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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

As we celebrate twenty-five years of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS), we reflect on what this journey has truly shaped within us. Institutions may be measured by milestones, programmes, or events, but their deeper legacy lies in the values they cultivate. For MSDS, those values have formed the foundation of a culture of social citizenry.

Our founder, Shri. P. N. Devarajan, was clear in his conviction: inequality cannot be bridged through charity alone. Charity may provide temporary relief, but transformation requires responsibility. He reminded us that social consciousness must be lived, practised, and passed on. It must enter our homes, guide our professions, and shape our institutions. This principle has remained central to our work.

One of the most enduring values we have gained is responsibility as discipline. Responsibility is not limited to acts of generosity; it is reflected in ethical governance, transparency, consistency, and respect for stakeholders. In the social sector, good intentions are not enough. Credibility is built when actions align with values. Over time, we have learned that institutional trust grows from integrity.

Through CSIM, we have translated these values into structured learning. We have emphasised that compassion must be matched with competence. Social entrepreneurs and NGO leaders are encouraged to design viable models, measure outcomes, and remain accountable to the communities they serve. Sustainable change requires managerial rigour as much as empathy.

We have also learned that meaningful progress begins with listening. Proximity to community realities prevents assumptions and strengthens relevance. Whether engaging with farmers, youth, women's groups, or grassroots organisations, dialogue has always preceded design. This participatory approach has deepened both impact and trust.

In recent years, our focus on agripreneurs and ecological resilience reflects an evolving understanding: environmental stewardship and social equity are inseparable. Soil health, food systems, and rural livelihoods form an interconnected foundation for justice. The next generation must see sustainability not as an option, but as obligation.

In this special Silver Jubilee issue, we feature four changemakers whose work reflects the living philosophy of MSDS—Dr. Jayashree, Ms. Deepika K, Mr. Harinath KasiGanesan, and Ms. Shobhana Thangam Sundar—each of them recipients of the MSDS Awards 2026. Their grounded leadership demonstrates how social consciousness can be lived through enterprise, community engagement, and ecological responsibility.

As we look ahead, the lesson from twenty-five years is clear. Social consciousness must be organised, measurable, and renewed across generations. If future leaders combine innovation with integrity, compassion with competence, and growth with accountability, the journey of social citizenry will not only continue—it will strengthen.

Marie Banu Rodriguez

EDITORIAL

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu Rodriguez

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI'S VISION AND THE NEED FOR AGRICULTURE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

In a rapidly industrialising and technology-driven world, agriculture is often viewed as an economic sector—measured in yield, productivity, and market value. Yet from the standpoint of Ramana Maharshi, agriculture would not merely be an industry. It would be a way of living in harmony with the natural order. Though Ramana Maharshi did not write treatises on farming or agricultural policy, his teachings offer a profound spiritual foundation for why agriculture remains essential for future generations.

At the heart of Ramana's philosophy lies the understanding that the Self alone is real, and that all life arises within that one undivided consciousness. When this non-dual vision is understood, the separation between human beings and the earth begins to dissolve. The soil is no longer an external object to be exploited, but a manifestation of the same life principle that animates us. Agriculture, then, becomes not merely food production, but participation in a sacred cycle of life.

Ramana Maharshi lived simply at the foot of Arunachala. His life demonstrated a deep respect for nature—not as romantic sentiment, but as natural alignment. Food was received with gratitude. Resources were used without waste. There was no obsession with accumulation. This simplicity offers a powerful lesson for future generations facing ecological degradation and food insecurity. Sustainable agriculture begins not only in technique, but in attitude. When consumption is guided by contentment rather than greed, the land is allowed to regenerate.

One of Ramana's central teachings was that suffering arises from the ego's sense of separateness. This same sense of separateness underlies environmental destruction. When humans see themselves as independent from the earth, they treat land as property rather than as life. Intensive extraction, chemical dependence, and monoculture systems reflect this mindset. Ramana's method of self-enquiry—asking “Who am I?”—challenges the illusion of isolation. As the ego loosens its grip, the rigid boundary between “human” and “nature” softens. Agriculture then shifts from domination to cooperation.

For future generations, agriculture is not merely about survival; it is about resilience. A society disconnected from its food systems becomes vulnerable—economically, socially, and spiritually. Ramana's teaching encourages self-reliance at the deepest level. Just as he guided seekers to discover the source within, communities must rediscover their connection to the soil. When young people understand where food comes from, how seasons shape growth, and how life depends on balance, they cultivate humility alongside skill.

Ramana also emphasised non-violence—not only in action, but in perception. To cultivate the land in a way that exhausts its fertility is a subtle form of violence. To farm in a way that nurtures soil health, biodiversity, and water cycles is an expression of reverence. His compassion extended to animals and all living beings around him. Such an attitude suggests that agriculture for the future must be mindful of animal welfare, ecological diversity, and long-term soil vitality. Farming becomes an act of stewardship rather than exploitation.

Importantly, Ramana did not advocate withdrawal from life's responsibilities. His teaching allows for full engagement in worldly duties while remaining inwardly centred. Applied to agriculture, this means innovation and science need not be rejected—but they must be grounded in awareness. Technology guided by greed accelerates depletion; technology



guided by wisdom enhances sustainability. Future generations will need scientific advancement, but also the discernment to ensure that progress does not sever humanity's relationship with the earth.

Another aspect of Ramana's life that speaks to agriculture is his embodiment of sufficiency. He demonstrated that happiness does not depend on abundance of possessions, but on inner stillness. When societies redefine prosperity solely in terms of economic expansion, agricultural land becomes collateral damage—converted, overused, or chemically burdened. If future generations learn to value inner contentment, they will be less driven to sacrifice fertile soil for short-term gain. Simplicity becomes not deprivation, but freedom.

Agriculture also carries a deeper symbolic meaning in Ramana's teaching. Just as the soil must be tilled and cleared of weeds for seeds to grow, the mind must be cleared of egoic tendencies for wisdom to arise. Both processes require patience, care, and alignment with natural rhythms. In this sense, working with the land becomes a form of meditation—an intimate participation in life's unfolding cycles.

In a time of climate change, declining soil fertility, and rural distress, Ramana Maharshi's teachings remind us that the crisis is not only external but internal. When the mind is restless and driven by accumulation, the earth bears the consequence. When the mind is steady and aware, action becomes measured and compassionate. For future generations to inherit fertile land and secure food systems, there must be a transformation not only in policy, but in consciousness.

Ultimately, the need for agriculture for future generations is inseparable from the need for inner clarity. To know who we are is to recognise that we are not separate from the soil that nourishes us. When this understanding becomes lived experience, farming ceases to be an economic necessity alone—it becomes an expression of gratitude and responsibility. In that spirit, agriculture can remain not only viable, but sacred, ensuring that the generations to come inherit both food security and ecological harmony.

Source: Inspired by the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi



THE SOIL SCIENTIST-ENTREPRENEUR

Dr. S. Jayashree, PhD, approaches agriculture as a living system—where soil, food, livelihoods, and human health are inseparable. An environmental microbiologist and scientist-entrepreneur, she is the Founder and CEO of BioVersion Agri Services, operating from Coimbatore and Chennai, and also serves as COO of Kiana Agriculture, Netherlands. Her work moves between lab research, field trials, farmer engagement, and product innovation, but the core idea stays the same: restore soil, and you protect everything that depends on it.

