

# A Secured Life

Photo stories of natural farming adoption in India



Grady Walker and Henny Osbahr



# A Secured Life

Photo stories of natural farming adoption in India

*Grady Walker and Henny Osbahr*  
© 2024



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution  
4.0 International License DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.11222234  
University of Reading





# Foreword

This book is a collection of photographs, or image responses, taken by women farmers in Andhra Pradesh, India, and the accompanying descriptions they wrote for each photo. We, the research team from the University of Reading in the United Kingdom, have produced this book as a way of returning these images to the farmer groups that helped us with our research, and to share their stories of natural farming adoption with a broader audience.

We present a selection of photos drawn from hundreds of images captured with digital cameras by women farmers in two rural communities. Reproduced on the following pages are the original farmer responses. Many responses show wear and imperfections that indicate these are the tangible possessions of the farmers that they retained.

In some instances, the photos have been marked to call attention to elements within the image. The

image descriptions are written in *Telugu*, the language spoken in Andhra Pradesh, and we have provided the translations. All the images shared in the book are done so with the informed consent of the farmers, consistent with ethical research practices.

The narrative analyst and author Arthur Frank wrote that research too often “finalizes” participants, by claiming an outsider’s authority about who a person is, and what defines their life. Our research took place in collaboration with the farmers. They were not our data, nor were they our research informants. Instead, they produced the data for our study in the form of images and descriptions: photographs taken based on themes chosen through their own interactions and dialogue at meetings of their pre-existing farmer groups. With no authority to finalize, all we can say is *this is how it was at the time, and we do not know how it is now*.



Researchers and women farmers discuss natural farming in Andhra Pradesh

Beginning in 2019, we partnered with Andhra Pradesh's state natural farming organization, *Rythu Sadhikara Samstha*, to reveal insights about natural farming adoption that could underpin the ongoing expansion of natural farming across the state to more than six million farmers. We visited multiple local farming communities and trained our community research partners in the specific methodologies—both soil science and so-

cial science—that we intended to use in our interdisciplinary study.

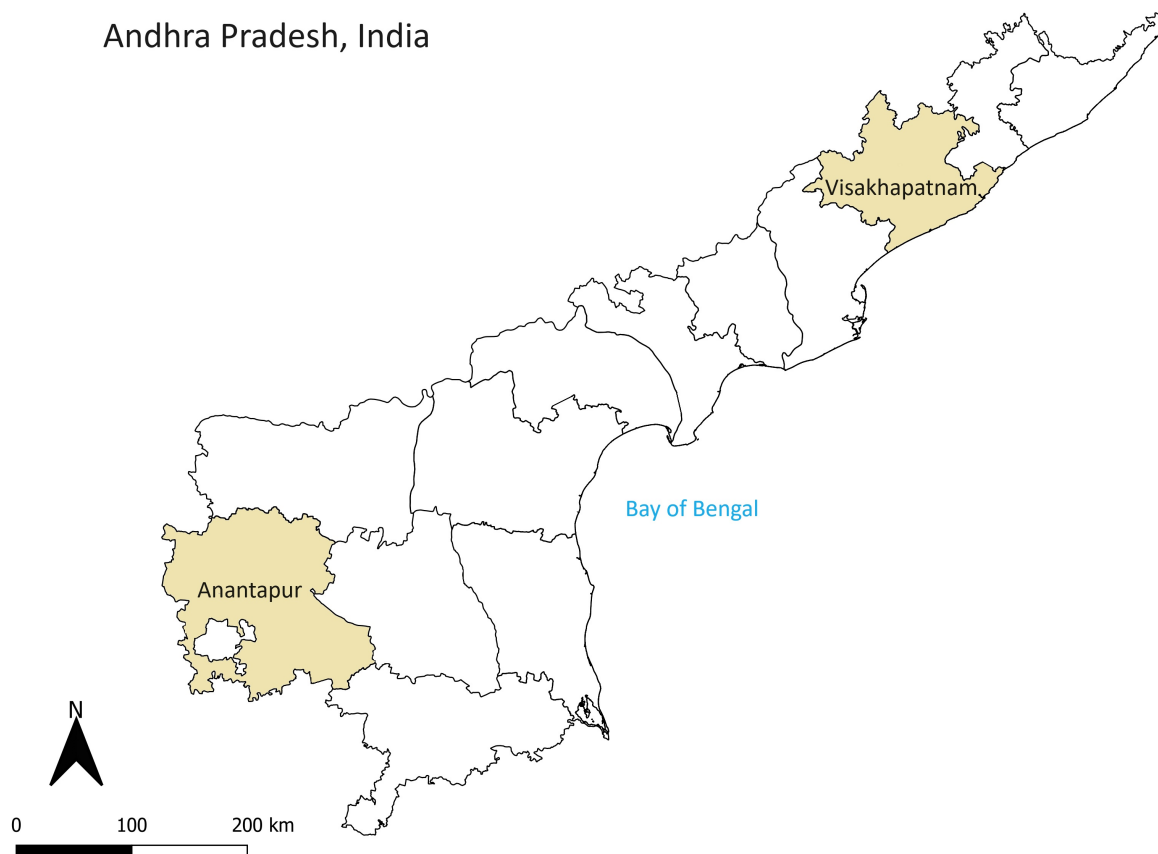
The photographs in the book are drawn from an activity widely known in research and engagement as participatory photography. With the help of community researchers, we initiated participatory photography investigations with six established women's Self-Help Groups in Andhra Pradesh.



