

FACE-TO-FACE



“Through Television, one can simplify complex scientific information into practical advice by combining field visuals, farmer voices, and expert inputs. Collaboration with agricultural television programmes like Annadata through its visual communication can greatly influence rural communities and support agricultural research and extension in scaling up new knowledge.”

Prameela Paruchuri
Associate Chief Producer
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FROM FIELDS TO SCREEN: ANNADATA’S JOURNEY OVER THREE DECADES

Prameela Paruchuri has been associated with Annadata, ETV Telugu's daily educational show on agriculture, since its inception in June 1996. This programme has inspired a generation of rural communities in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana over the past three decades, and it continues to do so to this day. Prameela has played a key role in developing this programme over the years, and she is currently serving as its Associate Chief Producer.

In an engaging conversation with Rasheed Sulaiman V, Prameela reflected on her three-decade-long professional journey. She shared insights gained from her extensive experience at ETV, which has been producing and telecasting Annadata.

As someone who joined ETV’s Annadata team even before its formal launch in June 1996, how do you look at your career spanning almost 30 years?

I consider myself fortunate to have been part of Annadata since its inception, and to have worked with Shri Ramoji Rao, the visionary who founded ETV and was the force behind the Annadata Television programme, as well as many other stalwarts who contributed to Annadata over the decades. I learnt everything about television journalism on the job from stalwarts such as Y. Hanumanth Rao Garu (1995-2003) during my initial years and later from Ch. Narayana Swami Garu (2003-2009) and Dr V Ranga Rao Garu (2001-2013).

I am incredibly proud to share that since its inception on June 30, 1996, *Annadata* has been produced and telecast every single day without fail. Over the years, its programmes have provided immense benefits to

farmers across both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. I have been part of this incredible journey. It was one of the earliest private television programs on agriculture in India, at a time when Doordarshan was the only major broadcaster.

How did you come to Annadata in 1996?

As you are aware, ETV was established in August 1995 by Shri Ramoji Rao, and he was keen to launch a daily special programme for farmers called Annadata. Mr Hanumantha Rao Garu, who previously worked in the All-India Radio (AIR), joined Annadata as its Chief Producer in 1995.

I joined Annadata in February 1996 as a content producer and scriptwriter after completing my BSc in Home Science and MSc in Foods and Nutrition from the then Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University (renamed as ANGRAU later). I was responsible for developing agricultural stories and coordinating with experts. I have always had an interest in farming, and during my graduate and master's studies at APAU, I took several courses on agriculture. Initially, I knew little about the media field, but when I joined, I quickly learned from a knowledgeable and supportive team. Within six to eight months, I became confident in my work.

Our early team comprised five to six members. The initial task upon my joining was to identify the visuals needed for the [Annadata title song](#). The song, written by Veturi Sundara Rama Murthy and sung by Shri S. P. Balasubramaniam, continues to be the title song for the programme even today.



How has the Annadata Programme evolved over the past three decades?

Initially, the 30-minute Annadata programme in Telugu was telecast daily on ETV only in the morning, from 6:30 to 7:00 AM. In 2000, the programme expanded to four additional languages: Kannada, Bengali, Marathi, and Oriya, with ETV's network expansion. Our office was moved from Hyderabad City to Ramoji Film City that same year. Eventually, there were ten ETV regional channels, each carrying an Annadata edition.

In 2003, ETV launched Jaikisan, a 30-minute evening program under the news platform, focusing on farmers' issues beyond technology, which include aspects related to the availability of inputs, marketing, and prices. In 2021, this exclusive programme was discontinued, and the segment was merged into Annadata, with the last eight to ten minutes of each episode now covering these issues. Currently, the Annadata program airs in the morning on ETV Telugu (6.30-7.00 AM). It is repeated in the evening (6:30-7:00 PM) on ETV News Channels (ETV Telangana and ETV Andhra Pradesh). The repeat allows farmers who miss the morning slot to watch later. YouTube now complements TV viewing, giving audiences flexible access anytime.

Television has penetrated deeply into the rural areas of both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, with almost 80% of households owning a Television. ETV also has a strong cable TV presence across these states. Do you have an estimate of the viewership of the Annadata Programme on Television?

We estimate that about 24 million households own a Television in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (put together). According to the latest BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) estimates, around 5 lakh viewers watch the Annadata episode every day on average.

