

Nammalvar returns to Mother Earth

Gentle and wise organic farming pioneer inspired thousands



Thalaivar (1938-2013)

As the year 2013 bade us goodbye, Dr Nammalwar you also tragically chose to say goodbye to us. While 2014 will replace 2013, who will replace you Ayya? Your saintly demeanour, your passionate bonding with Mother Earth and your incisive knowledge of plant science, your ability to speak with great depth using the simplest of languages and phrases, – each of which could have made any person great, your turn of phrases that could touch the heart of the smallest person and shed light for the biggest of scientists, – each of these could have made any person a great man. But you carried all these qualities so lightly on your frail shoulders and in your simplicity made even people like me see the light in ecological ways of dealing with food, farming and nature. I am sure I was one of the thousands of

people whose paths you lit up with your smile and knowledge. I am devastated with your parting Thalaivar. I can't see anyone replacing you to lead the organic movement in India. The new crop of smart alecky traders of organic goods who pose as leaders of organic movement are not even a patch on you. In fact they are destroying the spiritual values you had imbued organic movement with by their focus on monetary gains or losses. All organic farmers and activists are orphaned today and it will take decades to fill the void you have left.

At the Millet Network of India [MINI] we are doubly orphaned Thalaivar. Many people do not know that you were the co founder of MINI. Years ago at the Bio-Devastation meet at Aurobindo Ashram, New Delhi we had talked to each other

the marginalisation of millets. And when I said we should start a Millet Network, with your beatific smile, you gave your nod. A couple of years later when this thought was realised, you came to Pastapur to inaugurate the network with a few peasant millet farming women of DDS. Could we have, even in our dreams, thought that millet movement would be so widespread in India within a few years? And that it will signal a revolutionary change in India's PDS policy to let millets enter the grains distributed in it? And that the movement started along with you in the tiny village of Pastapur would spread across the continents to West Africa? Behind all these, your blessings and encouraging smile always gave us a quiet confidence that we can do revolutions under your benign gaze.

But the defining moment for me in our long innings together was the moments we spent in a ramshackle Chennai lodge when you had declared a short halt to your tour of Tamil Nadu to fight against GE crops. To see you in your advancing age and frail health take a long tour, moving in an apology of a van, visiting village after village to spread the message of organics and waking people up against GE crops was a moving moment.

The folk sayings you used to spread your knowledge also stay with me for a long time. 'The top is for humans, middle is for animals and the bottom is for the earth,' was a famous saying you used repeatedly to convey that millets are used to feed the humans [top], middle [the stalk] for animals while the roots [bottom] are left for Mother Earth to feed on. And with such sayings you conveyed the spiritual essence of ecological farming. And when you are gone, there will be very few left who can talk with such profoundness, depth and simplicity.

Au revoir organic saint-warrior. Reach God's Abode which you created here on earth in your Vanagam. There in the paradise, your Vanagam will be a permanent abode for nature.

Tearfully,
P V Satheesh (DDS/Hyderabad)

Nammalvar's Passing (30.12.2013)

Nammalvar had chosen to ignore the health issues bothering him and concentrate on spreading the message of organic farming in the last two years. The end came quickly. In the last few months he had been steering the anti-methane gas extraction project in Thanjavur region. An attempt that will destroy the water table permanently. He had been asking the locals to protest vehemently and had been at the fore front of this movement. Around the 25th, he had taken ill and asked for cancellation of all engagements for a week and decided to rest with friends in Thanjavur region. On the 30th of December, he developed chest pain around 7.30 p.m. and passed away within half an hour.

He would have been 75 years old, come April 2014. More than 30 of these years have been spent in walking the length and breadth of the state of Tamilnadu, challenging the prevailing paradigms on agriculture, food, health and economy. A rare thinker who combined his knowledge of Tamil culture, history and scriptures with the hands on knowledge on organic farming, he was the walking encyclopaedia of the Tamil soil. As soon as a farmer said where he came from, Nammalvar would talk about the soil type in the particular region, the crop types, the availability of knowledge, the practitioners in the area... the amount of knowledge he carried on himself made him a delight for every farmer whom he met and a terror for the lazy professors of agriculture universities who hardly stepped beyond their green tents.

A college in Thanjavur opened up its doors and vast ground to have the honour of officially hosting the mourning for Nammalvar, his body was kept for people to pay their respect and homage in the campus and large pandals had been erected for those visiting to sit. They all came, the farmers young and old, scientists, bureaucrats in personal capacities, politicians from parties of every colour of rainbow and some not in it, people divided by loyalties, ideologies, party and caste affiliations (they are synonymous in some cases in Tamilnadu), silently nodding at each other, sitting together in circles and sharing their stories of encounters with Nammalvar.

