

## 51<sup>st</sup> Shodhyatra: June 17- 23, 2024, Harima-Chak Dhani | Rajasthan : Part-I

*On this journey the yatris experienced and noticed a facet of India which few have imagined. Amidst the scorching heat and the arid land of Nagaur, Rajasthan, there stood an unusual sight of cultural harmony. While walking one day, the yatris saw a religious site which looked different. Moving closer and going inside they realised it was a temple and a masjid together in the same building having two adjacent rooms. Ramdev Peer Mandir is an extraordinary sight which depicts oneness and unity. The sight left the yatris in wonder, respect and peace.*

*From Harima to Chak Dhani the journey was full of learning and quiet reflection.*

*The yatris walked to understand and learn resourceful local knowledge and support and promote the development of traditional and local enterprises in Rajasthan.*

*The walk was supported by a team of local volunteers motivated by Sri Krishna, Satish and members from the Mali Samaj.*

The Shodhyatra began with 50 participants from 15 states reaching Paryavaran Van, at Harima Village. A mini forest spread across 36 bighas of land, Paryavaran Van was created by the efforts of Shri

Himmat Ram Bhambhu amidst the dryland. When the yatris reached the village, the lunch was being prepared with local produce. The menu consisted of aloe vera curry, chapatis, lapsi, etc.



Ramdev Peer Mandir



### Meeting Innovators at Harima Village

The yatris met a few notable farm innovators, each one contributing to society in their unique ways:

Shri Sundaram Ji, a Padma Shri awardee developed a method to grow trees with just one litre of water, ensuring survival without further watering. He brought apples which he had grown in Rajasthan, a variety originally developed by Hariman Sharma in Himachal Pradesh. Himmat Ram Bhambhujji, a Padma Shri awardee, shared his journey of planting over 5 lakh trees and fighting for wildlife conservation. Shri Rameshwar Prasad Ji discussed his innovations of grafting techniques with the Khejri tree and the discovery of 14 different varieties including a thornless Khejri.

At the innovator's press conference, the yatris met more people such as Smt. Santosh Pachar, a Presidential awardee who developed a new carrot variety, Mr. Ashok, an entrepreneur who promotes organic farming and gives employment to women and Mr. Rahulchand Panchariya who showcased his innovations in organic sweet potato cultivation and millet-based products.

### Story of the Likhmidas Temple

The yatris visited the Likhmidas Temple where the temple operators, Kamalji Bati and Sunilji shared an inspiring story about the temple's construction, community and Nagaur. They had received donations worth Rs 1.80 Crore in one day by offering 1 Gaj of temple land for Rs 501 to the public. They also tried to reduce the use of plastic glasses by buying stainless steel



glasses and giving them to people who need them for different events like marriage with the condition that they have to return 20 per cent more glasses than what they had received.

### Local Produce and Culture

The yatris visited M/s Shubhangini Spices, a prominent manufacturer processing Kasuri Methi (dried fenugreek leaves) and Pudina (mint). The owners explained the method of selection and processing of Methi, and highlighted the unique properties of Nagaur's water that contribute to superior Methi quality. Manual cleaning and grading processes were observed, with a suggestion from the yatris to use ultraviolet light to prevent contamination. Additionally, the potential for applying for a Geographical Indication (GI) was discussed.

As yatris walked further towards Atusar village, a welcoming scene unfolded with a meeting arranged at the village temple. A large hoarding in the village square displayed meritorious candidates, showing a higher proportion of girls than boys. A model of the solar system was presented by Shri Rajaram Tak, a teacher while Shri Shravan Kumar Soni demonstrated how home spaces



could be made greener using bonsai plants. The vibrant energy of the villagers was displayed through a two-hour Dandiya performance, accompanied by the resonant beats of the Dhol, which made Shodhyatris forget their fatigue. After the festivities, a traditional dinner of khichdi, kadhi, sabji, and chapati was served.

On their way to Firod, the shodhyatris visited a gaushala that houses around 1000 cows in separate barns for the blind, the unwell, and the healthy. The gaushala provides care, and medical facilities to cows, including the non-milking ones. Nagaur has 611 gaushalas.

The yatris also witnessed the plucking of Ker from the thorny trees. It is a medicinal plant and is used in a variety of recipes in Rajasthan. It costs around Rs 1800-2000/kg and is a delicacy served during marriage ceremonies. The shodhyatris met a few prominent village personalities: Shri Kanaramji, a 91-year-old innovator who shared tips for staying fit, emphasizing waking up early, eating healthy, and avoiding addictions. He had a leg disability and made a crutch that supported his leg from the thigh, freeing his hands. Shri Tejaram Ji, a 64-year-old PhD holder in Economics, shared his wisdom; Anaramji - a herbalist for animals



*Skit performed for de-addiction*



Dharamveer Khambojji interacting with children

and humans, practising traditional knowledge for 40 years; Shri Sataram - the only farmer in the village using camels for farming. Smt. Phuli Devi and Rami Devi - traditional healers; Shri Babulalji - a volunteer helping to organize the yatra in the village. Many villagers here had secured prestigious positions in the army and also few had sacrificed their lives for the country.

