

From Rickshaw Puller to Herbal Healer and Fabricator

Dharamveer's curiosity for herbs drove him to find the novelty in their uses, and new ways of processing them. By following the traders on rickshaw in old Delhi, he developed deep understanding of the market. Read about how he designed machines for processing aloe vera and many other fruits. He has seen life in all its shades; the mockery of his neighbours on one side and international acclaims on the other. His struggle continues

Dharamveer Kamboj was born on May 15, 1963 at village Damla to Shri Ramswaroop Kamboj and Smt Savitri Devi. As an inquisitive child, Dharamveer would often accompany his mother for collecting *kesu* (*Butea monosperma*) flowers, watching devotedly how those flowers were taken care of, made into colours for *Holi*. Unfortunately he lost his mother in childhood, but inherited from her, a curiosity for nature and its herbal wealth. At school, he participated in a science exhibition with his instrument viz., 'emergency light'.

In 1980, a saint came to his home and talked to him about herbs. He was curious and asked the saint if he could earn a good living through herbs and its plantation. The saint gave him an assertive nod. The words encouraged him and whenever opportunity came, he dedicated himself to know more and more about the herbs, their plantation and business.

He earned his livelihood by farming on two acres of land, held jointly with his brothers. In 1986, he got married to Shyamudevi. Just after three days of his daughter Pooja's birth, he left for Delhi to search for better means of income. There he worked as a rickshaw puller. But this arduous phase of life became a turning point. He used to ferry traders to Khari Bawli area of Old Delhi, where they used to pay hefty amount for herbs. This amazed him and he would often converse with the passengers and vendors to know about the herbs and the income they could fetch. His passion for herbs was revived. Unfortunately his stay at Delhi had to be cut short as he met with an accident in 1987. Severely injured, he was brought back to village and it took a year to nurse him back to health.

After recovering, he joined the village development society and through that went for a training program in improving agricultural practices for six months. He interacted with farmers and experts in the agricultural sector from Krishi Vishwa Vidyalaya, Damla and Nauni University, Solan, H P. He also took training in organic farming. In Champaghat, he visited the government

herbal gardens. National Park in Jabalpur, taught him the idea of biodiversity and sustenance. He started with his experiments on organic farming in 1989 which got him several awards. His contribution and creditable work in this field started getting recognized and acknowledged. The promotion of mushroom farming, vermicompost and other similar promotional farming initiatives like growing strawberries and improving vegetables and their varieties, in and around his village brought him further recognition. His small farm of half acre became his laboratory for practicing innovative farming methods. He personally recounted how he would get seeds of different herbs which were used for ayurvedic purposes in small bottles and grow them in his garden. He would take these from two or three different local traders and compare the plants. Sometimes he found that the plants which came up were different from the names given on the labels. In such cases he continued to get the seeds from others, grow them, compare and find out the authentic ones. In this hit and trial method he not only found the actual seeds but discovered many other as well! In his pursuit of organic farming he also picked up herbal healing practices and has been using them. In 2004, he got a chance to visit Rajasthan through the Horticulture Department, Govt. of Haryana

with a group of farmers and learnt the processing of *Aloe vera* and *amla* for producing value added products for better income generation.

Dharamveer decided to produce value added products instead of only the raw material. But the machinery for the purpose was out of his reach. In 2002, a bank manager came to Yamunanagar to promote *Aloe vera* farming among the villagers. He also discussed with Dharamveer about the *Aloe vera* gel extractor and its installation. But in lieu he asked five lakh rupees as consultation fees, which Dharamveer could not afford. So he started working on the gel-extracting unit himself. After an effort of six to eight months, he was able to develop the first prototype of the Multipurpose Processing Machine for producing juices in 2003. The performance of the machine was acceptable but he improved upon to make it suitable for extracting the essence of various herbs and processing of other products. With the help of a workshop owner Shri Vijay Dhiman at Jagadhari, he developed the present model of the Multipurpose Food Processing Machine.