“Over time, I realised that soil health and human health are not separate conversations. They are the same conversation—just viewed from different ends of the food chain,” reflects Jayashree.

“Research should never become an indoor sport. If it stays inside a lab, it remains a paper. When it reaches a farm, it becomes a solution,” says Jayashree.

Her professional journey began far from laboratories. For over 13 years, she taught at Chinmaya Vidyalaya in Coimbatore, from LKG to Plus Two. Teaching brought fulfilment, but it also surfaced an inner restlessness—an urge to step beyond the classroom and work on problems that shaped real lives and communities.

“I loved teaching because I could see learning happen in a child’s eyes. But there was always another voice inside me—one that kept asking, ‘Can I do something that changes outcomes beyond the classroom?’” recalls Jayashree.

A school science exhibition became a turning point. A student’s father, Professor Lakshmanaperumalsamy, noticed her enthusiasm and encouraged her to pursue higher research. That conversation, she says, expanded her sense of possibility. She registered for a PhD in Environmental Science, specialising in Microbiology, and began exploring how microbes, plants, and soils interact—particularly under stress.

“Professor Swami didn’t just tell me to do a PhD. He made me believe my curiosity had a place in research—and that I could contribute to agriculture in a meaningful way,” shares Jayashree.

During her PhD, Professor Swami introduced her to vetiver (*Chrysopogon*

zizanioides), the plant that would become central to her work. Vetiver fascinated her not as a botanical subject but as a practical tool for soil restoration. In lab analysis, she observed improvements in soil texture and vitality in vetiver’s presence, especially in degraded conditions. The plant, for her, became proof that ecological repair can be observed, repeated, and applied.

“Vetiver behaves like a system, not just a plant. You see soil change—its texture, its vitality, its ability to hold life. It is rare to find something so natural and yet so powerfully functional,” emphasises Jayashree.

For her, the next step was clear: take knowledge to farmers. In 2007, she began conducting workshops—well before digital tools made outreach effortless. Invitations were handwritten and posted, and the sessions were designed to translate lab insight into farm decisions. Adoption followed, including by Mr. Pandian from Sivaganga district, who embraced vetiver cultivation and became a reference point for other farmers.

“Today, we take outreach for granted—one message and a hundred people know. In 2007, we wrote letters by hand. But I wanted farmers to see, touch, and understand what I was seeing in the lab. That is how trust begins,” explains Jayashree. “When a farmer adopts something and stays with it—not for a season, but as a practice—you know your research has crossed the bridge from theory to livelihood,” she adds.

A milestone arrived in 2024, when her Indian patent on vetiver’s anti-venom properties was granted. For Jayashree, intellectual property is not merely a badge; it is a route to responsible scaling, ensuring innovations are protected and can travel beyond a narrow circle.

“I have learned that innovation alone doesn’t create impact. If you don’t protect it, you can’t scale it responsibly. A patent is not a trophy—it is a shield that helps an idea reach more people,” says Jayashree.

Her perspective is shaped by earlier lessons. During her PhD years, she and her team developed discoveries—such as floating technologies for water-based cultivation—that were not patented due to limited awareness of IP pathways. Today,

she sees innovation as a pipeline: discovery, protection, proof, communication, and market strategy.

“When you come from academia, you think discovery is the finish line. It isn’t. Discovery is the starting line. After that, you need protection, strategy, and a way to take it into the world,” Jayashree points out.

One of her most distinctive innovations emerged not from a planned lab experiment, but from a field observation. While running organic fertiliser trials with international collaborators Dr. Metin Turan (Turkey) and Dr. Sanam (Netherlands) across locations such as Gujarat and Ooty, she noticed heaps of discarded plastic nursery trays used for cabbage saplings. When she asked what happened to them, she was told they were simply burnt.

“That answer shocked me, because it revealed how quietly plastic enters our soil and air—not through one big event, but through everyday practices that feel normal,” says Jayashree.

Her response became Biomanure Pots: biodegradable nursery trays and pots designed to decompose into nutrition rather than pollution. Biomanure Pots is made using organic fertiliser and natural tree gum. Prototypes lasted 60 to 90 days and supported strong plant growth; as the pot breaks down, it releases nutrients into the soil, improving fertility while removing plastic disposal concerns. Two versions were developed—one heat-pressed for durability up to six months, and another without heat-pressing for shorter cycles. A patent has been filed for the innovation.

“I kept thinking—why should a nursery tray end its life as pollution? Why can’t it end its life as nourishment? That single question became Biomanure Pots,” recalls Jayashree. “The beauty of Biomanure Pots is that farmers don’t have to dispose of it. They plant it. The pot becomes part of the soil story—slowly breaking down, feeding the plant, feeding the earth,” she adds.

To commercialise Biomanure Pots and scale other eco-friendly solutions, she founded BioVersion Agri Services. Yet she is candid about what makes agri-entrepreneurship difficult: adoption is as

much cultural as it is technical. Farmers often expect quick results through chemical inputs, and organic transitions demand patience and consistent support.

“The hardest part is not explaining science. The hardest part is changing expectations. Chemicals promise speed. Nature works on timelines. Convincing people to respect that timeline is real work,” acknowledges Jayashree.

She also highlights an ecosystem gap: researchers are trained to discover, but often not supported to translate and deliver. “Academia teaches you how to discover. Entrepreneurship teaches you how to deliver. Most innovators struggle because they are trained for discovery but not for delivery,” adds Jayashree.

Jayashree is equally clear about the role women can play in accelerating sustainable agriculture. She notes that women have always been central to farming, but their voices have often been overlooked. In Gujarat, she observed women farmers asking more questions and leading adoption of organic practices.

“Women have always done the work in agriculture. What is changing now is that women are beginning to ask the questions—and questions are the first sign of leadership,” says Jayashree. “When women adopt a practice, it becomes community knowledge. It moves from one farm to many farms—not by instruction, but by example,” she adds.

On balancing profit with ecological sustainability, she argues that short-term thinking creates a false conflict. She believes profitability and sustainability can coexist when farmers strengthen direct market linkages and treat soil as a long-term asset.

She remains optimistic about technology—drones, AI, and IoT—improving efficiency, monitoring soil health, and drawing youth into agriculture. “When biotechnology meets computer science, agriculture stops looking like an old profession and starts looking like a frontier industry,” says Jayashree.

