

Vasudhā Calling

A newsletter for enabling sustainable living

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Comprehensive Platform for Knowledge Sharing on Sustainable Living





Our Green Lifeline: Why Forests Matter¹

Dr. Sugato Dutt

Forests are silent partners in our life story. They help us breathe, drink clean water, grow food and face climate change, even if we live far away from them in crowded towns and cities.

Forests: our hidden life support



Forests work like the lungs and cooling system of the Earth. Trees absorb carbon dioxide, release oxygen, hold the soil together, filter rainwater and keep local temperatures lower and more stable.

For many rural and tribal families, forests are like an open market under the sky, providing fuelwood, fodder, fruits, nuts, honey, herbal medicines and small timber that support daily life and income. Even in cities, our furniture, paper, medicines and even some beauty products quietly depend on forest resources.

How development changed our relationship with forests

After the Second World War, the world rushed towards rapid industrial growth, cities expanded and roads cut through natural landscapes. At that time, many believed that forests, rivers and minerals were almost endless, so using more and more was seen as a sign of progress.

By the 1970s and 1980s, however, it became clear that this model was harming both nature and people. International efforts such as the Stockholm Conference, the Brundtland Commission and the Earth Summit at Rio slowly pushed governments to accept that development must be “sustainable” – it should meet our needs today without destroying the natural base that future generations will depend on.

¹ Excerpts from the authors article entitled, “Sustainable Management of Forests – concept and practice” in Vivekanand Kendra Patrika



India's forests today: hope and concern

India's forests tell a mixed story of loss and slow recovery. Over several decades of the last century, large areas were cleared for agriculture, dams, mining, roads and cities, especially in low-lying and easily accessible regions.

Today, the India State of Forest Report 2021 estimates that about 21.71% of our land is under forest cover, and total forest and tree cover together are a little over one-fourth of the country's area, with a modest increase since the previous assessment. This shows that strong laws, people's movements and conservation programmes have started to make a difference, although pressures from development have not disappeared.

Forests and climate change: nature as a shield

Climate change may appear in the news as global graphs and distant conferences, but forests connect it directly to our life. Trees and soils store huge amounts of carbon; when forests are cut or burnt, that carbon escapes into the atmosphere as greenhouse gases, but when forests are protected and restored, they pull carbon back out of the air and lock it away.

Recognising this, the global community created REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, plus conservation and sustainable management of forests) to support countries that protect their forests and improve forest carbon stocks. India has pledged, under the Paris Agreement, to create an additional 2.5–3 billion tonnes of carbon sink through forests and trees by 2030, and programmes like the Green India Mission aim to improve and expand around 10 million hectares of forest and tree cover to help meet this goal.

Laws, communities and shared governance

India has brought in several laws and policies to slow deforestation and involve people in forest care. The Forest Conservation Act has made it harder to divert forest land for non-forest use, while the National Forest Policy and Joint Forest Management guidelines call for people's participation in managing and restoring forests.

Acts like the Forest Rights Act and the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act recognize the rights of tribal and traditional forest dwellers and give Gram Sabhas a role in managing forest resources. When local communities have secure rights and share benefits from forests, they are more willing and able to protect and regenerate them, making conservation a partnership rather than a conflict.

Forests and the Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remind us that environment, economy and society are deeply interconnected. Forests sit at the centre of this web: they support SDG 1 (No Poverty) by providing livelihoods, SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by offering wild foods and genetic diversity for crops, SDG 3 (Good Health) through nutrition and traditional medicine, and SDG 13 (Climate Action) by storing carbon and protecting against disasters.

Under SDG 15 (Life on Land), countries aim to promote sustainable forest management, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and expand afforestation and reforestation by 2030. Mangrove forests, for example, protect coastal communities from storms and sea-level rise while also supporting SDG 14 (Life below Water) by acting as nurseries for fish and other marine life.

What can a common person do?

It is easy to feel that forests are the government's responsibility or that only people living near them can protect them. In reality, the choices of every consumer, every family and every neighbourhood add up, either reducing or increasing pressure on forests.



