

Vasudhā Calling

A newsletter for enabling sustainable living

Date: 15.9.2026

Volume : 2 Issue : 06



Comprehensive Platform for Knowledge Sharing on Sustainable Living





SPECIAL ARTICLE

A Tribute to Shri A. Balakrishnanji President, Vivekananda Kendra

(3.5.1938 – 27.8.2026)

G.Vasudeo



Five decades of close association came to an end with the passing of our beloved President, Shri A. Balakrishnanji, on 27 August 2026. As I look back over these fifty years, memories—many of them deeply personal—come flooding back.

I joined Vivekananda Kendra in 1977, while Shri Balakrishnanji had joined the very first batch of workers in 1972. When I entered the organisation, it was still in its infancy—a five-year-old institution, finding its feet and striving to build a strong organisational foundation.

Mananeeya Eknathji was working tirelessly to build a dedicated team and establish a sound organisational structure. Before he could fully consolidate the organisation, however, he fell ill, followed by the crisis caused by the closure of the ferry service to the Rock Memorial. It was a very difficult and uncertain period. During this critical phase, Shri Balakrishnanji stood like a rock and helped steer the organisation through the crisis.

A Pillar of the North-East Work

One of Shri Balakrishnanji's most enduring contributions to Vivekananda Kendra was the building of its work in the North-East, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh. At a time when the region was difficult to reach and communication was extremely challenging, he took upon himself the responsibility of nurturing the Kendra's educational work there. Roads were poor and telephone facilities were limited. Yet he travelled extensively, going from school to school and village to village, patiently building relationships and strengthening the work.



In the initial years, he even personally maintained the accounts of each of the seven schools, writing the cash books and ledgers by hand. There were none of the simple accounting tools or software that we take for granted today. But his contribution went far beyond administration. He built systems, developed institutions and, above all, nurtured people. Over the years, he created a strong second line of workers who could carry the work forward. Jaykar, Sriram Agashe, K. Vasudevan and Capt. Venkatraman were among those who strengthened the work under his guidance. What began as a modest effort in Arunachal Pradesh gradually took deep roots and, like a banyan tree, spread across the North-East.

The true measure of what he had built, however, was not merely in the number of schools or the geographical spread of the work. It was in the deep bond he had established with the people of the region. This became particularly evident to me during his last days.

About fifteen days ago, Shri Ganesh, who was looking after Balakrishnanji, showed me a short audiovisual recording from Tawang district, on the border with China. People there were praying for Balakrishnanji's recovery and good health. Among them were students and alumni of

Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalyayas, including a senior official of the Arunachal Pradesh Government. They were praying along with Buddhist Lamas in their traditional red robes.

The sight deeply moved me. Here was Balakrishnanji, lying ill in faraway Kanyakumari, while people in one of the remotest corners of India were praying for his recovery. The prayers of the students he had nurtured, the alumni who had grown through the institutions he had helped build, and the Lamas who joined them were a powerful expression of the affection and respect he had earned over the decades. As I watched the recording, tears came to my eyes. I felt deeply moved by the living spirit of India's culture and civilisation. A person in Kanyakumari was being remembered and prayed for by fellow Bharatiyas in Tawang, at the farthest frontier of our country. For me, this was perhaps the most touching testimony to Balakrishnanji's lifelong contribution to the North-East and to the bonds he had created there.

A Wonderful Colleague



Shri Balakrishnanji served the organisation in several capacities. But beyond the positions he held, he was simply a wonderful person to work with. In the early years, whenever he went on a long tour, sometimes for a month or two, I would look after his responsibilities, including general and local administration. There was an unwritten understanding between us: one day before his return, I would stop taking any major decisions.

After he returned, he never questioned me about what had been done in his absence. In fact, there was rarely any need for a lengthy briefing. Such was the trust between us and such was our mutual understanding. We worked with a remarkable tuning of the mind, built over decades.

Vivekananda Bharat Parikrama

The Vivekananda Bharat Parikrama of 1992 was another milestone that revealed Shri Balakrishnanji's extraordinary organisational and managerial abilities. Our then President, Dr. Lakshmi Kumari, led the Parikrama, while Balakrishnanji was entrusted with the enormous responsibility of coordinating its logistics. He looked after every detail, ensuring that the entire operation functioned smoothly through what, in managerial language, we would call the backward and forward linkages.

