

32nd Shodhyatra
28th Dec. 2013 to 02nd Jan. 2014
Nirmal Kuteya Sultanpur Lodhi to Seechewal
Jalandhar, Punjab

Background

In order to reach and connect with the people at the grassroots, a learning walk is organized by Ahmedabad based Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions (SRISTI), a voluntary organization, twice a year in rural areas in different geographical locations of the country, with support from National Innovation Foundation – India (NIF) and the Honey Bee Network. The aim of this yatra, called the “Shodhyatra” is to identify and felicitate local grassroots innovators, traditional knowledge holders, students with innovative ideas and people with significant contribution to the society in conserving bio-diversity etc at their door steps, in front of their community so that inspiration may be drawn by others. The marching group of Shodhyatris consists of scientists, innovators, villagers, students, professors, who travel about 100-120 km over a period of six-seven days, to convey the message of the network. Biodiversity and idea competitions are organized among children while recipe contests are organized among women in some of the villages (particularly with focus on such food recipes in which at least one less known or forgotten plant produce has been used).

32nd Shodh Yatra

SRISTI organized the 32nd Shodh Yatra in Jalandhar district of Punjab during December 28th 2013 to January 2nd 2014. The yatra was supported by Ek Omkar Charitable Trust, National Innovation Foundation – India (NIF) and GIAN North. Over ninety Shodh Yatris from various parts of the country and from other countries like Sweden, Germany, Holland, Russia, France and Singapore walked for about 90 kilometers together. During the shodh yatra, the yatris met and felicitated a number of innovators, farmers, creative children, centenarians among others.

The yatra started at Nirmal Kuteya, Sultanpur Lodhi, where rich tributes were paid by the shodh yatris to the valiant efforts of Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal who had mobilized local communities to clean the Kali Bein river when state and the legal systems proved inadequate in the matter.

The yatris met a number of innovators during the yatra. Lakhwinder Singh of Busowal village had developed a small machine to sow gladiolus flower bulb. This is a low cost machine with low maintenance. Lakhwinder had seen a video of such a machine on the internet, which was quite costly and high in maintenance so he decided to make one of his own.

In another village, Ali Khurd kalan, the yatris met Gurdayal Singh and Varjan Singh, who have developed an onion variety where one can get up to 27 onions from one bulb. It was surprising to find just one farmer Sher Singh of Mirpur near Seechwal who grows completely organic crops. The yatris also found a cycle hoe in Bhago Buddha

village, similar to what Gopalbhai Bhise developed in Maharashtra. Carrot cleaning machines were also found in many villages.

A frugal and simple innovation for serving water to those eating food sitting on ground was found in the Lodhiwal village. The yatris also met Soni Bhagat, a physically challenged person who modified a motorcycle and making it a mobile cart to sell kulchhey chole. He made his first vehicle 18 years ago, which was the third such a vehicle, and now there were many.

Dharamveer Kamboj, an innovator from Haryana, also demonstrated his multipurpose processing machine in various villages, explaining how his machine could make mint extract, ber juice, and gooseberry juice without crushing seeds. Siddipur village showed lot of interest in the machine. During the yatra, a few centenarians were also honoured. The yatris also organized recipe and idea competitions in most of the villages.

The experience during the shodh yatra makes us believe that the agricultural science and extension system needs a complete recast. Political parties cannot sustain the declining profit margins in agriculture by more and more subsidies (leading to non - sustainable use of natural resources). Now, one has to apply far more pesticides, fertilizer than a few decades ago because of declining soil fertility, predators of pests, increasing resistance of pests to the chemicals etc. It costs more energy now to get the same amount of water from deeper layers of groundwater. The shodh yatra, thus, gave us new insights about the deepening crisis in agriculture growth and sustainability.