Some simple actions can make a big difference over time: using paper carefully, avoiding unnecessary wooden products, reusing and repairing instead of buying new, and choosing recycled or certified products when possible, all reduce hidden demand for forest resources. Supporting tree planting in schools, villages and urban spaces, protecting local parks, learning about native species, and respecting the rights and wisdom of forest communities are powerful steps for ordinary citizens. When we shift from a “take and forget” mindset to a “care and restore” mindset, forests stop being distant green patches on a map and become living partners in our own sustainable lifestyle journey. Each thoughtful purchase, each tree planted, each voice raised for conservation is a small act of gratitude to these silent guardians that keep the Earth – and our own lives – in balance.



Dr. Sugato Dutt was a member of the Indian Forest Service. He worked both as trainer as well as administrator in tiger reserves, mangroves as well as montane- shola forests and grasslands in various districts of Tamil Nadu. He holds a doctoral degree in Conservation Geography, earned in Fellowship with the East-West Centre, Honolulu USA.



Nature Proposes - Man Disposes

Dileep Kulkarni

In this series, we will look at the salient features of the nature's system one by one, and understand the follies of human system vis-a-vis that. It will provide us many insights for making changes to move towards sustainability.

8. DECENTRALIZATION

In nature, everything is decentralized. Plants grow and animals/birds live in a scattered way. All production and degradation take place in a decentralized manner.

We are so accustomed to this 'common' fact that we hardly ever ponder the reason behind it. But the reason is very important from a sustainability point of view.

Actually, there are more than one reasons behind decentralization: equal distribution of the load of jobs; fullest utilization of resources available everywhere, etc. But the most important reason is 'energy'. Nature possesses all the coal, petroleum, or uranium; but she never uses these 'capital' sources. She carries out all the activities with only the 'income' energy: the solar flux. That being decentralized (scattered, high entropy), the whole system of nature has evolved to be decentralized. To gather this solar energy, plants grow in a decentralized way. For the same reason, they form a canopy. Production of oxygen and food is further decentralized to the molecular level: each molecule of chlorophyll does that production.



As this basic activity is decentralized, everything else is decentralized. As food is available in a scattered manner, the birds and animals live in a decentralized manner. Faecal/dead matter falls down on the ground in a decentralized manner, hence the decomposers are present everywhere. Entropy-decrease (production) and entropy-increase (decomposition) are both decentralized. Yet another benefit of such a system is in curbing the spread of contagious diseases: to a large extent, though not fully.

Till 1750, all species including Homo sapiens honoured this system of nature. Although man did build civilizations, the energies he used compelled him to live in a decentralized way. Nevertheless, this species has always been greedy, and always wanted to consume—and hence produce—ever more. But energy availability was the limiting factor.

At last, in 1750, this limit got removed. The era of 'produced energies' started; and since that time, we have been producing ever more energy. All the energies in the new paradigm are 'centralized': concentrated, low entropy. They have made possible all the developments in technologies also. As soon as such energies were available, man started centralizing everything. First, it was the centralization of industries, which was followed by centralization of population. Thus, the prevalent model of development came to be appropriately known as 'Industrial-Urban'. Over the last two-and-a-half centuries, all aspects of life have become centralized: production, markets, businesses, financial services, living, water supply, sewage systems, waste disposal, treatment of diseases, cremation... everything. All these things, as also transportation, communication, etc., use huge amounts of energy. There is a centralization of economic, political, financial and administrative powers also, which, along with many other drawbacks, consume huge energy. It is because of centralized energies that the macro-economic growth—the 'growth economy'—has been possible. The same is called 'development'.

We can't deny what 'development' has given; but what about the destruction it has wrought? Like shrewd economists, are we also going to externalize all the costs and consequences of development? All the problems we are witnessing—and facing—in the inner and outer environments are because of centralization, which, in turn, has been possible due to centralized energies. Resource depletion, pollution, piling up of wastes, extinction of species, spread of infectious diseases, outburst of psycho-somatic ailments, social pathologies, wars: the basic reason behind all is one and the same. All these problems have made the development non-sustainable. We cause and aggravate such problems by using centralized energies, and to solve them, we use more such energies!



Hence, to keep problems to a minimum, decentralization is the best policy. Nature is wise in keeping her system like that. She uses, hence, only the income energy. The present-day intelligent-but-unwise species, viz. Homo economicus, Homo technicus, use capital energies, and in the process head towards collective suicide.

