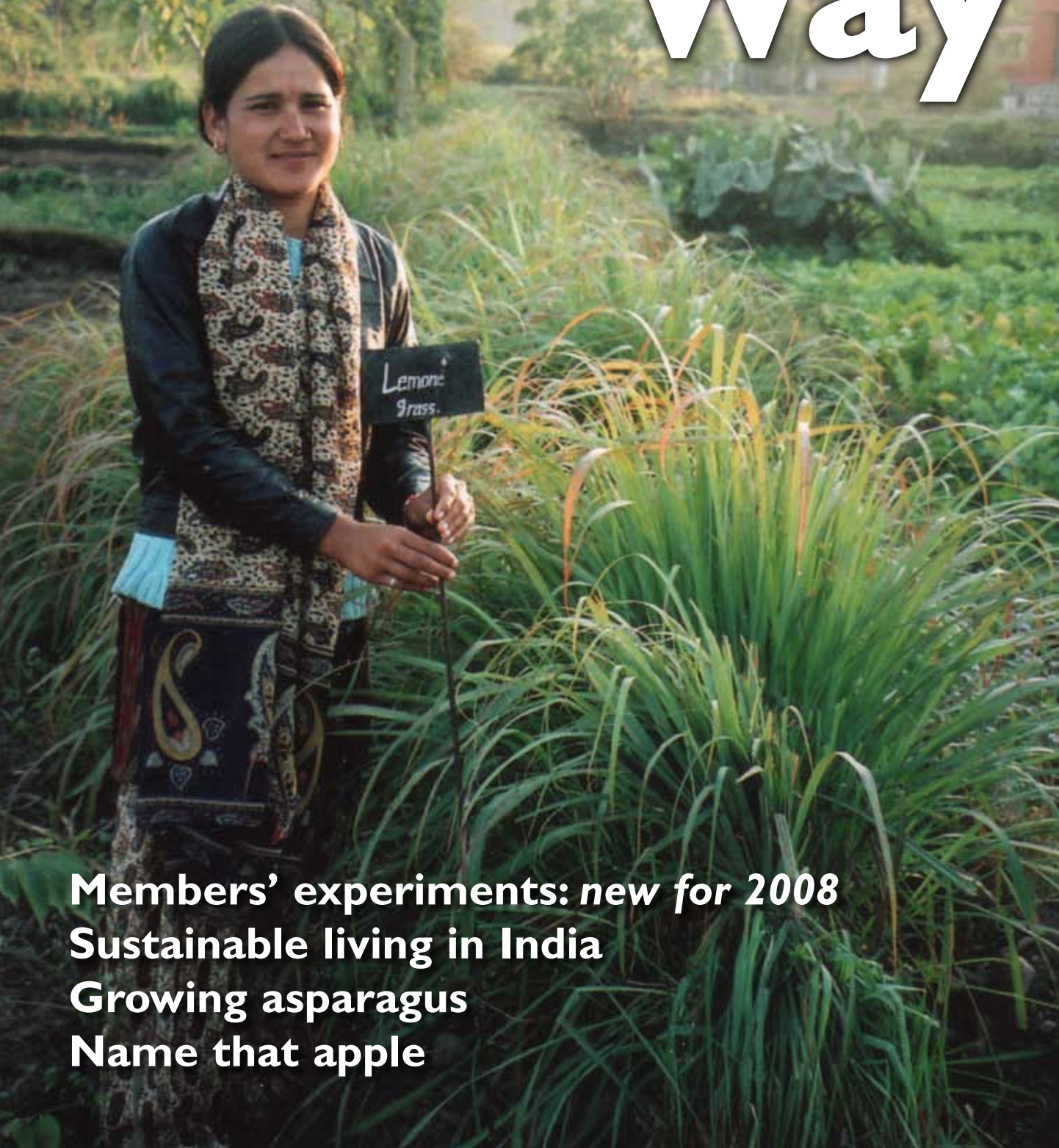


# The Organic Way



**Members' experiments: *new for 2008***  
**Sustainable living in India**  
**Growing asparagus**  
**Name that apple**



# Sustainable Living in India



Lakshmi with lemon grass

The course I attended was run by Satish Kumar, Venerable Samdhong Rinpoche, Prime Minister in exile of the Tibetan people, and Dr Vandana Shiva. It was held at Dr Vandana Shiva's International College for Sustainable Living at her Navdanya Farm, in beautiful countryside close to the Himalayas in North India.

Apart from the course, living on the farm and practising sustainable living was an inspiration. Every morning began with yoga as the sun rose over the beautiful misty fields and orchards.

## Gandhian practice

As participants, we adopted the Gandhian practice of Shramdaan. After breakfast each day, 30 of us worked in four teams for an hour, rotating the tasks of preparing vegetables and cleaning the kitchen, washing up and cleaning the dining room, and working in the fields. The food, cooked from fresh ingredients, mostly grown on the farm or in the garden just outside the kitchen, was delicious.