We have noticed that the older generation, aged 50 and above, still prefers television, while younger audiences follow Annadata on [YouTube](#). The program remains popular because of its credibility, practical content, and farmer-friendly approach.



When did Annadata go online?

We started our YouTube channel around 2014-15. At first, we uploaded older episodes. Soon, we began posting new ones daily. Each day's program is now available in full, with short segments released the next day. The channel has more than 445,000 subscribers, indicating strong audience loyalty. As preferences change, people want short, quick videos. That's why Annadata now shares both full episodes and short clips, making agricultural knowledge accessible at any time.

By tracking viewership data on YouTube and calls to the Annadata Helpline, we found that farmer success stories and episodes featuring new crop varieties are the most popular. Episodes about managing pests

and diseases follow. YouTube is effective because it allows for short clips, fosters viewer engagement, and provides instant feedback through comments.

As we often say, “content is the king,” and this is especially true for media. How do you decide and develop relevant content that interests farmers and telecast it every day through Annadata? Is it a real challenge?

Yes, it is challenging, and the biggest challenge is ensuring fresh, high-quality stories every day. Field-based reporting is time-consuming, and identifying and capturing success stories requires additional effort. Weather conditions, crop seasons, and the availability of scientists also affect scheduling. Despite this, we’ve never missed a broadcast in 30 years, which is a significant achievement.

We rely on seasonal priorities, calls from farmers, and daily feeds. For instance, based on the crop season (Kharif/Rabi), we identify the topic and then seek out agricultural experts (mainly from Agricultural Universities and KVKs) who can present on the subject. We also consider the stage of the crop to determine the actual content. Another factor deciding the content is the region, the varied agro-climatic regions of the combined state. We always look for farmer success stories, which are of great interest to our audience. However, identifying, shooting, and then covering these success stories in a 5-6 minute segment is a significant challenge.



Video editing at Annadata

Since day one, we have been operating a toll-free helpline (1800-425-4085) that is active from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM, where farmers can call with queries on crop issues, seed varieties, and market information. We receive 15–20 calls an hour. This also provides us with ideas on the challenges farmers currently face, which serves as input for deciding the content. Many older viewers call regularly, treating the program like part of their daily routine. Through this mechanism, we also sometimes get feedback on our programmes, and some farmers request contact details of experts or featured farmers.

We also work closely with ETV’s larger news network, which includes district-level staff reporters and freelance videographers who contribute agricultural stories from across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Some content available in our 30-year-old video library, such as crop visuals, is seldom reused to complete seed-to-harvest sequences when fresh footage is incomplete. This library is a priceless resource for future generations and for the training of new team members. Every week, we plan by sending a list of target topics to all our contributors via WhatsApp groups (separate for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana).

Is livestock and fisheries coverage as frequent as crop-based topics?

Although crop-based stories comprise approximately 70% of the content, we ensure that at least one story from an allied sector, such as fisheries or livestock, is featured daily. Fisheries coverage is limited because there are fewer research stations and experts, while livestock stories are more frequent and widespread.

How do these field reporters and freelancers work?

Each district has a staff reporter overseeing local contributors. In total, we receive inputs from about 30–40 contributors daily. Freelance videographers specialise in agricultural shoots—they handle both camera and interviews. We train them periodically (once every year or two) on technical aspects, such as camera work, lighting, and how to effectively record success stories of farmers. Training covers when and how to shoot crops (for example, during peak harvest), how to frame shots, and how to conduct interviews with farmers and scientists. We emphasise clarity, good visuals, and complete coverage—from sowing to harvest. They also learn about storytelling, covering economic and management aspects, and ensuring scientific accuracy.



Recording a field programme for Annadata

How is the Annadata production team structured, and how do you finalise each episode?

Here, at the headquarters, we have a team of 5 to 6 members from agricultural backgrounds. We handle everything—script writing, editing, anchoring, and voiceovers.

Every day, we review the feeds we received from the districts and sort them based on relevance and region. We record anchor introductions separately, edit all stories, and compile the final episode. The selection ensures balanced regional coverage and a mix of crops, technologies, and success stories. Urgent or time-sensitive stories—like pest outbreaks or market news—are prioritised for immediate telecast. Each

30-minute Annadata episode typically features 3–4 technology-based stories. We try to represent all five agro-climatic zones of the Telugu states. For the Jaikisan segment, we select 2–3 issue-based stories.