We chose images from two specific districts because of the contrasting climate, ecological landscapes, and weather patterns. We found that the environment the farmers live in has an impact on their reasons for adopting natural farming and on associations they drew between natural farming and the wider context of their respective communities.

Because our interest as social scientists was the way in which farmers perceived the practice of natural farming, and the subjective connections they drew between natural farming and their everyday lives, we built our participatory

photography study around theories of group consciousness-raising proposed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Our village-based community researchers led the participatory photography activity by following a defined methodology, but the context of the group discussions and subsequent themes chosen for photo representation were determined by the farmer participants. We, as outsider researchers, never joined these group meetings. This maintained an insider-to-insider relationship between everyone involved in the activity.



Paulo Freire pioneered the use of topical and generative themes in critical education. Topical themes are themes which have been proposed to a group but have context with which group members can connect. Generative themes emerge from group discussions independently. Topical themes served as the basis for group discussions led by the community researchers and were the starting point for the group's conversations about natural farming. The themes were natural farming innovations such as mulching or farming with natural resources. These innovations, some specific and some more ambiguous, were then photographed by the farmers using a digital camera provided to the group by the community researcher. The camera was shared among the members of the group so that the farmers could take the photos individually. The community researcher printed the images and asked each farmer to write her description of the image below it. If the farmer was unable to write, the community researcher would write down the description the farmer dictated to her.

At the next Self-Help Group meeting, the images were shared among the group one at a time. They were then spread out in the

middle of the meeting circle in a thematic collage and discussed as a group representation of a theme. Similarities and differences were pointed out by participants. A new theme was identified from the collage, and the farmers would then photograph it during the week, representing it in any way they chose ahead of the next session. As themes became less specific, they were represented in a wide variety of ways; for example, the generative theme *Peace of Mind* yielded an incredible range of photo responses, each representing *Peace of Mind* for the farmer. In some instances, farmers photographed something that robbed them of their peace of mind, such as a dry well.

In our analysis we considered these individual responses as photo stories. Each image and description told a specific story, but when contextualized within a thematic collage, they represented a generalization of the theme, specific to that group and that moment in time. We identified several narrative types that we could see emerging from the response. These were *Memory*, *Consciousness*, *Independence*, and *Legacy*. This book presents three images selected from each narrative type in both project districts. In addition





A community researcher leads a participatory photography meeting

to the narrative type, we provide the reader with the theme that is being represented by the photograph, the translation of the photograph's name and description, and the name of the photographer.

It is important to remember that the narrative types were determined by the research team, and not the farmers themselves. Therefore, our lens and subjectivity as

researchers cannot be separated from the analysis. A different set of eyes may see different narratives emerge. For this reason, we present the images and descriptions without further researcher commentary or analysis, and we leave the readers to make the interpretations they see in the photo stories.





# The Anantapur photo responses

The first series of images is from Anantapur, a district in Andhra Pradesh's southern scarce-rainfall zone. It is officially categorized as a "poor" district and located far from any urban centres. Agriculture is the most important economic activity in the district, despite the precarity resulting from frequent droughts. The Government of India previously declared Anantapur one of India's districts more prone to farmer suicides, which are often the outcome of excessive farmer debt following a poor harvest.

*Independence*, the most prevalent narrative type, was represented in photo stories from Anantapur as

something farmers desired, rather than something farmers possessed. For them, independence meant freedom from tension and struggle. Photographs told stories of water scarcity, water conservation, rains, self-reliance, the importance of money, escaping precarity, entrepreneurship, empowerment, and security. Other stories fit in the narrative types of *Memory*, *Legacy*, and *Consciousness*.

As mentioned, the photographs are presented with the direct translation of the description text written by the individual woman farmer. The theme for the photograph and its title are also provided to help navigate the stories.

## Memory

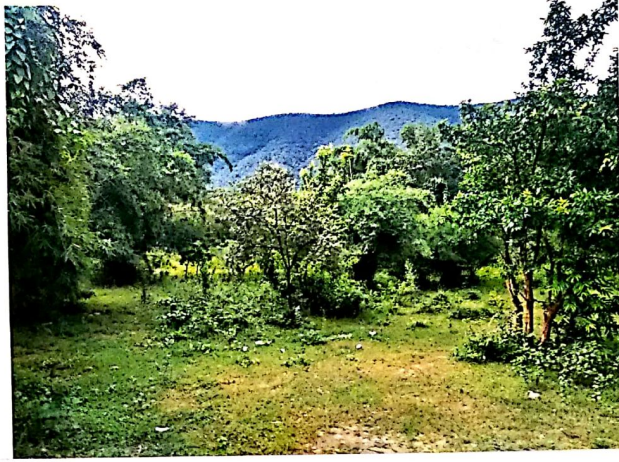
Nature's Greenery

by K. Nagaveni

Generative theme: happiness

అక్షర హృదయం :-

Nagaveni  
67 - Happiness



వర్షా దశకాలకు, మనకు నెలలూ ముఖ్యమైనది  
వర్షం బాగా పడుతున్నది. దివికల్ల చెట్లు  
బాగా పెరిగివున్నాయి. ఎక్కడ చూసినా పచ్చని  
కనిపిస్తుంది. మనసు ప్రకృతిగర్భం లోనున్నది  
అది.

