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Gandhian Angel Samatbhai Zada



Samatbhai of Dherai village in Chotila taluka of Gujarat is a people's person in the real sense. He has carried out several programs in the neighbouring 11 villages to spread knowledge on irrigation, trees and health among others. His region is on the border of Surendranagar and Rajkot districts. The region consists of rocky and mountainous land, interspersed with flat plains suitable for farming. Farmers of this area also struggle under a lack of irrigation facilities.

Farmer Samatbhai was addicted both to smoking bidis and use of chemicals in his fields. He was once considered an authority and was a dealer of insecticides and pesticides in his village. But there occurred a huge transformation and Samatbhai underwent metamorphosis to become totally free of any addiction. He first quit smoking and later use of chemicals for farming. Samatbhai with his wife Gauriben took this decision despite knowing that they would reap better profits in the short run by using the chemical fertilizers available at subsidised rates.





It was in 2003 that Samatbhai initiated organic farming of groundnuts in his considerably sterile field. He first started with a small piece of land and then after gradually gaining confidence, spread the practice to the rest of his land. In a time span of two years he had completely converted his fields to organic farming. He sowed groundnuts, pearl millet and sesame in the monsoon season whereas in winter it was wheat and cumin. He started using organic resources acquired from his cattle too. He had to toil hard in his farm for 12 to 14 hours. After the expected growth of the crops, there is always a fear of attack by wild animals. In order to protect his farm, Samatbhai had to spend nights sleeping near the fields too. After all this hardwork the next step after harvest was to manage selling to the market. He slowly developed his own market for organic farm produce. He realised that groundnuts cannot fetch much of a price whereas groundnut oil reaps better profits. So he started selling organic groundnut oil. He sells to Vadodara through Jatan and Vasundhara, at the Sattvik food festival in Ahmedabad as well as among friends in Rajkot. Apart from groundnuts he also sells sesame hair oil and an edible sesame

delicacy called kachariya, which are also produced by him.

When there was a lot of hype in whole of country including Gujarat over BT Cotton, Samatbhai worked hard for 4 to 5 years to develop a cotton crop without BT. He started collecting seeds from BT free cotton fields and experimented with them tirelessly. Despite getting no economic returns, he did not give up. At last he was able to develop a variety of cotton which is neither hybrid nor Monsanto Patented or BT and yet has a fairly good yield.

Today there is hardly any seed available in the market if a farmer wishes to grow cotton which is BT free. Such farmers can obtain these seeds from Samatbhai.

Samatbhai's deep desire to create Khadi cloth from BT-free cotton has also been fulfilled through concerted efforts. He has created khadi garments from such BT-free cotton which is completely organic and natural. The cloth is neither bleached by chlorine nor coloured using chemical dyes. The garments get their colour using traditional methods of dyeing from Kutch. Samatbhai was guided by Udhog Bharati from Gondal in this process.

During a Green Film Festival at Vadodara, Samatbhai said, "After starting organic farming my thoughts also have become very pure. I constantly think of ways to reduce my needs and desires." Samatbhai wears only khadi garments and is even thinking of giving up the khadi trousers to wear knee-length shorts.

Samatbhai observed villagers are not equipped financially to face unexpected expenditures during illness. He provides monetary help from his savings to any villagers whenever they are in such need. He saw that the village school's compound wall was very weak and would fall to dust very soon. He undertook a five day long protest in the

form of a fast to get the attention of the concerned education authorities.

During all his endeavours and adversities, Samatbhai's wife Gauriben was always by his side providing strong moral support. Today when he needs to travel a lot due to his work, Samatbhai jokes, "Gauriben is the manager of my fields."

In 2012, Samatbhai was awarded the Gandhi Mitra Award by the Gujarat State Governor. This award was jointly given under the auspices of Ahmedabad's Vichar Trust and Rajkot's Sampada for persons who have contributed towards any village development.

Today, when so many farmers are committing suicides, Samatbhai is like a true Gandhian angel for farmers.