

## ECORESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING - NAVADARSHANAM

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The enthusiasm was unbound when the germ of Navadarshnam was put in place at Gagganhalli village in Tamilnadu about 35 kms from Bangalore city. The land was a vast piece of open space of around 110 acres lying fallow without any cultivation for decades. The whole thing was envisaged in Delhi at the house of Shri T.S. Ananthu is a great visionary who after studying from IIT Madras went to US, worked with IBM but returned to India and joined Gandhi Peace Foundation. The main aim was to apply Fukuoka Principles in farming and other spheres of living like housing, energy and water consumption etc. Shri Pratap Aggarwal the oldest person in our group had already worked in Natural Farming at Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh where it is called Rishi Kheti. He also brought out the Fukuoka book called One Straw Revolution, an Indian edition under the aegis of Gandhi Peace Foundation.

The project was started in 1990. It became a group of 25 people from all walks of life and every corner of India due to large network of Shri T S Ananthu. Initially three structures were built like village huts for living, kitchen and toilet. They were made of mud with thatched roofs and an electric fence was put all around the land to stop cattle grazing to secure the vegetation growing there. The

land has a mild slope from the north to south and south east. Small bandhs were built so that during rains the water doesn't go all the way to the lowest point and can be made to percolate down as ground water in between at different places.

Over the years we have seen the land transform from a barren, lifeless, over-grazed, burnt and eroded landscape to a vibrant scrub jungle with a natural diversity of plants and animal species. Today Navadarshanam is home to thousands of plants – grasses, shrubs and trees as well as over 100 species of birds, all kinds of snakes, lizards, insects as well as smaller mammals like rabbit, mongoose, wild boar, deer, the occasional leopard, sloth bear and at certain times of the year wandering elephants and bison. As we have watched the ecosystem regenerate with awe and wonder, we also realize how precious regenerative ecosystems like Navadarshanam are and how important it is to let them continue to unfold for eternity and let generations to come marvel at the little mysteries that they reveal. We look up this as a grand heritage to be shared and passed on to future generations – how can we own the freshness of the air or the sparkle of the water or the sounds of the birds chirping or the warmth of the land.



Common Iora on Navadarshanam land

The sustainable farming practices at Navadarshanam incorporate traditional knowledge systems, agro-forestry practices, natural farming practices and at an overarching level are guided by permaculture principles and ethics. Some of the key values that guide the farming practices are:

- Creation of regenerative farming ecosystem – soil, water, flora and fauna should be net positive with each successive cycle of farming
- Growing local and seasonal varieties
- Low to zero input organic farming
- Rain-fed farming of grains and pulses; low water use systems for vegetables and fruits
- No mechanized farming of any kind

The community consists of highly educated city folks who have left their plum jobs and settled here due to their passion and the adjacent village of 25 families. Slowly and steadily the traditional farming practices are being followed which has more or less the same principles as modern permaculture. Different workshops are held here on permaculture techniques, Gandhian way of life etc. People from nearby cities like Bangalore, Chennai etc come to Navadarshanam to learn these permaculture techniques which they can use in their kitchen gardens or rooftop gardens. Fair ethics of permaculture are affecting the villagers eating habits, farming practices and livelihood.



Ecofriendly houses

Our practical approach to reforestation and wilderness preservation is best captured in these words:

“Natural plant groupings form through dynamic relationships among species and the environment over long periods. The natural landscape works – harvests water, builds soil, minimizes disease and pest, reproduce themselves, have copious yields, have a grand diversity of species and work a plethora of ways that we cannot even comprehend. All this while still looking absolutely beautiful.”



Recently it has taken the attention of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification [ UNCCD] which has considered it as a successful role model for Ecorestoration and Community supported Agricultural project. Navadarshanam has shown how these practices if followed consistently can make change in the environment and all its elements where man is part of it.

## REFERENCES

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