Though he travelled with the Parikrama for the entire year, his heart remained in the North-East. During the Parikrama, he wrote to me reminding me that I must find time to visit Arunachal Pradesh. There is a familiar saying in English: "You can take a man out of the village, but you cannot take the village out of the man." The same could be said of Balakrishnanji: you could take him out of the North-East, but you could never take the North-East out of Balakrishnanji. His contribution to Arunachal Pradesh in particular, and to the other states of the North-East in general, will always remain an important chapter in the history of a nation.

Carrying Forward Eknathji's Legacy

After the passing of Mananeeya Eknathji, Balakrishnanji carried forward one of his important legacies—mobilising resources for the expansion and growth of Vivekananda Kendra and its service mission. He approached people from different walks of life and raised funds for branch centres and for various major projects of the Kendra. The Vivekananda Hall, Ramayan Darshan and Bharat Mata Sadanam, among others, benefited from his tireless efforts. Even when his health was failing, he continued to write letters, make requests and mobilise support for one project or another. He simply did not know how to stop working.

A Life of Quiet Endurance

All this work, together with decades of tireless travel, inevitably took a toll on his health. Having been his neighbour for more than forty years, I knew that he was suffering from several ailments and often had to endure considerable physical discomfort. Yet he never complained. He rarely spoke about his health and never allowed his physical difficulties to come in the way of his work. If you asked him, "How are you?", his answer would invariably be, "I am fine."

That simple response reflected something fundamental about his character. He did not want others to worry about him. His attention was always directed towards the work, the organisation and the people around him.

A Karma Yogi with Deep Faith

Although Balakrishnanji was essentially a Karma Yogi, devotion was also an integral part of his life. He had deep faith in Guruvayurappan. Whenever he experienced pain or difficulty, he would loudly chant, "Narayana, Narayana."

His love for animals was equally well known. His affection for cows and dogs was unmistakable. A few days ago, his pet dog Ajay met him at his cottage after a long gap. Balakrishnanji told me, with great emotion, that Ajay had shed tears on seeing him.

He would also regularly feed crows and squirrels. Many of them seemed to know his routine and would wait outside his room for him. Perhaps this was one reason why he was reluctant to move permanently to the cottage, leaving behind his old room, which did not even have an attached bathroom. These small details reveal another side of the man we knew—a person who, despite the enormous responsibilities he carried, retained a deep sensitivity towards all living beings.

A Brave Soldier of Swami Vivekananda

During the last few months, Balakrishnanji fought his physical battles with the courage of a brave soldier of Swami Vivekananda. Mananeeya Eknathji used to say that he would not stop working; he would stretch himself to the limit and, in his own words, "break." Balakrishnanji seemed to have followed the same spirit throughout his 89 years. He stretched himself, served the organisation, travelled tirelessly, built institutions, nurtured people and continued to work until his body finally could no longer accompany his spirit.

For five decades, I had the privilege of knowing him as a colleague, neighbour, friend and fellow worker in the mission of Vivekananda Kendra. His passing leaves a deep void—not merely within the organisation, but in the lives of all those who had the opportunity to work with him.

Balakrishnanji has now taken leave of the world, but the institutions he built, the people he inspired, and the affection he created across the length and breadth of Bharat will remain his enduring legacy.

We offer our respectful homage to this tireless Karma Yogi, organiser, colleague and friend.

May his soul attain eternal peace.

Om Shanti!



Shri.G.Vasudeo is working as a Secretary of Vivekananda Kendra - NARDEP



Sustainability in the 21st Century: Choosing a Better Path for Humanity¹

Dr. Priyadarshini Karve

Sustainability is often understood as using fewer resources, reducing waste and protecting nature. These are important actions. But sustainability is much more than a set of good practices. It is a question of survival, justice and the future of humanity.

Planet, People and Profit

Sustainability is often represented through three circles: planet, people and profit. However, these circles should not be treated as equal and separate entities.

The planet is the largest circle. All life exists within it. Human society is part of the planet. Economic activity, in turn, takes place within society. Therefore, profit-making activities must remain within the limits of society and nature.

This simple way of looking at sustainability helps us understand many current conflicts. Any economic activity that damages the planet will eventually harm people. Pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss and resource depletion do not remain outside the economy. They ultimately affect health, livelihoods, food security and social stability.

A business cannot be called sustainable merely because it produces an environmentally friendly product. Its entire process must be examined. How are its raw materials obtained? How much energy does it use? What happens to its waste? How are workers treated? Does it increase inequality? These questions are part of sustainability.

Understanding Our Ecological Footprint

I would like to discuss one of the most useful concepts related to sustainability - ecological footprint.



It helps us understand how much of the Earth's productive capacity is required to support our lifestyle.