## Dr Shiva's work

Vandana Shiva is a valiant campaigner – like those who work at Garden Organic – *for* biodiversity; local food; seed, food, and water sovereignty; women's rights and democracy; *against* globalization; mono-thinking and monoculture; the abuse of power by global seed, chemical

Last November, Bruce Nixon, writer, speaker, consultant, and activist, travelled to India for the first time, to attend a course on Gandhi and Globalization at Navdanya Organic Farm and International College for Sustainable Living, Dehra Doon, North India. Struck by the similarities between Garden Organic and Navdanya, set up by Dr Vandana Shiva, Bruce resolved to write this article for *The Organic Way*.

fertilizer, and pesticide companies, and by some of the soft-drink multinationals who use up precious water.

She fought and won the campaign against the patenting of the neem tree – which has a wide range of uses including medicinal and pesticidal, besides its ability to grow in arid regions – by US multinational WR Grace and continues the fight against US RiceTec's patenting of Basmati rice. She is also fighting GM, and many would say she is essentially fighting her own government too, dedicated as it is to Western style industrialization.

## Non-violent farming

Over 20 years ago, it was becoming apparent that a paradigm shift in the practice of agriculture was needed. Navdanya was born of this search for non-violent farming, which protects biodiversity, the Earth, and small farmers. The farm was created on arid land, exhausted beyond hope by a plantation of eucalyptus trees. To the amazement of local farmers, Dr Shiva's green manures and composting methods, use of oxen instead of tractors, and sustainable watering of fields gradually restored the soil to lush fertility. That convinced them of the merits of her methods.

High-cost corporate agriculture is having an adverse impact on the livelihoods of these farmers. The Green Revolution, industrialized agriculture, and globalization are not working for them. The increasing cost of production combined with falling prices and the decline in farm credit is putting great burdens on farmers. GM seeds have been disastrous failures for these Indian farmers. All this is pushing farmers to suicide. Since 1997, more than 25,000 Indian farmers have taken their lives.

## Support, rescue, and conserve

'Navdanya' means 'nine crops' – the crops that represent India's collective source of food security. The main aim of the Navdanya biodiversity conservation programme is to support local farmers, to rescue and conserve crops and plants that are being pushed to extinction, and to make



Kitchen garden



Making compost



Papaya fruit



Neem tree

### Typical Programme at Navdanya

**January** Limits to Globalization: Ecological, Social, and Cultural

**February** Grandmother's University: Women's Traditional Knowledge in Food and Health

**March** Biodiversity Conservation and Biodiverse Organic Farming

**July** Mango Harvest Weekend

**September** Globalization and Ecofeminism

**September** Agro Ecology / Organic Farming

**October** Food Safety and Food Security

**November** Gandhi and Globalization

them available through direct marketing.

The farm and college comprise a working organic farm; a participatory research programme to provide direction and support to environmental activism; courses on sustainable living and agriculture; organic food cultivation, composting, and water conservation; cooking; a large seed bank; composting demonstrations, and festivals. Like Garden Organic, it has a wonderful programme of courses – see the boxed list. Navdanya has a shop and café in New Delhi's big open-air market, Delhi Haat.

The farm and college embody Gandhian principles, including non-violence. So do Dr Shiva's fieldwork and campaigns. She campaigns against the industrialisation of agriculture, commodification of food and water; robbing peasants of water and land; diverting of water; patenting seeds, plants, and food, and against the abuse of corporate power.

### Seed bank

The college has its own seed bank and organic farm spread over an area of 20 acres. Dr Shiva's efforts have resulted saved of more than 2,000 rice varieties from all over the country, including indigenous rice varieties adapted over centuries to meet different ecological demands. The farm has also conserved 31 varieties of wheat and hundreds of millets, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, and multipurpose plant species, including medicinal plants. There is a large collection of mango and citrus varieties and trees of all kinds including the bountiful neem.

Navdanya is actively involved in the rejuvenation of indigenous knowledge and culture. It has created awareness of the hazards of genetic engineering and defended people's knowledge from biopiracy and food rights in the face of globalization.

Over the past 20 years Navdanya has initiated Community Seed Banks with many partners. Navdanya encourages partners to become self supporting to reflect its philosophy of seed sovereignty. Navdanya has established 34 seed banks in 13 states across the country.

### Touching many

Navdanya supports hundreds of local farmers and has shown them how to survive using traditional varieties and organic methods. They are currently working in about 5,000 villages of India. Navdanya has so far trained above 200,000 men and women farmers, students, government officials, representatives of national as well as international NGOs, and voluntary organisations on biodiversity conservation and organic farming.

It would be wonderful if Garden Organic's members visited Vandana Shiva's farm and college and exchanged knowledge with her highly talented and dedicated people.

For more information about Navdanya and the courses they offer go to [www.navdanya.org](http://www.navdanya.org)

Visit [www.bruce-nixon.com](http://www.bruce-nixon.com) to find out more about Bruce Nixon, author of *Living System: Making Sense of Sustainability*.