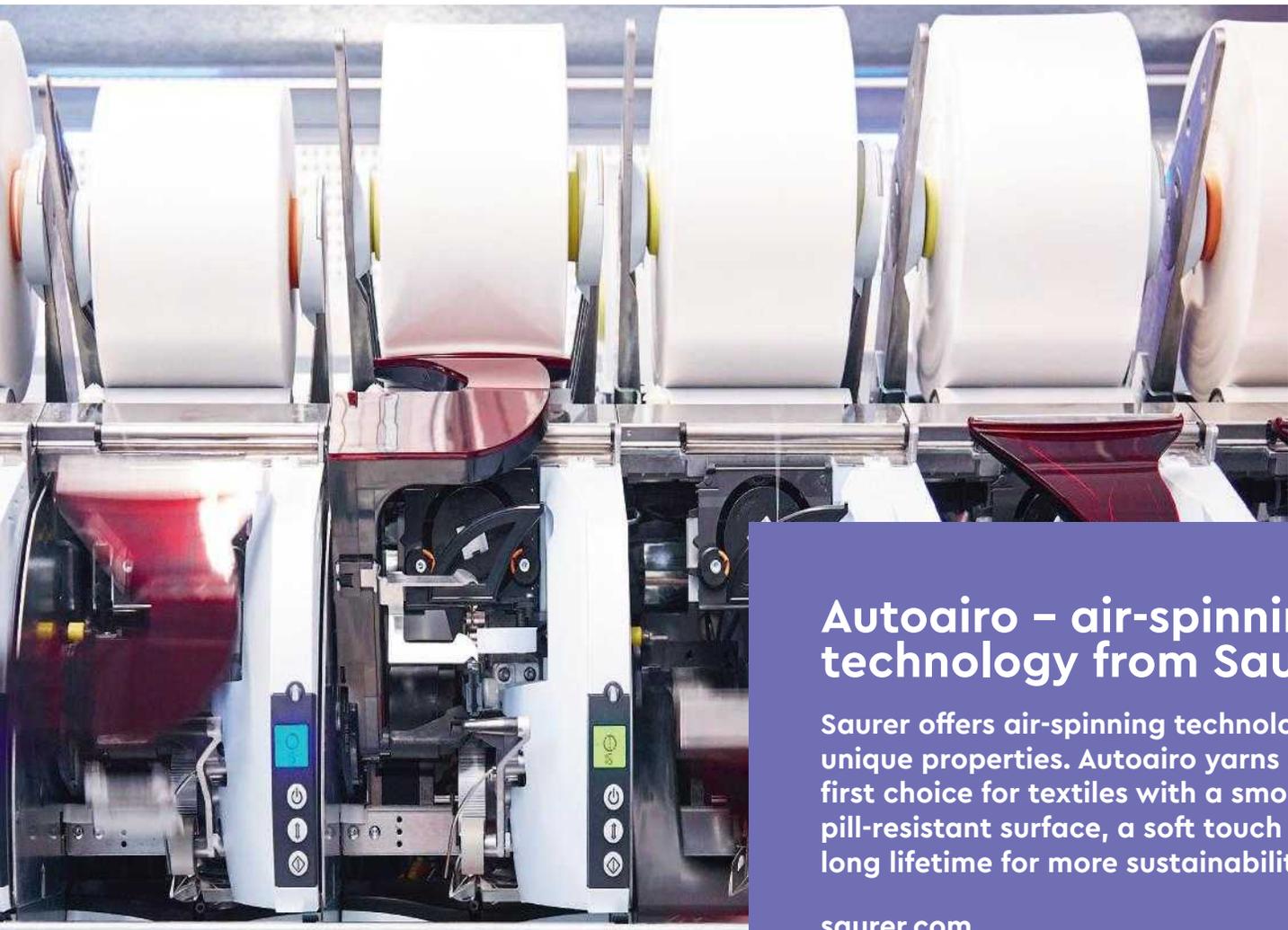




- INNOVATION IN TEXTILE MACHINERY AND MANY MORE
- CORPORATE GLANCE: RAYMOND

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Hemp: The Roadmap to Sustainability



Senthil Kumar Sivamathiah
Founder, PURAA

Yaniv Mitra.

Senthil Kumar Sivamathiah is a Literature Professor by profession who has launched a new brand for Hemp named PURAA as he wants to transform the society towards sustainability. Puraa means Pure! He started this venture when he was inspired by his son Yaniv Mitra on a trip to their native place and they are promoting sustainability ever since! Exclusive interview with Mr. Senthil Kumar Sivamathiah, his Start Up promotes sustainable fibre to finished products.

What is your inspiration behind starting this company?