'We used to only have meetings in Kalyana Mandapams where people were invited to come, early day meetings of his had only farmers attending,' said Ramvel, an amazing organic farmer from Nagapattinam, 'now, his meetings are often held in large maidans and near public places and

there is an instant crowd and thousand easily gather to listen to him, if he could have lived another 10 years, he may have changed the way the state did agriculture completely,' he concluded. He and the entire village of organic farmers had left mid-night on hearing the news and landed straight at the college grounds.

Another young man broke down completely and uncontrollably. He had met Nammazhvar when in his corporate job (and there were a few hundreds like him at the funeral and perhaps a few thousands across Tamilnadu with similar stories), quit the jobs and became an organic farmer. He had named the small organic shop he opened in a village in northern Tamilnadu as 'Nammalvar'. He had also given his son the name of the endearing 'Iyaah' as Nammalvar was called by all. He had been with Nammalvar three days ago and couldn't see a world without the Iyaah around.

'Did you know he knew all the pasurams of the Alvars? He could cite from Tamil scriptures as much as from his deep experience on organic farming,' said Ananthoo, the coordinator of Safe Food Alliance of Tamilnadu and ASHA network. A group of college students randomly collected around the vast ground, suddenly converged into an ordered march carrying a garland, when they stood as an institution to place their wreath and pay homage, only to disperse and share stories of Nammalvar Iyaah visiting their college again.

The policeman on duty was busy reading up the special story on Nammalvar in the morning Tamil daily while those of the 'anti-Methane campaign' were giving fiery speeches on resisting the State move and declaring how they would lay their lives down but would not let the drilling happen. They will not let down Nammalvar's last major fight. The speech ended, some in the crowd clapped their hands in appreciation loudly, joined by the policeman who had just then finished reading the newspaper. He stood up, clapped, looked around feeling embarrassed and left the pandal...it was the Iyaah effect on him. The same effect of encountering a life lived in dedication to the organic farming movement. The effect that will continue to inspire, touch and shape the organic farming movement in Tamilnadu for decades to come.

'Iyaah was casting the seeds of wonderful people and initiatives all this while, now, he will energize us by becoming the fertilizer itself,' said a farmer leader.

True to Indian tradition, a group of women farmers had set-up two counters and were providing healthy herbal tea to all

those who had travelled and come to pay homage to Nammalvar since the morning. Somehow the supply kept coming while the crowd came and went and the women never tired in providing this.

Around lunch time another group of men brought in organic flattened rice (*aval*) in two traditional flavours which was distributed with gentle understanding nods by volunteers to all those who had gathered.

Another group of farmers came with a truck full of saplings of local varieties of trees and plants that were distributed to everyone who cared to ask, and there were many takers.

We had to leave and realized that none of us had eaten much, so, on the way out we stopped by the local small restaurant in Thanjavur. After serving whatever was left over from lunch time, the waiter hovered, 'You all came to the college?' he enquired. 'Yes,' we said and told him that we had come to pay our respect to Nammalvar. One of the younger guys opened his smartphone and showed us a picture of Iyyah. The waiter removed his footwear and touched the phone with much reverence and touched his forehead in respect, 'I saw the poster this morning on the walls, so, sad!' he exclaimed, 'Such noble souls are so few in our times...I had once passed by a mandapam where he was giving a talk, I couldn't stop and listen, but, they had books with his photos in it selling outside. I have one of them in the pooja mandapam of my house now and bow to him everyday!' That left many of us speechless!

Hopping back into our vehicle further down the road and taking a ride back to the city was Sara, an American activist. She had travelled by road most of the day from Chennai, coming to Thanjavur and was getting back within half hour with us. 'That is a lot of travelling for just being here for a short time,' someone commented. 'I had to be here, he healed me the last time I was here. I had a major skin problem and he was the one who healed me!'

Ram Subramaniam wrote this note at OEAI's request after he visited Thanjavur to pay his last respects to Nammalvar's mortal remains.

India's Organic Farming Legend

Colleagues, friends, disciples and follows recount their experiences

OFAI'S TRIBUTE

The Organic Farming Association of India is deeply saddened to hear that Dr G Nammalvar – easily one of the most extraordinary and outstanding pioneers of the organic farming movement in India – passed away on December 30, 2013 near Pudukottai in Tamilnadu.

The Association and its members convey their most heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

Dr Nammalvar was a founder member of the Association and later became its Advisor. He regularly attended meetings and conventions of the Association and large numbers of farmers looked forward to hearing about the techniques of organic farming from his lips.