Consider a simple example. If a person wants to eat 100 grams of cooked rice every day for one year, around 36.5 kilograms of rice must be produced. This requires land, water, seeds, fertilisers, energy and labour. The rice must be harvested, processed, transported, cooked and finally consumed. Waste generated during this process must also be absorbed or managed.

All these activities require resources from different parts of the Earth. When the resource requirements of our food, housing, transport, clothing, electricity and other activities are added together, they form our ecological footprint.

¹ Based on Dr. Priyadarshini Karve's speech at the webinar organized by Vivekananda Kendra-NARDEP

The ecological footprint of humanity has grown beyond the capacity of one planet. In other words, we are using resources faster than nature can regenerate them. This raises an uncomfortable question: Where is the extra Earth coming from?

The answer is that we are borrowing from the future. We are using resources that should have remained available for future generations. The environmental debt created today will have to be paid by those who are yet to be born.

Earth Overshoot Day

The idea of **Earth Overshoot Day** makes this problem easier to understand.

Imagine that the Earth gives humanity a yearly resource budget on 1 January. If we use the entire budget before the end of the year, the date on which the budget is exhausted becomes Earth Overshoot Day. From that day onwards, humanity is effectively living in ecological overdraft.

Earth Overshoot Day has been arriving earlier in the year. In 2023, it fell on 2 August. In 2024, it moved to 1 August. In 2025, it arrived on 24 July. In 2026, it moved slightly later to 30 July. This small improvement offers some hope, but it is not enough to suggest that the crisis has been resolved.

The carbon footprint is one part of the larger ecological footprint. Reducing fossil-fuel use and carbon emissions can help push Earth Overshoot Day further into the year. But a sustainable future also requires attention to water, land, biodiversity, materials and waste.

Population or Consumption?

Population growth is often presented as the main cause of environmental destruction. However, Dr. Karve pointed out that the global population growth rate has been declining since around 1960. The world population is expected to stabilise at around 10 billion people.

The more serious concern today is the unequal use of resources. The richest 10 per cent of the global population consume around half of the planet's resources, while the poorest 50 per cent survive with only a small share.

This means that sustainability has two connected dimensions.

First, humanity must reduce its total resource consumption. Second, it must reduce inequality in consumption. Asking poor communities to consume less, when their consumption is already very low, will not solve the problem. The major responsibility lies with those whose lifestyles demand excessive energy and materials.

A sustainable future must therefore be both environmentally safe and socially just. The poor must have access to food, housing, health, education, energy and dignified livelihoods. At the same time, excessive consumption by affluent groups must be reduced.

Learning from Human History

Human beings have changed their way of living several times in response to ecological and social pressures.

For hundreds of thousands of years, humans lived mainly as hunter-gatherers. This lifestyle depended on the natural regeneration of resources. As population increased and access to food became more uncertain, human beings gradually moved towards agriculture and settled life.

Agriculture increased the carrying capacity of land. It allowed more people to live in a given area. Over time, agriculture supported villages, cities, industries and complex civilisations.

The industrial era brought another major transition. Human beings shifted from muscle power, wood, wind and water towards coal, petroleum and electricity. High-density energy sources increased production and improved living conditions for many people. Life expectancy increased, infant mortality declined and new forms of labour protection and democratic institutions emerged.

However, industrialisation also produced pollution, waste, climate change, resource depletion and inequality. It would therefore be simplistic to say that everything before industrialisation was good and everything after it was bad. Every transition has brought both gains and losses.

The lesson is important. If human beings have changed their way of living in the past, they can do so again. We do not have to remain trapped in an economic system that is damaging the planet.

Moving Beyond Fossil Fuels

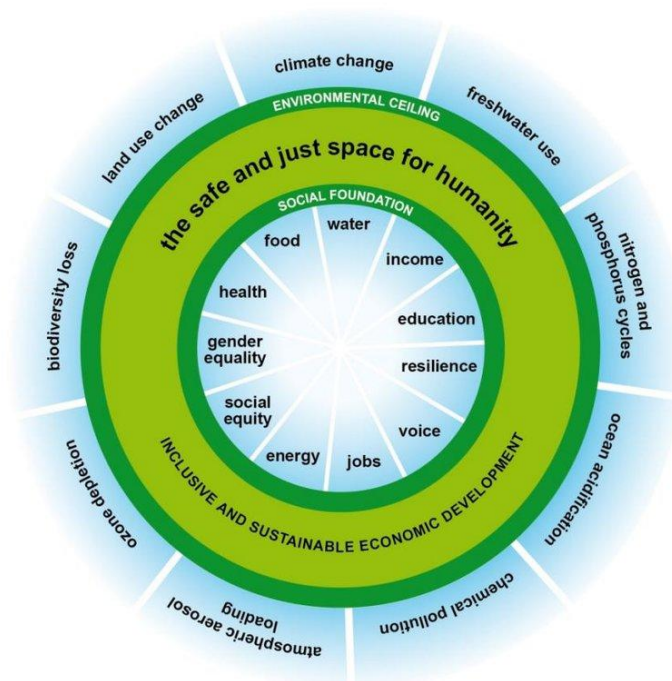
The transition away from fossil fuels is necessary because of their environmental impacts. But it must also protect the social and economic gains achieved through modern energy systems.