Marie Banu Rodriguez

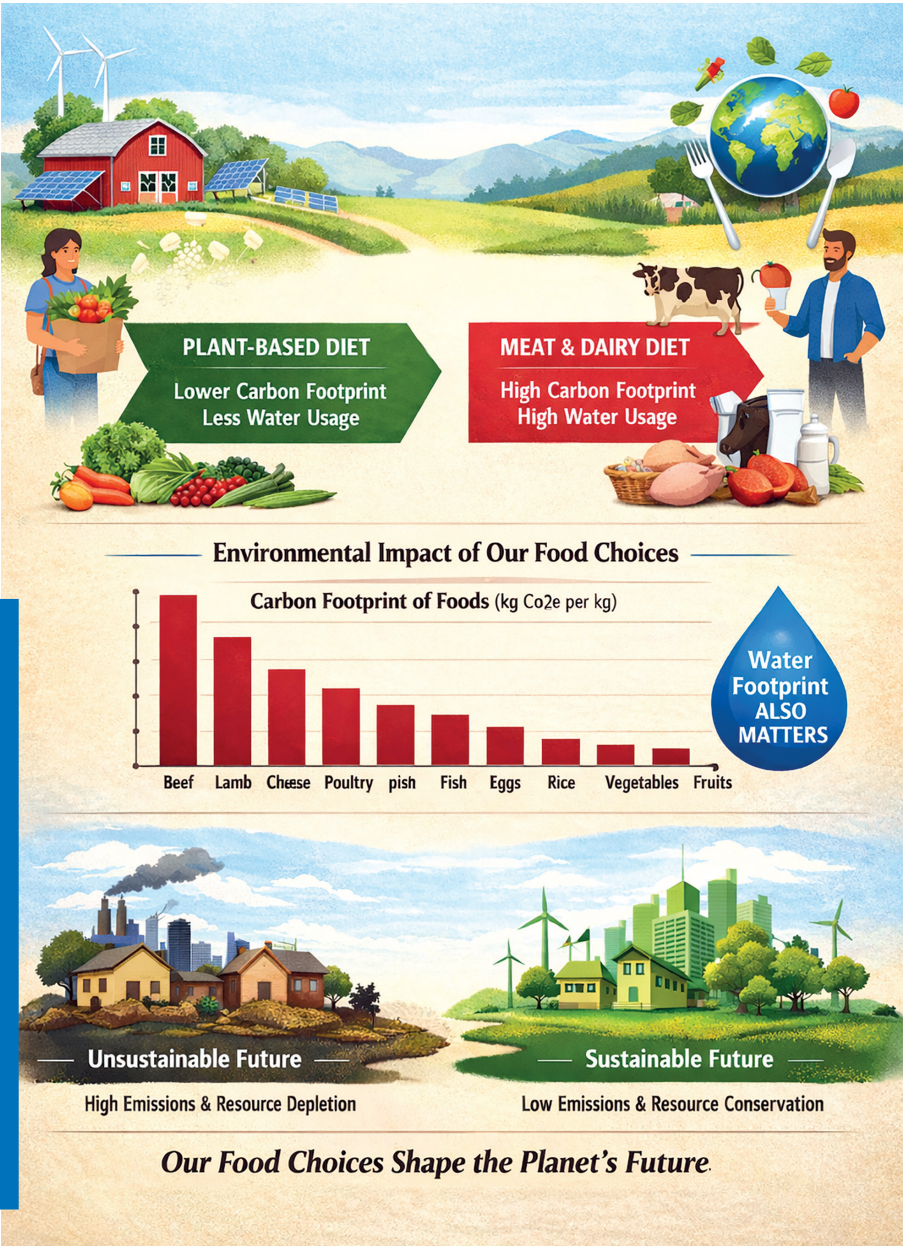
OUR CONSUMPTION CHOICES AND SUSTAINABILITY

The entire world is speaking about sustainability. Businesses and governments are shifting their vision to make the world more sustainable. In this article, I examine how our consumption choices – our food choices impact global sustainability.

What do we consume every day?
In discussions of sustainability, people often address topics such as air travel, energy conservation, and water conservation. While all are good, and many are aware of the choices we have and how each affects global sustainability, little is discussed about our food choices. I often encounter people who assert that food choice is personal and that every person should have the freedom to eat whatever they want. This article is not about forcing someone to



change their food choices, but more so to look at the impact and then see what comes up for you – from that place, if you intend to change something, do so.
Three Important Elements – Roti, Kapda aur Makhaan (Food, Clothing & Shelter)
Regardless of where we live on this planet, these three elements are essential to human life; they are embedded in our cultures in different ways across the globe, depending on the climate and the cultural practices that have evolved over thousands of years in those regions. In this article, we talk only about Food. Among these three essential elements, shelter is something we create for ourselves only once or twice in a lifetime. Clothing is also not a frequent affair – unfortunately, because of fast fashion, the frequency and quantity of clothing we have now is far higher than what previous generations had. Food is a basic requirement for life. It occurs every day and hence has a significant impact on our own sustainability. When we combine the food choices of billions of people across the globe, every day, it makes a



agriculture. What is produced by the farmers is defined by what is required by the consumers – the demand supply principle of economics. Overall, the food choices we make drive global agriculture.
If we take an example of mangoes – the mango saplings have to be planted, they have to be watered, nurtured, taken care of, and once the mangoes appear and they ripen, they have to be harvested – it may be mechanical or manual – and then they have to be distributed to different places. Then it reaches a shop, store, or vendor near us, from where we purchase it. This is a simplified version of the cycle that every product or food item we consume undergoes. The impact of different products, including food, is calculated in terms of Carbon Footprint – the total carbon emission for the production of that particular food. Similarly, a Water Footprint for each product is calculated to quantify the amount of water required to produce a particular food. This includes fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products, meat, etc.
Different kinds of foods have different carbon footprints. Below is an image from a research paper that shows the carbon footprints of various food items. The values are expressed in terms of CO₂eq – which is CO₂ Equivalent. This is termed as GWP – Global Warming Potential. The higher the GWP the worst is its impact on environment, i.e. it leads to consumption of more resources.
To make it simple, the more plant-based a person's food is, the lower their carbon footprint, i.e., the lower the impact on the environment. One of the reasons why we are moving to millets is not only that they are healthier than rice, but the GWP of millets is far less than that of rice, and the water footprint is also less. Overall, as the majority of us shift toward food choices with a lower GWP, the world will become more sustainable.

Crop/animal product	GHG emission (g kg ⁻¹)			
	CH ₄	N ₂ O	CO ₂	GWP (CO ₂ eq.)
Wheat	0.0	0.3	45.0	119.5
Rice	43.0	0.2	75.0	1221.3
Rice, basmati	53.7	0.3	82.5	1515.4
Pulse	0.0	0.8	83.3	306.8
Potato	0.0	0.1	10.0	24.9
Cauliflower	0.0	0.1	13.3	28.2
Brinjal	0.0	0.1	12.5	31.1
Oilseed	0.0	1.3	50.0	422.5
Poultry meat	0.0	2.7	50.0	846.5
Mutton ^a	482.5	0.0	0.0	12,062.7
Egg	0.0	2.0	1.0	588.4
Milk ^a	29.2	0.0	0.0	729.2
Banana	0.0	0.2	10.0	71.6
Apple	0.0	1.0	41.7	331.4
Spice	0.0	2.5	100.0	845.0
Fish	25.0	0.3	18.8	718.3

Source: calculated from Bhatia et al. (2004), NATCOM (2004), Chhabra et al. (2009), Pathak et al. (2009b) and Jain et al. (unpublished).