It all happened before two years (May 2020) when we (my wife Sweeta, daughter Thaneesha Mitra, my son Yaniv Mitra and I) went to Ooty, the Nilgiris, the Queen of Hills, for summer vacation. By the way, I am from Ooty, settled in Chennai. My son was 5 years then, he was very excited to meet his grandparents and relatives, I am from a beautiful village named Katerly Dam, my parents live in our house there and we have a kitchen garden behind our house. My parents grow all vegetables in the kitchen garden and cook them fresh, needless to say that the field is free from pesticides, and other chemicals. He used to go to the field along with his grandmother, pluck fresh vegetables and my mother used to cook tasty delicious and chemical free food.

Yaniv realized that the food was very tasty, delicious, and yummy and he felt very energetic too. Therefore, he asked me 'Dad, what is so special with the food grandma is preparing compared to Mom's preparation in Chennai'. I had to explain to him about pesticides, chemicals, inorganic vegetables, land becoming uncultivable because of the use of chemicals etc and had to explain to him about the ill effects of these pesticides, chemicals that leads to serious health issues amongst all age groups. He is generally very curious to know and explore, as that is the age to

explore many things.

After staying in the Nilgiris for a month, breathing fresh, unpolluted air, chemical free food, daily evening walk with his grandfather near the dam, drinking native cow's milk, curd, ghee and playing with our cows made him feel like heaven and wouldn't want to go back to Chennai. He asked me if he could stay along with his grandparents in the Nilgiris or take an initiative in Chennai in order to make things better starting from chemical free food, fresh air, his favourite cow's milk and curd and the list goes on and on and on.

Oh! I did not introduce myself right, here we go, my name is Senthil Kumar Sivamathiah, I am an educator by profession (working as an Assistant Professor in a deemed to be university in Chennai) and entrepreneur by passion. More so, I am a literature person and I was able to connect everything my son was telling me and started my initial research on how one can change the world as a better place for the future generation to live in happily. If I being an educator do not practice what I preach in the class, then I cannot be a real educator. I remembered Gandhi's words, 'If you want to see the change, you be the change'. I became the change and started my journey on sustainable development along with the person who enlightened me to be the change, which

is my son, Yaniv Mitra.

'We need to clean up the soil, re-fertilize the land, bring back its originality; save water for the upcoming generation, feed cows with natural food in order to get good, healthy milk, encourage farmers to use natural fertilizers, plant more trees, rethink the way we live our lives, go for sustainable clothing, change the entire scenario etc. Is it possible for a single person to do all these things just because your then 5-year-old son told to change all these.

I seriously started researching about sustainable development and sustainable living and **YES**, I got the answer from nature itself as '**HEMP**', **YES**, and **HEMP Plant** has the capacity to change the entire ecosystem towards sustainability. Hemp plant is called as the **SACRED PLANT** and it is believed that Lord Shiva himself has given this plant to the world as a liberator and hemp plant is mentioned several times in the sacred Vedas.

Hemp is a very versatile plant that has nutritional value extremely good for our skin and health; hemp can **replace** more than **2,500 products** that are **hazardous to earth**. It can be refined into a variety of commercial items beginning with medicines, food, fine textiles, papers, clothes, beauty products, oils, building material, biodegradable plastics, paint, insulation biofuel, animal feeds and many more. It helps end hunger, reduces deforestation, purifies the earth, it boosts the economy and saves water by consuming less water to grow.

When did you start this business?

Our private limited company **SMLSS AGROS PVT LTD** was born in 2021 and I am very proud of my son Yaniv Mitra because our company is the brainchild of him. We have created a brand named '**PURAA**', which means **purity**. We coined many names but he and his sister **Thaneesha Mitra** both stood for the brand name '**PURAA**' and my beloved wife **Sweeta** gave the tagline for the brand as '**THE FUTURE**', Hence it is '**PURAA, THE FUTURE**'.

I want to promote sustainability and educate people about the benefits of hemp, only when we promote hemp, we can talk about sustainability. It all has to start from planting hemp on a large scale to reap the benefits of hemp on a long run. When we do it, we

will have enough raw material with us and we can use it to create various sustainable products and can bring down the cost of hemp. Currently the cost of hemp is high, as we only have limited quantity of raw material that we mostly source from Uttarakhand. The union and state governments should frame a policy to grow and promote hemp and its byproducts, it is high time they work in a constructive manner in order to uphold sustainable lifestyle.

Tell us about your products, as most of them are sustainable.

Hemp is a very versatile plant that has nutritional value extremely good for our skin and health; hemp can **replace** more than **2,500 products** that are **hazardous to earth**. It can be refined into a variety of commercial items beginning with medicines, food, fine textiles, papers, clothes, beauty products, oils, building material, biodegradable plastics, paint, insulation biofuel, animal feeds and many more. It helps end hunger, reduces deforestation, purifies the earth, it boosts the economy and saves water by consuming less water to grow.

