



Memo n°3: Kolon Arachchige Saman Prasanna

Farmer, Sri Lanka

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I am K.A. Saman Prasanna a citizen of Sri Lanka and currently working as the president of Padavi-Sripura farmers' association. I was born in 1973 at Padaviya and live in Padaviya farming colony whole my life.

I have been engaging with almost every activity taken place in our society as a community leader. I was just 22 years when I first heard this kidney disease. Our farther described it as a mysterious disease. I have experienced how this devastating disease affects all aspects of our society. Initially it was named as kidney disease of unknown cause. However, general perception of my community was this disease is due to the usage of agrochemicals. We don't know the western science but our community came to this conclusion using their intuition. Sri Lanka is a nation, which cultivates rice continuously for last 23 centuries. There is no record in the known history about this kind of kidney disease. My grand farther and farther confirmed this disease emerged in mid 1990s. Agrochemicals were introduced in early 1980s. Before 1980s our community cultivated rice, finger millet, sesame, vegetables, fruits and many other local varieties of grains. Initially our farmers refused to use agrochemicals. Nevertheless, to obtain agrarian-loans usage of agrochemical and newly improved seed varieties was a must. At the same time mono cropping was promoted. In early days farmers have brought chemical fertilizers and pesticides (which were given free of charge) but not used and left at home. Because farmers believed it will be harmful for the environment. Ultimately agrarian officers found this and farmers were punished. This is how agrochemicals were forcefully introduced to our community.

Our fathers' generation never brought water to the field. They freely drank water from the streams near the paddy fields. After couple of seasons of using agrochemicals fish in these streams died. Frogs too became extinct. Water in the streams became unsuitable for consumption. Every problem started from this introduction of agrochemicals.

Herbicide was the most attractive chemical for farmers. It drastically reduced the workload of farmers. Initially we used Gramoxone. Soon it was replaced with Roundup. When we spray Roundup soil became soft like butter. However, even earthworms in deep soil died. This broke our heart because we all are Buddhists. Buddhism taught us do not harm any living being; it taught us all to fear death, comparing oneself with others, one should neither kill nor lead to any action that lead to death.

People gradually became sick. Kidney disease was the most prominent but the prevalence of heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, cancer, and newborn with abnormal features became more and more frequent.

Various people from different institutes visited our community saying they will find the cause of kidney disease. They have collected our blood, urine and various samples. Unfortunately we didn't even see them thereafter. None of the results were available to us. In 2010 Dr. Channa and his team visited our farming colony. He was a close friend of Dr. Chintaka who was the doctor of our village hospital. Unlike other investigators his team stayed in our village lived and ate with us. His team collected information from more than 120 kidney patients and 200 odd healthy individuals. All most all villagers were screened for kidney disease. They have collected blood, urine, drinking water, soil, food, fertilizer and pesticide samples. They gradually became friends of our villagers. We have prepared food for them and helped their research.

Couple of weeks later, we received investigation reports. More than 50 young farmers were newly identified as having kidney disease. They were referred to the Anuradhapura and Padaviya renal clinics. After couple of months Dr. Channa told us according to his findings this disease is primarily due to agrochemicals. We were quite happy as it matched with our belief, which we arrived through our intuition and experience.

We have been working closely with medical faculty in Rajarata University for last 5-6 years. They regularly visit our farming colony. We received more than 15 water purification machines, scholarships for school children and many help for affected families with their intervention. Majority of farmers are now willing to carry out agrochemical free farming. Dr Channa's team has introduced us traditional rice varieties. We have grown them without using any chemicals. The yield is very good but the problem is market because people are adapted to newly improved varieties. In 2015 Roundup and five other agrochemicals were banned. I am very happy with this decision, as they are responsible for killing our farmers. These chemicals make us killers; deviating from Buddhist teachings.

It is a desperate need to abandon all these agrochemicals otherwise there will be no future for our children; unless, any living being may not able to survive in this toxic environment.