^a Emission of nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide for milk and mutton production was not considered as buffalo, cattle and goat in India are mostly fed with by-products of crops.

significant difference.
Food and Sustainability
Everything that we do in our lives requires resources. Even if we are merely surviving without clothing and shelter, we still need food, and for that food to be produced, there is a process involved:

What World Are We Building
Keeping whatever thoughts are coming to you, think of the consequences when you scale up our food choices to your family level, community level, national level and then global level – then you will see why every choice we make in every day of life matters in making the world more sustainable. The earlier we can together make a shift in our consumption choices, there will be a shift in the overall agriculture patterns across the globe, and this is a very sustainable way of enhancing global sustainability, because our consumption choices are not one-off events, they are our everyday choices and every human being on planet earth has a role to play in it. Let me know what new perspectives of thought have opened up for you, or if you have any questions to ask write to me at srkr@zenithimpactworks.com
S Ravi Kanth Reddy
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TWO DECADES OF ROOTED TRANSFORMATION IN RURAL TAMIL NADU

There are organisations that work in communities and then there are organisations that become a part of the heartbeat of those communities. For over twenty years, Payir Trust has been that rooted presence in the aspirational district of Perambalur, Tamil Nadu. From its beginnings in Thenur village in 2005, Payir has grown into a catalyst for holistic rural transformation, touching over 25,000 lives through integrated initiatives in healthcare, education, ecology, governance and livelihoods.

At its heart, Payir began with a simple belief: rural communities, when empowered with knowledge, resources and agency, can shape their own futures. "The idea isn't just to serve, it's to enable people to see what transformation looks like, and then to lead it themselves," says founder Senthilkumar Gopalan.

Alongside Senthil stands Dr. Preethi Lucy Xavier, whose passion for social justice was nurtured from childhood by parents active in human rights and community mobilisation. Joining Payir in 2010, Preethi has shaped its health and well-being programmes, guiding initiatives from a fledgling clinic to an integrated care system serving over 7,000 families. She has pioneered school health and nutrition programmes, adolescent empowerment and inclusive care for

special children, while leading watershed, ecological restoration and women's enterprise initiatives across the district.

Foundations of Holistic Impact

Payir's approach has always been holistic, recognising that social challenges, from malnutrition and poor health to limited education and livelihoods are interconnected.

Healthcare and Nutrition: Over two decades, Payir has delivered over 2 million health services and distributed 5 million nutrition supplements, cutting child malnutrition and adolescent anemia by half. Today, 80% of the local population seek timely, rational healthcare.

Education: More than 25 government schools have benefited from enhanced class hours, exceeding 2 million in total. Average test scores rose over 50%, and more than 80% of students complete grade 12.

Ecology and Water Security: Payir's watershed and ecology initiatives, especially Project Bandham, have restored hundreds of water bodies, rejuvenated irrigation for thousands of acres, and planted 35,000 trees. Preethi's passion for micro-forests and sustainable farming has been instrumental in these ecological gains.

Livelihoods and Enterprise: The

Thoorigai Women's Collective, nurtured by Payir, generates sustainable income, fosters financial independence and operates two nationally and internationally recognised businesses.

Aarvam: Igniting Curiosity and Imagination

Payir's forward-looking vision is embodied in Aarvam Learning Centre, created with Amagi Media Labs Pvt Ltd. Aarvam offers experiential, inquiry-based learning in STEAM-H, hosting labs for Space, Earth and Ecology, Art, Makerspaces, Audio-Visual halls and a Planetarium. Phase 1 was inaugurated in August 2025 by Nigar Shaji and regular programs began in November 2025.

Aarvam's framework tracks behavioural shifts in curiosity, confidence, scientific understanding and teamwork, reaching 850 students in its first year with capacity for 3,500 annually. "Curiosity is at the heart of all learning. With Aarvam, we are creating a space where children can wonder, explore and grow," reflects Senthilkumar.

Why Payir Exists

Despite urban progress, rural Perambalur faces challenges: seasonal agriculture, social divides, gaps in education and healthcare, limited

community participation and lowest GDDP (Gross District Domestic Product) in the state. Payir addresses these through integrative programmes that build local leadership and ownership.

Looking Forward: The Second Generation

2025 marks a milestone, a moment to move from evolution to sustainable ownership. The first generation built roots, the next generation inherits the pillars. Watershed recognition, community health, adolescent nutrition, special children care and Aarvam's halls are foundations to expand upon. "Real impact isn't about how much we do, it's about how much communities take over," Preethi & Senthil remind.

Through partnerships with governments, leaders, and supporters, Payir continues to ensure villages are not just recipients of aid but architects of their own progress: resilient, equitable and thriving. With the guidance of Senthil and Preethi, the vision for the second generation is clear: to own, innovate, and elevate Payir's initiatives for the future.

Aatika Kundalam

MSDS CHRONICLES OF SOCIAL CITIZENRY



On the morning of 7 March 2026, at 10.30 a.m., the auditorium of M.O.P. Vaishnav College for Women slowly filled—farmers and entrepreneurs, students and social workers, alumni, trustees, and long-time well-wishers taking their seats with a shared sense of purpose. They had gathered to mark a milestone: the Silver Jubilee of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani (MSDS) and the presentation of the MSDS Awards

2026. Yet the story of that morning had begun twenty-five years earlier with a question that Shri. P. N. Devarajan (PND) posed at the very start of this journey: were we satisfied with giving alms, or were we prepared to build a society where such alms were no longer necessary? Those who worked closely with him remembered how he spoke—quietly, but with precision. He did not dismiss charity;

he placed it in context. He often reminded people that charity could relieve distress, but it did not correct injustice. Inequality, he believed, could not be bridged through goodwill alone. It required something deeper and more durable: social consciousness. For PND, social consciousness was not a slogan. It was a civic discipline—social responsibility that had to be lived, practised, and passed on, until it entered

homes, institutions, and professions as a shared ethic. Without that, even the best development efforts would remain fragmented and temporary. It was this conviction that shaped MSDS—not merely as a platform to distribute support, but as a movement to cultivate responsibility. **Nurturing social consciousness** The MSDS Awards had been created to

make visible those who embodied this philosophy. In PND’s view, recognition was not about prestige; it was about reinforcing values by bringing steady, ethical action into public view. The 2026 awardees stood firmly in that tradition. They were not accidental changemakers, but disciplined practitioners—people who chose to work close to communities, close to the soil, and close to reality. Over the past three years, the awards had carried a deliberate focus on agripreneurs. This had not been a thematic shift driven by trend, but by urgency. Soil health

had been declining. Food systems had been under strain. Rural livelihoods had remained precarious. Ecological imbalance and social inequality had become increasingly intertwined. PND had spoken about this interconnectedness long before it became a common framing. He had repeatedly drawn attention to how the weakening of soil and village economies could fracture the wider social fabric. Strengthening agriculture, therefore, was never only about yield. It was about restoring balance—economic, ecological, and moral. The agripreneurs honoured in 2026 had revived regenerative practices, promoted biodiversity, reduced chemical dependence, and built resilient value chains. They had brought enterprise discipline to ecological responsibility, showing that profitability and sustainability were not adversaries when guided by ethics. By honouring them, MSDS had underscored a foundational truth: food systems shaped equity—and strengthening agriculture responsibly addressed inequality at its roots.

"Do not merely feel for society. Organise for it. Practise responsibility. Sustain the change."

