

Vasudhā Calling

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SPECIAL ARTICLE

Advantages of a Panchakosha Approach to Modern Medicine¹

Dr. Hiramalini Sheshadri



When we think about health and healing, we often focus only on the physical body. Modern medicine has made remarkable progress in treating infections, managing emergencies and performing complex surgeries. However, when we deal with chronic illnesses, we need to look beyond the body and understand the person as a whole.

I believe that traditional Indian wisdom can offer valuable insights in this regard. It need not compete with modern medicine. Instead, it can complement modern healthcare by encouraging us to pay greater attention to our food, daily routines, thoughts, emotions and inner life.

Understanding the Panchakosha Approach



The Panchakosha concept provides a holistic way of understanding human beings. According to this traditional Indian framework, a person has five interconnected *koshas*, or layers.

¹ Based on Dr. Hiramalini's speech in a webinar organized by VK-NARDEP on 13.9.2026

The first is the Annamaya Kosha, the physical body nourished by food. The second is the Pranamaya Kosha, associated with vital energy and the processes that sustain life. The third is the Manomaya Kosha, which relates to the mind and emotions. The fourth, the Vijnanamaya Kosha, represents intelligence, understanding and discernment. The fifth is the Anandamaya Kosha, associated with inner peace and spiritual experience.

These layers are interconnected. Our physical condition can influence our emotions, while stress and emotional difficulties can affect our physical well-being. Our understanding, attitudes and sense of purpose can also shape how we respond to illness.

The Panchakosha approach invites us to consider all these dimensions when thinking about health. It is a traditional framework for understanding the whole person, rather than a replacement for medical diagnosis or treatment.

Food and Daily Habits Matter

Let us begin with the physical body. The traditional Indian saying “*Unave Marundhu*” means that food itself can be medicine. This reminds us of the importance of what we eat every day.

A balanced diet containing vegetables, fruits, millets and other nutritious foods can support our health. Traditional Indian cooking also makes use of spices and herbs such as turmeric, ginger, garlic, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves and tulsi. These ingredients have long been valued in our food traditions.

However, we should not assume that a particular food, herb or traditional preparation can cure a disease. Our nutritional needs differ, and people with medical conditions may need specific dietary advice. We should approach traditional practices thoughtfully and seek qualified medical guidance when necessary.

Food is only one part of our daily routine. Adequate sleep, physical activity, relaxation and regular habits also contribute to well-being. Small, consistent changes in our lifestyle can be important in maintaining health.

The Mind and Emotions in Healing

The mind is another important dimension of our well-being. Fear, anxiety and persistent stress can make it difficult to cope with illness. Hope, reassurance and emotional support can help people face their difficulties with greater confidence.

Our expectations and beliefs influence how we experience illness and treatment. Practices such as prayer, meditation and other forms of quiet reflection may provide comfort to people who find meaning in them. Repeating positive thoughts and developing acceptance can also help some people manage difficult circumstances.

These practices should not be presented as guaranteed cures. Rather, they can form part of a supportive approach to living with illness. Every patient has different needs, and we should respect individual beliefs and preferences.

Knowledge, Faith and Inner Strength

The Panchakosha framework also reminds us of the importance of understanding and discernment. Patients need clear information about their condition, the available treatments and the choices they must make. Knowledge helps them participate more actively in decisions about their health.

For many people, faith and spirituality provide strength during periods of uncertainty. The source of that strength may differ from person to person. We should respect each individual's beliefs and support them in ways that are meaningful to them.

A sense of inner peace does not mean that we deny suffering or ignore medical realities. It means finding the emotional and spiritual resources that help us face life's challenges.

The Importance of a Compassionate Doctor–Patient Relationship

I would also like to emphasise the relationship between doctors and patients. Healing involves more than prescribing medicines or carrying out procedures. Patients need to feel that they are heard, understood and treated with dignity.

A doctor who listens carefully, explains the situation honestly and responds with compassion can help build trust. Patients, in turn, need the opportunity to ask questions and understand their treatment. Attention, empathy and integrity should be integral to healthcare.



This human relationship is particularly important when people are living with chronic conditions that require long-term care and changes in daily habits.

