

Navadarshanam – An Example Of True Development Right Outside Bengaluru

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a small community founded in 1990, located in rural Tamil Nadu adjoining a reserve forest about 50km from Bangalore. They have been exploring alternatives to the modern way of living and thinking, seeking both ecological balance and inner peace. Navadarshanam started as a community of people who felt that people all over the world were getting trapped in the urban, industrial form of life and were ending up being disassociated with nature, resulting in ecological destruction. Its origin lay in a study circle, of individuals who met during the 1970s and '80s in IIT Delhi and Gandhi Peace Foundation to introspect and have dialogues on these themes. They don't accept funding from agencies and run on donations and the revenue it generates from selling the food products. They also adhere to the principles of non-individual ownership of land and property. The community members have experimented in the areas of eco-restoration and wilderness preservation, alternative energy, sustainable organic farming, water harvesting, health and healing as well as in promoting healthier and traditional foods. Some of the key focus areas and principles that Navadarshanam works on are discussed below.

Green(er) buildings and energy

The houses are made of compressed mud blocks using little quantities of cement and steel. The houses have had no wall plastering and red-oxide flooring. The natural air and lighting in the house ensure that fans are rarely needed even in summers. The residents aim to live a lifestyle minimising their power needs. The houses where the members and visitors stay also use minimal electronic and electrical equipment. Those needs are also met locally through solar energy, biogas and other methods of local energy production. One of the focus areas for Navadarshanam is to be off the public power grid.

Community-supported agriculture The farming practices incorporate traditional knowledge, natural farming and permaculture techniques. They grow seasonal and local varieties of food using minimal external chemical-free inputs for farming. The use of machines in farming is also kept to a minimum. They work to deliver chemical-free food to urban consumers in Bengaluru in a manner that a fair price of the produce is provided to consumers. They have also setup Self-Help Groups with people from nearby villages ensuring that income from value-added products is shared amongst the rural community. This way they also help build a connection between farmers and consumers and ensure urban consumers build a wider understanding of the farming processes and challenges associated with it. They work to secure food locally grown either on their farms or at a nearby distance with the aim of keeping low carbon footprint of food.

Rainwater harvesting

Navadarshanam uses rainwater harvesting techniques to store roof rainwater for domestic use. They also work to reduce their reliance on groundwater to ensure the reduction in groundwater reserves can be reversed. On an individual level as well, they are aiming to reduce individual domestic use and bring it to the rural average of 40 litres of water per person for all their activities.

Regenerating degenerated land The land on which Navadarshanam is situated was a huge expanse of barren land which has been transformed into an early stage forest primarily by preventing grazing on the land hosting thousands of trees and lot of wildlife. Most of the trees were planted by seeds from Thally Reserve Forest in the vicinity carried by birds, wind, animals resulting in a transformation of the land. They learnt that the naturally planted trees had a much tougher resistance to drought situations than the ones planted by them. This is because the naturally planted trees had the soil memory of being in their native

environment which helped them survive and thrive in adverse conditions much better than trees which were planted from outside Whilst they aim to keep a low profile so as not to become a “touristy” place, Navadarshanam welcomes visitors with an interest in their lifestyle, values and principles. There are indeed no fixed tariffs for rooms nor are luxuries such as air conditioning. Visitors can donate a token amount for their stay on a principle of giftism.

Inner work Following in the footsteps of some of the great spiritual thinkers of India, Navadarshanam bases all its activities around the realization of the true state of being. For most of the people living in Navadarshanam, the external work is a reflection of their inner transformation and growth. In today’s world, an experiment like Navadarshanam which has survived and thrived for over 25 years now is a living proof that an alternate vision of development can be achieved.

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