From philosophy to pedagogy PND also believed that conviction alone was insufficient. He emphasised that good intentions had to be matched by competence, because social commitment required structure, skill, and rigour. That realisation had led to the establishment of the Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM)—a capacity-building institution designed to translate values into managerial discipline. CSIM had trained social entrepreneurs, NGO leaders, professionals, and youth to combine empathy with execution. Participants had learned to build viable models, understand governance, strengthen financial sustainability, and measure outcomes. Field immersion had complemented classroom dialogue, and reflection had accompanied action. Many alumni had gone on to launch enterprises, strengthen grassroots organisations, enter CSR leadership, and expand community-based initiatives. In doing so, they had carried the philosophy of social citizenry into diverse sectors—extending the reach of MSDS well beyond a single institution. **Accountability as a civic ethic** The Silver Jubilee had also drawn attention to another



strand of this journey: SAN India. If MSDS had nurtured values and CSIM had built competence, SAN India had strengthened accountability. Social audit, as practised by SAN India in collaboration with SAN UK, had gone beyond financial compliance. It had examined relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and social impact, asking whether programmes genuinely served stakeholders, whether resources were used responsibly, and whether change endured. PND had welcomed this culture of scrutiny. For him, transparency was not a burden; it was an ethical necessity—an expression of responsibility, not an administrative formality. Together, MSDS, CSIM, and SAN India had formed a continuum: nurture social consciousness, build managerial competence, and embed institutional accountability.

Launching the Chronicles A defining moment of the Jubilee celebration had been the release of MSDS Chronicles of Social Citizenry – 25-Year Journey of Commitment and Change. The volume had documented the milestones, programmes, and people who had shaped this path. It had been more than an archive; it had been a marker of what became possible when values were translated into structure—and when responsibility was not merely spoken about, but organised and sustained. As guests gathered in the auditorium on 7 March 2026, they did not simply witness an awards ceremony. They participated in a reaffirmation. In an era of rapid economic growth alongside persistent inequality, the core of PND’s message remained urgent: responsibility could not be outsourced. The Silver Jubilee stood as both milestone and mandate. It celebrated twenty-five years of commitment. It honoured agripreneurs and changemakers who strengthened communities and ecosystems. It highlighted the educational role of CSIM and the accountability movement of SAN India. And it renewed a simple, demanding call that had shaped this institution from its earliest days: move beyond sentiment, build capability, practise responsibility—and sustain the change.

Marie Banu Rodriguez

VETIVER – A NATURE-BASED SOLUTION FOR CARBON SEQUESTRATION

The steady rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide levels has accelerated global warming, triggering cascading effects on ecosystems, water cycles, agriculture, and livelihoods. As nations pursue emission reductions, carbon sequestration has emerged as a critical pillar of climate action. Afforestation and reforestation are widely promoted, since trees absorb carbon dioxide through photosynthesis and store carbon in above-ground biomass (trunks and branches) and below-ground roots.

On average, a mature tree sequesters about 22 kg of carbon dioxide per year. To offset 1 tonne of carbon dioxide annually, roughly 50 trees are required. An average urban resident emitting about 4.5 tonnes per year would need to plant nearly 225 trees to become net zero. While tree planting remains essential, complementary solutions are needed—especially those that sequester carbon faster, deeper, and more resiliently.

Why Vetiver?

Vetiver grass (*Chrysopogon zizanioides*) presents a powerful Nature-Based Solution (NBS) for carbon sequestration. Research indicates that vetiver can sequester approximately 15 tonnes of carbon per hectare per year, compared to about 2.9 tonnes per hectare per year for trees under typical conditions. The difference lies in its growth dynamics and root architecture.

Vetiver grows 1.5–2 metres above ground and develops dense roots reaching 3–4 metres deep within two years. Both its green shoots and extensive root mass act as carbon sinks. Crucially, carbon stored deep in the soil is more stable—less vulnerable to tilling, erosion, forest fires, or surface disturbances—and can remain locked in the soil for decades.

The above-ground biomass of vetiver can reach 60–100 tonnes per hectare per year, representing a substantial carbon sink that regenerates annually. Unlike trees, which require many years to mature before achieving significant sequestration rates, vetiver delivers meaningful carbon capture within the first 12 months.

Built for Extremes

Vetiver is exceptionally hardy. It thrives in temperatures ranging from -15°C to $+52^{\circ}\text{C}$, tolerates pH levels from 3 to 11, survives in saline and sodic soils, withstands waterlogging, and can recover even after fire exposure. It is virtually a low-maintenance grass, inexpensive to plant, and easy to establish—qualities that make it scalable across diverse geographies.

India's Sequestration Opportunity

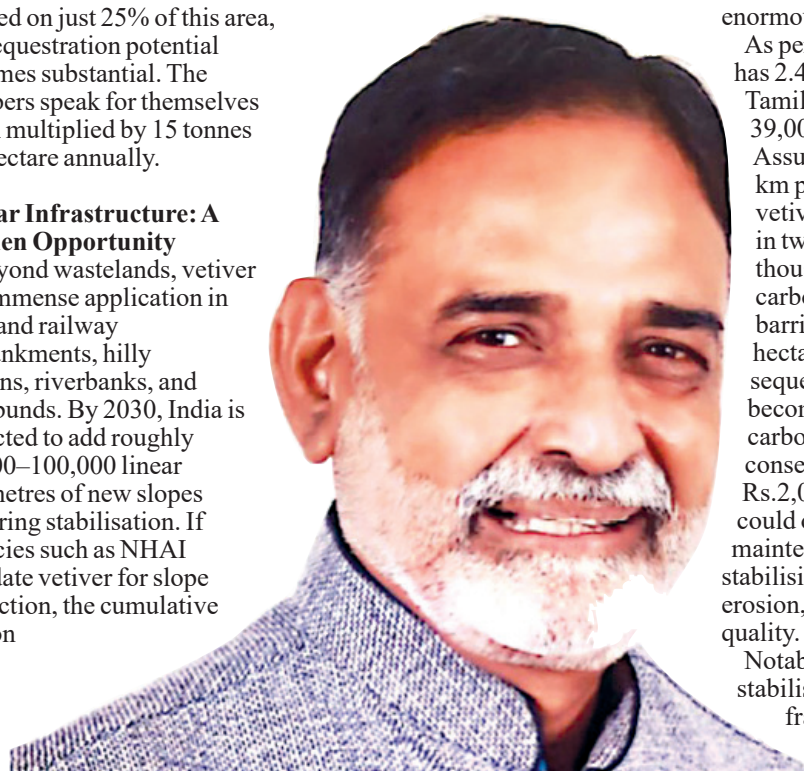
India has committed under the Paris Agreement to create an additional 3 billion tonnes of carbon sequestration by 2030. The country also has approximately 56 million hectares of wasteland, much of it in dryland regions. At a potential of 15 tonnes per hectare annually, even partial conversion of wastelands into vetiver carbon farms could make a significant contribution toward national targets.

With the operationalisation of the Indian Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) in February 2026, vetiver plantations can transform ecological restoration into measurable economic benefit. Carbon farms distributed across states—starting with pilot projects in Tamil Nadu—could align climate mitigation with rural livelihoods.

Tamil Nadu alone has about 2.93 million hectares of wasteland. Even if vetiver is planted on just 25% of this area, the sequestration potential becomes substantial. The numbers speak for themselves when multiplied by 15 tonnes per hectare annually.

Linear Infrastructure: A Hidden Opportunity

Beyond wastelands, vetiver has immense application in road and railway embankments, hilly terrains, riverbanks, and lake bunds. By 2030, India is expected to add roughly 80,000–100,000 linear kilometres of new slopes requiring stabilisation. If agencies such as NHAI mandate vetiver for slope protection, the cumulative carbon



sequestration—and associated carbon credits—would be enormous.