He was not in the best of health in the past couple of years. He had two choices: either retire and look after his health which most people above the age of 60 are advised to do by their doctors; or carry on relentlessly with his task of promoting organic farming, fighting Monsanto and GM crops, and advising thousands of organic farmers on how they could improve their organic farming practice.

We all know he chose the latter. He was happier that way.

Now we will find it difficult to find another person like him, to do the things he did. Even an army of his followers may not be adequate.

So at this period in the history of the organic farming movement in India, we too have two options.

Either we simply mourn the passing of a truly inspiring leader who lived only to promote sustainable, ecological agriculture, and leave it at that.

Or we renew fullsomely our commitment to ecological agriculture, listening all the while to what Nammalvar wrote and spoke about it. There is little doubt about which option would make Nammalvar happiest.

Claude Alvares
OFAI Secretariat, Goa



Nammalvar set up Vanagam (Heaven on Earth) to bring his organic farming ideas into full play. He worked in the field himself. He was cremated in Vanagam.

Deepak Suchde

We were closet from heart and he presented all our National workshop of NAT-UECO science with love and affection and active supporter of PRAYOG PARIWAR.

I feel he will continue even from beyond his physical life.

Sridar, Thanal

It was with total disbelief that we heard of Nammalvar Ayya leaving us. Me, usha and jayan where together when we heard this and we were dumb stuck,

He was a guiding spirit behind our Save our Rice Campaign, especially his leadership in Tamilnadu. He helped and guided us through many of our own organic farming work, and was such a wonderful educator.

We have lost a sage, that led us not only into organic farming but also into thinking and living in such revolutionary active and simple ways.

Biju Negi

I bow my head to him. Let his going make us more resolute.

But I will not call it a loss, if we have imbibed what he said and did in his life on earth. His words and his legacy will continue to live, which we will continue to follow.

Kavita Karuganti (ASHA)

This is indeed a very great loss for the ecological farming movement in India.

Sangita Sharma (Annadana)

Have such fond memories of Namallwar Aaya especially in Bhopal in 2009. We both walked couple of miles bare feet in the rain to reach our destination. Whilst all travelled in cars, I had the pleasure of his warm and vibrant company. So, memorable and vivid, it feels just like yesterday! We carried dandies (sticks) to avoid falling into puddles, amidst giggles, we spoke our hearts content on topics close to our hearts. We first met in Auroville in 2004 when he visited our Tsunami project, all in praises for rehabilitating 5 villages.

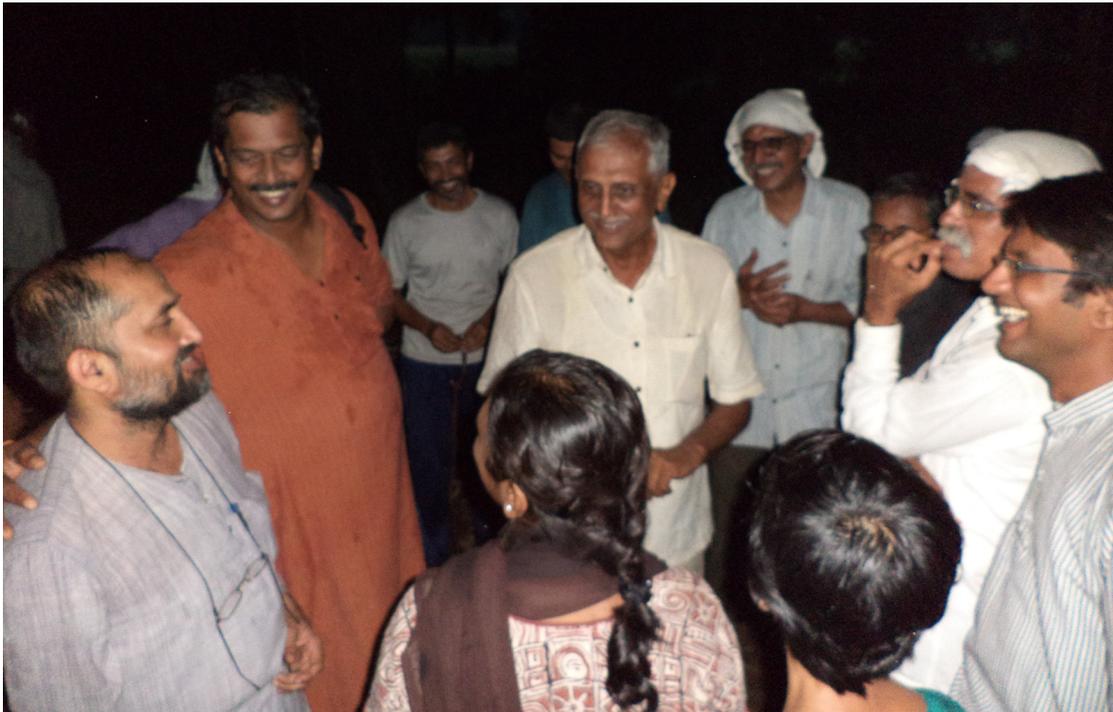
The mornings used to see Ayya doing his pranayaam creating a rapture of aerobic breathing techniques with sounds brought by doing Sitali holding the tongue like a crows beak, Sitkari hissing like a snake to Bhramari humming like a bee and more. Up like a lark, I used to join Ayya in pranayaam and it felt magnificent to be in tune with his divine energies.

