Universal Human Values with Farmers

Shramik Bharti: Promoting natural farming practice in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, India

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Shramik Bharti, is an organization that has been actively promoting "Avartansheel Kheti," a natural cyclical farming practice rooted in Madhyasth Darshan philosophy, among small and marginal farmers in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Despite financial incentives to move to natural farming practices, many farmers reverted to chemical farming, indicating a need for a deeper, more holistic approach.

BACKGROUND

Natural farming, as promoted by Shramik Bharti, faced challenges as financial motivation alone was insufficient. To address this, Shramik Bharti engaged 200 farmers in Uttar Pradesh in a knowledge system called Universal Human Values (UHV), based on Madhyasth Darshan. This ‘Co-existential Philosophy’ is an insight into reality and human nature. 'Darshan' in the Sanskrit language means to "see", or have a vision of reality as-it-is. This comprehensive knowledge system (darsana) examines and provides clarity in all dimensions of human life: the experiential, rational, emotional and occupational. This understanding further contributes in living with care, love, generosity, kindness and benevolence.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The project aimed to instill a holistic perspective towards life, nature, and farming among the participants through 3 objectives:

1. Develop a holistic perspective towards life and profession, happiness, and prosperity based on a correct understanding of human reality and existence.
2. Foster the competence to understand and participate in the harmony of nature/existence.
3. Cultivate the ability to conceptualize a humane society characterized by an undivided society and universal human order.

To achieve these objectives, a series of six workshops (each lasting five days) and five follow-up sessions (each lasting two days) were conducted. These workshops involved self-investigation and self-exploration, allowing farmers to internalize UHV principles through natural acceptance and experiential validation.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

There was a process of self-investigation and self-exploration. Whatever is found as truth or reality was stated as a proposal and the participants were facilitated to verify it in their own right, based on their Natural Acceptance and subsequent Experiential Validation—the whole existence was the lab and every activity was a source of reflection. These images (see figure 1 and 2) capture the words farmers used to describe their values and priorities before and after their participation in the workshops. They are now able to see that they can achieve happiness and prosperity, in continuity by developing harmony with self, family, society and nature.

Before attending the program, some believed that happiness was about accomplishments and possessions, while others connected it with physical facilities and external factors.
However, after the program, they now see happiness as living in harmony with family, society, and nature. The focus shifted to understanding and nurturing relationships, and not just accumulating material things.
The participating farmers are members of Farmer Producer Organizations formed in their districts by Shramik Bharti. They realised that after attending the Programme their behaviour towards other members has become more compassionate and trustworthy. They now feel to cooperate with others, in contrary to competition.

Some of the farmers clearly stated that they were mainly doing chemical farming and experimenting with natural farming on a small piece of land, before attending programme on Universal Human Values. But after attending UHV workshops, they recognize the value of natural farming for self, family, society and nature. The change in participants' understanding about nature and farming practices is illustrated in Figure 2, where they emphasized and committed to adopt natural farming for production of safe and nutritious food for everyone and enrichment and protection of Mother Earth.

Overall, UHV education has changed farmers' existing mindsets, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and practices that were largely based on assumptions. The programme brought a shift from self-centered views to a holistic understanding of life. This has led to a fostering of self-awareness and personal growth. In particular, participants embraced the idea of mutual enrichment and harmonious co-existence with nature. This understanding will strengthen farmers' commitment towards natural farming, thus ensuring a greater longevity in the shift to sustainable food production.

*Figure 1: Words describing "**goal of life**" pre and post UHV Workshops*

*Figure 2: Words describing "**happiness**" pre and post UHV Workshops.*

LEARNINGS

The UHV workshops significantly altered the participants' mindsets, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, leading to a holistic understanding of life. The experiential learning approach proved effective in fostering self-awareness and personal growth, promoting a commitment to sustainable farming practices. This model holds potential for wider application across different farming communities, with the need for continuous and intensive mentoring to support ongoing learning and practice.

Challenges included accommodating farmers' busy schedules and adverse weather conditions, which were mitigated by adjusting the workshop schedule. Overall, the initiative demonstrated that integrating UHV into farming practices can lead to sustainable and fulfilling agricultural practices.