Complementing Modern Medicine

I want to make one point very clear: the Panchakosha approach should complement modern medicine, not replace it. Modern medical care is essential for diagnosing diseases, treating emergencies and managing many serious conditions. Patients should not stop prescribed medicines, postpone necessary investigations or delay treatment in favour of traditional remedies or spiritual practices.

At the same time, healthcare can benefit from giving greater attention to nutrition, lifestyle, emotional well-being, knowledge and the personal values that give people strength. These dimensions can be considered alongside appropriate medical treatment, with guidance from qualified healthcare professionals.

My appeal is that we look at health in a more holistic way. A human being is not merely a physical body with a disease to be treated. Each person has a mind, emotions, understanding, relationships and, for many, a spiritual life. Recognising these dimensions can encourage a more compassionate and person-centred approach to healthcare.

May our understanding of healing grow to include not only the treatment of illness, but also the care of the whole person. As the universal prayer reminds us:

Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu — May all beings everywhere be happy and free.



Dr. Hiramalini Seshadri, Rheumatologist, Chennai



The Artisan

Raghunandan Trikannad

Rich greenery abounded the plot of land, adjacent to the rough untarred road leading to a small place called Kumta. The plot as such was very small—may be just ten cents—but it had a small kitchen garden growing a few brinjal and chilly plants, a papaya tree and a plantain tree with the fruits hanging. But the plot as such had predominantly coconut trees. And necessarily so, for they helped the owner in his survival for very existence. The plot belonged to Shukrāchāri, and the place was Kumta, a sleepy little town in the Uttara Kannada. This little town is also in the area known as the *Maḷe Nāḍu*—or the “Land of Rain”. It *definitely* used to rain here for four months, but *mostly* for six months! Consequently, the umbrella was part of one’s body here.



The time we are peeping into was monsoon, and the patter of the huge rain drops falling on the tiled roof was quite disturbing to Shukrāchāri—though we may find it pleasing! For once he wished and prayed, that it would stop. This wish, which seemed to go unheeded made him a little annoyed with himself. But he was as helpless as he had been in these past twenty years. This very helplessness had made him take drastic and rash decisions in life. He did not know whether he regretted the decisions, but he had not been happy with his lot, with his life and most of all his profession. For he was an artisan, a sandal-wood carver.

He was now *almost* ashamed to call himself as one. And yet this had not been the case when he was in his prime. “I must refrain from thinking of past.” Shukrāchāri said to himself and started thinking of the future course of action. Venkatesh the new Sub Divisional Magistrate, had called him to his Office at three that afternoon, and it was already one-thirty. It would take at least an hour to wade through the flooded roads. But the problem was not only walking to the office, but of carrying his work of art, he had promised to show the young officer. It would get wet and perhaps soiled or even spoilt. He did not know why but this boy Venkatesh, had given him some hope, that his art may survive yet. But now it seemed to him that even God was against him, from the way it was pouring! With disappointment writ on his face, he strained his weak eyes to look outside his plot, but these blessed coconuts did not permit him to even do that. In utter frustration, he sat and something snapped in his mind and suddenly it looked as though the load was off his mind. It was his own mind *unburdening itself*. And his eyes fell lovingly on the carving, not unlike that of a father on his handsome and eloquent son. The depressive climate vanished from his mind and *hence* the body.

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It was almost over, the only thing that remained to be done was a bit of polishing. He stood at a distance of ten feet and looked at it critically. For once there was no flaw in the work. He was a very good critic of art—specially *his own* art. He had done many carvings and there had been invariably some error or fault, though it was almost imperceptible to others. This statuette was of Saraswati—the Goddess of arts and learning. He liked it, and the others would adore it, for it was as though a living being had been reduced to size. Shukrāchāri had learnt this from his father, who mainly used to make ornamental jewellery boxes. They made a comfortable living in this trade. As was the custom in those days, a marriage would need at least four to five of such boxes. Added to this, some persons from outside the state would also order them.