It rained heavily over the last two or three months in our district. The trees are growing well as a result of this. Wherever you look you can see greenery. Being surrounded by greenery makes us feel very peaceful and happy.

## Memory

Women Farmers  
by C. Ramanjinamma  
Generative theme: women's empowerment

మహిళా క్రైడల్

Ramanjinamma  
GT- women empowerment



మా గ్రామంలో వర్షాలు సరిగా పడకపోవడంతో  
మనీజరించడా వ్రాసాయి కూలయి. అందరూ  
తొకా గ్రామాలకు కూలీలు పనులు వెళ్తుంటున్నారు.  
దీని ద్వారా ధనం వస్తుంది.

Due to dry spells in our village, women who are agricultural laborers work in other villages.  
We are earning income through this.

## Memory

Clouds in the Sky

by B. Tulasi

Generative theme: happiness

భాగ్యలక్ష్మి పేజీలు

Tulasi  
AT- Happiness



మా గ్రామంలో భాగ్యలక్ష్మి ఈ మామిడి  
లకు వర్షానికి ఉంగో ఈ ఊరిగలు భాగ్య  
లే మేము వర్షం వస్తోంది అని సంతోషించు.  
ఈ ఊరిగలు ఎక్కడా తిరిగడంలే మాకు వర్షం  
పడతూది అని సంతోషంగా ఊరిగలను చూస్తుంటా  
ఈ ఊరిగలు భాగ్యలక్ష్మి వర్షం వస్తోంది మా  
కు చాలా సంతోషము.

In our village we believe that it is going to rain if we see dragonflies and clouds in the sky. When we see dragonflies in the sky it is an indication that it is going to rain. We feel joyful when we see these dragonflies flying in the sky because it is going to rain.



## Consciousness

A Tree That Fell in My Field  
by C. Ramalingamma

Generative theme: importance of money

ನಾ ಖಾಲಿ ದಗ್ಗರ ಎತ್ತಿಹೋದ ಪೆಟ್ಟು 1-

Ramalingamma  
Gr. importance of money



ಮಗ್ಗಮಂಳಿ ಕಡಲು ಸರಿಗಾ ಎತ್ತಿಹೋದ  
ಕಾಡು ಪೆಟ್ಟು ಇದು ಇದು ಎತ್ತಿಹೋದ. ಗಾಡು ಎತ್ತಿ  
ಪೊಡದಿ ಬಿಡಿದಿ. ಈ ಪೆಟ್ಟು ತುಂಬಾ ಕೂಡ  
ಕೂಡಾ ಕಾಡು ಲಿಪಿಗೊ ಕಾಡು ಕಾಡು.

Many coconut trees fell down because they dried up due to a lack of rainfall in our village. They fell down because of heavy winds. We will use the wood from the fallen for cooking purposes.

## Consciousness

Groundnut Crop Harvest

by M. Nagaratnamma

Generative theme: happiness

వేరుశనగ పంటకొత్త

Nagaratnamma

47 - Happiness



ఓ పొలంలో , వేరుశనగ పంట అన్ని ZBNF  
పద్ధతులు . పొడిస్తూ ఆర్థికమైన ఆహారాన్ని  
పండిస్తున్నాను. ఇదిని వల్ల ఇబ్బతు లేదు.  
అలాగే నిధులు విడుదల చేశారు. ఇలా  
రావాలి. సంతోషంగా ఉన్నాను .

We practiced all ZBNF [natural farming] methods in our groundnut field and produced healthy food. This method requires a low investment. We obtain high yields. I'm feeling joyful because of all of these things.

## Consciousness

Redgram Seedlings in My Field  
by M. Adilakshmi  
Generative theme: knowledge and skill

నా పొలంలో కంది నాటు

Adilakshmi  
AT - knowledge & skill



మా పొలంలో కంది నాటు వేస్తున్నాము.  
బిడి ట్రీప్లు పద్దతిలో నీరు ఉంచుతున్నాము. ఇది చాలా  
కొత్త పద్ధతి. ఎంబ బాగా ఎంతో ఫలాయం వస్తుంది  
ప్రకృతి వ్యవసాయ పద్ధతిని పాటిస్తున్నాము.

