

How Aranyam Naturals Transformed the Lives of Farmers in Meghalaya



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Aranyam Naturals, a Delhi-based social startup founded by Meenakshi Bhardwaj, has been dedicated to assisting North-Eastern tribal farmers since its establishment. The journey began in 2015 at a CSR conference, where Meenakshi encountered a social worker who presented her with honey and turmeric while seeking help for her village. This humble request eventually gave birth to Aranyam Naturals, which has now become a beacon of hope for farmers in the region. By working directly with women farmers, Aranyam Naturals provides them with a platform to showcase their products and ensure fair prices for their produce.

The impact of Aranyam Naturals on the lives of marginalized tribal farmers in Meghalaya has been profound. These women farmers, belonging to the Mookyndang, Shanpung, and Laskein villages, have been practicing traditional farming methods for years. However, they faced difficulties in accessing markets and earning sustainable incomes. Aranyam Naturals stepped in to offer support, providing farmers with a reliable source of income while allowing them to maintain their traditional way of life.

One of the key products associated with Aranyam Naturals is the region-specific Lakadong turmeric, renowned for its high curcumin content. This turmeric is cultivated on the small plots of land owned by the farmers themselves. Additionally, the honey sourced from the forests of Cherrapunji and Mawsynram adds to their product line. By directly engaging with the farmers, Aranyam Naturals ensures they receive fair prices for their products, enabling them to lead more sustainable lifestyles. Through its efforts, the startup has empowered nearly a hundred farmers by providing them with the means and resources to continue their traditional farming practices while ensuring access to a reliable income source. The impact of Aranyam Naturals extends beyond the economic benefits, as it also promotes sustainable living and preserves traditional farming practices.

"We always want to ensure that we source sustainably and provide a livelihood to those we are sourcing from," affirms Meenakshi Bhardwaj, founder and CEO of Aranyam Naturals. Her visit to Shillong in 2015 seemed ordinary at first, but the fortuitous meeting with the social worker led to an entirely unexpected outcome. When Meenakshi attempted to offer money in return for the honey and turmeric, the social worker refused, instead requesting assistance for her poverty-stricken village where farmers were not receiving fair prices. Although unsure how to help initially, Meenakshi made a promise and returned to Delhi, dedicating herself to Aranyam Naturals full-time.

Unfamiliar with turmeric and its potential, Meenakshi decided to have it tested in a lab. The results revealed an exciting discovery—the curcumin levels in the Lakadong turmeric ranged from 7 to 10 percent, significantly higher than the local turmeric's 2 to 3 percent. Recognizing the value of what she held in her hands, Meenakshi became determined to assist the farmers and believed that the world needed to benefit from Lakadong Turmeric's exceptional qualities.

The process of cultivating Lakadong turmeric involves small land plots owned by the farmers, many of whom are single mothers or sole providers for their families. After the turmeric is dried, it is ground into powder using a small machine, although the process is time-consuming. The tribals collect honey from the forests, bringing it back to their homes to hang the honeycombs on their roofs. The honey drips down and is collected in cans, then taken to the social worker, who assists with packaging.



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