

# 'Nel' Jayaraman, The Crusader Who Revived 170+ Native Paddy Varieties!

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[In the early hours of Thursday, India lost KR Jayaraman, one of the country's foremost traditional seed conservationists, to cancer. Jayaraman's lifelong crusade to protect native paddy varieties is so legendary that he came to be widely known as 'Nel' Jayaraman—Nel means paddy in Tamil. A native of Adirangam village in the Tiruvarur district, Jayaraman was a class 8 dropout who began his work as a conservationist in 2004. He was following the footsteps of his mentor, G Nammalvar, who had died promoting the need of preserving native paddy seeds. At that point, he had only managed to collect 15 varieties of seeds. He then cultivated these in his own village, with the intention of distributing the grains to farmers nearby. \*Nel Jayaraman\*. Source: Facebook. This dream came to fruition when he organised \*Nel Vizha\*, a one-of-its-kind paddy seed festival in 2006 and distributed approximately 2 kgs of native seeds to farmers across the state at no charge. For the next decade, he went on to revive close to 174 indigenous paddy varieties that were thought to be lost forever. Some of which include Mappillai Samba, Rajamannar, Kavuni, Milagu Samba, Gundu Kar, Salem Samba, Sigappu Kuruvikar, Kallimadaiyaan, Samba Mochanam, Vadan Samba, Pichavaari, Navara and Neelan Samba. While preserving these varieties was one of his primary goals, Jayaraman also worked relentlessly towards popularising them amongst local farmers, besides vociferously advocating organic agricultural practices for increased paddy production. It is also believed that he personally inducted close to 40,000 farmers into organic farming as well as seed conservation. Jayaraman took his cause to the literary sphere as well. He authored several books that reiterated the need to protect native paddy varieties. In fact, many of his books—Mamarunthaqum Parampariya Nel, Nellathikaram and Nellukiraitha Neer to name a few—are widely renowned. In recognition of his exemplary efforts, Jayaraman was bestowed with the 'Best Organic Farmer' award by the state government, two years in a row \(2012 and 2013\). Source: Facebook. Two years later, he won the 'Best Genome Saviour' award instituted by the National Innovation Foundation \(NIF\), which was conferred to him by the President of India. Officiating as one of the training directors of CREATE, a consumer-based organisation in Tamil Nadu, he had essayed a crucial role in furthering the famous 'Save our Rice Campaign' across the state. Sadly, he was diagnosed with malignant melanoma earlier this year, and despite undergoing intensive treatment at a private hospital in Chennai, he lost the battle and breathed his last today morning. In recognition of the unparalleled legacy that Nel Jayaraman has left behind, we pay our respects to the selfless conservationist. We also hope that his tireless efforts in reviving lost paddy varieties will inspire farmers and agriculturists, for generations to come. First published by \*\*The Better India\*\* on Dec. 6, 2018](#)