Ayya, you remain forever in my heart. I am most fortunate to have shared valuable precious moments with you. Wish to dedicate a beautiful Yogananda quote 'From joy we have come, from joy we live, move and have our being and in that sacred joy, we melt again'.

P Srinivas Vasu (SOIL)

HE WAS A DRONAACHAARYA to many who ventured into FARMING MOVEMENT in South India. I am one of his thousands of students - known him since last two decades. He was a true activist. IT IS A GREAT LOSS to the movement.

New Year Letter to OFAI members from Sarvdaman Patel President, OFAI



Sarvdaman Patel shares a lighter moment with (clock-wise, beginning left): Kapil Shah, Debjee Sarangi, P. Babu, Claude Alvares, Robit Jain, Pompy Ghosh and Niranjana Maru during the Vadodara meeting on OFAI revisioning of goals and strategies

Dear OFAI Members,

Warm greetings for a happy 2014 on behalf of the Organic Farming Association of India, of which you are a valuable member.

I regret that we begin this year without the company of G Nammalvar, a founder of the Association and a life-long Advisor. Nammalwar galvanised farmers into converting into organic wherever he went and whenever he spoke. Now the task on each of us is greater simply because he is no longer there to shoulder it on our behalf. We will remember him fondly and always.

Your association now is more than 10 years old. It has more than 5000 members, most of whom are organic farmers, making it the most unique organic farming organisation in the world.

In addition to individual organic farmers, we also have many of the principal organic farming associations from various states as members, which makes us an even more powerful association.

This year, Ashish Gupta, MC member, has been elected as the Vice-President of the Executive Board of IFOAM-Asia.

Over the last 10 years, we have been busy conducting innumerable training workshops, regional meetings, four biennial conventions and one major South Asia International Conference. In 2014 we hope to organise our 5th biennial convention, this time in Punjab. We want to take the organic farming movement into the very heart of the very first State that was in 1966 encouraged to unleash what

has become a veritable flood of chemical fertilisers and synthetic pesticides (and now GMOs) in this country's fields and environment.

We have brought out the *Living Field* and *Shashya Shamala*, the newsletters of the association in English and Hindi. We have helped set up the PGS system of organic certification. And today OFAI's website (www.ofai.org) is the most sought after source of information for people interested in organic farming and how they can practise it.

Having reached here, however, we need to take stock of our strengths and weaknesses. How do we intensify the drive to get farmers to switch to organic farming methods? How do we make a difference to India's agriculture?

To answer these questions effectively and honestly, we organised a major brainstorming with some of our original and leading OFAI members at Vadodara in August 2013 on my own farm near Anand in Gujarat. The sole purpose of the meeting was to find ways and means to push the association's work further and to give it fresh vision and dynamism. A lot happened at the meeting which will hopefully reach you shortly through the pages of the *Living Field* and *Shashya Shamala*.

Doubtless many of you, being OFAI members, have participated in one or the other of these meetings or workshops. In fact, nothing of what has been achieved so far could have been done without the active support of the association's members. However, as the Vadodara meeting

concluded, we need to open up, bring in more people, reach out to several others and create a larger network of organic farming individuals, organisations and communities.

More important, we need to take the initiative ourselves to organise more training and awareness meetings and more interactions between organic farmers and urban consumers in the form of green haats and markets and reduce our collective dependence on a centralised secretariat. No doubt, organic farmers on their own cannot take up these initiatives. Those who are the direct beneficiaries of organic food, the consumers, must take the lead in these exchanges.

For these reasons, I am writing this letter to you (and your organisation) to seek your ideas on how we can take this association forward and how you would like to associate more actively in the carrying out of its principal objective -- which is nothing less than full conversion of India's agriculture to organic farming.

Please therefore do write to me or to the Central Secretariat giving us suggestions, programmes and activities which you feel would benefit the association and organic farmers. We are also open to people telling us how they can strengthen their own association in their own area or state and how OFAI can assist.