Can there be a 'middle path'? —Yes, certainly. We can have agriculture and industries that use only the body energy of humans and animals. Such an economy will be a 'steady-state' one. There will certainly be development—both civilization and culture—but it will surely be sustainable.

That is the Gandhi pattern: decentralization being its foundation. The sooner we appreciate and imbibe the wisdom therein, the better.



On Divine Acceptance

Raghunandan Trikannad

Sound of wavelets kissing the hull of the houseboat, soft breeze caressing the curtains on the windows carried the fragrance of flora on the bank. Deeply involved in reading a bound volume under the lamp, was Rabindranath Tagore. He was lost in the words of a book on Aesthetics—a branch of philosophy dealing with the principles of beauty and artistic taste. Suddenly, a gust of wind entered the apparent calm and silence to put out the flame. It was only apparent as his mind was all along filled with the noise of the words! The poet in him woke up to discover the silence around him, which was almost physical. Without bothering to relight the lamp, he stepped out on the deck. He was overwhelmed by the light of a full moon, the river, mangrove, sounds feasting his ears... An insight struck him like lightning: "Here is beauty all around me, and I was looking for it in a book!!"



Existence knows nothing of the future and nothing of the past. It is only the present. Now is the only time, and here the only space. The moment we go astray from now and here, we tend to get into conflict. A constant tussle goes on within, between the past and the future—what was and what should be. As a consequence, we miss "what is" and the present instantly turns into the past! We go on living in memories which are but footprints on the sand; or project life into the future, which is also as non-existential as the past. One is no more, the other is not yet, and in between the two one loses the real—the present, the now. Does it mean that we should eliminate the past and the future? Not at all! It only means that "what is now" is to be lived totally. Then it really becomes a present—a gift, for the future, which will be the present at that time. Spirituality is a science of how to be in the present, in here and now or simply to "be."

Out of the infinite paths to "be" is to learn the art of seeing the Divinity in Existence. When we understand that each and every thing or being has its place and purpose in the design and rhythm of this infinite Existence, we stop labelling anything as "good" or "bad", "beautiful" or "ugly", "sacred" or "profane". It is like all colours fitting into a painting on a canvas. Then we understand that it was our misperception, misinterpretation and misunderstanding that each one is separate and different from the other. We wake up into an organic world—whole, interdependent, and supportive. We realise that the world is ethereal, that every being is its integral and inseparable part.

The constant feeling that "Vasudha—Nature, is not an object for humankind for use and exploitation, but the very principle of Life and Existence" helps in leading a sustainable life.





Sustainability or Self-Deception?

N. Krishnamoorti



Every year, the community gathered under green banners. Saplings were planted. Speeches were delivered. Photographs were taken. Environment Day ended with applause and self-congratulation.

And then, quietly, the old trees were cut. Not because they were dead.... Not because there was no alternative. But because the roads had to be wider— for bigger cars, faster traffic, and uninterrupted expansion.

When questioned, the leader responded confidently: “We are sustainable. For every tree we cut, we plant two.”

The master listened and said calmly, “You are not sustainable. You are accounting.”

The problem was the **assumption that growth must continue without limits.**

- ✓ You cannot preach restraint while living in excess.
- ✓ You cannot worship growth and expect balance.
- ✓ You cannot consume endlessly and call the damage an external problem.

What We Refuse to Admit

The crisis is not pollution. The crisis is **identification.**

Identification with consumption as success ... comfort as entitlement ... status as progress

As long as identity is tied to “more”—more space, more speed, more power— sustainability remains cosmetic, reversible, and dishonest.

Until that identification breaks, tree planting will remain theatre, and sustainability will remain a story we tell ourselves to avoid changing how we live.





Jadav Payeng: A Practitioner, not a Poster Boy

Madhan Kumar

Jadav Payeng never set out to become an environmental icon. He didn't speak the language of sustainability, climate change, or global responsibility. He lived on the banks of the Brahmaputra, where land disappears quietly and returns as sand.

In 1979, after a severe flood, he saw snakes stranded and dying on a barren sandbar. The flood had not killed them. The absence of trees had. The land could no longer protect life.