The sandal-wood being soft was easily carvable and moreover, quite freely available, was the raw material for their handicraft trade. The shavings thereof, would be used for preparing garlands. But Shukrāchāri had dared to experiment on something else, statuettes. It was sold as hot cakes and he started getting orders from Bangalore emporia. Not that, this venture of statuette was in anyway new, but his art was well received. But then as it usually happens, Shukrāchāri did not gain much financially, though his name became popular among artisans.

This statuette of Saraswati outdid every other in its beauty, and if the expression could be used, the artisan fell in love with his own creation. That very afternoon he received a letter from Bangalore to be prepared for an exhibition, where the creations were being judged. He finished the statuette and added a swan—the vehicle of the Goddess—to it. With the help of a carpenter friend, he made a beautiful case with glass on all four sides to house it. He was ready for the exhibition.

What followed was quite obvious, the Goddess of Learning was adjudged the best, among over *two thousand* pieces of art. Honours followed, and to a very great extent financial wellbeing, as many orders were received for the similar statuettes. Nearly fifty similar statuettes were made by him, but somehow the original remained unsurpassable. One foreigner even offered an exorbitant amount for his original. But he never parted company with Her! He started teaching his son, Dutta who unfortunately did not develop any taste for it. Though sad, he accepted his lot quite stoically. His daughter was given away in marriage at Shimoga about ten hours away by bus.

Then came a period of shocks, his wife died of influenza the dreaded disease of the fifties. His son went away to join the Army, in spite of his entreaty. He became a loner, for his parents had died long back, and he had only two children. Even then the Art gave him not only company but also consolation. He kept on making figures from the vast Indian mythology.

Another, unique piece was that of “Amritamanthana”— the churning of the ocean of milk by the Gods and Demons for Amrit, the elixir of immortality. The story goes that the Gods and Demons did this work jointly, and in the process many things came out of this ocean, mostly good—like the Kalpataru, the wish fulfilling tree, Kāmadhenu the Divine cow etc.—but the poison also came out of it. Nobody could tolerate it and hence, Mahadeva was called upon to drink it. The beauty of this work of art was the expression of Shiva in the act of drinking it. It had so much of equipoise on his face, that one felt as if the event was really taking place. Ironically, when he finished it, he himself had to drink the poison.

The year had been 1962, and the month, November. He had heard that the Chinese had attacked our country. But never for a moment had he thought that it would affect him so much. Dutta had been killed in Ladakh and his uniform was being sent. The body had been cremated on the war front itself.

This time, he could not even immerse himself in his work. Not because, he was emotionally disturbed, but *because sandal-wood became restricted and scarce*. He was broken hearted. He started brooding over his fate, which had not been his nature. He started getting irritated at small things, which was not his lot. But, he had to live. And so, he started cultivating the coconut grove. He was not an agriculturist, nor was he a businessman but an artisan through and through.

And so, he could barely subsist on the income from the sale of coconuts. Finally, as though the coffin was being nailed, a tree climber, who used to cut the nuts for him, had fallen off *his* tree and had injured the spine. The tree-climber's relations had made him agree to pay for the treatment. And so, he had decided to sell the statuette of Saraswati, whom he had held so close to his heart. The SDM had been interested in buying it. But the rain had....

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There was a knock on the door which brought him back to the present. It must be nearly five now he calculated mentally. The downpour persisted. When he carried the weak and old body to the door and opened it, he found the officer he was to meet at three. Calling him inside he said:

‘The rain would not stop. If I had come there carrying Her, She would have got drenched.’

Venkatesh did not comprehend the words immediately, but when he understood, he laughed and said:

‘You mean the statuette? Yes, that was why I came here to have a look at *Her*! But where is She?’

When Shukrāchāri pointed his hand reverentially towards the glass case, Venkatesh was overtaken by the feeling of awe, reverence and happiness, all at once. He could not take off his eyes of Her. Truly She was... he could not get the word, and so he gave up verbalisation and just kept looking. When he came to, his eyes fell on the old wrinkled face of Shukrāchāri, the creator of the Goddess of learning. The old eyes were moist and so expressive that he did not need to hear any words from the artisan.

‘Look Sir,’ started Venkatesh ‘I now understand why you did not sell Her. I feel you should not.’

‘But then how can I raise five thousand rupees, to treat Manjunath? But yes! I had forgotten entirely. I can sell off this piece of land.’