All these suggestions will naturally be placed before the Managing Committee at its next meeting early next year.

Please therefore write/email or phone us as suggested. I am grateful for any suggestions that we receive. They will be considered in all seriousness.

With best wishes,

Sarvdaman Patel
President

OFAI'S 10 YEARS

By P. Babu and Dr Bharatendu Prakash

OFAI was formally launched on 27th July, 2003. However, the discussions to set up an organization of organic farmers began six months earlier. A two day workshop of organic farmers was held on 8th and 9th March 2003.

According to the press note issued after the meeting, the discussions centered around how to assist small and marginal farmers to market their produce so as to meet the growing demand for organic food within the country's domestic market, in contrast to increasing state support given to the export market. The participants also discussed alternatives such as quality assurance schemes, eco-labeling and the need for an operating manual for organic farmers.

At the end of the meeting it was decided to set up a national apex body, federating organic farming movements, farmers groups and associations from the principal organic farming states in the country and further to establish a country wide scheme to certify the organic produce originating from organic farms.

In other words, the farmers who had gathered at the workshop wanted to provide a parallel scheme for organic farmers to sell their produce in the local or internal market. It was also the first concerted effort towards a farmers'-led certification scheme, although details like the organizational form, standards to be adopted, how to implement the scheme, etc., still remained to be formulated.

At the second consultation – held on 26th and 27th July 2003 in Bangalore – the assembled group went into the details of the Certification Scheme, besides discussing other matters including the setting up of OFAI. The invitation letter in fact stated: “Most organic farmers feel that the time has come for the formation of an all-India association that will not only represent the interests of growing number of organic farmers but also work on policy issues, creation of markets for organic produce, certification of genuine organic farms, preparation of training manuals, etc.”

A press release issued at the end of the July meeting shows that the group decided to pursue these objectives. The press release states that “organic farmers, under the banner of OFAI, have come together to market their poison free food in a more systematic way to consumers.” It asserts that “OFAI is concerned with local markets and will concentrate its energies and focus on providing healthy food to Indian consumers.”

It also refers to other aspects like membership drives, farm visits, usage of labels and OFAI's decision to offer an alternate certification scheme. It records the decision that OFAI will be run by a national steering committee comprised at first of organic farmers.

It informs that major policy issues will be decided by farmers, who will maintain over all supervision of the organization. It also mentions accrediting NGOs who are involved over the past decade in food production along organic farming lines, for

providing scientific and technical inputs, training and study tours, etc. The press release concludes by asserting the need to protect indigenous varieties of seeds and argues for subsidies for organic farmers for all the eco-system services they provide.

These few documents capture the dominant trends and engagements of OFAI then. Hence, it could clearly be said that most of the deliberations after the formation of OFAI centered around how to install alternate scheme/s to guarantee the organic produce and how to develop markets for sale of the organic produce.

At the outset, it must be stated that the minutes, reports and memos pertaining to OFAI's MC and NSC meetings show that all statutory requirements have been complied with. There has also been regular communication with members through circulation of the minutes of the meetings. All documentation, notwithstanding some pending work with regard to memberships, is largely updated. In other words, the formalities associated with running an NGO are in order.

However if we move on to programs and issues then one can't escape the reality that the deliberations and the discussions at NSC/MC meetings hardly went beyond the formal agenda. OFAI has not succeeded in inspiring new ideas and action plans. There is a tendency to stick to business at any cost. In-depth discussions on issues and strategic planning to pursue these issues have not taken place either in the MC or the NSC meetings. Apart from the formal requirements to hold meetings, the group has not met even once to deliberate on any of the contemporary issues affecting organic farming either at an all-India level or even region-wise.

In the meanwhile, more than any other sector, agriculture is in deep crisis.

Organic farming is obviously connected to the external environment and the successful stewardship of nature's resources goes a long way towards attaining economic and social success in organic farming. However, the resources are traded away and acute collapse of the farming system is observed all around.

The continuing suicides of farmers in all categories, indebtedness, increasing land alienation, GMOs, changes in legal regime with regard to seed, new regulations, politics of food production and increasing concentration in corporate hands, collapse of the commons, increasing instability due



During the Vadodara meeting, participants were taken around the Bhaikaka Farms. Here they are seen at the site of the new Gurukul for organic farming being set up by Sarvdaman

to water stress, climate variability, encouragement of millets, restructuring of PDS, ecological pricing of agricultural produce, markets and social tension, etc., to mention few of the challenges that are threatening the very survival and sustainability of agriculture.