Solar power, wind energy, micro-hydropower, biofuels, green hydrogen and other technologies offer possible pathways. Energy storage and improved efficiency will be essential because renewable sources are not always available at the same time as demand.

Technology is not automatically sustainable. It must be evaluated through its resource use, social impact and long-term consequences. At the same time, technology should not be treated as the enemy. Innovation can help solve problems when it is guided by awareness, regulation and public responsibility.

A New Economic Vision

Doughnut Economics presents a useful vision for the future. The model has two boundaries.



The first is the ecological ceiling. Humanity must not exceed the planet's safe limits. The second is the social foundation. Every person must have access to the basic conditions required for a dignified life.

The safe and just space between these two boundaries is where humanity should aim to live.

This requires a shift away from the belief that economic growth and GDP must increase endlessly. GDP is an important economic measure, but it does not tell us whether people are healthy, safe, educated or socially secure. It also does not show whether nature is being destroyed.

Measures such as the Social Progress Index can help us focus more directly on basic human needs, well-being and opportunities. Economic planning must give greater importance to living conditions rather than treating GDP growth as the final goal.

The Role of Young People

The future will be shaped by today's decisions. Young people will live with the consequences of the choices made during the next few decades. They may become the last generation to experience a collapsing civilisation, or the first generation to achieve true sustainability.

For this reason, young people must be given space to think independently and shape their own future. Older generations have valuable experience, but their knowledge was developed under conditions that are very different from those of the 21st century.

Climate change, artificial intelligence, technological transformation and planetary resource limits are new challenges. They require fresh thinking, courage and imagination.

Sustainability is not about returning to the past. Nor is it about rejecting science, technology or development. It is about creating a better pathway—one that protects the planet, improves human well-being and reduces inequality.

The choice is before us. We can continue borrowing from the future, or we can begin living within the limits of one Earth.

The generations yet to be born are waiting for the decisions we make today.

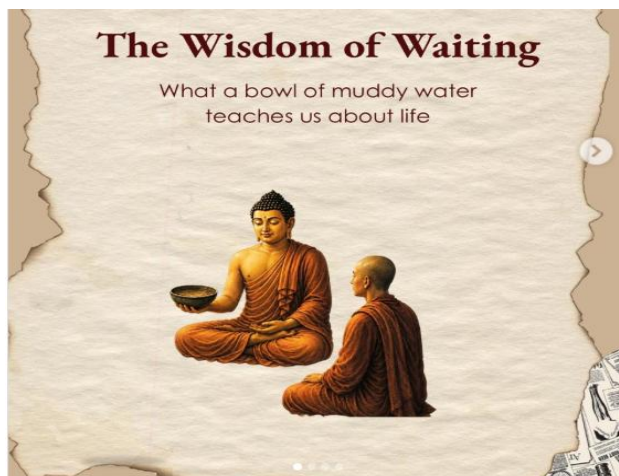


Dr. Priyadarshini Karve is a Director, Samuchit Enviro Tech, Co-Founder, OrjaBox, Chief Executive Officer, Clean Energy Access Network (CLEAN)



THE GREAT SETTLING

Raghunandan Trikannad



It was just another day for others
But not so for Tathagat—the Buddha
Who could see through every event
Understand every being, ride on every
moment.

Ananda, His shadow following Him
Everywhere had whispered about
The journey they were to make on foot
Was ready and eager to learn anew.

It was a village far off, needing
Them to walk through forests
Trek through hill tracks and
Rivers and streams to cross.

The comfort of the warmth
Gave way to sun in zenith
The heat and sweat and fatigue
That goes with it, but He walked on!

At a small stream they met
The bullock carts coming from the
Direction they were moving, but
With Buddha, they too moved on.

After some distance, Tathagat stopped
Looking at Ananda kindly, he said,
“Fetch me some water, from the stream

We passed, for I am thirsty!”
Always eager and happy to serve
The disciple rushed to the stream
But was disappointed, as the
Water was muddy and not fit to drink.