‘You do not have to sell anything. From the Municipality I shall arrange everything. But only on one condition.’

The artisan’s eyes were a little doubtful, with the same tone he asked:

‘What could that be?’

‘You see, from my school days, I have been interested in wood carving. I never got any teacher to give me the finer aspects of the art. Could you please teach me?’

Again, the artisan’s eyes were filled. God is great, in one stroke, his problems were solved and his incompleteness was removed. From the day Dutta had refused to learn the art from him, he had felt a kind of restlessness within, the restlessness which is the outcome of *not transferring* the knowledge to the next generation. Shukrāchāri was fulfilled.

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And presently, nearly twenty years after the above episode, the Statuette of Saraswati adorns the living room of Venkatesh, now a Divisional Commissioner, at Bangalore. More than that, he is now an accomplished artisan himself, with in many exhibitions. Not only is the Statuette with him but also the art. In short, the artisan lives on, through Venkatesh. God willing, he will live on even after Venkatesh.



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.



Culture: A Legacy We Must Keep Alive

N.Krishnamoorti

When Akbar and Birbal encountered an elderly man planting a mango sapling, Akbar wondered whether he would live long enough to taste its fruit. The man explained that his grandfather had planted trees for his father, his father had planted trees for him, and he was now planting for his children and grandchildren. "Everyone plants; everyone enjoys," he said.

Akbar: "Do you hope to live long enough to eat the fruits of this tree?"

The elder laughed. "You have missed the rhythm of life, my son! That is not how it works. My grandfather planted this orchard, and my father enjoyed its fruits. My father replaced the trees that died, and I enjoyed their fruits. Now I plant this sapling so that my son may enjoy its mangoes. To keep this tradition alive, my son and grandson will also plant trees, allowing their children to enjoy the fruits of their labour.



"In our family, everyone plants trees, and everyone enjoys the fruits. If someone thinks, 'I will not live long enough to taste the fruit, so why should I plant a tree?' the golden chain will break, and the family bond will be severed."

Moved by the elder's wisdom, generosity and foresight, Akbar pulled out a bag of gold coins and presented it to him. "Father, I am proud to have citizens of such wisdom, generosity and love in my kingdom. Please accept this gift from your ruler."

Accepting the unexpected gift, the elder smiled and said, "This must be a new variety of mango! Normally, mango trees take eight to ten years to bear fruit. But this variety has yielded fruit on the very day I planted it!"

Impressed by the elder's wit as well as his wisdom, Akbar offered him another bag of gold coins. Accepting it, the elder remarked, "Mango trees normally yield a harvest once every two years. This new variety has given me two bumper harvests in a single day!"

Reflection for action:

- What values should we pass on?
- Which local traditions and skills need protection?

How can we involve young people in practising, documenting and sharing them today?

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Shri.N.Krishnamoorti – a senior worker of Vivekananda Kendra, he is a respected thinker, philosopher, orator and prolific author of more than a hundred books in English, Tamil and Hindi.



BEST PRACTICE

From Traditional Fishing to Climate-Resilient Coastal Livelihoods: Selliamman Nagar Tribal Fishermen Society

A. Madhan Kumar

Based in Selliamman Nagar, Pazhaverkadu (Pulicat), in Thiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu, the Selliamman Nagar Tribal Fishermen Society is a community institution of the Irular tribal community. Established in 1979, it has worked to strengthen the identity, dignity, and collective voice and livelihood opportunities of lagoon fishing families who have historically faced social and economic marginalisation.



Through collective action, the society has helped members move beyond dependence on vulnerable fishing labour towards more independent and diversified livelihoods. Support for fishing assets has enabled every fishing family in the society to own a fishing boat, strengthening their ability to earn from their own work. Alongside traditional fishing, members have taken up aquaculture activities such as cage fish culture, crab fattening, improved fish-culture methods and ornamental fish culture. Red snapper and sea bass are among the species with market potential.

The society has also encouraged women's participation in livelihood development. It has around 160 members, with women making up approximately half of the membership. Women are increasingly involved in ornamental fish culture and other productive activities, helping broaden participation in what was traditionally a male-dominated livelihood.