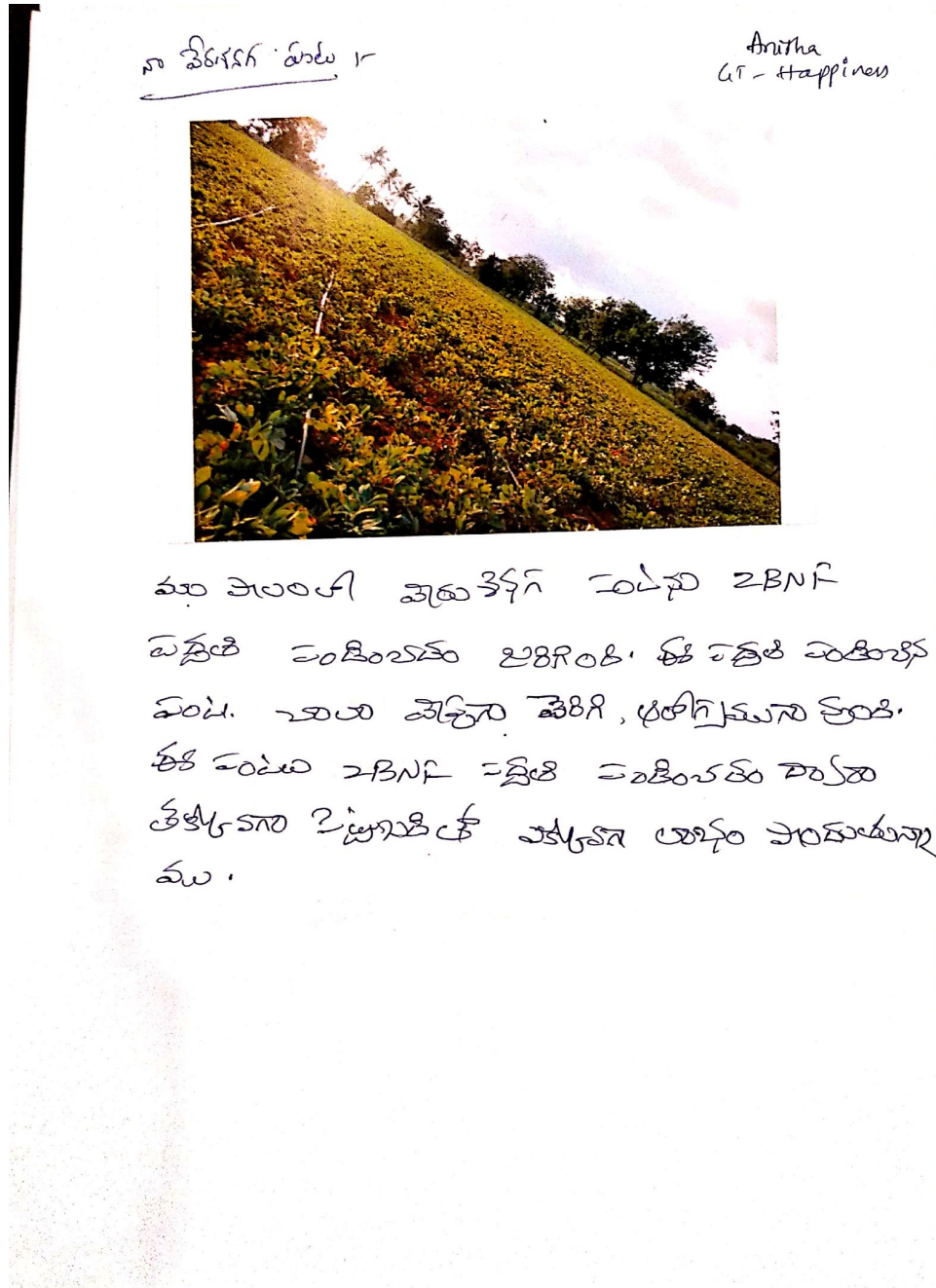
We are planting redgram seedlings in our field. We irrigate the field using a drip system. This is a very new method. We'll get good income if the crop grows well. We follow natural farming practices in this field.

## Independence

My Groundnut Crop

by M. Anita

Generative theme: happiness



మా పొలంలో పెరుగుతున్న పంటను ZBNF  
పద్ధతి పెంపొందించు బంధువు. ఈ పద్ధతి పరిశోధన  
పంట. ఇలా పంటను పెరిగి, భరిత్రమైన పంట.  
ఈ పంటను ZBNF పద్ధతి పెంపొందించు పంట  
తక్కువగా పెంపొందించు పంటను అధిక పంటను  
మ.

We are growing a groundnut crop in our field using ZBNF [natural farming] practices. The crop grown using this method has dense and healthy canopy. Growing this crop with ZBNF practice requires a low investment but delivers a high profit.



## Independence

My Ragi Crop

by D. Akkamma

Generative theme: importance of money

నా రాగి పంట

Akkamma  
G1. Importance of money



నేను ఒక ఎకరంలో రాగి పంట వేకాను.  
గింజ పంటనుండి దళిల్ వుండి రాగి పంటకు కాండం  
లాగానే పురుగు పోకింది. దీన్ని నేను నీమోస్త్రం తయారు  
చేసి దీనిని స్ప్రే చేశాను. నీమోస్త్రం స్ప్రే చేయడం వల్ల  
పురుగు ఉప్పు తగ్గిపోయింది. దీనివల్ల బాగా వస్తోంది

I have grown ragi [finger millet] on one acre. The grain is in the milking stage. There has been an attack of stem borer in my ragi field. I will prepare neemasthram and I will spray against this. We can control the pest incidences to some extent with neemasthram. Then we can earn more profit.



## Independence

Our Bullock Cart

by K. Nagaveni

Generative theme: knowledge and skill

మా ఎక్కుల బండి

Nagaveni!  
G.T - knowledge & skills



ఇది మా ఎక్కుల బండి. దీనిలో మేము తోటా  
పొలానికి వెళ్తాము. మల్చింగ్ కి ఉపయోగపడే గడ్డిని కొనుగో  
వస్తాము. నా భర్త సహాయం లేకుండా బండి తోటా  
నాకు చాలా ఆనందంగా వుంది

This is our bullock cart. We go to the field on this bullock cart daily. We cut the straw required for mulching and carry it on this bullock cart. I feel happy when I drive it without the help of my husband.