At Mundwa, yatris witnessed stories of agricultural transformation. They met several farmers such as Shri Prahalad, who didn't give up the cultivation of Khejri trees despite the resistance from his family. He was successful in cultivating Khejri, and was able to generate a decent income and set an example for others to follow. Another farmer spoke of his innovative approach to cultivating paan methi, transcending caste lines and securing fair trade for cotton crops. While telling about different people's contributions in the area, farmers spoke highly of a person who treats cows with homemade remedies and doesn't charge anything even though belonging to a different faith. The shodhyatris met Smt. Sarju Devi Ji, a vibrant 108-year-old who sang



Eight varieties of sweet potatoes, Rahulchand Panchariya

bhajans and replied to every question in the form of poetry.

When the yatra reached Kuchera Dharamveer Khambojji, a rural entrepreneur, participated despite a fractured leg, demonstrating courage and dedication. He showed his inventions, an electric wheelchair and fruit juices.

Meetings with villagers were organised in every village for knowledge exchange and greater interaction between the villagers and the yatris. During one of the meetings, a teacher Satar Khan revealed that when he first joined the government school, there were 45 students; now, there are 320. He aims to increase the number to over 400 students.

Idea competitions were held in different villages all throughout the journey. A few interesting ideas received were a scooter which starts only when the helmet is worn by the rider ([https://nif.org.in/innovation/wear\\_a\\_helmet\\_to\\_start\\_your\\_two-](https://nif.org.in/innovation/wear_a_helmet_to_start_your_two-wheeler/706)

wheeler/706), a device to indicate if there is a requirement of manure in the field (Rinku Jeji), bottle with an option of hot and cold water simultaneously (Simran).

Students performed skits and Rajasthani cultural dance giving a strong message on overcoming addictions, inequality etc.

Conversations with farmers revealed a significant water shortage in Nagaur, with reliance on rainwater for drinking, irrigation, and daily use. The yatris reached visited the Sant Chaturdas Temple at Butati, known for healing paralysis. The final meeting at Chak Dhani. involved distributing books on animal disease treatment and concluding the Shodhyatra with heartfelt farewells and gratitude.

One of the noticeable ways of recognizing excellence was seen in Chak Dhani where the achiever's list was written on the wall of the school.

राजकीय उच्च माध्यमिक विद्यालय चकड़ाणी नागौर									
एल्युमनी बोर्ड									
क्र.सं.	नाम	पिता का नाम	पद	विभाग	क्र.सं.	नाम	पिता का नाम	पद	विभाग
1.	श्री हेमराज	श्री मोहनलाल	राजस्व	राजस्व	19.	श्री निस्ताराम	श्रीजीवनराम	II <sup>nd</sup> ग्रेड अ	शिक्षा
2.	"पतराम	"मोहनलाल	राजस्व	राजस्व	20.	"लेखराम	"	हवलदार	B.S.F.
3.	डॉ. रघुनाथराम	"रामदयाल	चिकित्सक	केचिकित्सा	21.	"सोहनलाल	"जोराराम	हवलदार	आर्मी
4.	श्री भंवरलाल	"चन्द्राराम	व्याख्याता	शिक्षा	22.	"रामनिवास	"	A.S.I.	रा. पुलिस
5.	"सताराम शोमिड़	"झुमरराम	अध्यक्ष	शिक्षा	23.	"रामस्वरूप	"शिवकरण	A.S.I.	C.R.P.F.
6.	"रामचन्द्र	"जोराराम	रा. पुलिस	रा. पुलिस	24.	"ओमप्रकाश	"मदनलाल	H.C.	रा. पुलिस
7.	"चन्द्राराम	"मिराराम	रा. पुलिस	रा. पुलिस	25.	"संजयकुमार	"शंकरराम	II <sup>nd</sup> ग्रेड अ	शिक्षा
8.	"लेखराम	"सिरदाराराम	सुबेदारमेजर	ARMY	26.	"भंवरलाल	"मल्हारराम	हवलदार	आर्मी
9.	"रामनिवास	"धर्माराम	जलसेना	जलसेना	27.	"सुनील	"ताराचन्द्र	अ. III <sup>rd</sup> ग्रेड	शिक्षा
10.	"भंवरलाल	"भाराराम	H.C.	R.P.F.	28.	"ओमप्रकाश	"किशनाराम	व. अ.	शिक्षा
11.	"नाथूराम	"चन्द्राराम	H.C.	G.R.P.					
12.	"पुनाराम	"सोहनराम	अ. III <sup>rd</sup> ग्रेड	शिक्षा					
13.	"बाबूलाल	"सोहनराम	अ. III <sup>rd</sup> ग्रेड	शिक्षा					
14.	"हृदयानराम	"भाराराम	अ. III <sup>rd</sup> ग्रेड	शिक्षा					
15.	श्रीमती पूर्णिमा	"शैलानराम	अ. III <sup>rd</sup> ग्रेड	शिक्षा					
16.	श्री यादुराम	"सालूराम	अ. III <sup>rd</sup> ग्रेड	शिक्षा					
17.	"सोहनलाल	"नेनराम	S.E.	P.W.D.					
18.	"हेतराम	"रावतराम	मैनेजर	R.M.G.B.					

