

A Juicy Tale

A large farm in Goa was famous for its watermelons. Every year, the farmer would organize a popular contest in which kids from near and far were invited to participate. He would keep all the large watermelons for the contest and the smaller ones for sale. The contest required the kids to scoop out as many seeds as possible from the watermelons within an hour and toss them in a bowl. The one whose bowl was filled to the maximum level with seeds was proclaimed the winner—taking home the largest watermelon of the harvest.

The farmer had a sharp son. He noticed that all the large watermelons were getting sliced and wasted in the contest. So, he proposed that the kids eat their watermelons while spitting out seeds in the bowl. Soon, the contest gained popularity and the number of participants increased. However, the overall consumption of watermelons remained same since the kids could eat only so much in an hour.

Just because a tradition has worked well in the past does not mean we shouldn't question age-old customs and be open to innovation. Embracing change is good.

The boy grew up, moved to a big city for higher education, and then returned after graduation to run the farm. Having learnt new tactics, he proposed another change in the contest. He realized that the large watermelons fetched more money. Therefore, he started selling those and kept the smaller ones for the contest. This new custom continued for years until all the good watermelons vanished. In the end, the farm stopped doing well and there were no more contests organized. What went wrong?

Previously, when the contest was held, the best watermelons were kept for the kids, and the seeds collected by them were used for the next harvest. As a result, each year would yield bigger watermelons than the previous one. Ever since the boy started keeping the small watermelons for the contest, the yield kept getting smaller by the year.

Just because innovation evolves our present does not mean we replace time-tested customs and reinvent without thought. Embracing change is not always good.

The first and second part of the story have conflicting moral. Why? It's because

we are evaluating from a wrong point of view—how change affects the farmer's family.

Let's shift our vantage point from the farmer to the contestants.

The son's first innovation was driven by a desire to delight contestants, which led to a win-win situation. His second innovation was self-centered with no regard to contestants' delight. The result—loss to both the parties.

Our focus should not be on the "change". Instead, it should be on the "recipients" of the change!