## Legacy

My Five Layer Model  
by B. Malleswari  
Generative theme: health is wealth

మా రూప రుచి రుచి రుచి రుచి:-



నా మొలకల 5 లెవెల్స్ విశాల 5 రకాల మొక్కలు  
నారింజ, బాదామ, మొనగా... మొలకల, కంది, జామ,  
కొర్రులు, కిరీట, పొలియించి జరిగింది. పొలియించి  
దాని కిరీట, పొలియించి. ఇప్పుడు మొలకల-మొలకలం.  
కొర్రులు, కిరీటలు అలా అంటే రుచి రుచి రుచి

In my field I have planted five different types of plants like papaya, moringa, mango, redgram, guava, and also vegetables and leafy vegetables. With long-duration crops we can meet requirements like children's education, and with vegetables and leafy vegetables household requirements are fulfilled.

## Legacy

Land Turned Barren due to No Rainfall

by C. Venkatalakshmi

Generative theme: peace of mind

దర్శనం వైక బిడుగా మరిగ పొలం



మాకి పంట ఎకరాలు పంట పండి ఇంకా వర్షం వచ్చేదా  
లెందో పంట బాగుపడింది బాటలూ నిక్కి-బిక్కి పంట నాశనం  
మరిగిపోయి మా పంటలూ నిక్కి పండి కేవలం నివాసం మాత్రం  
నాి

We have 2 acres of land. It hasn't rained yet. We also have a bore well, but the groundwater is empty so there is no water in the well. Our home is on the farm itself. We live there.

### Chicken Shop in Our Village by D. Bharathi

Generative theme: women's empowerment

మా ఊరి చికెన్ షాపు

Bharathi  
GT - women empowerment



ఇది మా ఊరిలో ఉండే చికెన్ షాపు.  
ఇక్కడ ఉండి మేము కావలసినవి చికెన్ తెచ్చుకొంటాము.  
ఈ షాపు ద్వారా ఆదాయం వస్తుంది. దీని ద్వారా  
వచ్చిన ఆదాయాన్ని ఇంట్లో పిల్లల చదువులకి వాడు  
కొంటాము.

This is the chicken shop in our village. We will get whatever chicken meat we need from this shop. We will get income from this shop. We can use this money for children's education and household needs.





# The Visakhapatnam photo responses

Visakhapatnam, in contrast to Anantapur, is officially classified as a “rich” district. It is in the state’s wet zone and experiences double the annual rainfall of Anantapur. There is a major port in the district, which acts as an economic hub. *Independence* in Visakhapatnam was not represented as something desired by the women in this area, but instead as something already possessed. The decision to adopt natural farming for them was not simply economic, but also social and cultural.

Although the coast is vulnerable to the impacts of cyclones, farmers in Visakhapatnam generally do not experience the same level of precarity resulting from climate and weather as those in Anantapur.

Photo stories in Visakhapatnam focused on happiness, tradition, a love of nature, clean living, good habits, children, the preservation of culture, and shaping the future.

## Memory

Our Home - Our Garden

by D. Annapurna

Generative theme: secured life

జీవన భద్రత

జీవన భద్రత

మా ఇల్లు - మా తోట



మనం పని చేయగలిగే వయసులో (అమ్మగల కుటుంబం) - మనం  
పళ్ళెం మొక్కలు, కలప మొక్కలు ఒక లోటలా పెంచుకొని -- అందులో  
ఒక ఇంట్లు కట్టుకుంటే మనం మనం అక్కడ ఉన్నప్పుడే ఆ తోటలో  
ఆ ఇంట్లో ఎంలే ఉంటుంటే ప్రశంసగా చెప్పవచ్చు. ఆ పళ్ళెం  
కలప అమ్మగా వచ్చిన అమ్మాయితో అమ్మగా బేరం నోగించుకోవచ్చు.

మనం. అమ్మగల

ఆ తోటలో

*During our youth we have to grow fruit trees and timber like a garden, and build a house in the garden, then by the time we get old we can relax peacefully in that garden and in that home. I will live my life happily with the income generated from the fruits and timber.*

## Memory

Planting Trees - Avoiding Plastics  
by T. Varalakshmi  
Generative theme: good habits

మంచి ఆలవాటు  
మొక్కలు నాటడం - ప్లాస్టిక్ నిషేధం



మొక్కలు పిల్లలను మంచిగా మార్చుతుంటుంది,  
ప్లాస్టిక్ వాడకం వదిలివేసి పంట పనులు ఆలవాటు చేసి  
యారి. వంట న్నారా ఎంతో కొంత వాళ్ళు తగ్గించి  
డ్రులలో కూడా మార్పు వస్తోంది. దీని వలన మన  
కోరిక కూడా అవగాహన పెరుగుతుంది. ఈ రుబ్బా  
టండి.

తెలుగున పరంజ్యో  
అ-ఆవీక్షి-1

We have to teach school children about planting trees and avoiding plastics so that we can also see a small transformation in their parents so that the awareness in our village will also be raised and the village will stay good.