Recognising outstanding students



The pain behind the glitter!

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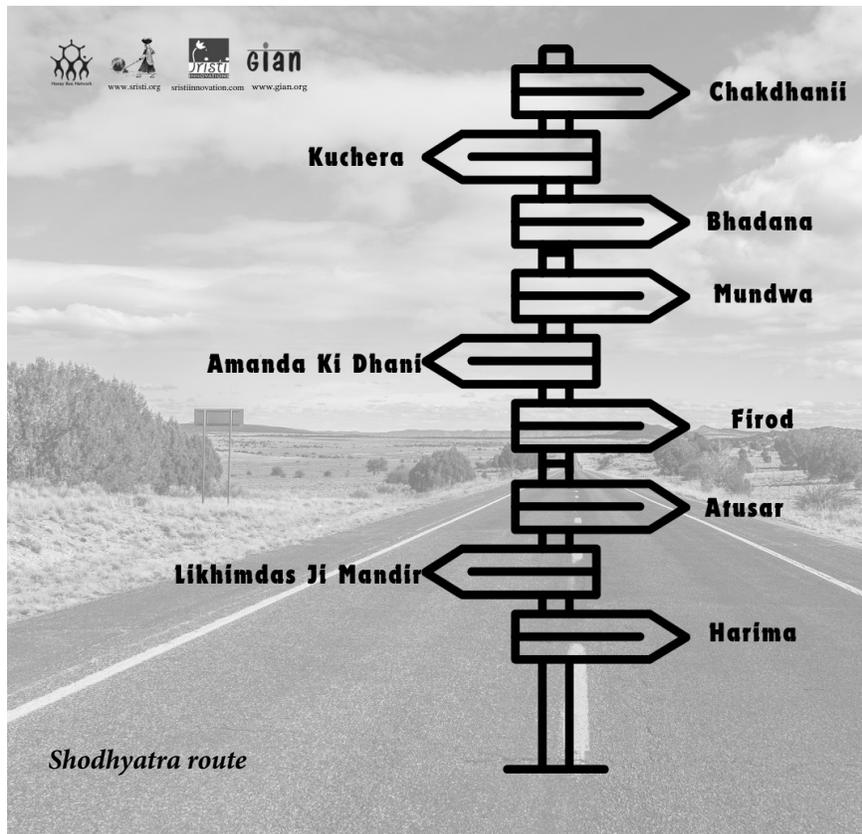
*The week-long journey of the Shodyatris, took them through nine villages in the Nagaur district in Rajasthan. Yatris had the chance to meet children, villagers, educators, innovators and centenarians. The objective was for people to learn from local communities, each other, nature and their inner selves. Meetings were held with villagers at every stop. The purpose was to absorb the creativity and innovative activities in a rather spontaneous and impromptu manner. The people were curious to see us walking in hot weather.*

The Shodhyatra, organized by SRISTI, supported by GIAN and the Honey Bee Network, is an attempt to reach out to such parts of the country, where hardships and challenges of the natural surroundings motivate people to reproduce and develop frugal solutions.

The yatris experienced the flora and fauna of semi-arid regions and met innovators and farmers who had developed innovative ideas and tools to survive and thrive in such a climate. They encountered a unique amalgam of cultural fusion, social service, study centres for students, methi processing center, mostly dry but some filled up water bodies etc. Meeting farmers like Sundaram Vermaji and Himmat Ramji Bambhu helped yatris learn more about their efforts to conserve the biodiversity of the region. Mr. Ashok, an entrepreneur, promoting organic

farming and giving employment to women and Mr. Rawalchand Panchariya who showcased his innovations in organic sweet potato cultivation and millet-based products. The innovator, Mr. Rameshwar Lal ji developed a thornless variety of the Khejri tree (*Prosopis cineraria*).