OFAI cannot be oblivious to these developments. Organic farming should be intrinsically rooted in regeneration of rural economy and OFAI should seize these developments and start working on the approach required for such an intervention. We therefore need to be clear about what are the issues and areas where OFAI should initiate action or collaborate with other fraternal organizations.

OFAI's activities can be briefly summarized as follows:

Preparing the Organic Standards Manual.

Documentation of organic farming practices. The documentation centre of OFAI organizes and disseminates necessary technical information to thousands of farmers through the interactive website, newsletters and publications in different languages. Documentation of farmers' practices in Marathi language has been done.

Development of a Organic Labeling Scheme (OLS) and a Certification Scheme (PGS). The work of preparing the labeling scheme and certification scheme was carried out by some NSC members with support from a consultant.

Inviting pioneering individuals and institutions working in organic farming to be associated with OFAI in some capacity or other.

Organising training programs to strengthen the technical competency of farmers.

OFAI has organized training programs in UP and MP and MOFF has reworked the training curriculum to cater to the changing times. In UP KisanVignan Kendra organized three training cum discussion and one training program in MP. At least two thousand small farmers and OFAI members across India get trainings in "Best Practices" in organic farming for improvement of yields and of income through processing and marketing.

Facilitating the marketing of organic produce. It was decided to train 25 inspectors, certify 25 farms and establish 4 green shops in the metropolitan cities.

Organising the Biennial convention.

Preparation of an organic farming policy in MP and some of the northern states.

Setting up of PGS. The organic marketing system (PGS) is recognized by the Indian Government and in place all over India. It is used by around 15,000 organic small farmers.

Initiating an anti-GMO campaign.

OFAI sent a circular urging members to "initiate campaign on such issues including monitoring and resisting of entry of GE crops in to their respective regions." A GMO cell was set up, co-ordinated by Ram. (2005/6). The focus was essentially to generate literature and create awareness. The campaign did do some work but did not gather momentum.

Publishing *The Living Field* – a newsletter for circulation among members. The North India office published *Shashiya Shamala* in Hindi.

Setting up the North India secretariat to take forward the activities in northern part of the country.

Preparation of a Rural curriculum

Research on Soil Organic Carbon

Interaction with IFOAM and INOFO

Research work along with ASHA on comparative study on the productivity of organic and chemicals farms

A consolidated project report covering the period ending 2012 has carried out a SWOT analysis wherein it has categorized the work of OFAI into three specific areas: Institution Building, Association related activities and Outreach programme.

OFAI's Achievements: Landmarks and Milestones

OFAI could rightly claim many achievements. It is the first and foremost network of organic farmers and promoters of organic farming in the country. OFAI has been consistently organizing training programs and placing in public domain a series of generic organic farming practices. Innumerable training programs were held on different aspects of organic farming. Although it is difficult to gauge the impact of OFAI, and however limited its reach might be, given the continental size of the country, we are certain that it has kept alive the subject of organic farming.

The biennial conventions and South Asia Conference (SAC) by emphasizing different themes like seeds, climate change, and sustainable practices have contributed significantly to spread the message and trigger the imagination among many people. As mentioned earlier, the impact will take some time to express itself.

The establishment of PGS is seminal contribution of OFAI which – as long as alternative farming exists – will be eminently used by farmers, especially small farmers.

OFAI has spent considerable time and resources to develop the Organic Labelling Scheme (OLS) and standards and certification scheme. It is only after OFAI initiated work on these lines that the farmers started expressing themselves. The alternative knowledge and experiential learning received a further push though even OFAI is not realizing it.

OFAI has encouraged documentations of organic farming practices in regional languages apart from documenting it in English. This we believe is a significant contribution towards creation of knowledge and empowers alternative knowledge systems.

Our organisational structure is largely top-down. Invariably most of the communication and initiation comes from the CS and the state units just react to them, if at all. In fact, state units hardly respond to any mail \ communications from the CS. This has led to several misunderstandings. Some believe that OFAI is too centralized



Former OFAI President, D D Baramagoudra; Bernard (Auroville), Claude Alvares and Sultan Ismail were part of the Vadodara discussions on OFAI's revisioning



Kapil Shah, OFAI's new secretary, addresses the group assembled to discuss OFAI's strengths and weaknesses over the years and to propose future action plans

and the states feel left out. There were occasions when state secretariats were never taken into confidence on some issues, leading to undermining of their role. On the other side of the spectrum, it is a fact that most of the state units do not respond to the requests and concerns of CS. This is not a question of right or wrong but there is some deeper problem: either our choice of organizational structure is wrong or the wave length between CS and state units is missing. The confusion regarding the role and functions of state secretariats is central to the dissatisfaction of the state units and some of them moving out of the organization.

