

Gujarat cardiologist's heart beats for organic farming

A practising cardiologist for 25 years, Dinesh Patel spends long hours cultivating grain, fruit and plants in his organic farm on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, Gujarat's principal city.

'We have a strong 'I' as our enemy. And with a little learning, we get stuck with that 'I' and feel separate from other creations of nature,' said Patel, who devotes most of his energy to his 150-acre Sardar Patel farm in Kathvada village, about 50 km from Ahmedabad.

'The day we realise we are nature, our view of life changes,' Patel told IANS during a tour of his farm.

Patel's company Sardar Farm Organic Products is all about promoting organic products, as he believes it not only detoxifies the soil but also helps raise production with a minimum investment in inputs.

'Our produce is in demand and we send it to many parts of India like Mumbai, Goa and Bangalore.'

Sheer love for nature and the natural way of things prompted the doctor to start his farm almost simultaneously with his medical practice.

'We are at present certified producers of wheat, paddy, bajra, maize, pulses, aniseed and cash crops like cotton and castor. Around 35 acres of our farm comprises orchards of sapota, mango, gooseberry and lime.'

There are also thousands of cactus plants brought in from many parts of the world. One cactus is cement grey in appearance and looks almost rock solid. Another is like a bunch of tennis balls grouped together with blooming flowers.

So does he practise as a heart specialist?

'I am a medical consultant with a masters in medicine and 25 years of practice, with special interest in cardiology,' is how Patel describes himself. 'I go to my clinic in Naroda in the morning. Otherwise I am with nature.'

On Sunday mornings, he turns up at his farm at 6 a.m. And he has stopped going to the clinic in the evenings. He is never seen without his pouch that has tools to cut and clean his plants.

His farm has a gobar (cowdung) gas plant, mainly used as cooking gas in his house and that of his relatives. 'No farm is complete without cattle,' he says, adding 'when gobar is totally free, why not use it?'

His farm has cycads in 5,000 varieties. Pointing to a cycad plant, the doctor says: 'It is 150 years old.'

He shows 40 varieties of bougainvilleas, 25 varieties of champa flowers with distinct fragrances, and assorted date palms, some of them having leaves like sharpened arrows.

The doctor even subjects some of his plants to music therapy. 'Music for the plants helps them grow'.

Near a bill borgia, a conch-shaped pink flowering plant, rests a tall coconut tree with its leaves spread like an umbrella, filtering rays of noon sun. He shows tiny pineapples (ornamental ones), which taste like the fruit but are rarely eaten because of their small size.

He then points to a short, massive cycad and opens its petals to show egg-sized seeds. 'There are 250-500 seeds in it and it takes 15 years for a cycad plant to flower,' Dinesh says.

'I have 16 female plants. I bought male plant pollens from Africa and pollinated these female plants. The seeds will be in the greenhouse so they can develop into baby plants which are 'very expensive' and very difficult to grow.'

What strikes a visitor, amid the plants and trees, is the infinite number of earthenware in the shape of tortoises, elephants, fish and other animals that add to the farm's aesthetic beauty.

Wooden chimes dot the place. 'When the wind and rain come, the chimes bring out perfect harmony,' he says.

'In a city, negative thoughts and vibrations emanate from cement and concrete walls. Trees, birds - over 60 species are found in the farm - and wind mean positive energies.'

'You need to listen to Mother Nature. I preach the law of giving. The more you give, the more you get back.'

As the doctor moves around, there is ample evidence of this. A mixture of wheat husk and fallen dry leaves has been used as food for plants and organisms in the soil.

'I would like to make this place an eco-tourism destination,' Patel says as he shows a baby sun rose and an array of fully-grown bamboo plants.

(V.N. Balakrishna can be contacted at vnbalakrishna@gmail.com)

V.N. Balakrishna (© IANS / India eNews)