There was no programme to address this. No scheme. No expert visit. So Payeng did the only thing that made sense to him: he started planting. Not as an activity. As a routine.



He planted bamboo first, because bamboo holds soil. He observed what survived and what didn't. Over time, he added native trees that belonged to the river's ecology. He returned every season. He adjusted quietly. He did not expand elsewhere. He stayed with one piece of land.

For years, no one noticed. The forest did not grow fast enough to be impressive, nor visibly enough to attract attention. There were no milestones, no reports, and no indicators to celebrate. Just continuity.

Decades later, the sandbar had transformed into a dense forest of over a thousand acres. Wildlife returned. The river slowed its erosion. The land stabilised. What emerged was not a plantation but a functioning ecosystem.

Only then did institutions arrive—media, awards, explanations. Only then was his work named “environmentalism”.

Payeng's work exposes a difficult truth for development practice: sustainability does not fail because people lack awareness. It fails because few are willing to stay, restrain, and repeat the right action for decades.

The forest stands as evidence. Not of success. But of patience.





Red Soil, Green Hearts: Mitti Mane's Experiment in Simple Living

N. Karthikeyan

On the outskirts of fast-paced Bengaluru, a quiet experiment is unfolding in mud and sunlight. It is called Mitti Mane – literally “mud home” – a community where families are trying to live simply, gently and joyfully with the Earth.

A dream born in a workshop

The story of Mitti Mane begins with a group of like-minded people who met at a sustainability workshop in the early 2000s. They shared a simple but powerful dream: to live close to nature, raise children who play in mud instead of malls, and reduce the harm their lifestyles cause to the planet.

This group of about 28 people pooled their resources to buy around four acres of land in Chikkanayakanahalli, a village on the outskirts of Bengaluru, next to Bhoomi College. Their vision was not just to build houses, but to create an eco-sensitive community, where the land, water, air and people are all treated with respect.

Mud houses in a modern city



Today, Mitti Mane has about 15 homes, each on a plot of roughly 3,000 square feet. The houses look simple and earthy, but they are the result of careful thinking: they are made mainly from mud blocks, rammed earth and other locally available materials, with very little cement and steel.

Using earth architecture keeps the houses naturally cool in summer and warm in winter, reduces the carbon footprint and can even lower construction costs by 20–30% compared to conventional buildings. Walking through Mitti Mane, you see thick mud walls, shaded verandas, clay-tiled roofs and open courtyards that invite light, breeze and birds into daily life.

Everyday life: simple, slow and connected

The real beauty of Mitti Mane lies in how its residents live, not just how their homes look. Most houses include rainwater harvesting, solar panels, solar water heaters, compost pits and systems to treat and reuse grey water from bathrooms and kitchens.



Instead of covering the land with concrete, they keep the soil open so that rain can soak in and recharge groundwater. One acre of land is set aside as a common area, where residents are developing a community garden and small food forest with fruit trees and vegetables. They also dream of a community kitchen, where neighbours can cook and eat together, and further reducing waste and strengthening bonds.

Rules that protect the spirit

To keep the original spirit of the place alive, the community has agreed on some clear guidelines. Only eco-friendly and sustainable construction methods are allowed, and buildings are restricted to a single storey so that the space remains human-scale, open and close to the earth.

Energy-saving devices like solar panels are encouraged, and concrete paving of open spaces is avoided as far as possible so the land can breathe. These rules may seem restrictive to some, but for Mitti Mane residents they are like a shared promise to each other and to the land: we will not compromise the health of this place for short-term comfort.

Challenges and choices

Many residents left comfortable city homes to move here, often shifting into rented houses in Mitti Mane before building their own mud homes. This was not an easy decision – it meant longer commutes for some, fewer urban conveniences and more physical work in maintaining homes and gardens.

Yet, residents describe feeling more “at home” in Mitti Mane than in their old city apartments. They speak of hearing birds instead of traffic, of children playing freely in the open, and of a deeper sense of community as neighbours help each other with building, planting and problem-solving.

Why Mitti Mane matters to all of us

Mitti Mane may look small on a map, but it holds big lessons for anyone interested in sustainable living. It shows that even in a busy, growing city like Bengaluru, people can choose a slower, simpler life that is lighter on the Earth without giving up joy, creativity or comfort.