Rushing back Ananda blurted out:
“Tathagat, the water is not fit to drink”
But the Preceptor insisted: “Go back
And fetch the water, for I am thirsty!”

Not saying anything, Ananda went
Back reluctantly, as the water was
Really dirty. When he reached
And lo! The water was crystal clear!

Happy that he would now be able to help
Quench the thirst of his Master
The disciple returned and offered
The precious liquid for the thirst.

Looking into the eyes of the disciple
This is what the Buddha said:

“You had asked how to meditate; how can
One calm the mind? That was my reply:
One does not meditate, one only allows
The mind to settle; by not disturbing
Like the mud settling down in the stream!”



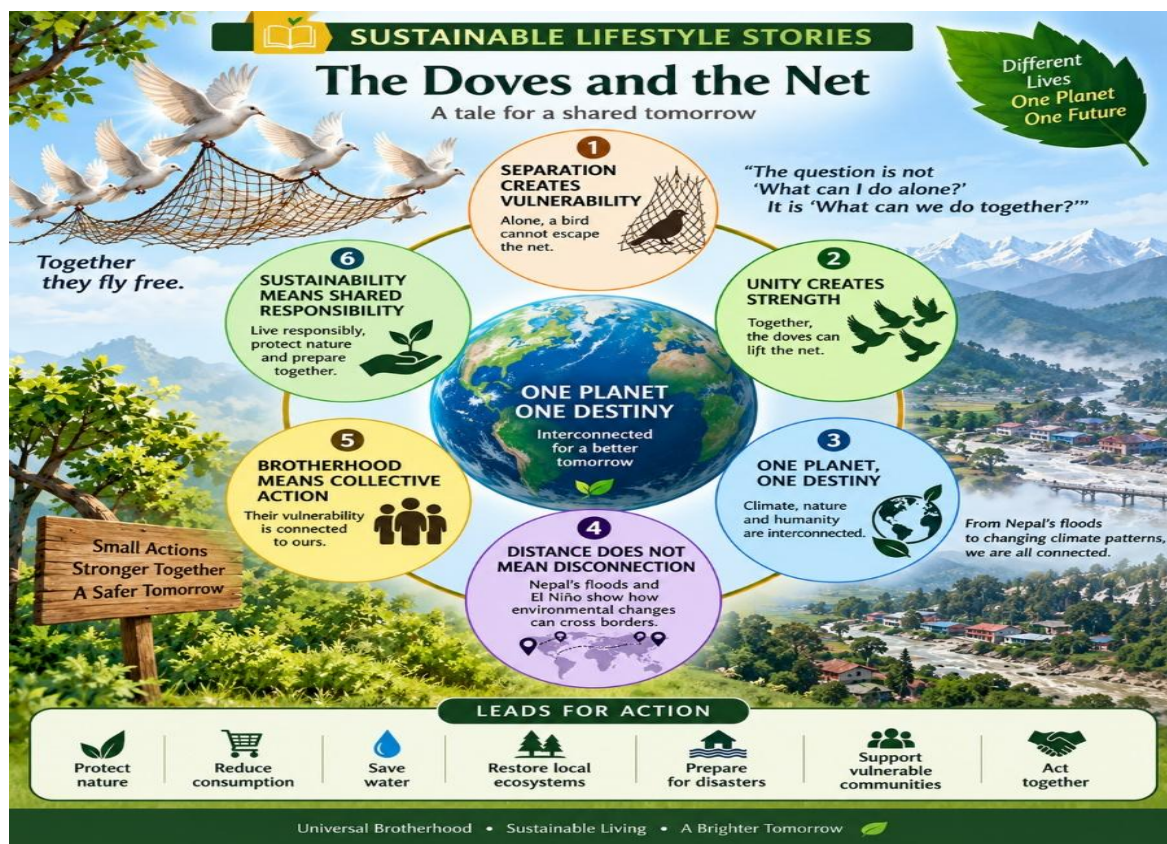
Shri.T.Raghunandan, a Chemical Engineer by training who also worked for Vivekananda Kendra in the formative years, managed a 10+2 Senior Secondary School in Rajasthan for thirty-one years with his wife Vasantha and has now settled down in Kerala for sadhana.



SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE STORIES

The Doves and the Net

Anon



A flock of doves descended to eat scattered grains. A hunter trapped them in a net. Each bird struggled alone, but the net tightened. The leader urged, "Let us fly together." Flapping their wings in unison, the doves lifted the net and escaped.

