

The sustainable sandhai

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Karupatti Palagaram at the Sandhai | Photo Credit: [Shanthini Rajkumar](#)

Learning about the treasure trove of local produce straight from our farmers is just one of the pleasures of participating in the Sunday Sandhai, a new initiative by Coimbatore Corporation and RAAC

The image of a lone farmer supporting a massive plough caught my immediate attention on WhatsApp. It was part of a message that invited us to namma ooru sandhai. An effort on the part of people who are striving to make the farm to table connect keeping in mind the sustainable and natural



methods of agriculture.

Country vegetables at the Sandhai | Photo Credit: [Shanthini Rajkumar](#)

'Namma ooru sandhai' focused on selling natural products directly to the end consumer without the interference of middlemen. The venue was the Corporation school on Cross Cut Road. The invitation also urged the customer to bring their own shopping bags, baskets and containers for their



Sandhai corridors | Photo

purchases, including things like cold-pressed oils and pickles.

Credit: Shanthini Rajkumar We arrived at the school grounds at 10.30 am to find a large number of people buying things. The open courtyard in the middle had people from agriculture explaining methods, practices and so on. There was also a play that highlighted the role of farmers in our lives. It was heartening to learn that the civic authorities had made this possible along with the members of RAAC. Corporation Commissioner Dr Vijayakarthekeyan said, "We need to look back at traditional practices to move forward in a manner that aids development. Whether it is choosing the cycle as a mode of transport or bringing back local ingredients into our kitchens, we have to realise that the old ways need to be re-adopted for a better future." We met Alageshwari who first thought up of the idea of a monthly sandhai

. She was profoundly moved by the teachings of the green crusader, Nammalvar, and was determined to follow through. She has worked with several schools, organisations and individuals in setting up working farm units that continue to be extremely successful. The floor of the school's long corridors of the school were filled with all manners of products. It left little space for walking but that did not deter the shopper's enthusiasm. Ashok Kumar had made the journey from his village of Uthukuli to showcase a wide range of naturally procured fruit and vegetable seeds. Uma Maheshwaran gave up a corporate job to make, among other things, an aromatic kulliyal podi (a bath scrub) made of herbs, flowers and roots like vetiver, panner rose, nanari that does not strip the skin of essential oils and has a cooling after-effect on the body. He sources the ingredients



from nattu marundhu kadais and friends' farms.

[Natural fibre products at the Sandhai](#) | Photo Credit: [Shanthini Rajkumar](#)

Bhaskaran from Vellaikovil was selling
pirandai

pickle and spice powders to ward off colds. Suganthi offered grains and spices that she grew herself under her brand Tharumugai. We also met Anbu who runs a free-range chicken farm at Kethanur and cooks on order from his home at Tirupur. Sundaram weaves mats from dharbai grass and makes vetiver

fans and loofahs. Viswanathan and team who make colourful toys, pouches and baskets from palm fibre under the banner Panaiyetram. There were many more such people but they were too busy trading to find time to talk.



[Vegetable and fruit seeds at the Sandhai](#) | Photo Credit: [Shanthini Rajkumar](#)

The

sandhai

was a watering hole for people of all age groups to mingle and understand the importance and advantages of adopting a more natural lifestyle. Plastic bags were vetoed and the sellers made parcels out of banana leaves, old newspapers or cloth. Mud pots filled with drinking water were placed around to quench thirst. The couple selling *kambhu koozhu* did brisk business. The crowds proved that more and more people were trying to make the changeover to a natural way of life and were keen to know how. It was such a vibrant and educative environment that one failed to notice the heat, also thanks to the water-sprinkled *vetiver visiris*. For more information The

sandhai

will be held on the first Sunday of each month Contact Alageshwari at 9500125126, Suganthi at 9894911762, Panaiyetram (Saminathan) at 8012325499, Sundaram at 9791231078, Nature's Bucket (Uma Maheshwaran) at 9962250949, Anbu at 9344201577, Ashok at 9500125125 First published by

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