More importantly, it proves that sustainability is not only about technology; it is about relationships – with soil, water, neighbours and future generations. Shared guidelines, common spaces and regular conversations help Mitti Mane residents grow not just vegetables, but trust and responsibility.

Mitti Mane is not a ready-made model for everyone to copy exactly, but it is a living laboratory of hope.





Book: First Ecology - Ecological Principles and Environmental Issues

Ajit Sharad Barje

Everything in the natural world is deeply interconnected. The health and stability of ecosystems depend on the balance between living organisms and their environment. This interconnectedness means that changes in one part of an ecosystem can have far-reaching effects on other parts. The book 'First Ecology' authored by Alan Beeby and Anne-Maria Brennan explains this very foundational principle of ecology, which introduces the reader to the science of ecosystems and environmental relationships. The book presents an engaging way to understand the intricate systems that make up the natural world. At its core, the book explains that ecology, the study of ecosystems and the interactions between organisms and their surroundings, is a science that helps us understand how life on Earth works.



The authors introduce readers to the fundamental concept of ecosystems, which are communities of living organisms interacting with one another and their physical surroundings like water, air, and soil. These systems are dynamic and constantly changing, shaped by natural forces and human activity. They describe how energy flows through ecosystems, beginning with the sun and moving through producers (plants) to consumers (animals) and decomposers (fungi and bacteria).

One of the key themes of First Ecology is the role of biodiversity. It explains that the diversity of species in an ecosystem is crucial to its stability and function. The more diverse an ecosystem, the more resilient it is to changes, whether from natural disasters or human actions. Loss of biodiversity, such as through habitat destruction or pollution, can lead to ecosystem collapse.

Throughout the book, the authors highlight the importance of understanding ecological principles in order to address environmental issues. Climate change, pollution, deforestation, and overexploitation of resources are all interconnected problems that threaten the balance of ecosystems. By understanding how these issues affect ecosystems at a fundamental level, people can make better decisions to protect the environment.

The authors also discuss how human activity has altered ecosystems throughout history, particularly since the industrial revolution. While humans have gained from these changes in terms of technological and economic development, they have also caused significant harm to natural systems. They stress the need for a more sustainable approach to development, one that considers the long-term impacts on the environment and seeks to minimize harm to ecosystems.

They don't just focus on the negative aspects of human impact; but also explore positive examples of ecological restoration, where people work to bring ecosystems back to health. These examples demonstrate how understanding ecology can help create solutions to environmental problems. The book encourages readers to think about how they can contribute to environmental conservation in their own lives, whether through reduction in consumption, conserving energy, or supporting conservation efforts.

Although the book is primarily meant for students, it is equally helpful for anyone who wants to know more about ecology. In essence, 'First Ecology' lets the reader understand that ecology is more than a scientific discipline. It's a lens through which we can understand our relationship with the Earth and our role in protecting it for the future. By understanding the basic principles of ecology, readers will be better able to make choices that support the well-being of the planet and all its inhabitants



RESEARCH REVIEW

“Ajit is a freelance writer. He, along with his wife Manisha, runs Carvi Resource Library & Study Centre and Dnyanjagar Bookstore at Nashik, Maharashtra.”

Film: **Living the Change - Inspiring Stories for Sustainable Future**

N. Karthikeyan

“Living the Change: Inspiring Stories for a Sustainable Future” is not a film of distant experts giving lectures; it is a journey into the lives of ordinary people who have decided to quietly redesign their everyday habits. Through their stories, the film invites the viewer to ask a simple but powerful question: if they can change, why not me?



A film of questions and possibilities

The documentary begins by acknowledging the uncomfortable truth: humanity is facing multiple crises at once – climate change, environmental damage, resource depletion and social inequality. Instead of dwelling on fear, the film gently moves the focus to solutions that are already being practiced on the ground.

Directors Jordan Osmond and Antoinette Wilson travel across New Zealand, meeting individuals and communities who are experimenting with new ways of living that are both sustainable and regenerative. Through interviews with thinkers and doers, they help the viewer understand how we reached the current crisis and, more importantly, how simple lifestyle changes can become part of the answer.