His innovation received in Fifth National Competition of Grassroots Innovations and Traditional Knowledge organized by NIF in the year 2006, has already been short listed for further value addition. Dharamveer has been using this machine since 2005. He improved the machine according to the suggestions and feedback from the users whom he sold the machine and the concerned experts.

Multipurpose Food Processing Machine

This is a multipurpose device capable of pulverizing and extracting oil from various herbs. The device is designed in such a way that it can also be used as a big pressure cooker or a sterilizer. He also devised a method of extracting juices, and essence from *Aloe vera*, and *amla* for further processing. He has been using this machine for producing various cosmetic and health care products. Its portability makes it suitable for 'on



farm' processing, thereby adding value to farmer's produce and reducing the transportation and stocking problems.

Salient Features

a) Light in weight and portable, saves the cost of transportation of the raw material from fields to processing site; b) Capability to process around 200 kg of herbal products, fruits or so, in an hour; c) Low cost of production enables common people to have herbal products in the form of gel, juice, essence, etc.; d) Easy to operate; anyone can run the machine with a little training and e) Has potential to generate employment and is quite affordable.

Present Status

The machine has been commercialized and a patent has been filed. The cost of the present machine is around one lakh twenty thousand rupees. Dharamveer has already exported some


to Kenya and was excited to inform that the Kenyan government has asked for some more machines.

Future Aspirations

He proudly recalls how a simple farmer and a rickshaw puller has been able to visit hotels like Le Meridian (where Honey Bee network had invited him to an MIT conference on emerging technologies) all because of the recognition of his creativity. He wants to develop a farm where he will grow, process and sell the herbs. At present, Dharamveer lives with his wife and children on the outskirts of the village near his two acres of land.

Dharamveer's family was a great support when he decided to start his own enterprise of agro foods and organic farming. Pooja, his daughter, doing MBA, wrote in a mail that her mother always motivated him. She single handedly looked after the family so that he could continue to pursue his innovations. She was apprehensive in the beginning, worrying about the expenses of education and innovation. But she gave up her worries to let him pursue his passion.

Pooja recounts how their neighbours made fun of her father, calling him insane. But now they consider him a worthy example for all. She along with Prince, her brother, doing computer engineering helps him with technical tasks. Pooja has resolved, "I will make my father's efforts get results in the global markets."

Dharamveer gives the credit for his achievements to his mother who instilled in him the urge to know more about herbs and their uses. The only thing that Dharamveer regrets is that his parents are not around to see his success. His mother had inculcated love for herbs in him; his father had listened with him the insults and had borne with him the rejections. 

Celebrating the Broom: Arna-Jharna Museum

Arna-Jharna: The Desert Museum of Rajasthan celebrates the open spaces of the desert, including its flora and fauna as part of a larger holistic exploration of the museum as a place of learning, instead of collecting antiquities or precious art objects. Envisioned by late Komal Kothari, one of India's leading folklorists and oral historians, Arna-Jharna Museum can be described as a *process* of interactive learning experiences drawn from traditional knowledge systems. The Arna-Jharna Museum will devote the first three years of its existence to a single object - the broom. Inconspicuous, marginal, tucked away in corners, hidden under the bed, it would appear to be devoid of curatorial value. Brooms can be made out of an astonishing diversity of materials, primarily in the rural areas from twigs to waste material that are available in their environments. It is bound to address the income generation of broom-making families and the possibilities of their social recognition. The Broom Project will also travel to the far corners of Rajasthan on a truck. This Mobile Museum will be primarily performative in nature, with traditional puppeteers and performers enacting stories of the broom from a subaltern perspective.

The museum will seek partnerships across the world, so that the traditional knowledge systems of the desert can be shared with community museums, eco-museums, universities, and other institutions committed to new modes of interactive and intercultural learning. It is in this spirit of open dialogue that the Arna-Jharna Museum invites all individuals, groups, and institutions to support its collaborative impulse.

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