The community is developing further opportunities suited to the Pulicat coastal environment, including brackish-water fish culture, bivalve culture and crab fattening, alongside plans for a multipurpose community hall. Existing ornamental fish breeding and aquaculture enterprises, as well as a proposed clown fish farming initiative, reflect the society's interest in expanding livelihood options. Housing support has also contributed to improved living conditions, with 100 concrete houses constructed for community members.



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Dileep and Purnima Kulkarni

Dileep Kulkarni

In 1975, when I was formally studying for a Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, I became involved with two social-service organisations in Pune, Maharashtra. One was Gramayan, which worked in the drought-prone areas of Pune district. The other was Grahak Panchayat, a consumers' organisation. These experiences exposed me to rural problems, social work and different philosophies of life. I began to feel that I should do something to address the problems I saw around me.



At Grahak Panchayat, I had the opportunity to volunteer in many activities. I started speaking in public, writing articles and editing a monthly magazine. Later, I became involved in publication work, which helped me understand the power of writing and communication.

Three things helped shape my thinking. I studied Raja Yoga and Karma Yoga, attended the *Yoga Shibir* organised by Vivekananda Kendra in Kanyakumari in December 1982, and read books by thinkers such as E. F. Schumacher and Fritjof Capra. These experiences broadened my understanding of science, economics, technology and society.

Gradually, I came to believe that many problems we see around us—stress, anxiety, social inequality, environmental damage and the loss of biodiversity—are connected to one underlying issue: consumerism. We often try to solve problems individually without addressing their common cause. I felt that we needed to change our way of living rather than merely treat the symptoms of excessive consumption.

I expressed these ideas in my Marathi book *Nisargayan*, published in 1986. It was later translated into English as *Ahead to Nature*. But I realised that writing and speaking about sustainable living would not be enough. I had to practise it myself.

Choosing a Different Way of Life

In 1985, I married Purnima, who shared my views on adopting an eco-friendly lifestyle. After leaving my job, I joined Vivekananda Kendra as a full-time worker. I later worked with Marathi Prakashan Vibhag in Pune. After nine years, I decided to leave that activity and devote more time to living according to my principles.

Purnima had completed her degree in Ayurveda. In 1993, when our elder son was about two and a half years old, we moved to Kudawale, a small village in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. We have now lived here for more than three decades.

We had two aims: first, to help people understand the need for an eco-friendly life; and second, to practise such a life ourselves.

I have written more than twenty books and ten booklets on different aspects of eco-friendly living. Purnima writes about the same subjects from the perspective of Ayurveda. I also edited and published the Marathi monthly magazine *Gatiman Santulan* from 2001 to 2021. We have conducted lectures and awareness camps, including joint camps that we began organising in 2005.

However, our most important work has been to bring these ideas into our daily lives.

Reducing Our Ecological Footprint

We have focused on three aspects of our lifestyle: resources, energy and technology. Over the years, we have reduced our use of all three. We follow the four Rs—Refuse, Reduce, Reuse **and** Recycle. As far as resources and energy are concerned, we try to avoid non-renewable materials and depend on renewable ones wherever possible. We prefer simple, appropriate technologies to sophisticated ones.

We built our house using locally available laterite stone and mud blocks. The roof is made of Mangalore tiles, and the supporting structure uses local wood. Except in the kitchen, the flooring is earthen. Purnima applies cow dung to the floor every week. We have no gadgets in our house, and we do all our household work manually.

We use electricity only for lighting and charging a mobile phone, which is shared by both of us. We do not have a computer. I write with a fountain pen on paper that has been used on one side. We reuse scrap paper and avoid laminating the covers of books I publish. Our monthly electricity consumption is just one or two units.

We have never purchased or driven an automobile. In our village, we walk to do our daily work. When I travel to Pune for printing or publication work, I use a bicycle. For longer journeys, we use non-air-conditioned public transport.

We once asked ourselves why we should use LPG when we did not use petrol for transport. We therefore decided to stop using LPG. It took us eleven years to shift completely to a wood-fired stove and solar cooker, and we surrendered our LPG connection in 2004. We collect the required firewood from around our house and cut it ourselves.

