data.



“  
Sanitation is more Important  
than Independence  
”

In his pursuit of Swaraj, Mahatma Gandhi recognised that a clean nation was just as vital as an independent one. He believed that a clean environment would foster a clean mind and society.

In India, manual scavengers, who cleaned dry latrines, continued to face severe social discrimination of the Dalit community, the lowest stratum of India's caste-based society. The practice of manual scavenging appalled Gandhi. He considered it a national shame and a stain on India's conscience.

According to him, the failure to maintain cleanliness indicated a lack of civic sense and moral responsibility towards the community. This belief continued to influence initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan Mission, which drew inspiration from his vision of a clean and just society.

Despite a law passed in 1993 to prohibit manual scavenging, the practice persisted. According to the 2011 Census, there were still 794,390 dry latrines cleaned by manual scavengers, predominantly women.



Hygiene, safety, and sustainability are integrated at every stage of Sprint6's project execution. From the planning phase onward, restrooms are designed with touchless fixtures, safe and durable materials, efficient layouts, and water- and energy-saving technologies. Standardised construction practices reduce human error, while automation helps limit contamination risks. Importantly, these considerations are not limited to initial execution; they are reinforced through continuous monitoring and long-term maintenance services.

Sprint6's turnkey project model further supports consistency and accountability. By offering a single point of responsibility



for design, construction, automation, and maintenance, the company eliminates coordination gaps that often arise when multiple vendors are involved. This integrated approach ensures uniform quality control, adherence to timelines, and cost efficiency. For clients, it also simplifies decision-making and improves visibility across the project lifecycle.

Quality and safety are formalised through Sprint6's ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 45001:2018 certifications. These frameworks standardise internal processes, safety protocols, and quality benchmarks across projects. Beyond compliance, they reinforce a culture of continuous improvement and risk mitigation. For clients, particularly public institutions, these certifications translate into confidence in execution, worker safety, and



long-term service reliability.

Balancing time, cost, and quality remains one of the most persistent challenges in infrastructure development. Sprint6 addresses this through disciplined planning,

standardised designs, and the use of proven technologies. Integrated execution reduces rework and delays, while real-time monitoring creates accountability at every stage. This structured approach enables the company to meet budgetary and scheduling constraints without compromising hygiene or performance.

Sprint6's credibility has been further strengthened through recognition and support from StartupTN and investment by the Government of Tamil Nadu. This association has opened access to institutional networks, pilot projects, and

large-scale public infrastructure opportunities. It also positions Sprint6 as a reliable partner for government bodies seeking sanitation solutions aligned with public health objectives, policy

frameworks, and long-term sustainability goals.

Working closely with public-sector stakeholders has shaped Sprint6's understanding of scale and inclusivity. Public sanitation projects demand compliance, transparency, and adaptability, particularly when serving diverse user groups. Sprint6's approach prioritises user-centric design, incorporating features that address accessibility, safety, and ease of use for children, elderly users, and persons with disabilities. Technology is applied thoughtfully to support usability rather than create barriers.

Preventive maintenance and AMC services play a crucial role in sustaining dignity in sanitation infrastructure. Regular inspections, early fault detection, and timely servicing prevent deterioration and ensure consistent hygiene standards. This proactive maintenance model reduces downtime, extends asset life, and ensures that facilities remain dependable for users over time.

Looking ahead, Sprint6 identifies several trends shaping the future of sanitation infrastructure in India. Increased adoption of touchless technologies, IoT-based monitoring, predictive maintenance, and AI-driven systems is expected to redefine operational efficiency. Expansion into Tier II and Tier III cities, growing sustainability mandates, and alignment with smart city and urban health initiatives will further influence how sanitation infrastructure is planned and managed.

Sprint6's growth strategy reflects these shifts. The company aims to deepen its smart sanitation offerings through advanced automation and sustainability features while expanding its geographic footprint beyond South India. By scaling its turnkey and AMC services across regions, Sprint6 seeks to extend its impact and set consistent standards across diverse contexts.

Ultimately, Sprint6 envisions sanitation infrastructure as a measure of how seriously societies take everyday human needs. By integrating design, technology, monitoring, and maintenance into a single ecosystem, the company is redefining how restrooms are built and managed. In doing so, Sprint6 demonstrates that dignity in sanitation is not achieved through scale alone, but through systems that work quietly, reliably, and consistently for everyone who uses them.

*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](http://www.csim.in)

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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.

# “In agriculture, demand and supply will always be there. That is why I chose this field.”

*R. Anandan shares with Marie Banu his journey, philosophy, and vision for the essential oils sector.*

**M**r. R. Anandan is the Managing Director of Varsha Group of Companies, which comprises Varsha Aromatic, Bluetree Essential Oil Pvt. Ltd., and Aurum Alpha Engineering Works. With over 30 years of experience in medicinal and aromatic plants, he has built an integrated enterprise spanning cultivation, distillation, engineering, and exports across South India. Varsha Group supplies essential oils to international markets, pharmaceutical companies, and fragrance houses, following a field-driven, project-based model that includes land surveys, crop recommendations through detailed project reports, and structured buyback arrangements for larger projects.