# Memory

Oral Storytelling

by M. Devi

Generative theme: secured life

జనన శత్రువు

ఇంక కద



మతాలంటూ భాగదా ఉంటేనా? బుద్ధులుంటూ (అలాంటి) పెట్టివారు, యింకా అన్న పెద్దా ఉండరా వచ్చే వాళ్ళు ఉంటూ పుణ్యాలు ఇతిహాసాలు పఠించి కథలుగా చెప్పడం వలన పిల్లలను మాట సుర్పించి తెలిసి వాటా నుండి బయట సమాజంగా ఎలా ఉండాలి అని నేర్చుకుంటారు. కానీ అవి ఇప్పుడు అరుదుగా ఉన్నాయి. అక్కడ ఉండరా కలసి రాత్రినా మాట్లాడుకొని ఆడుకొని భినదంగా గడుపుతారు.

మాతవేది  
శ్రీ భాగవతం

In the olden days during Jagarana [people fast all night] some programs are conducted such as oral storytelling to keep the people awake. Both children and elders attend this program. The performances are about historical events, which teach children morals, ethics, and how to behave in society. People get together and happily enjoy themselves. But now, the storytelling [during Jagarana] is very rare [people watch movies instead].

## Consciousness

Farming with Natural Resources  
by P. Manikyam

Topical theme: farming with natural resources

+ సహజ వనరులతో భవనాభివృద్ధి:-



సహజ వనరులతో భవనాభివృద్ధి  
అవుతుంది, ఎందుకంటే అన్ని వనరులు  
సహజంగా ఉంటాయి, అందుకే ఇవి అన్ని వనరులు

By using naturally available Azolla instead of chemical fertilizers we are able to improve soil health and protect it from pollution.



## Consciousness

Milk Products

by K. Lakshmi

Generative theme: integrated farming

సమర్థితు వ్యవసాయం - పాల ఉత్పత్తులు



ఆవులు మరియు గేడెల నుండి వచ్చిన  
పాలను వృథాగా పాడుచేయకుండా దియ  
లేక ఉప్పుడుం ద్వారా మన ఆవసరం  
లను ఎంతకొంత కొంత ఉప్పు  
ఉంటుంది. అలాగే నెయ్యి ఇలా  
కాబట్టి ఉపయోగపడే ఉన్నా  
ఎక్కువ లాభం ఉంటుంది.

కృతి లక్ష్మి

శ్రీ ఆంధ్రప్రదేశ్

Instead of wasting the [excess] cow and buffalo milk, by selling it to the dairy we can get some money for our daily needs. Also, by preparing ghee, which is very costly, we can get more profit by selling it.

## Consciousness

Cow-Based Farming  
by B. Parvathi

Topical theme: cow-based farming



క్రిష్ణమ మంచి శుభదూనికే నువ్వుగా ఉపయోగిస్తారు  
నాటే రిక్క. చిలన చూత. ఉపయోగించుకుంటున్నా గి చిక్కు  
పెట్టి. ఉండే నీళ్లు శుభ్రం చూత ఎన్నడూ ఎంతో  
నోస్తారు .

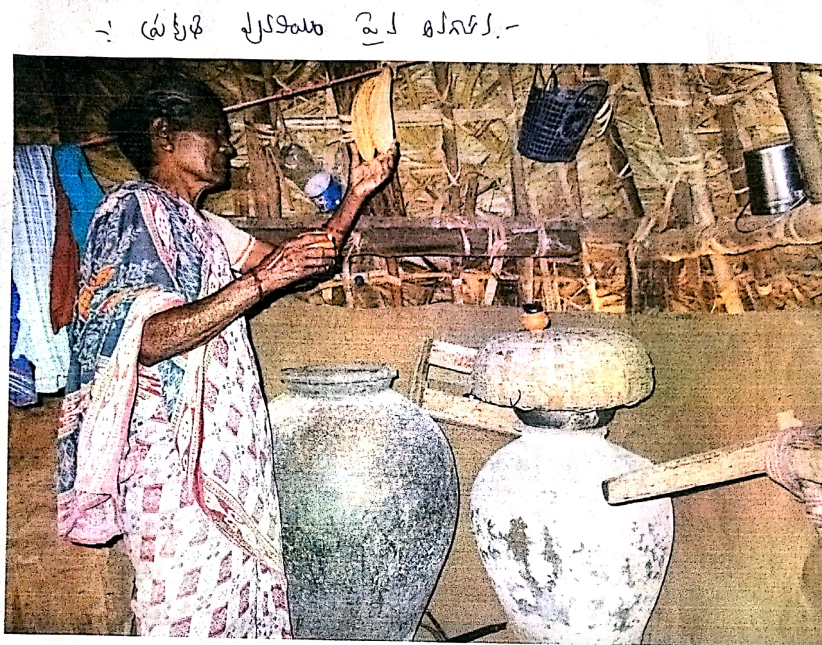
*The cow is a symbol of good fortune. We gain so many benefits from desi cows. The microorganisms in cow dung and cow urine are helpful in many ways.*

## Independence

## Awareness of Natural Farming

*by M. Kondamma*

Generative theme: awareness of natural farming



దేవుడు ప్రతి సంవత్సరం ఎల్లరూ క్రీస్తు విజయ చూపడం  
 కాకముందు, ఎల్లప్పుడూ విజయవంతం వున్న  
 సమయాలివి. ఎందుకంటే క్రీస్తు గురించి ప్రార్థించు స్త్రీలు.