Members have also expressed that OFAI must take a clear stand on a variety of issues facing the farmers' community and that OFAI must intervene on farmers' issues, wherever possible. However we have not been able find a mechanism by which OFAI can act on behalf of the farmers.

There are many issues where we did not respond adequately. For example, though OFAI initiated many activities around GMOs, seeds, etc., it could not sustain them. We never tried to examine the debt and suicide issues of the farmers in any sustained manner. The BRAI bill is in parliament and many are fighting it and our response is very limited. OFAI did not explore the possibilities of organizing campaigns even in the form of workshops and seminars on different aspects of organic farming, safe food, farmers' suicides, budgetary allocations and related issues.

Its capability to initiate sustained action on field needs to be looked in to. Given the fact that OFAI was the first collective of organic farmers in the country, such intervention would have had considerable impact and this should be considered as an opportunity lost.

There are many such occasions where the leadership has faltered. The search for people with perfect qualities is only in our imagination and it is important OFAI takes risks and takes a position on issues rather than adopt a please-all approach. The organizational structure that is set up is suitable for a certain set of activities and not capable of addressing other emerging issues on ongoing basis. We truly believe that this is not because of somebody's lack of interest or otherwise but is more of an organizational issue. Given the realistic appraisal of what we have done, what we are capable of doing and what we would like to do, will naturally be of great significance. We need to have a working clarity on these issues before we take up financial requirements, etc.

In a country the size of a continent, having various categories of farmers, it goes without saying that we need an all-inclusive approach but with a focus on resource-deprived communities. There are also many paths one can adopt and many ways of looking at the agrarian crisis and emerging alternatives. A conscious recognition of different concerns and appreciation of OFAI as a rainbow alliance will go a long way in creating a different and more congenial atmosphere.

Suggestions for the Future

If we go through the documents of the organization it is obvious that OFAI is definitely interested in working on policy issues and wants to bring about certain fundamental changes in the agrarian scenario. But OFAI is not in a position to transform this concern into tangible action. We need to consider how to do this.

OFAI has succeeded in launching the PGS system and making it a realistic option for the farming community, especially small

farmers. We need to sort out some of the issues around it and strengthen the system.

OFAI is successfully able to organize biennial conventions and certain types of workshops on organic farming, reinforced with documentation. Notwithstanding the regional variations, OFAI has successfully pooled its resources and has been able to broadly put across a set of farmer-led organic practices in the public domain. Unfortunately this contribution is not acknowledged. We need to examine how this can be done.

We need to consider whether the unevenness of our movement necessitates different approaches. We are neither temperamentally nor by training into 'project mode' but are forced to coordinate a project. This is often reflected in myriad ways – innocuous looking statements regarding membership and the boredom associated with files, etc. This observation is based on the inputs from members who stand for a larger role than the project mode enables. At the same time we recognize the importance of 'project mode' in certain areas like PGS, training, certain type of documentation, etc.

On the other side is the dynamism of advocacy, lobbying, campaigning and marketing. These create the dynamism of the movement which transcends all these aspects and incorporates all the above dimensions in different ways.

Majority of the members are neither into project mode nor into movement background. They are basically organic farmers and friends of farmers. The challenge of OFAI leadership is to evolve an organizational structure which combines both the 'project mode' and 'dynamism of movement'. This is easier said than done. We are not privileging one against the other. Alternately, the leadership should choose and make its stand clear as to which mode it prefers to function, at least for some time.

Lastly, we also have to consider the financial aspect. Apart from donors, what are the sources of raising resources for the organization? This needs to be clearly thought out and innovative mechanisms need to be put in place. Both organizational structures and financial issues are relevant to the programs we are going to initiate.

Conclusions

After scanning through many of the internal documents and being ourselves participants in most of the programmes in some form or other, we conclude with following observations:

It is obvious that hundreds of wonderful organic practitioners are part of OFAI and some of them are re-

sponsible for running the organization in their respective states. OFAI is the only organization which emphasises on farmers' knowledge, expertise and initiatives in the country.

OFAI has extensive documentation of organic practices in English and other Indian languages like Hindi, Gujarati, and Kannada. The website provides useful information on organic farming.

OFAI has successfully organised four biennial conferences demonstrating that it is one of the defenders of organic farmers, farming and its ethos. The conferences have contributed to defend the small farmers and to keep farming in the public domain.

OFAI was instrumental in installing a PGS system. OFAI took initiatives in formulating an OLS and PGS scheme for organic certification and facilitated the formation of the PGS Organic Council (where it has been consistently voted to the Secretary's position). This is a very significant contribution from OFAI for the small and very small farmers and also towards reclaiming spaces for farmers.

