

A compassionate approach to climate change

Sailesh Rao says global veganism would reverse global warming

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

When he saw a public-access broadcast of Al Gore's presentation on climate change in 2005, Sailesh Rao was working as an internet communications developer.

An electrical engineer by training, Rao had emigrated from India to study at Stony Brook University in New York, later earning a Ph.D. at Stanford University. In the late 1990s, he helped develop the Gigabit Ethernet on copper standard, which serves as the backbone of today's internet.

"That's not how our world leaders are talking about climate change.

They are not looking at the cancer; they are only trying to address the fever while the cancer keeps growing."

SAILESH RAO

But learning about the urgency of global warming set him on a new course. It's a problem, and he wanted to help solve it.

Soon after, Rao founded a nonprofit called Climate Healers. It partners with schools, tribes and other organizations to implement climate change solutions and promote reforestation. It's distributed thousands of metal grates for wood burning stoves to women in India and Africa, helping to cut down on fuel use and

smoke inhalation.

In 2008, he was awarded the Karmaveer Puraskar Noble Laureate, a national citizen social justice and action award in India.

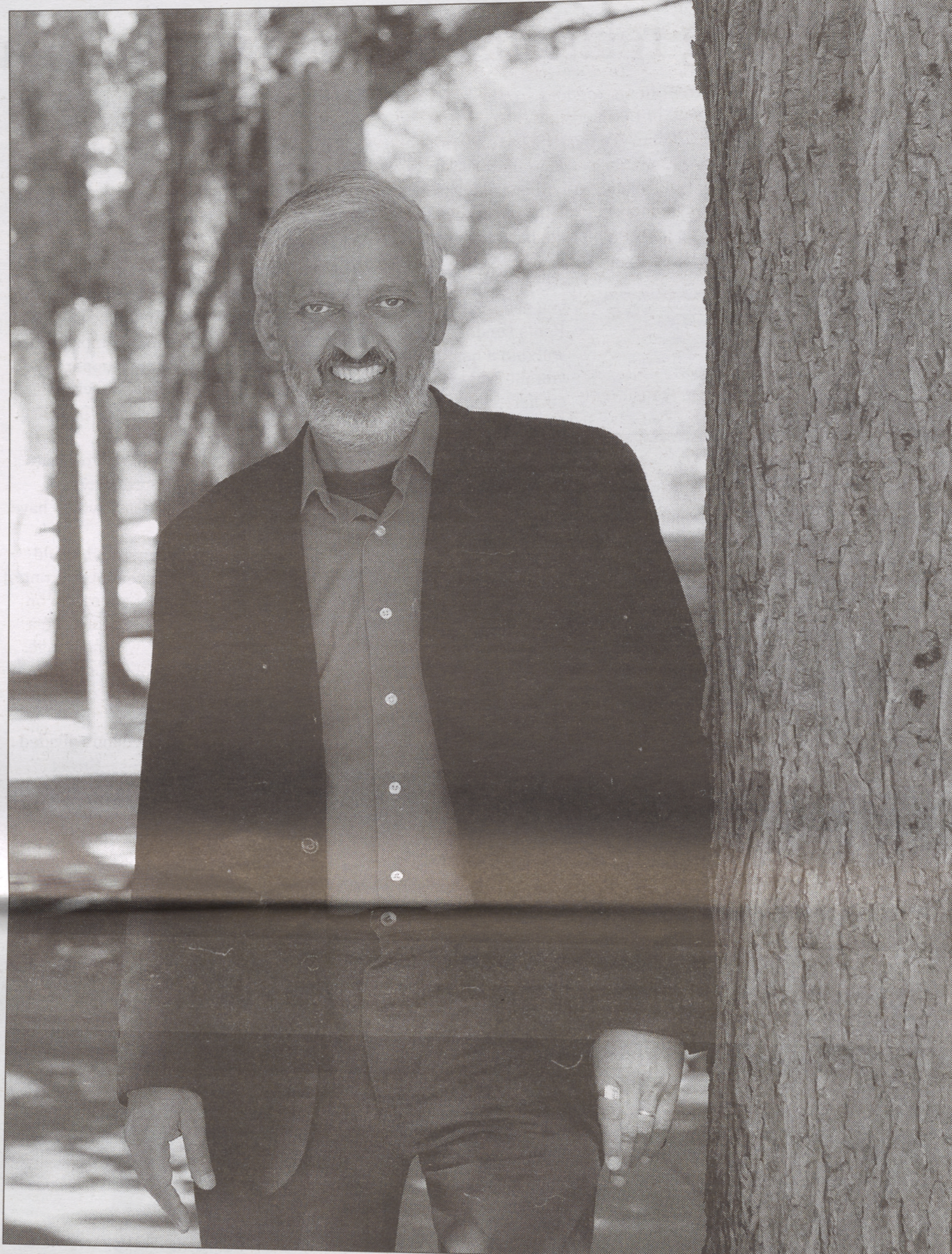
Rao also studied the climate problem, coming to the conclusion that a globally adopted vegan diet makes sense from both a scientific and a spiritual perspective. He's written two books on the subject, "Carbon Dharma" in 2011 and "Carbon Yoga" in 2016.

He's also contributed to three popular documentaries about climate, diet and toxins: "The Human Experiment" with Sean Penn (2013), "Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret" (2014) and "What the Health" (2017). They're all available on Netflix. A fourth film, "The Compassion Project," is in production.

This summer, he's touring with stops in the U.S., Canada and Costa Rica, giving a series of free lectures and advocating for a vegan lifestyle as a solution to climate change.

Street Roots sat down with Rao when he stopped in Portland in June to talk about his ideas on climate change.

Emily Green: *How does an engineer working in internet communications become a director of a climate-based nonprofit?*



Sailesh Rao, author of "Carbon Yoga," says the way the climate problem has been framed is "all wrong." PHOTO BY ARKADY BROWN

Sailesh Rao: When we were doing the internet originally, it was a collegial group working together, and we were idealistic – we were trying to do something that would connect the whole world. By the time I was working on 10-Gigabit Ethernet, it was all about money. How much money could we make, and how much money is being invested in this and that? It's a huge business. I was disillusioned with the whole process.

I happened to see Al Gore's presentation on TV. I was so shocked with what he was saying. If half of what he is saying is true, what are we doing? Why isn't everybody working on this? So I decided to study the problem, and within a few months I realized it was far worse than what he was saying, because he was only talking about one aspect. I told my wife, "I have to start working on this." She said, "If that's what you want to do, go for it." Of course I didn't know what to do, so I wrote to him (Al

Gore) and said, "How can I help you?" And I got trained by him on how to give his presentation. It was in November of 2006; I was in the second batch who were trained.

Then I went around for a year, talking about this. And I realized we can't just talk about this; we have to do something. In 2007, I started Climate Healers.

I felt that the way the problem was being framed in mainstream circles was all wrong, and it was being framed in a way I thought was absurd. Because if you think about it, if you had a fever, let's say 1 degree centigrade fever, and you have the lump the size of a coconut on the side of your head, and you go to a doctor and you said, "Heal me." And the doctor examines you and says, "That fever is caused by your lump. The best I can do is to make sure that the fever does not go over 2 degrees Celsius, and I'll give you Tylenol for that." You wouldn't be saying, "Give me Tylenol that makes it not

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