*Every year we don't need to wait to procure seeds [from the government distribution center or the marketplace] because we're preserving them ourselves, and it facilitates the farmers' ability to plant on time.*



## Independence

Awareness of Natural Farming  
by P. Manikyam

Generative theme: awareness of natural farming



రైతులు తామరపడిన పంటలు ప్రకృతి పువసాయి ద్వారా పండించడం వలన  
చాలా పంటలు ఎక్కువ మంది కొనడానికి, బోగ్గంగా ఉంటున్నాయి  
కొన్ని చూపుతారు.

People show interest in purchasing the produce cultivated by natural farming methods in order to stay healthy.

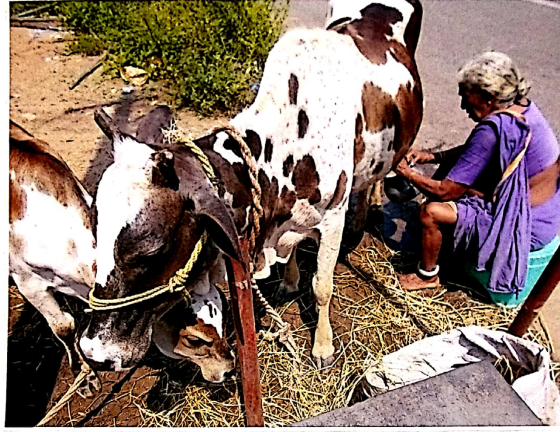
## Independence

Energy

by T. Varalakshmi

Generative theme: health

ఆరోగ్యం - శక్తి



దాని తనం, నుండి మంచి కలుషితం కాని  
ఆహారం తీసుకోవడం వలన 80 ఏళ్ళ వయ-  
సులో కూడా ఆరోగ్యంగా ఉండి ఎవరి మీదా  
ఆధార పడకుండా తన పని తాను చేసు  
కుంటోంది.

తలకాన వరలక్ష్మి  
పైడితల్లమ్మ 1

*By consuming chemical-free food [produced by natural farming] from childhood onwards, she can stay healthy up to 80 years and does not depend on any others for her work.*



## Legacy

Source

by K. Venkatalakshmi

Generative theme: integrated farming

సమకృత వ్యవసాయం - భారం



పనులూ, వ్యాపారాలూ బిజీగా ఉన్నానో స్థిరంగా  
పండించుకోవటం వలన పిల్లలకు మంచి ఆహారం ఎ  
పెట్టేటందుకు మెరుగుగా ఉంది. అయ్యే ఖర్చును తగ్గించ  
గలుగుతున్నాము. అది ఏదో ఒక విధంగా వ్యాపారానికి  
సహాయపడుతుంది

కృతి మేకట లక్ష్మి

ప్రతి ఆందోళన

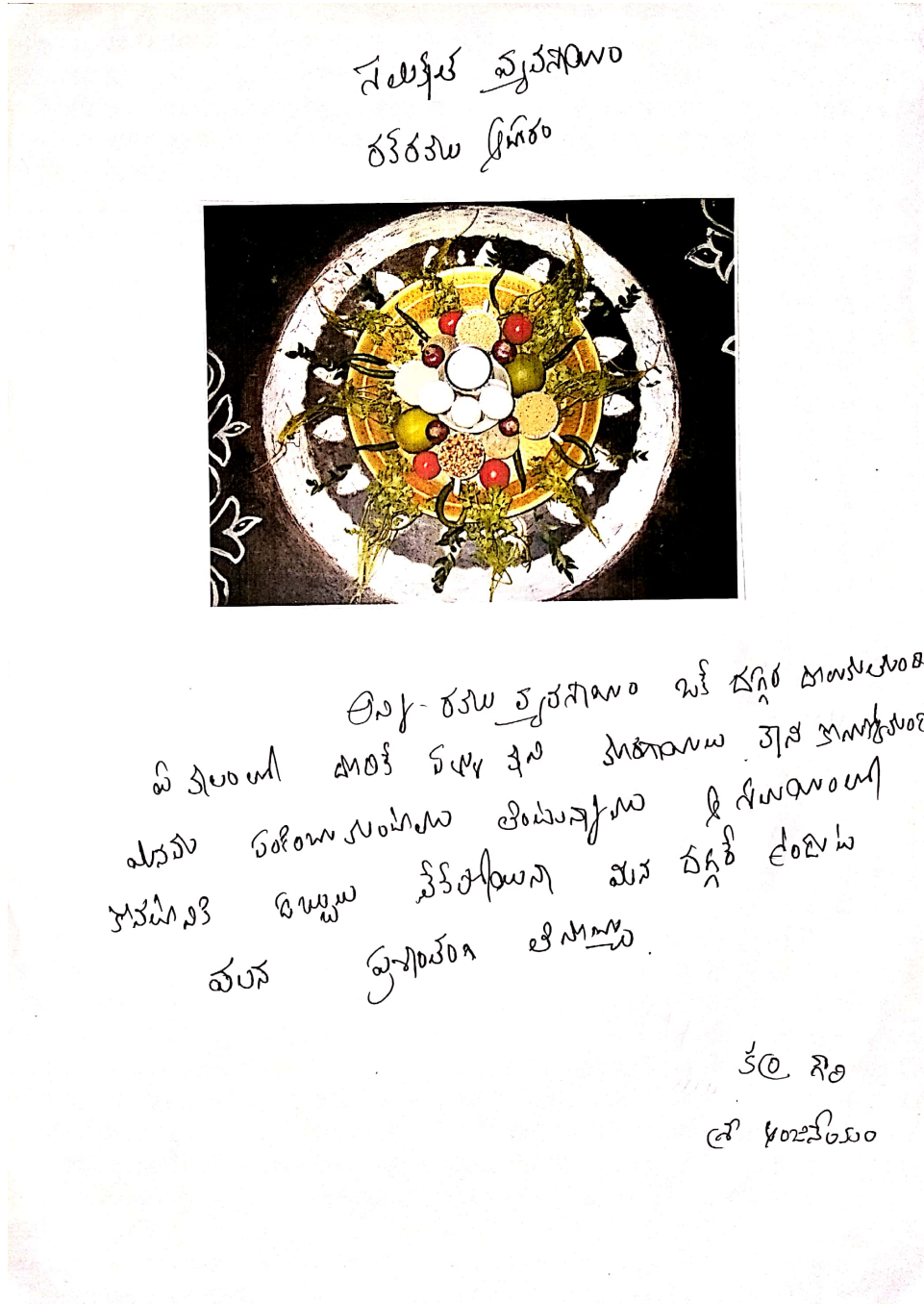
Even though I'm busy with lots of other work, I'm able to cultivate and provide healthy food to my children, and I'm also able to reduce my household expenses. This is helping me invest in my sister's sari business.