The tale offers lessons for sustainable living: separation creates vulnerability; unity creates strength; and our planet is interconnected. Nepal's floods and El Niño remind us that distance does not mean disconnection. Universal brotherhood must become action. We cannot control disasters, but we can reduce vulnerability by protecting nature, saving water, reducing waste, consuming responsibly, and preparing together.

Action: Universal Brotherhood is not merely feeling concern for people elsewhere. It means recognising that their vulnerability is connected to our own.

We cannot control every flood, drought or El Niño event. But we can reduce our vulnerability by protecting forests and wetlands, conserving water, reducing waste, consuming responsibly and preparing communities for disasters.

Universal Brotherhood means recognising that we are all caught in the same net of interdependence. Sustainable living is learning to fly together.





BEST PRACTICE

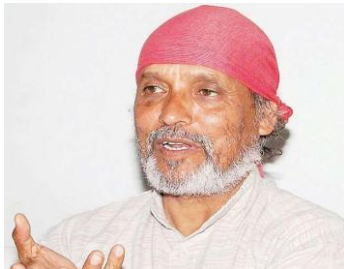
GDP or GEP: What Are We Really Growing?

A. Madhan Kumar

We usually measure a nation's progress through Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—the value of goods and services produced. But there is another important question: What happens to the forests, soil, water and air that sustain this economic activity?

This is the significance of Gross Environmental Product (GEP), an idea associated with environmentalist Padma Bhushan Dr. Anil P. Joshi. His work shows that environmental protection need not be separated from economic development. Restoring nature can also create livelihoods.

From the Himalayas: Action on the Ground



At **Shuklapur near Dehradun, Uttarakhand**, the Asan River catchment was restored through measures such as percolation pits, check dams and ponds. The objective was to improve water retention, groundwater recharge and agricultural productivity. The initiative also helped revive traditional water mills.

At Lachhiwala, traditional *gharat* water mills were upgraded with appropriate technology so that water could continue to power the mills while also generating electricity.

At Dhokwala, traditional water mills were similarly adapted for electricity generation, demonstrating how local resources, traditional knowledge and modern technology can work together.

Nature Is Natural Capital

A forest is more than timber. It supports water systems, biodiversity and livelihoods. A river is more than a source of water. It sustains agriculture, ecosystems and communities. Soil is more than a medium for growing crops. Healthy soil is an economic and ecological asset.

When these assets decline, the consequences eventually affect the economy through water scarcity, declining productivity, disasters and loss of livelihoods therefore encourages us to look at the health of water, soil, forests and air alongside GDP.

Action Agenda

Restore watersheds. Regenerate soil. Protect forests. Conserve water. Reduce waste. Use local resources wisely. Revive traditional knowledge. Apply appropriate technology. Create livelihoods through ecological restoration. Empower communities. Measure ecological gains alongside economic gains.

The lesson from Dr. Joshi's work is simple: GDP tells us what the economy produces. GEP reminds us what nature provides. True development is not GDP versus GEP. It is economic progress that does not destroy the ecological foundations of life.



Dr. A Madhan Kumar, Ph.D, in Managerial Psychology, is an advocate for sustainable consumption and production and practitioner, interested in building a sustainable lifestyle for the benefit of posterity. Email: squirrelgreen123@gmail.com / <https://www.linkedin.com/in/madhankumaralamandha/>