*In an exclusive interview, Mr. R. Anandan shares with Marie Banu his journey, philosophy, and vision for the essential oils sector.*

**Could you begin by telling us about your educational background and how your professional journey started?**

I completed my postgraduate degree in Commerce in Coimbatore and spent nearly five years working in corporate companies, primarily in the accounts department. Those years gave me strong financial discipline and exposure to structured systems. However, I gradually realised that corporate work is largely repetitive—the numbers change, but the nature of the work remains the same. Over time, I felt there was little scope for creativity or long-term personal growth, and I wanted to pursue something more dynamic and meaningful.

**What led you to move away from the corporate sector and consider agriculture?**

I began observing different industries closely and noticed that most sectors go through cycles of growth and decline. Agriculture, however, is fundamentally different. It is eternal. No matter the situation, people will always need food, medicine, and natural resources. That realisation stayed with me, and I decided to enter a field that offered long-term relevance and stability. Agriculture, especially beyond conventional food crops, appeared to be the only sector where demand and supply would always exist, even if the focus evolved over time.

**How did your interest shift specifically towards medicinal and aromatic plants?**

Around 1996–97, I attended an insurance-related course at the Karl Kuber Institute in Coimbatore. Due to a

schedule change, one of the sessions focused on agriculture and medicinal crops. The speaker spoke about plants that grow in forests, deserts, coastal regions, and grasslands, and how they form the basis of medicines used worldwide. That session sparked my interest and made me realise that medicinal and aromatic plants represent a vast, underexplored agricultural field with global relevance.

**Did your family’s agricultural background influence this shift?**

Yes. Two generations ago, my family was deeply involved in agriculture. Over time, as education became a priority, family members moved into formal employment. I chose to return to agriculture through small, practical engagements. This helped me reconnect with the land while applying an enterprise-oriented mindset shaped by my corporate experience.

**What were your early agricultural ventures, and what lessons did they offer?**

One of my earliest large-scale ventures was marigold cultivation. I noticed that marigold flowers from our region were being exported extensively and moved into contract farming. At one stage, I was managing nearly 500 acres across Dharmapuri, Salem, and parts of Karnataka such as Gundlupet, with close to 90 people involved in daily operations such as ploughing, plucking, loading, and transport.

Floriculture taught me valuable lessons in labour management, corporate supply requirements, and agricultural scale. However, it also revealed its limitations. Flower cultivation is highly climate-dependent. While income may be good for several months, a single adverse season can disrupt production entirely. This lack of stability prompted me to rethink my focus.

**How did vetiver become central to your work?**

Around 1999–2000, vetiver had a strong presence in regions such as Mangalore and Kannur, which led me to explore its cultivation. I learned that vetiver is highly versatile and can grow across diverse soil types and climatic conditions. However, cultivation alone is not enough. Vetiver root extraction is technically demanding, and improper extraction can leave nearly 70 percent of the root underground, directly affecting oil quality.

Vetiver oil contains more than 150 chemical constituents, and its value depends on maintaining this profile. Through continuous practice, testing,



and validation—particularly through GC reports—I gained a deeper understanding of how soil, altitude, and climate influence both yield and aroma.

**What factors determine the quality of vetiver oil?**

The quality of vetiver oil depends largely on soil type, altitude, and extraction methods. Vetiver grown near sea level, especially in coastal areas, is generally suitable only for ornamental use, as it lacks the aroma required for essential oil production. The best medicinal and aromatic vetiver comes from medium-altitude regions, roughly between 100 and 500 metres above sea level. Roots grown near riverbanks, mangrove zones, and specific forest belts produce oils with distinct densities and chemical profiles.

**How has your enterprise grown over the last three decades?**

For nearly 30 years, I have worked exclusively in medicinal and aromatic plants. Today, our companies produce essential oils from nearly 25 varieties, including lemongrass, palmarosa, citronella, curry leaf, vetiver, and davana. We cultivate around 60 acres directly and also work with nearly 150 tribal families, providing them with training and employment suited to their daily lives. Production is spread across multiple zones to ensure year-round activity. Today, we are among the leading producers in South India in essential oil wetware and distillation.

**How do you ensure quality and credibility in production?**

Good Manufacturing Practices are non-negotiable for us. Cleanliness, discipline, and transparency are

maintained at every stage of production. We use multipurpose distillation vessels rather than single-use equipment and never compromise on quality. In this industry, reputation matters more than volume. Our consistent quality over decades has ensured recognition for purity in both domestic and international markets.

**Training and knowledge-sharing appear central to your work. Why is this important?**

When I entered this field, very few people were seriously engaged in medicinal and aromatic plants. I believe that for any industry to grow sustainably, knowledge must be shared. Over the years, we have trained farmers, factory workers, students, and aspiring entrepreneurs. Through collaborations with institutions such as Anna University’s Entrepreneurial Development Cell, we have trained around 700 individuals. Last year alone, nearly 1,150 people visited our facilities for live training and industrial exposure, free of cost. Seeing people grow into entrepreneurs or skilled practitioners is one of my greatest satisfactions.

**Why do you consider vetiver a sustainable livelihood option?**

Vetiver offers multiple benefits. It reduces soil erosion, improves soil health, purifies water, and generates stable income. When managed properly, even one acre can yield strong returns with relatively low maintenance. It serves multiple markets—ornamental, cosmetic, fragrance, and medicinal—making it a low-risk crop. Farmers can also integrate livestock, fodder use, and staggered harvesting to ensure year-round income and employment.