

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART

PROVINCE OF INDIA



NEWS FROM THE BHOKAR COMMUNITY

>>> **EXPERIENCE WITH THE DRUM STICK TREE: NATURE'S MULTI-VITAMIN**

In the midst of an enlightening workshop on biodiversity at Ashankur, Bhokar, a profound idea sprouted within me. I proposed the distribution of medicinal plants, particularly the Drumstick tree, among the remedial class children. The response from the resource person was nothing short of exhilarating, affirming the significance of such a venture.



Swiftly, we gathered seeds, procured black plastic bags for cultivating the saplings, and commenced planting. The Drumstick tree,



known for its expeditious growth and minimal maintenance requirements, flourished under the collaborative efforts of both staff and non-staff members. Within a month, we not only fulfilled our commitment to the remedial class children but also extended our benevolent reach to neighboring schools and the self-help group women. Prior to the distribution, a comprehensive study of the Drumstick tree's benefits was undertaken. Subsequent personal observations validated its status as a nature's multi-vitamin provider with

remarkable medicinal properties. Inspired by the positive outcomes, I took it upon



myself to propagate this botanical marvel. Today, within the Ashankur campus there are a number of Drumstick trees that stand testament to our commitment.



While initially hesitant due to the prevalent abundance of the plant in households, I realized the widespread ignorance regarding the nutritional potential of its leaves, flowers and fruit. Beyond culinary applications, the leaves proved invaluable for preparing nutritional medicines, the flowers exhibited medicinal efficacy, and the fruit emerged as a rich source



of calcium. Each facet of the Drumstick tree serves diverse nutritional and medicinal purposes. Roots, often employed in pesticides, were recognized as a primary plant part. Expert opinions underscored the myriad benefits of drumsticks, especially its efficacy in addressing malnutrition, boosting immunity through Vitamin C, acting as antioxidants, providing iron, aiding in diabetes management, regulating cholesterol, controlling body weight, promoting hair health, and expediting healing.



In awe of this divine gift, I perceive the Drumstick tree as a blessing, a privilege bestowed upon us by the Creator. Amid the vast array of living beings meticulously designed by God, it becomes our sacred duty to acknowledge and nurture these creations. Alas, many of us traverse through life oblivious of



the purposes of trees like the Drumstick, hidden in corners with their true over-all value overshadowed by its fruit. As we progress, let us refocus on God's natural bounty, recognizing this tree, which provides multi-vitamins, bestowed upon us, and in doing so find healing for ourselves and our world. Thank you

Sr. Sabita Narzary CCR (Congregation of Carmel Religious)

➤➤➤ WALKING WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

“To be presence and to be with people” it is one of the ways to make our presence meaningful by assuming a servant leadership in all our interactions. Our presence to one another can be authentic and manifest God’s presence through real relationship that is “giving of self in love”.



We need to interact with people especially with women of different communities by our lives in ministry. This helps us to enhance our capacity to build healthy relationships. There is a need for human formation in an individual's life that requires us to take out negativity from different communities.

I had gone to Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth - Rahuri for an exposure trip with our self help group women. There were women from different communities and faiths, i.e. Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Dalit and Maratha. We travelled together and visited different departments of that institution – first we went to the agricultural information centre to get information about different crops, then we went to the bakery, food processing centre, seed storage, animal husbandry, fruits' nursery, medicine plants place, dairy and vermin-compost manufacture centre and we had lunch together. We shared food with each other, whatever one brought from home. It was like sharing love and accepting appreciation. We all enjoyed the experience, especially



I enjoyed it.

According to me, the aim of this trip was to develop one's capacity to relate in an edifying manner and to accept others. I felt happy to be with women, even though I was not able to communicate with them, because I do not know the Marathi language and some women do not understand Hindi. It was difficult, but yet I was happy to see all women coming together, talking, asking questions, laughing in freedom and going to learn something new outside of their own world (i.e. their homes).

I remembered our Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne, who went to America to serve His people. She also did not know the language of that place and she could not communicate with people. We all know that she did not communicate with their language but she communicated with the language of her heart that is through love and prayer. I also felt the same. I could not communicate with them. I was just with them and smiling, whenever I had to say or give any answer then I had to speak in Hindi.

It was a great time spent with beautiful people of God, who loves each and every individual in this world. I thank God for giving me an opportunity to know Him deeply and more closely by experiencing His love and presence through women of different communities.

Sr. Anita Hamsoy rscj



GOD'S LOVE IS ABUNDANT

Three layers of crops are like abundance of God's love, peace, joy and happiness in my life. The crops were grown together and each had a different maturation time. They had different water requirements. One tall and the others short were grown together. The crop yield increased. The soil was utilized properly. We harvested more than one crop at the same time. It helped in maintaining a balance of soil nutrients.

I was using my hands in the soil and it has been an enjoyable, gratifying and humbling experience for me. When we learn about the abundance of God's blessings in our daily lives in nature is like getting



or receiving a new life as a free gift from our Heavenly Father.

This year, I got the opportunity to work in the farm and we took initiative to do the three layers farming. We planted watermelon, chilies and papayas with the help of Mr. Atul Abuj, the farm supervisor, and the staff of Ashankur. We worked together as one family. It was a new and different experience for me. My heart was filled with joy and happiness.