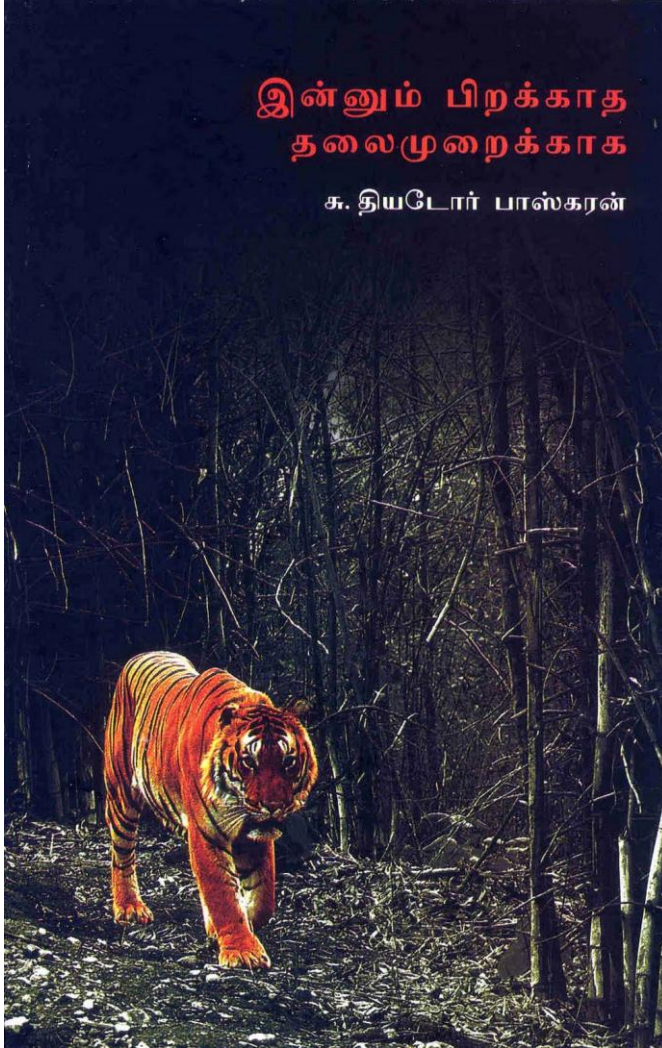


Innum Pirakkatha Thalaimuraikkaga

By S. Theodore Baskaran

N. Karthikeyan

What kind of world are we leaving behind for those who are yet to be born? Will they inherit living rivers, healthy forests, diverse wildlife and clean air? Or will they inherit a damaged planet and stories of the natural world that once existed?



S. Theodore Baskaran's Tamil book *Innum Pirakkatha Thalaimuraikkaga—For the Generations Yet to Be Born—* raises these difficult questions. Published by Uyirmai Pathippagam in 2006, the 200-page book brings together essays on the environment, wildlife and the destruction of nature. It is not merely a book about forests and animals. It is a serious reflection on human responsibility.

The title itself is powerful. It reminds us that the Earth does not belong only to the present generation. We are temporary users of a planet that must also support future generations. Every forest we destroy, every river we pollute and every species we eliminate reduces the possibilities available to them.

Baskaran writes with the knowledge of a naturalist and the concern of a committed environmentalist. His essays draw attention to the many forms of damage caused by human activities. The book examines the decline of wildlife, the destruction of plant species, the disappearance of habitats and the careless manner in which development projects are often planned.

One of the strengths of the book is its ability to connect the loss of individual species with the larger ecological system. The disappearance of a bird, animal or plant is not an isolated event. Every species has a role in nature. It is connected to other species through food, shelter, pollination, seed dispersal and many other ecological relationships.

When a species disappears, an entire relationship may also disappear. This is why conservation cannot be limited to protecting a few attractive animals. It must include forests, wetlands, rivers, grasslands, mountains and the smaller forms of life that are often ignored.

Baskaran's concern for wildlife is not based only on the beauty or uniqueness of animals. He asks us to understand their place in the natural world. The tiger, for example, is not important only because it is a magnificent animal. Protecting the tiger also means protecting the forest in which it lives. That forest supports many other animals, plants, insects and human communities.

The book also questions the common understanding of development. Roads, dams, industries, tourism projects and urban expansion are often presented as symbols of progress. But development becomes dangerous when it ignores ecological limits. A river is not simply a channel carrying water. It is a living system. A forest is not merely land covered with trees. It is a complex habitat that supports countless forms of life.

The essays encourage readers to look closely at the natural world around them. A pond may appear to be an unused piece of land to a developer. To birds, fish, insects and local communities, it may be an essential source of life. A hill may appear to be an attractive location for construction. For the ecosystem, it may be a water catchment, a wildlife habitat and a source of streams.

This way of looking at nature is one of the most important contributions of the book. Baskaran asks us to move beyond a purely human-centred view of the Earth. Nature should not be valued only for the resources it provides to people. Other species also have a right to exist.

The book is also important for the role it plays in Tamil environmental writing. Environmental concerns are often discussed through technical reports and scientific publications. Baskaran brings these issues into Tamil in a clear and accessible manner. He shows that ecological thinking is not limited to scientists or conservation professionals. It is relevant to every citizen.

His writing also reminds us of the importance of language. When people lose contact with nature, they gradually lose the words, stories and knowledge associated with it. The disappearance of local names for birds, plants and animals reflects a deeper cultural distance from the natural world.

The book does not offer easy solutions. Instead, it asks us to change our attitude. Conservation must begin with observation, respect and responsibility. We must learn to see a tree as more than timber, a river as more than water, and wildlife as more than a tourist attraction.

For readers of *Vasudha*, this book has a special relevance. Sustainable living is not only about reducing plastic use, saving electricity or choosing responsible products. It is also about understanding the ecological systems that sustain life. It is about asking whether our choices leave space for other species and for future generations.