As per 2025–26 data, India has 2.42 million water bodies. Tamil Nadu alone has over 39,000 tanks and lakes. Assuming each has just a 1 km periphery, planting vetiver along bunds—even in two rows—translates into thousands of hectares of carbon-sequestering green barriers. At 15 tonnes per hectare annually, the sequestration impact becomes significant. If carbon credits are valued conservatively (for example, Rs.2,000 per tonne), returns could offset planting and maintenance costs—while stabilising banks, preventing erosion, and improving water quality.

Notably, vetiver-based slope stabilisation costs are often a fraction of concrete solutions—sometimes nearly

10% of the cost—while generating carbon credits rather than embodied emissions.

A Divine Grass for a Climate-Conscious Future

Vetiver is more than a grass; it is a resilient, regenerative ally. It stabilises soil, filters water, supports biodiversity, and locks carbon deep below ground—quietly and efficiently. As India advances toward its 3-billion-tonne sequestration target, vetiver offers a scalable, low-cost, low-maintenance Nature-Based Solution. In the journey toward climate resilience and net zero, this “divine grass” may well prove to be one of our most practical and powerful tools.

P.N. Subramanian

ENGINEERING WELLNESS

Parents' occupations shape children's lives in subtle yet powerful ways. Growing up, children absorb skills, values and worldviews simply by observing what their parents do every day. Even when they pursue education and careers that appear entirely different, those early influences often remain quietly embedded. At some point—sometimes by choice, sometimes by circumstance—many find themselves reconnecting with the work their parents once did, seeing it through a new lens.

For a few, this reconnection goes beyond nostalgia or necessity. It becomes life-changing. What once felt ordinary or even limiting begins to reveal deeper meaning, resilience and possibility. Armed with new education, exposure and confidence, they reinterpret their parents' occupations not as inherited constraints, but as foundations for innovation, purpose and identity. "I lost my father when I was 18 years old, but today, all his books and notes as a Siddha doctor, have helped me build my new identity as an entrepreneur," says Ms Deepika K, Founder and Managing Director of Kain Organics Private Limited in Thiruppathur.

Born in Alangayam village, she grew up in a household deeply rooted in traditional wisdom. Her father, a dedicated Siddha doctor, believed in a way of life that aligned health with nature. Her mother, an organic farmer, committed herself to cultivating traditional rice varieties such as Karuppukavuni and Pungar, along with nutrient-rich millets—reviving indigenous crops long overshadowed by commercial hybrids. Over the past four years, Deepika has actively supported her mother in this effort, even while pursuing her own ambitions.

Her parents wanted her to study well and build an independent future beyond the village. She completed her Engineering degree in Electronics and Instrumentation and stepped confidently into the corporate world, working in Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad. New cities brought new opportunities and new lifestyles. Gradually, her food habits shifted toward processed meals and fast food. Chemical-based personal care products became routine. The urban pace felt aspirational, yet her health began to deteriorate. Chronic hair fall and autoimmune complications surfaced, forcing her to confront an uncomfortable question: in chasing modern success, had she drifted too far from the traditional wisdom she once grew up with?

COVID-19 became a turning point in many lives. For Deepika, it felt almost destined. When work-from-home arrangements became the norm, she returned to her village—initially as a temporary adjustment. But distance from the city brought proximity to something far more profound. Spending more time on the farm, she began assisting her mother in daily agricultural activities. The slow rhythm of sowing, weeding and harvesting gradually replaced the urgency of corporate timelines. It was during this phase that her mother introduced her to nature-cure practices—knowledge she



had absorbed over years from Deepika's father. These were not merely remedies, but a philosophy of living in harmony with the body and environment.

Deepika began consciously shifting her lifestyle. She adopted a predominantly plant-based diet rich in fruits, vegetables, pulses and traditional grains grown on their farm. She prioritized adequate sunlight exposure, consistent yoga practice and mindful routines. As her curiosity deepened, she turned to her father's carefully preserved books and handwritten notes to understand the scientific and philosophical foundations behind Siddha healing and natural living. Her interest evolved into formal learning. She enrolled in and completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Yoga, strengthening both her practice and theoretical grounding. "I was ignorant. I didn't know anything about simple herbs like arugampul. Thanks to my mother's support, I can now identify medicinal plants, understand their properties and explain their therapeutic value," she reflects.

In 2020, she launched a YouTube channel named Meyvruksha, where she began documenting her experiments with traditional, plant-based personal care formulations. What started as simple educational videos soon gained steady viewership. Audiences were not just watching—they were asking. Many requested to purchase the very products she was demonstrating. Responding to this organic demand, her research content gradually transitioned into small-scale product distribution. She began with just three offerings: herbal hair wash powder, body wash powder and a traditional hair oil, that was made with 30 ingredients. The

years 2020 and 2021 were devoted almost entirely to research, formulation refinement, ingredient sourcing and understanding customer feedback. She approached it methodically—testing combinations, studying traditional texts and validating the efficacy of ingredients.

As her customer base grew steadily through word-of-mouth and digital reach, the enterprise gained momentum.



Encouraged by this traction, she formally registered her company in 2025, marking the transition from passion project to structured business with around 30 different products. Today, Deepika balances two worlds. While continuing her professional career, she simultaneously manages her own enterprise—traveling across cities to set up stalls, participate in exhibitions and introduce traditional, chemical-free

products to mainstream consumers. What began as a personal healing journey has evolved into a mission-driven venture rooted in heritage, health and entrepreneurship.

"My mother often tells me that she is proud of what I am doing. More than that, she feels I am carrying forward what my father would have done. She says she sees Appa in me—and that is very emotional for me," shares Deepika. Her the journey is no longer just about product sales or business expansion. Her vision extends beyond commerce. "My aim is not merely growth in numbers, but to build an ecosystem of wellness and care," she adds. As her digital presence and customer base expanded, she began receiving frequent inquiries from people eager to experience a nature-based lifestyle firsthand.

Many asked whether she runs a physical centre. These conversations sparked a larger idea—transforming her venture into a holistic wellness brand with a dedicated experience centre.

She envisions a space where traditional food systems, Siddha-informed practices, yoga, herbal knowledge and natural personal care converge under one roof. "My background helped me rediscover this way of life, but not everyone has the privilege of returning to their roots in the way I did. I want to create a guided space that helps people re-anchor themselves to lifestyle practices that were common just two or three decades ago," she elaborates. For Deepika, tradition is not a relic of the past—it is a living, evolving force. "Tradition is not lost so easily," she says with quiet conviction. "We will continue to rediscover, refine and restore its richness and potency."

Shanmuga Priya.T

RETURNING TO THE SOIL TO ASK BIGGER QUESTIONS ABOUT HEALTH

On most mornings in Pennagaram, Tamil Nadu, a man you might mistake for any other farmer walks his fields with the kind of quiet attention usually reserved for laboratories—checking leaf texture, scanning the soil surface, reading the crop’s mood. Only later do you hear the backstory: this is Harinath KasiGanesan, a former researcher associated with DRDO and later a senior research faculty professional in the US, who chose to return home and rebuild his life around farming, indigenous seeds, and what he calls “curing health problems through the roots.”