We prepared the soil, mixed manure and leveled the ground and put in drip irrigation and after that we put bed mulching paper. First, we planted watermelon saplings, after ten days chilies and then after 15 days papayas were planted. On the side we planted marigold flowers for protection from insects. When these crops were blooming in the field, I felt so happy and proud and said “God is good. It is His blessings for us”. Watermelons grew well, but for chilies and papayas, there was not enough water in the well to water them. I was

worried; I did not know what to do. For almost one and half months we did not have enough water in the well to water them. Our well and bore-well had dried up. I felt very sad and hopeless. Then suddenly we got the good news that we are getting canal water. I was so happy that I couldn't express my joy. After getting water, the plants began blooming and crops were looking very green and beautiful. After some time again there was water problem, all the crops were drying. We did not know what to do again. Then we tried to drill sideways bore-well in the well. It was very risky and challenging, because people were getting scared to go down and dig in the well. At last, one person agreed and he brought his friends and they started drilling the bore-well and by the grace of God we got enough of water for the crops. After the hard work when I saw the plants growing, I was happy to see the crops.

I received more than what I had expected. It was a drop in the ocean of God's generosity, abundance, love, care and concern for all who are staying here in Ashankur. When I look back, I feel gratitude to God and people who have helped and supported me. Experiences of planting three layers of crops, not only gave me plenty of fruits but also changed my life, healed me to grow, removed darkness from my heart, body and mind too. At the time of difficulties, I felt God's guiding hands. I felt that He is leading me, comforting and blessing me to live a new life. I believe in God, I surrender everything in His hands and He gives me strength to face problems and challenges in my life. This three layers plantation taught me, how to care for the land and for myself. God's love is always with me that I must feel it constantly. I experience the sense of unity with our mother earth, of which we all are part of it, with my body.

Ms Rita D'Souza (Volunteer)

➤➤➤ BIODIVERSITY IS SOUL FOR LIFE, EACH LIFE IS IMPORTANT TO IT



I would like share about the activities we have done to create awareness among women and children to save biodiversity. Pope Francis says “it is our profound

conviction that the future of human family depends also on how we safeguard the gift of creation that our Creator has entrusted to us". So let's take care of our common home.

We had two workshops for our self help group women and children on mapping the biodiversity in their villages. The agenda of the workshop was: a) Relevance of health, nutrition, livelihood and education to development of core competence of women in biodiversity assessment and consequently to empower them to engage meaningfully in land use decisions and its relevance for overall well being; b) Appreciation of ecosystems services and its relevance for an alternative planning process; c) Development of a perspective on biodiversity based on the assessment of the



biodiversity at Ashankur campus and its relevance for health and overall wellbeing.

The meeting began with a prayer and inspirational songs sung by the women. 230 women from 10 villages and 125 children from two schools and children from nearby participated in the meeting. For children, introducing the programme to them it can be likened to the Mahabharat in modern times – the struggle for sustainable development

and a clean environment for children is the new need of the hour. The children were told to get into the subject of environment and ecology. Children were divided into eight groups to express their views on different topics. The women were divided into 10 groups. Before breaking into groups, the content of the posters relating to invasive species and useful species were read out by the women as a few of the women were illiterate. The

exercise was undertaken to understand how literate women could help the groups to prepare the documentation needed to report on the understanding developed by them. One of the woman said that if the nature is properly protected and understood it is possible to survive without money as had been the case before money was invented.



Our health is directly correlated with the environment that we are living in. This environment, which is physical, mental and also spiritual, is created collectively by human beings in their individual capacities. As we are aware, destruction of the environment is at its peak and its negative impact on health is quite visible in pandemics like COVID-19 at the global level, and at the local level it is reflected in the reduced quality of available food and oxygen. Nature and biodiversity are beneficial to our health, well being and quality of life. People feel better in nature, interact more positively and recover fast.



It was a great joy to see the women in group doing mapping and identifying all the medicinal plants and herbs available in their villages and also identifying traditional practices in treating illnesses with locally available plants and herbs. They realized that the biodiversity is very important to human health, safety, business and life. But it is declining rapidly. We must protect our natural ecosystems. So we collected seeds of different plants and herbs and prepared a nursery. We distributed 166 drumstick, 20 aloe vera, 18 sagarota and 4 neem saplings to the self help group women and remedial

class children. The women were taken for an exposure trip to the medicinal botanical garden. We need to conserve and breed different varieties of crops that are more resistant to diseases and climate change. This year, we encouraged 20 women to cultivate millet (bazari) which is the traditional food for the people of Maharashtra. Invasive species were removed from the Ashankur farm.

We also had a bee keeping training programme for women. Bees are important to preserving biodiversity. But they are under attack from chemicals and pesticides. The women were told to save the bees by planting nectar-producing wildflowers in their backyards, or even building bee boxes for local bees to call home. A field had been prepared which had yellow flowers to attract the bees. Also care had been taken to provide water in pots for the bees to drink. The need for the trees to host the bees was also stressed. We learned that every species has a specific role in an ecosystem. The ecosystem supports the services without which we cannot survive. At the end I say ‘protect nature, respect biodiversity and nourish all of life’.



Sr. Prisca Tirkey rscj