Innum Pirakkatha Thalaimuraikkaga is therefore both a book of environmental awareness and a moral appeal. It asks a simple but uncomfortable question: What will the generations yet to be born say about the choices we made today?

This is a book worth reading slowly. It may change the way we look at a forest, a river, a bird or even a small plant growing beside a road. Above all, it reminds us that protecting nature is not an act of charity. It is a responsibility to life—and to the future.

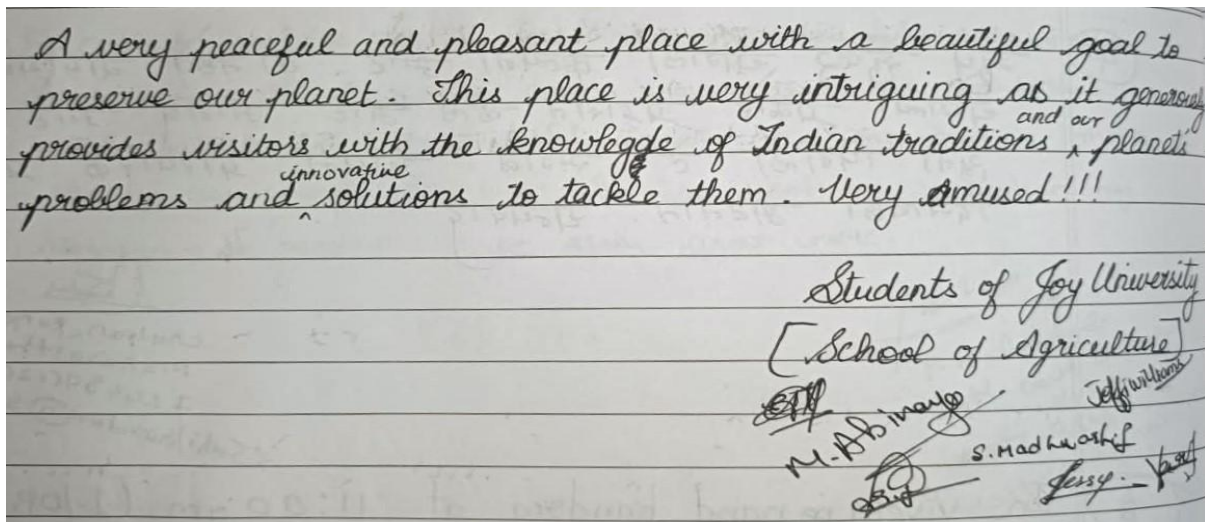
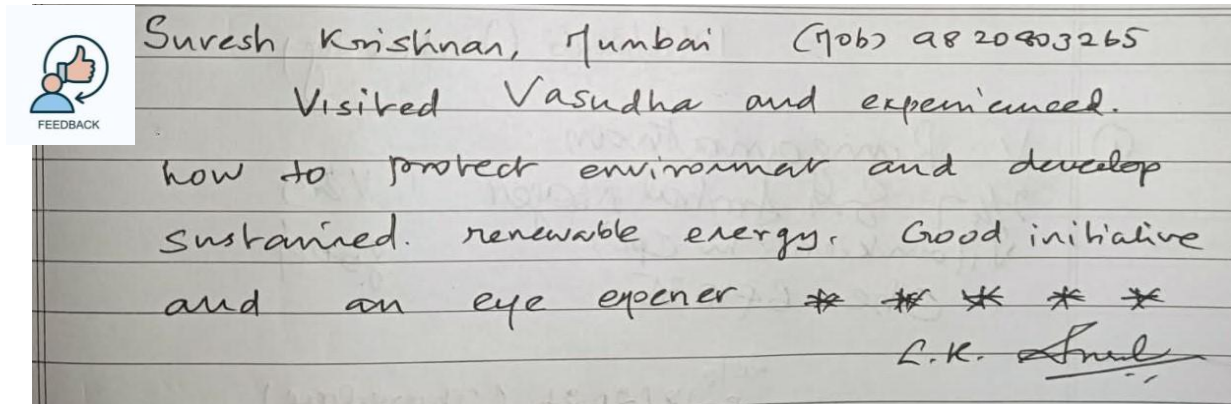


Shri N. Karthikeyan is a development economist who focuses on natural resource management, climate change, social protection, sovereign debt sustainability, microfinance, and sustainable lifestyles." E.mail id: karthinaga@zohomail.in



TESTIMONIALS

- In the month of August 10,500 visitors visited the Vasudha exhibition.



Selfie point