Along the way, yatris also met centenarians like 108 - year old Sarju Devi ji and 91-year old Kanaramji who shared stories from their lives. They



gave everyone tips on staying healthy and living a long life by waking up early, eating healthy and avoiding any addictions. Many traditional healers from the village shared their insights and knowledge with the Yatris. A sandstorm at night threatened to put a damper on the yatra experience, but the group steeled themselves and soon fell asleep despite the difficult conditions.

Yatris chanced upon Ram Chandra Sirohi who has made study rooms equipped with tables and A/Cs for the children of the village to study comfortably. This was reflected in the number of academic toppers in the village, most of whom were girls. The local communities took pride in the achievements of their children and yatris spent time talking to the children about their aspirations and even listening to their stories, like that of two students in the 8th and 10th grade who had made a rudimentary robot. Local youth opened up their

houses for the yatris to rest and freshen up in , acting as a reminder for every individual to be more generous. Indulging in conversations with fellow yatris, villagers, children in the vast arid landscape made up for an experience that everyone will carry with them for a long time.

Interactions with students along the way allowed them to express their creativity and learn from the experts among the yatris. Vishnu, a teacher who taught archery to students belonging to tribal communities and helped them compete professionally. He shared the journey of these children and the effort that it took for them to be recognized by the state. While most of the yatris left after the sixth day, few visited Loharpura, Nagaur city. It is home to around 500 blacksmith families, specialising in crafting precision tools for making jewellery. The group interacted with the artisans and tried to understand their work. The artisans face several challenges, including the use of small coal-based furnaces, non-ergonomic working positions, poorly ventilated and congested workshops, and inadequate protective eyewear. Despite these issues, artisans often downplay their difficulties and focus on creating something worthwhile for society.

### 51st Shodhyatra pools local Knowledge

Some of the traditional knowledge practices and contemporary innovations





collected during Shodhyatra: Rameshwar Lal ji specialised in grafting khejri to make it thornless. Despite being a bad year in terms of flowering and bearing pods, he noticed a tree full of flowers. He proceeded to collect its seeds as it had flourished in a dry year unlike other trees and might be able to produce fruit in the future even in bad years (refer to p 23).

To store the khejri seeds, they were first washed with cow dung and cow urine, then stored in ash to prevent insect attacks.

Sunda Ram Verma has perfected a technique to grow trees with just one litre of water once. During the first rain of the season, he would deep plough the field. When the last rain came, he would plank and ladder to break the capillaries. He would then make 4x4x10 inch pits, plant saplings in them, and fill the space above them with soil and add one litre of water. Water that has already charged the sub-soil can not easily be lost by evaporation now. The saplings planted in October-November send the roots downwards where the moisture is and catch the next rain. This method has an 80-85% success rate.

Some farms had tree plantations grown in a way that there were four types of trees growing side by side

such that there was always some kind of fruit available for birds and animals to eat.

Rawalchand Panchariya spoke to people about the five varieties of sweet potato that he had developed. He used a selection process over seven years for developing varieties of sweet potatoes that need less water to grow. Some of them had developed a deep red hue.

Ram Ratanji sells tractors to farmers at the starting cost of Rs.50,000. Farmers can then pay back the rest of the amount at their ease.

Sathika moth ki daal (*Vigna aconitifolia* or turkish gram) gets ready in 60 days and grows even if there are only two or three rains in the season. However, again, the taste of the crop has reportedly decreased. Similar results were seen with Moong dal and other similar pulses.



Shree Kanaramji, a 91-year old, shared his traditional remedies for animals. He mentioned that after giving birth to a calf, if part of the umbilical cord remains stuck in the cow a piece of old bamboo should be ground, boiled in water, strained with cloth, and given to the cow to drink after it cools. And for loose motion, isabgol soaked in cold water should be given to the animal.

#### Key Takeaways:

Yatris identified that commendable work was being done in the district of Nagaur in agro-ecology to protect the biodiversity, yet these strategies and solutions were limited to the local areas and proper dissemination had not occurred. Channels like the radio and social media could be used for spreading localised knowledge. Recognition for innovators like Himmatramji Bambhu who has helped conserve the landscapes and waterscapes for many wildlife species is important to understand how similar models can be replicated elsewhere. Additionally, access to learning and education pathways, through citizenship documentation, for children from nomadic communities (like students of teacher Vishnu) will ensure that their talents are recognized and they get an equal opportunity for education. And finally, encouraging organic farmers in producing value-added products, such as snacks from millets can enhance their economic stability and help them purchase essential farming inputs.