Everyday heroes of sustainability

One of the strengths of the film is its focus on “everyday heroes” – farmers, families, volunteers and local organisers. Viewers meet people running community-supported agriculture projects, where families receive weekly bags of fresh, organic produce directly from local farms, reducing dependence on supermarket chains.

The film then moves into regenerative agriculture and food forests, showing how land that has been treated gently can heal and produce abundant food without poisoning soil and water. We

also see families choosing to live simply, reducing clutter and consumption, and discovering that less can indeed become more – more time, more health, more meaningful relationships.

Money, waste and community reimaged

“Living the Change” does not stop with food and farming. It explores creative ideas like local currencies and timebanking, where people exchange services using time or community credits instead of regular money, making relationships more important than profit.

The documentary visits repair cafés where volunteers help neighbours fix broken items instead of throwing them away, and households practicing zero-waste lifestyles that drastically cut down their garbage. From composting toilets to community compost pickups, the film shows how even something as “ordinary” as waste can be transformed into a resource when we rethink our habits.

Why this film matters for “Vasudha Calling” readers

For readers of “Vasudha Calling”, this documentary is like a moving picture version of the ideas often discussed in these pages. It translates abstract terms like “regenerative living”, “permaculture” or “local economy” into real faces, real farms and real families.

The film is also encouraging because it shows that you do not have to be perfect to start; small steps like growing a few vegetables, joining a local group, reducing plastic, or learning to repair can become part of a global wave of change. Watching others make these choices can gently challenge us to look at our own lifestyle and ask: which of these changes can I try in my own context?

An invitation to watch and act

“Living the Change” is freely available online, making it easy for families, students, teachers and community groups to watch together and discuss. It works well as a conversation starter for local initiatives: a screening in a school, college, village hall or housing society could lead to concrete actions such as starting a community garden or a repair corner.

If you have ever felt that the problems of the world are too big and your efforts too small, this film is worth your time. It does not offer a single grand solution, but it opens a window into many small paths that ordinary people are already walking. Watching “Living the Change” may not answer all your questions, but it will almost certainly spark new ideas, conversations and the quiet courage to take one step towards a more sustainable future.



In the month of November 13,200 visitors attended the Vasudha exhibition.

Comments on Reels sent by Vasudha

Every message you weave is a breath of divinity — soft as dawn, yet thunderous in its truth.

Each word blooms within the soul, scattering light across the corridors of thought, and guiding the heart toward horizons unseen, where wisdom meets wonder.

Thank you so much for your lovely & valuable messages. Wishing you most and more...



Balakrishnan, Tirupur



Timely word of caution..... Will they heed????

The glamour of flashy lifestyle is actively promoted by vested interests, that robs the gullible of their sagacity.

World over, while real manufacture / production yields less and less returns, the business middlemen skim the profits for perpetuating themselves.

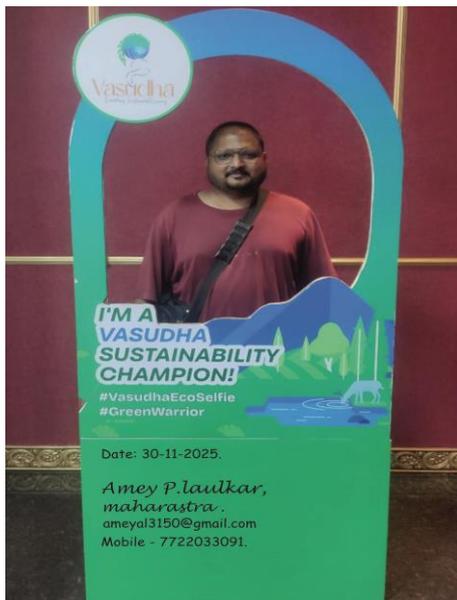
The Rich becoming richer, is glorified, little realising that behind the veneer of such glossy picture lies the vandalism of hapless minions.

Where's the way forward, as the World is increasingly gripped by a mafia that is out to devour it.

Dharmo Rakshati Rakshita:

Auditor – R.Swaminathan, Chennai

Vasudha Eco Selfie Corner



M.K.Gupta

I have never seen such a project in India in my entire **61 years of life**. It is truly a **remarkable initiative** that helps keep our **Sanskaras** alive.

I would be happy to join your **Sunday webinars**, either in **Hindi or English**.

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