## Legacy

Different Types of Food

by K. Gowri

Generative theme: integrated farming



All types of food can be available at a single place. We can eat any type of fruits and vegetables that we cultivate ourselves instead of buying. Even if we don't have money at that time, we can eat peacefully.

## Legacy

Pure Air  
by P. Atchiyamma  
Generative theme: health

ఆరోగ్యం - మంచి గాలి



మనమే సాంఘిక తోటలు పెంచుకొని  
మనమూ మన పిల్లలు కొంత సమయాన్ని  
అక్కడ గడపటం వలన స్వచ్ఛమైన గాలి  
ని పోషించుకోవటం ఎంత ప్రశంసనీ  
పొందుతుంది.

పొట్ల అచ్చయ్యమ్మ  
పైర్ తల్లిమ్మ 1

*By growing gardens ourselves and encouraging our children to spend time in that area we will be able to get fresh air and be at peace.*





# Afterword

The images on the preceding pages offer a window into the lives of farmers who have adopted natural farming. While the photo stories indicate that some have clearly made the decision to reject chemical farming to improve their economic situation through savings on the cost of agricultural inputs, others have connected natural farming to gains that cannot be quantified, such as challenging gender norms, healthy living, reconnecting with traditions, and offering peace of mind.

The stories told by farmers reflect important values they hold. As social scientists, we recognize the importance of farmer perceptions, and we are interested in understanding how farmers, in their own words, account for the decisions they make to secure their lives. It remains vital that farmers are enabled to be co-creators and experimenters within rural and agricultural innovation projects. Farmer perceptions will affect the value, uptake, and success of future initiatives by government, non-governmental organizations, or researchers. Our research reveals the ways that different perceptions about identity, behaviour, and

meaning shaped experiences of natural farming in Anantapur and Visakhapatnam, and how these perceptions influenced farmers to adopt alternative farming practices.

Subjective stories reveal layers of behaviour, meaning, and identity that are specific to context. The way farmers experience agricultural transitions through their everyday lived experiences, their willingness to adopt and innovate, and their reasons to embrace or reject new technologies or ideas, can only be understood through approaches that respect their perceptions in context. That is the value of participatory methods and approaches, such as the one we have shared in this book.

We hope that the photo stories speak to each reader in their own way, and that each reader develops their own subjective interpretations. As stated earlier, we do not offer a final analysis of these communities and the lives embedded within them. Lived experiences, exposures, and behaviours will continue to evolve. Using this methodology, we present a story of how it was at that time.

# Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the contributions from the interdisciplinary research team from the University of Reading, namely Chris Collins, Sarah Duddigan, Tom Sizmur, Liz Shaw, Sarah Cardey, and Mondira Bhattacharya. Mondira kindly assisted in the selection process of images that appear in this book. We also thank Alice Haughan for creating the map of Andhra Pradesh.

We thank Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS) in India, the organization behind the promotion of community-based natural farming in Andhra Pradesh. Sravanthi Ponolu, Himabindu Anniseti, and Bhavana Latchipatruni were the community researchers at RySS who each facilitated participatory photography activities with Self-Help Groups in the farming communities, and without them this project would have not been pos-

sible. Jayna George contributed as an overall facilitator, with the support of Zakir Hussain and Vijay Kumar.

Finally, and most importantly, we express our gratitude to all the farmers across Andhra Pradesh who participated in this study, and who gave permission to use images. We deliberately chose to only include photographs in this book taken by the women who were part of the study.

To read about our participatory photography study in greater detail, please search for our open-access article entitled *Thematic Collages in Participatory Photography: A Process for Understanding the Adoption of Zero Budget Natural Farming in India*, published in the International Journal of Qualitative Methods in 2021.

Cover photo: T. Varalakshmi  
Photo on page 6: G. Walker  
Photo on page 9: S. Ponnolu

To cite this publication:  
Walker, G., & Osbahr, H. (2024). A Secured Life: Photo stories of natural farming adoption in India. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11222234>



**University of  
Reading**