Over the years, through interviews, public talks, and university sessions, his message has found an eager audience because it speaks directly to a lived Indian reality—worry over food quality, fatigue with chronic illness, and a quiet suspicion that modern solutions often arrive too late, too expensive, and too disconnected from daily life. In Harinath’s world, the starting point is rarely the hospital. It is the kitchen. And before the kitchen, the farm.

At first glance, this framing sounds almost too simple. Yet it is precisely this simplicity—delivered with the confidence of a man who has worked inside formal research environments—that makes people pause and listen. He does not begin with complicated charts or biochemical jargon. He begins with a question that every household recognises: What is the food we eat doing to us? And he carries that question back to the soil, insisting that health is not merely an individual outcome, but an ecosystem result.

a turning point that began at home

Harinath’s pivot, as he narrates it, wasn’t a branding decision. It was personal—and it began with his mother. “It was personal—and it began with my mother who was diagnosed with advanced arthritis and spondylitis. I was distressed watching heavy medication lead to complications like gastric ulcers. Her condition was getting worse day by day... Upon my suggestion, she started drinking boiled Moringa juice every morning. She was completely cured in no time.”

This experience became the emotional core of the story he tells. It is the reason he gives for returning to India, choosing farming, and building a mission that he frames as public-facing science rather than private success. He often speaks of that period as a moment when the boundaries between laboratory knowledge and household life collapsed. He had spent years in environments where research was rigorous, specialised, and often separated from the daily realities of ordinary families. And yet here was a crisis unfolding in his own home, in a language that most systems struggle to address: the slow suffering of chronic illness, the compromises of long-term medication, the sense that relief is always partial and never complete.

When he narrates his mother’s recovery, it is with the conviction of a son who believes he witnessed a turning point—one that demanded a deeper inquiry into food, lifestyle, and prevention. For his audience, the story has the quality of a testimonial: immediate, human, and emotionally persuasive. It invites listeners to imagine the possibility that something familiar and accessible—like a leaf used in everyday cooking—could hold a solution where expensive interventions feel inevitable.

“my research wasn’t reaching the public”

Harinath speaks with the moral urgency of someone who has seen the inside of high-end research ecosystems—and walked away. “I felt guilty... most of my research was somehow not reaching the public. Instead, profit-minded multinational drug companies were benefitting from it.”

In that single line, he reveals the deeper driver behind his choices: not only a belief in food-based prevention, but a discomfort with how knowledge travels. He suggests



that research can become trapped—translated into products that are profitable but inaccessible, or into systems that reward complexity over community benefit. In his framing, this is not merely an economic critique; it is a social critique. If scientific progress does not reach ordinary people in meaningful ways, what does it ultimately serve?

This is where his talks often shift from personal narrative to public argument. He questions what he calls a reductionist approach—treating disease outcomes without addressing causes. And for him, the causes repeatedly circle back to food and lifestyle. “The primary root cause of all modern human diseases is the quality and type of the food we eat and the lifestyle we lead,” he says.

He is aware that this is a provocative statement. It carries the sweep of a grand theory. But he uses it

deliberately, because it shifts the frame. Health, in this lens, is not only a hospital problem; it is a household problem—shaped every day by what we grow, buy, cook, and consume. This framing also places responsibility in uncomfortable places: not just on doctors and hospitals, but on food systems, chemical inputs, supply chains, and consumer choices.

searching for what modern diets have misplaced. With that conviction, Harinath went looking for what he believes modern diets have misplaced: indigenous varieties, local cultivation knowledge, and biodiverse farms that feed more than the market—they feed resilience. His interest in “forgotten foods” is not nostalgia. It is, in his narrative, a public health strategy.

He is known for speaking about traditional food

cultures and indigenous rice varieties—foods that older communities valued, but modern markets pushed aside. In his worldview, this loss is not harmless. When diets narrow to a few high-yield, high-polish staples, he argues, nutrition narrows as well. Diversity disappears not only from fields but from bodies. And when that happens, the rise of lifestyle disorders begins to look less like individual failure and more like systemic consequence.

His farming practice, as he describes it, is rooted in organic inputs and on-farm preparations—composting methods using cow dung and cow urine, green biomass, and herbs, with an emphasis on restoring soil life and improving nutrient availability. In his telling, the soil is not dirt; it is a living system. And when that system is repaired, he believes the food system—and therefore the health system—begins to repair itself too.

This is one of his most resonant ideas: the invisible life of soil as the foundation of visible health. In his talks, soil becomes a metaphor and a mechanism at once. When soil is depleted—stripped of microbial diversity, saturated with chemical residues, or treated as a passive medium—he suggests the plants grown on it may carry that depletion forward. Not always in ways we can see immediately, but in slow shifts: reduced nutrient density, weakened immunity, altered metabolism. Whether or not every listener agrees with the full chain of causality, the image is compelling: a living soil creating living food that supports living bodies.

farming as philosophy

For Harinath, agriculture is not simply a profession. It is an ethical and cultural practice. He believes farming is beyond livelihood and into philosophy, almost as if agriculture is where science and civilisation meet. “Farming is a science for me; it is art, and it is culture; it is a way of ‘Vasudeva Kutumbakam’...”

That phrase—Vasudeva Kutumbakam, the world as one family—signals the larger canvas he sees. It suggests that farming is not only about yield, but about relationships: with land, animals, farmers, consumers, and future generations. It also reveals why his message travels well. In a time when agriculture is often discussed only in terms of economics and crisis, he speaks of agriculture as meaning. And meaning, when delivered with conviction, creates followers.

from fields to formulations: the “moringa bullet” chapter

Over time, Harinath’s public identity widened—from organic farmer to wellness educator, and then to inventor-promoter of a moringa-based poly-herbal health supplement he calls “Moringa Bullet.” In his presentations, he describes it as a moringa leaf-based supplement blended with other herbs, positioned within a larger “food as medicine” narrative.

This is also where his story becomes both widely compelling—and, for responsible readers, a place to slow down.

Because alongside agricultural advocacy, the product is often promoted with sweeping claims, including that it can “cure and prevent all diseases.” That language



resonates emotionally, especially among families living with pain, fatigue, long-term medication, or fear of worsening diagnoses. It offers a sense of control in situations where people often feel powerless. It offers a promise that health can be regained without the fear and cost that sometimes accompany medical systems.

Yet this is precisely where careful boundaries matter. The story of a man returning to soil to rethink food and prevention can be inspiring—especially when it encourages households to eat better, reduce chemical exposure, and reconnect with local foods. But when any supplement is presented as an all-purpose cure, readers should approach it with informed caution. Bodies are complex; diseases vary; what helps one person may not help another; and serious conditions require diagnosis, monitoring, and evidence-based care.

what his story ultimately represents

Harinath KasiGanesan’s appeal lies not only in the product chapter, but in the larger narrative: a researcher who returned from formal institutions to rebuild knowledge where people live—on farms, in kitchens, and in daily choices. He asks questions that many people feel but cannot articulate: Why are so many of us unwell? What changed in our food? What did we lose when we moved away from biodiversity? What happens when we treat soil as dead and bodies as machines?

Whether one accepts all his conclusions or not, the questions themselves are worth sitting with. Because they point to a truth that is hard to deny: health is not manufactured in hospitals alone. It is cultivated—slowly, quietly, and often invisibly—through what we eat, how we live, and what we allow our food systems to become.