To begin with, we have started making fabric and finished products (menswear, womenswear kids wear) socks, towels, bed sheets, pillow covers, yoga mats, complete stationary items, (papers, diaries, note books, packing material, bags) hemp seeds (for breakfast, snacks, salads), protein powder and edible oil from hemp. The journey so far has been very satisfying.

You have entered the industry at a very challenging time... Right now, people are not in that mindset of paying those extra bucks. So, how do you manage?

Yes, you are right. It is actually quite difficult. Primarily, awareness is very important. People ask me, 'Why do we need to pay so much?', 'what is hemp?' I constantly educate people about hemp plant and its benefits. We do not have a retail shop as of yet. We are planning to open our first hemp store in February 2023 in a mall in Coimbatore. We are targeting Coimbatore, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai and Mumbai to set up hemp stores by the end of 2023. We are in talks with certain governments to import the raw material in bulk quantities; you will come to know about it soon. The scenario is going to change in a few months. As of now the cost of raw material is high the overall production cost is also high. If things go well as

planned, we can give these products to people in half the rate in the 2nd or 3rd quarter on 2023.

We are reading a lot about Hemp these days especially from abroad. However, to talk is different and to actually promote it in a country like India is different...

It is simple...you saw a person buying a shirt in front of you; it is because he liked it. Only when people come to know about it, they feel it, they will understand about it and then they will buy it. If I just keep on talking about hemp without having any products made of hemp in hand, it will not work.

Apart from Hemp, what are some other fibres that are sustainable or have a good market?

Bamboo is one of the best sustainable fibres. Organic cotton and linen are fine to a certain extent. Bamboo is a very good fibre, we can make garments from 100% bamboo fabric or we blend them and make it cheaper. For example, we have hemp and bamboo blend, bamboo and organic cotton blend, hemp and organic cotton blend and tencel blend too.

Across the industry, we have polyester that is the synthetic fibre, then we have cotton, which is a natural fibre and lastly, we have these sustainable fibres. According to you what is the percentage in the industry that constitutes of these sustainable fibres?

Sustainable fibres are not even 1%. There are more than 1.3 billion people in our country and only a handful of people are in hemp industry. That is a very small number. Therefore, how can we cater to such a large number? These handful people are the one who are currently manufacturing hemp products, in our country. On the other hand, there are thousands of people in cotton industry. Therefore, there is no comparison whatsoever. We cannot bridge this gap unless we promote hemp. Primarily, we need to create awareness. I hope that events like expos will open up doors for promoting hemp products and sustainability overall.

As an industry professional, what kind of awareness activities are you expecting to be carried out? What should we do jointly as a part of the industry to promote this awareness that is needed?

Actually, all governments in India should promote this. Now, only the Uttarakhand government is promoting this. Supreme Court has given orders that Hemp can

be used for industrial and medicinal purposes. However, no government is coming forward. We have to take it as a priority. If governments ask the farmers to plant hemp, rest everything can be taken care of, the prices will also come down drastically. We can make India a country that will have only sustainable products in the next 20 years. The media industry should come forward to promote sustainable fabrics and sustainable products as a precedence to save nature, save the world and make this world a better place for the future generation to live in.

Being an educationist, you have entered the industry as a start-up. What is the advice that you would like to give to the new and upcoming start-ups that are working towards sustainability?

My suggestion for the industry is, money is only a by product, do not run behind making profits. Money will come and go; we can earn it at any time. However, once we spoil nature, we will not get it back. Unless we are aware, we will be unconsciously damaging nature. We have to join our hands together and come up with a workable timeline to make and promote only sustainable products.

These days, the word 'sustainability' has become a fancy word; everybody is using it without even knowing what meaning of the word. First, research what is sustainability and what they can do for the betterment of the future generations as well. In the last two years, the whole world witnessed the rush, not to jewelry shops, malls or showrooms, but to hospitals, the reason being lack of immune power among people as everything they consumed had only chemicals in them. The overall quality of life has degraded. Hemp is the only plant that can change this scenario, as it is sustainable. My only advice is that, the newcomers should start researching. Once they start researching, they will understand. It is a step-by-step process. ITC was selling cigarettes, but now they are selling books! So, this change in the journey is needed. People are coming up with sustainable products, so this change will happen eventually.

If you want change, be the change:

Yaniv Mitra is showing keen interest on the development of the company and he encourages us to explore new products based on hemp that are 100% sustainable and ecofriendly. To recognize his mission and vision **Yaniv Mitra** (now 7 years old) will be inducted as the **CEO** of SMLSS AGRO PVT LTD in the coming General Body Meeting. Probably the youngest CEO ever. He is being the **CHANGE**. As per his suggestion, for the readers of this article, he wants to present 25 hemp shirts as a compliment for those who review this article, promote hemp in your surroundings and in your social media pages about the benefits of hemp and start working towards sustainability.

The journey of sustainability continues...