OFAI has taken initiatives to launch a campaign against GMOs. OFAI is deeply concerned with indigenous seeds and seed sovereignty, has organised conferences, meetings, etc., and has recently taken a critical position on the BRAI Bill. Similarly, OFAI is interested in action-research. A study of micro-faunal behaviour and populations in organic v/s inorganic farms is also completed. However the initiatives against GMOs, and for indigenous seeds did not develop as a campaign as expected, nor has it been able to position its research studies for campaigns or place them on a larger canvas.

In short, while OFAI did reasonably well in organizing conferences, training programs, documentation, PGS and creating some pressure in formulating certain policies in certain states, it did not do well in campaign and action-related issues. This needs to be remedied.

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Editor: Claude Alvares

OFAI Driving Seat

Kapil Shah, Secretary, and **Claude Alvares** at Secretariat will continue to be overall responsible for implementing decisions of the MC and NSC. This was decided at Vadodara.

P. Babu will take charge of formulating and drafting policy issues for the association. He will seek the assistance of others.

Organic farming awareness programmes of the association will be under the overall supervision and control of **Niranjana Maru** from Wardha.

Technical training and HRD programme design would be with **Ashok Bang**.

Raghava (Treasurer, OFAI) will handle certification issues.

Shamika Mone will be in charge of research issues affecting the organic farming movement in the country.

Relations with other NGOs and international groups will be the responsibility of **Ashish Gupta**.

Building the organisation would be the preoccupation of **Kapil Shah, Debjeeet and Diliprao Baradkar Deshmukh**.

More information on implementation of the above measures will be featured in the coming issue of *Living Field*, as three pages of this newsletter had to be redesigned at the last minute due to the demise of Nammalvar in Tamilnadu.

Goa's Organic Farming Priest Inacio Almeida Dies

Within two days of the departure of Nammalvar from this planet, on January 1, 2014, Fr Inacio Almeida, another influential and much loved organic farmer-priest, from Goa also decided to return to the bosom of Mother Earth.

Fr Almeida was in fact often referred to as 'Dharti Mata' by his numerous followers and admirers.

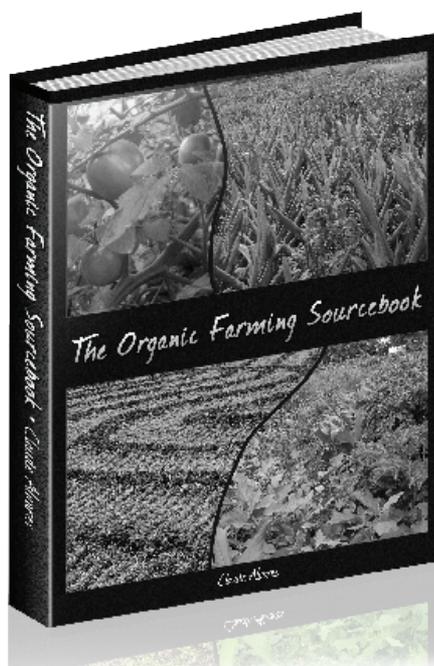
Words cannot describe the enormous dynamism and social commitment of this incredible priest. He did for organic culture in Goa what Nammalvar did for his state of Tamilnadu.

A Goa State awardee for farming, Fr Almeida, was actively working at the Bhirondem farm of the Pilar fathers at Sattari, Goa. He was most sought after by the people for his 'healing touch' with regard to medicinal properties of trees. He played a pivotal role in encouraging organic farming and also in taking nature and farming based education to the schools and bringing children closer to agriculture.

A few months back he was seen encouraging school children who had taken up SRI cultivation of paddy at Sangolda. Of late he had embarked on promoting the Paradise Tree commonly called as Lakshmi Taru. More details on him can be found in the pages of the *Organic Farming Sourcebook*.

Members of Goa's organic farming community are at a loss. They will sorely miss him.

New Organic Farming Sourcebook (5th edition)



The Organic Farming Sourcebook is written and edited by Claude Alvares with the assistance of Nyla Coelho. The book contains almost everything connected with organic farming in India, including a vast directory of organic farmers. Packed with pictures, the book now includes new chapters on GM seeds, farm animals, especially indigenous cows, and a comprehensive list of green or organic stores from all the different states.

Payment by DD only, drawn in favour of "Other India Bookstore," payable at Mapusa 403507 Goa.

Pp. 460 Rs.500 (post and packing free)

For your copy call 0832-2255913 or email: myofai@gmail.com or simply write a postcard to:

OFAI Central Secretariat, G-8 St Britto's Apts., Feira Alta, Mapusa 403507 Goa.