The Team Annadata (Kali, Sushma, Prameela, Naveen Kumar and Pavan Kumar)

How do you decide which experts to feature?

Based on the crop season, we identify relevant scientists from agricultural universities, research stations, District Agricultural Technology Transfer Centres (DATTCs), Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and state line departments. For instance, during the Rabi season, we cover paddy in West Godavari, Bengal gram in Kurnool, and vegetables in Telangana. We coordinate with research stations to cover new varieties, pest management, and best practices.

In general, we have received immense cooperation from agricultural universities and KVKs, and they are happy to feature their work and share new knowledge among farmers through television. As we understand, each media appearance also counts towards their performance appraisal. We prefer experts who can communicate simply without using technical jargon and speak confidently on camera.

Do you think agricultural experts could improve their effectiveness if they received training on engaging with the media?

We noted that some experts possess deep technical knowledge, but struggle to communicate engagingly and clearly. A few are excellent communicators, especially those with KVK or field experience. Clearly, orientation of agricultural scientists on good practices in speaking to the camera (voice control,

appearance, using language appropriate to the audience, managing anxiety, etc.) can help improve the programme quality.

For new recruits, we also require fluency in Telugu (both speaking and writing scripts), especially for anchors and scriptwriters. The ability to write good scripts, edit videos, and record anchor voiceovers is another skill we look for. We train recruits in all these skills over a period of about a year. Later, many move to other roles in media after gaining this experience, so Annadata also functions as a training ground for agricultural communicators.

The media is a vital sector that can potentially provide employment opportunities to agricultural graduates. Still, I am unsure whether these topics are currently covered in the graduate-level agricultural curricula or in extension courses at the Master's level. I would request that agricultural universities examine this aspect and strengthen training in communication, extension, and media skills, so that students can apply their knowledge practically and connect with farmers or media organisations like ours. Even a short media communication course—covering camera handling, scripting, and social media use—would make graduates far more employable and capable in extension and media roles.

How is the Annadata programme funded?

As you are aware, advertisements constitute the primary source of revenue for all types of media. Due to its wider reach among farmers, companies involved in agribusiness provide advertisements, which is part of the business model behind Annadata. Moreover, Annadata is part of ETV, a key channel within the ETV Group. Though we carry spot advertisements in the Annadata programme, we do not promote specific brands or products within the programme. Instead, we mention only the chemical or generic names, thereby ensuring that the programme remains neutral and farmer-focused.

What distinguishes Annadata from other agricultural programs?

Its consistency, quality, and farmer-first approach. Since 1996, we've maintained daily telecasts without interruption. Unlike some other channels, we record directly in the field, not in studios, ensuring visual authenticity. Farmers deeply trust Annadata. Our commitment to factual, unbiased information has built long-term credibility with farmers.

When Annadata started, Doordarshan's *Krishi Darshan* was the only agricultural program available, but it was mainly studio-based and lacked engagement. Annadata revolutionised the format by bringing cameras directly to farms, showing fresh visuals, and presenting real farmers and scientists together. That field-based approach became a benchmark for all later agricultural media.

Annadata has been serving as a bridge between research and farmers. We simplify complex scientific information into practical advice through TV and digital media. The combination of field visuals, farmer voices, and expert input ensures that farmers learn both the technology and its real-world applications. In many ways, Annadata functions as an extension tool at a mass scale.

As I understand, Annadata has received several awards for its exemplary contribution to agricultural broadcasting.

Yes, we received the prestigious Nandi Award (Silver and Copper) in 2010 for excellence in agricultural programming. Before that, in 2008, we got the CMS Academy Awards. In 2011, Annadata was awarded

the TRS Lalithakala Parishat - AP Cinegoers TV Award for the Best Agricultural Programme. In 2022, Annadata received the Best Language Film Award (Telugu) at the MANAGE Agri Film Festival.