Food, Clothing and Nature

We use only cotton clothes and try to avoid purchasing items packed in polythene bags. We carry reusable glass or metal water bottles and use cotton bags for shopping.

Our use of chemicals is almost nil. We use ash to clean dishes and avoid chemical detergents. We do not use food preservatives, mosquito repellents or pesticides. Frogs around our house help control many pests.

Our food is simple and mostly home-cooked. We prefer local grains, vegetables and fruits because transporting food over long distances requires energy. We avoid certain foods that involve high energy consumption during production or storage. For example, we do not eat fruits brought from faraway places when local alternatives are available. We have also avoided ice cream and similar products because refrigeration and freezing require considerable energy.

We have preserved the trees around our house and planted many fruit- and flower-bearing trees. These trees keep the surroundings cool, reducing the need for fans. We enjoy seasonal fruits, sometimes so much that we have to skip dinner!

Simple Living, Lasting Satisfaction

We are happy and satisfied that we could live the prime period of our lives—from our twenties to our sixties—to fulfil both our missions. We know that we are far from achieving an ideal eco-friendly lifestyle. In one self-assessment exercise, we received only 50 per cent marks. This reminds us that there is still much to learn and change.

Even though our life is simple and contented, we do not live without enjoyment. In winter and summer, when the sky is clear and the moon shines, we take our dinner outdoors. After the rainy season, we enjoy the crystal-clear water of the nearby river. In summer, we relish the fruits growing around us.

An eco-friendly lifestyle does require adjustments, both physical and psychological. We have learned to accept some discomfort without complaint. For us, the important thing is not to live perfectly, but to keep making sincere efforts.

I believe that our lifestyle is not something everyone must copy in every detail. Rather, it is an invitation to reflect on our own choices. We can all reduce unnecessary consumption, save energy, reuse materials, choose local products and respect nature.

Our journey has taught us that sustainable living is a continuing process. We may never reach the destination, but the effort to walk towards it is itself meaningful.



Shri.Dileep and Purnima Kulkarni are core group members of Vasudha and associated with Vivekananda Kendra – Nardep for more than four decades.



Captain Fantastic (English; 2016)

N. Karthikeyan

Can we raise a family away from consumerism and modern society? This thought-provoking film explores the possibilities and the limits of living close to nature.



What does it mean to live well? Does a good life depend on a comfortable home, modern conveniences, formal education and material possessions? Or can we find greater happiness through self-reliance, close family relationships and harmony with nature? *Captain Fantastic*, a 2016 American film written and directed by Matt Ross, explores these questions through the unusual life of a family living in the forests of the United States.

The film stars Viggo Mortensen as Ben Cash, a father who raises his six children with his wife, Leslie, away from mainstream society. Disillusioned with consumerism, capitalism and conventional education, the couple choose to live in the wilderness. Their children learn to hunt, gather food, climb mountains and defend themselves. They also read challenging books, study philosophy, discuss politics and question established beliefs. Physical fitness and intellectual development are central to their upbringing.

The family appears to have created an alternative way of life. They are physically strong, intellectually curious and largely independent of modern technology. Instead of celebrating Christmas, they celebrate the birthday of the political thinker Noam Chomsky. Their lifestyle challenges many assumptions about what children need to grow into capable adults.

Yet the film does not allow us to admire this arrangement without asking difficult questions.

Living close to nature

One of the most striking aspects of *Captain Fantastic* is its portrayal of life in the wilderness. The family depends on its surroundings for food and shelter. Hunting, gathering and physical activity are part of everyday life. They are not passive consumers purchasing everything they need from shops. They understand that survival requires effort, knowledge and cooperation.

For readers interested in sustainable living, this way of life raises important questions. Modern societies have become increasingly dependent on energy, machines, packaged goods and long supply chains. Many of us have little idea where our food comes from or how much energy and material goes into producing the things we use.

The Cash family reminds us that human beings can live with fewer material possessions and develop a closer relationship with nature. Their life encourages us to question unnecessary consumption and reconsider our dependence on technology.