Marie Banu Rodriguez



Centre for Social Initiative and Management

Contact Persons:

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

CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises

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

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CSIM also facilitates Social

"The first thing I focused on was ensuring a corruption-free administration."

Mrs. J. Shobana Thangam Sundar shares with Marie Banu her vision for Kovalam

Mrs. J. Shobana Thangam Sundar is the Panchayat President of Kovalam, a coastal tourist village in Tiruppur block, Chengalpattu district, Tamil Nadu. Born and brought up in Kovalam, she is a first-generation engineering graduate and an IT professional with nearly 18 years of experience. Elected in October 2021, she brings a systems-driven, community-first approach to local governance, shaped by years of grassroots social service since the 2004 tsunami.

In an exclusive interview, Ms. Shobana shares with Marie Banu her vision for Kovalam

What vision and motivation led you to contest the Panchayat elections in October 2021?

I always had a vision for how Kovalam should be. In October 2021, I got the opportunity to contest the panchayat elections. I realised that as Panchayat President, I could do more social work and also help ensure government schemes reach the right beneficiaries. People gave me complete support, and I am here.

When you took charge as Panchayat President, what was your first initiative?

The first thing I focused on was ensuring a corruption-free administration. I stated this clearly from day one, even though many people felt it was not realistic. I made it our guiding principle and asked all ward members and the entire panchayat team to follow it. They supported this approach fully.

My next priority was to transform the panchayat office into a one-stop centre for government services. I did not want the people of Kovalam to run from office to office and wait for basic services. This was not only influenced by my corporate exposure—people also expected a better system, and I had committed in my manifesto that residents would not be made to struggle across multiple departments. So I improved the ambience and made the office function in a more professional, efficient way.

Today, the panchayat office offers multiple services under one roof, including an Aadhaar centre and other citizen services. It is not only for Kovalam residents—people from across the ECR also benefit from it.

What changes did you introduce to make the panchayat office paperless and more efficient?

Yes, our panchayat operations are fully digitised. We maintain the 30 statutory records mandated by the Tamil Nadu government and have converted them into electronic form. We also run a structured grievance system—queries come in person and through social media, each is given a reference number and an expected resolution timeline.

Issues beyond our scope are tracked, reviewed in the Gram Sabha, and followed up through feedback calls. Taxes and e-seva citizen services are fully online. We also digitally track project status (state and central) and daily service delivery such as water distribution and garbage collection, so we can generate metrics and reports whenever needed.

Tell us about the Panchayat Learning Centre.

Kovalam is a Panchayat Learning Centre—one of only four such centres in Chengalpattu district. People from across India visit to see how we run the panchayat, how government schemes are implemented at the



ground level, and how good governance is practiced in everyday administration.

The learning centre follows the Government of India's Localised SDG framework for Gram Panchayats. Visitors learn how village planning and service delivery can be organised around all nine themes: poverty-free and enhanced livelihoods village, healthy village, child-friendly village, water-sufficient village, clean and green village, self-sufficient infrastructure village, socially secured village, village with good governance, and women-friendly village. They also see how these themes translate into systems, processes, and measurable outcomes at the village level.

Every month, we host batches of officials and elected representatives from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and other departments. SIRD (State Institute of Rural Development) also sends groups from across Tamil Nadu to learn from our processes and practices.

The programme is usually a half-day session. A typical batch has 40 to 60 participants, and school groups can range from 150 to 200 depending on the visit. On average, we receive about two batches a week—around eight batches a month. Visitors tour our initiatives and learn how each goal is implemented in practice.

During the sessions, I lead the orientation along with my panchayat secretary. We communicate in English, and when required, visiting teams bring officials who translate. Recently, we hosted groups from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. We also had elected officials across India. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, Block Development Officers attended, and when sarpanch participate, they are usually accompanied by Project Directors and other officers who support translation.

How did you build a reliable system for garbage collection and segregation in Kovalam?

Because Kovalam is a tourist village, waste management is a major civic challenge. We worked in phases. From October 2021 to 2022, we first ensured 100% door-to-door collection, without pushing segregation immediately. We expanded our fleet through CSR support—from one vehicle to four tractors and about 12 e-cars—to improve coverage and routing.

Once collection stabilised, we partnered with Plan Foundation and followed a roadmap: a waste-generation survey first, followed by continuous household training on segregation. With nine wards, we set up ward-level community composting centres for wet waste and created a 4,500 sq ft sanitation park to systematically sort and manage dry waste.

Accountability is ensured through a QR code for every household—waste is scanned only when

segregated correctly. The entire system is digitised, so we can track wet and dry waste, compost output, and diversion from dumping. We also run regular awareness sessions in schools and beach clean-ups.

Today, household waste is largely under control. Our next focus is changing the behaviour of outsiders and tourists who litter. Every individual must take responsibility for their own waste—if we can do it abroad, we should do it here too.

What prompted you to start/strengthen Balar Sabha and Mahila Sabha, and how were they functioning before your tenure?

Balar Sabha and Mahila Sabha are meant to function in every village, but they were not active in our panchayat. So we introduced Balar Sabha in a structured way. It is a children's assembly where children and adolescents raise issues and place their needs before the Gram Sabha for action—like a Gram Sabha, but led by children. We made it a firm rule that children's requests must be implemented—through government schemes, CSR, or other support. For example, we built quality toilets for boys and girls in the higher secondary school and added eight classrooms, mobilising around Rs.2 crore for these works. Children maintain records, and I ensure validation and follow-up.

Mahila Sabha similarly brings women's priorities—especially from self-help groups—into panchayat planning. It is conducted by panchayat members and feeds directly into our decision-making.

Can you explain your approach to conducting Gram Sabhas in different localities and using practices like samapandi to promote unity?

In Tamil Nadu, Gram Sabha is held six times a year—once every two months. In our village, we do not conduct it in just one location. We rotate the venue across different community areas so that participation becomes more inclusive. For example, if the Gram Sabha is held in a Muslim neighbourhood, we encourage people from other communities to attend as well, to strengthen brotherhood. Similarly, if it is held in an SC community area, we ensure that residents from all communities join there too.

We also practise "samapandi," where everyone sits together and shares a meal. The purpose is to reinforce unity and ensure the spirit of the Gram Sabha goes beyond discussion—it becomes a lived experience of social harmony. I want this practice to be sustained and continued. Earlier, many people did not fully understand what the Gram Sabha is or why it matters. Today, they recognise it as a powerful forum. Whatever is recorded in the Gram Sabha becomes a commitment that the local government must act upon.

What enables your team to manage day-to-day governance and multiple initiatives effectively?

Panchayat work is 24x7, and we operate differently from the usual model. What makes it possible is our volunteer-led system. Many of our programmes and initiatives run smoothly because the panchayat is powered by committed volunteers.

Even in my election manifesto, I had stated that everyone should get exposure and a role to contribute. We involve only Kovalam youth—both girls and boys—train them, and build teams that support day-to-day governance.

We have dedicated volunteer teams for state-led projects, central schemes, and local initiatives. While contractors execute infrastructure work, our volunteers track progress, quality, and timelines. On the ground, they update daily service monitoring—like water distribution—and handle rapid response tasks such as streetlight failures, ensuring there are no dark spots. Over time, they develop practical skills as well—many are trained on the job as electricians and plumbers.