Receiving the Best Language Film Award (Telugu) from Shri B K Patil (Minister for Agriculture, Karnataka)

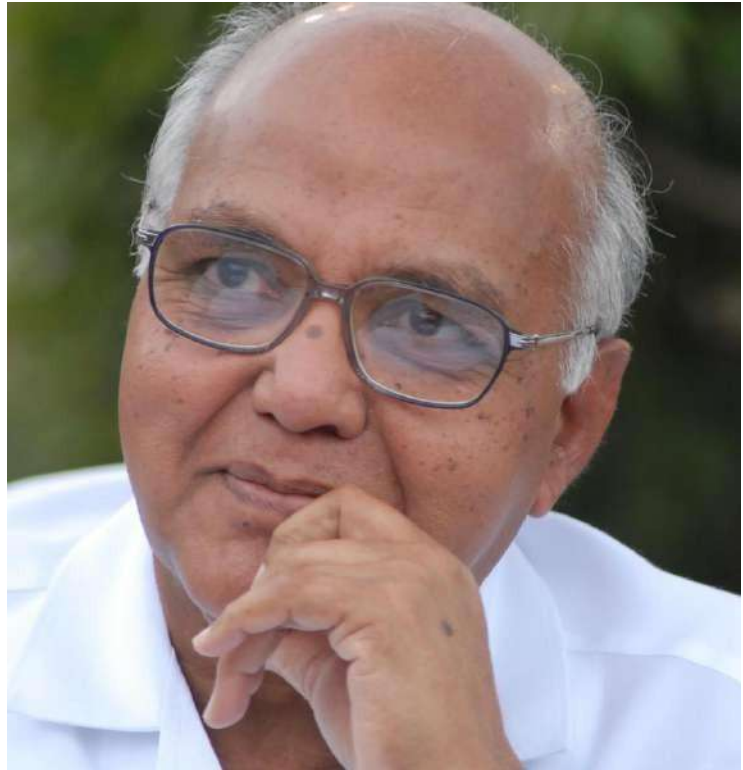
YouTube has also awarded us for crossing 100,000 subscribers. Beyond these, we also value the recognition from our viewers and the management. Our founder, Ramoji Rao Garu, personally appreciated many of our stories in Annadata, and he used to say that Annadata is “the heart of ETV.”

How have technological breakthroughs in broadcasting influenced Annadata over the years?

In the 1990s, we used Betacam large tapes and later on DVC cassettes—similar to audio cassettes. Now everything is digital, recorded on compact memory cards in HD quality. Earlier, transferring footage from the field was a significant challenge; however, today we receive high-definition feeds directly from districts via VSAT and internet lines, enabling faster editing and broadcasting.

How do you view the significant contribution Shri Ramoji Rao made to the Annadata in general and agriculture in particular?

The Annadata program on ETV was Ramoji Rao's brainchild and reflected his lifelong commitment to supporting the agricultural community he came from. For him, *Annadata Sukhibhava* (May Food Providers Be Happy) has been a guiding principle that led to the establishment of Annadata in 1969, the first farm magazine in the Telugu language (which ended publication in December 2022 after 54 years of publishing), followed by Raitheraju column in Eenadu and Annadata on ETV. He was deeply committed to the program. He used to say Annadata was "his blood and flesh." He watched it almost daily till he passed away in June 2024.



Shri Ramoji Rao (16 November 1936 – 8 June 2024)

His interest in agriculture extended beyond the media; he initiated farm projects in Ramoji Film City, adopted nearby villages, and promoted innovations in composting, horticulture, and dairy farming.

His passion kept Annadata alive and evolving for decades. In recognition of his immense contributions, the Government of India honoured him with the Padma Vibhushan in 2016. I am sure he remains forever in the hearts of farmers throughout Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

How do you see the future of TV versus social media for agricultural communication?

Television remains strong in rural areas, but the future definitely lies in digital and social media. YouTube and short-form videos are already attracting younger farmers who want instant, visual information. We believe that, over the next five to ten years, most agricultural communication will occur online.

What do you envision for Annadata's future?

The future looks strong. As long as agriculture remains central to people's lives, there will be space for Annadata. The platform may shift more toward digital media, but the spirit—educating and empowering farmers—will continue. Our goal is to adapt to changing technologies while preserving the program's authenticity and its farmer-focused approach.

After nearly 30 years, what does Annadata mean to you personally?

For me, Annadata is a family, a legacy, and a mission to keep farmers informed, respected, and inspired. Watching the program's impact on millions of farmers is deeply fulfilling.



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Acknowledgements: Our special thanks to Mr Muralidhar B for his support for organising this interview.

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