However, the film does not suggest that life in the wilderness is easy. It requires physical effort, practical skills and constant attention to survival. Nor does it imply that everyone should abandon modern society. Its deeper message is that we should examine our choices rather than accept consumer culture as the only possible way of life.

Education beyond the classroom

The children's education is another important theme. Ben teaches them at home and encourages them to read widely, think critically and discuss difficult subjects. They are familiar with literature, science, philosophy and political ideas. They can also manage many practical challenges that conventional schooling may not teach.

During a visit to Ben's sister's family, the differences between the two approaches to education become clear. Ben's children demonstrate impressive knowledge, while their cousins appear less prepared for such discussions.

But intellectual ability is not the only measure of education. The children have had little contact with the wider world. They struggle with ordinary social situations and have limited experience of people whose beliefs and lifestyles differ from their own.

This is where the film's questions become particularly relevant. Education should develop knowledge and independent thinking, but it should also prepare children to live with others. They need opportunities to make their own choices, learn from different experiences and develop relationships beyond the family.

When ideals become restrictions

The central conflict emerges after Leslie dies. Ben takes his children on a journey to attend her funeral and fulfil her wish to be cremated. The journey brings the family into contact with the society from which they have deliberately withdrawn.

As the children encounter unfamiliar situations, some begin to question their father's decisions. His eldest son, Bodevan, wants to explore the wider world, while Rellian challenges the way he has been raised. Their questions reveal a contradiction in Ben's philosophy: although he encourages his children to question established authority, he finds it difficult when they question his own.

This is perhaps the film's most valuable lesson. Even a well-intentioned alternative lifestyle can become restrictive when one person's beliefs dominate everyone else's choices.

Ben wants his children to be strong, independent and intellectually capable. Yet independence must include the freedom to disagree with one's parents. Protecting children from the pressures of mainstream society cannot mean preventing them from developing their own identities.

The film also deals with grief and mental health. Leslie's death affects the entire family and exposes the limitations of Ben's approach. Love, physical fitness, intellectual training and self-reliance cannot eliminate every human difficulty. People sometimes need emotional support and professional care, and no single philosophy of life can provide all the answers.

Finding a balance

Captain Fantastic does not offer a simple verdict on Ben's way of life. His rejection of excessive consumption and his commitment to his children's development are admirable. At the same time, his rigid beliefs and isolation create problems. The film asks us to distinguish between living by one's principles and imposing those principles on others.

The performances, especially Viggo Mortensen's portrayal of Ben, make this conflict convincing. The beautiful forest landscapes and the contrast between wilderness and suburban life strengthen the film's central questions. Humour and emotional moments prevent it from becoming a lecture on ideology or sustainability.

The ending is significant. The family eventually moves towards a more balanced life, combining elements of their earlier independence with greater engagement with the outside world. Their experience suggests that neither complete withdrawal from society nor unquestioning acceptance of it is necessarily the answer.

For readers of *Vasudha Calling*, *Captain Fantastic* is worth watching because it invites us to reflect on the relationship between consumption, education, family and nature. We may not be able to live in a forest or become entirely self-sufficient. But we can reduce unnecessary consumption, spend more time outdoors, learn practical skills, encourage children to think independently and build stronger relationships.

Above all, we can remember that sustainable living is not simply about escaping modern society. It is about creating a way of life in which human well-being, freedom and respect for nature can flourish together.

The film leaves us with a question worth considering: Can we enjoy the benefits of modern life without allowing consumption and convenience to determine how we live?



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TESTIMONIALS

- In the month of September 8,200 visitors visited the Vasudha exhibition.



A wonderful exhibition that captures the need of the hour. Inspirational to make small changes in our day to day life.

Amruta H
9220797838

15/9/2026 (Tuesday)

Sustainable living is the need of the hour. Videos shown here explain it very nicely and show its good effects.

Rupal Shah
9930366670

Coming Events

We have commenced conducting examinations in colleges across Tamil Nadu after providing students with the book From Scarred Earth to Sacred Earth. This year, we aim to reach around 50 colleges, with a minimum of 4,000 students participating. The response is very engaging. We also hope to motivate a select group of students to attend a three-day training programme on Vasudha at the VK-NARDEP Training Centre.

