



Shodhyatris crossing the Tunga river

About 45 farmers, innovators and SRISTI members from Gujarat joined the *Shodhyatra* in addition to about 60 others from Karnataka, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra etc. It had been felt that language could pose a problem in this region but the hospitality and warmth of the local people helped in overcoming most of the barriers in communication. There was tremendous enthusiasm among local communities. This was reflected in the way the *yatris* were welcomed in each village. In most places, the *yatris* stayed with local families and in temples.

### Purpose

The traditional purpose of the *Shodhyatra* – to recognise, respect and reward or honour innovators and traditional knowledge holders at their doorstep – was given an additional dimension in this *yatra* by the local organisers. They also identified and honoured some outstanding role models. Those who had shown extraordinary grit in the face of odds such as, a woman construction contractor, a head load worker who was known to help other workers and many other such individuals who had rendered outstanding social service were felicitated. The *Shodhyatra*, as we have always maintained, involves two journeys. One within and another without. The coordinates of the external journey

### Notable innovations

We began the *Shodhyatra* from Mr Anatha Subbarao's place, Guddethota village in Jaipura. He had installed the first hydel turbo generator of 1 KW made by Mr. Ratnakar who lived nearby. Mr Ratnakar, alias Turbo's water propelled turbine served dual purposes: of lifting water as well as generating power. He had been awarded last year by the National Innovation Foundation.

Locally, interest was shown in Mr Bhandari's areca peeling machine was displayed. Normally, two labourers are able to peel six kilograms of areca in one hour. Bhandari's machine could peel 25 kg in the same time with an initial expenditure of about Rs 25 to Rs 30,000. During the demonstration of the machine, the farmer Mr Rajendran, his wife, mother and other neighbours gave their feedback about further improvements required in the machine. For instance, it was pointed out that the areca, being slightly wet, did not detach from the peeler on its own. One had to pull it up slightly. Also, the areca and the shell did not get completely separated. Further peeling was required. Only one areca could be fed into the machine at a time. However, the machine was still quite an improvement on the manual labour-based peeling method. Three voluntary patrons, Krishnan, Ravi and Srinivasan, from Bangalore along with Prakash, showed interest in working further on this concept using their personal savings.

We also met an inventor, Krishnamurthy Bhat, who had developed another areca peeling machine (cost: Rs. 5000). He had used a vehicle tyre as the

flywheel and made more modifications compared with the existing machines for peeling ripe areca nuts. He had attached a conveyor belt to a tin. The belt picked up the arecanut from the tin, one by one, and put it in the machine for peeling. The peeling was better in this case as compared to the results achieved with Bhandari's machine, possibly because this machine dealt with dry areca nut. The cost was also less. We offered to support this machine and be involved in further incubation and commercialization. There was also an interesting innovation in the cultivation of the local vanilla crop. Sometimes, because of various reasons, certain branches of the vanilla creeper do not receive sufficient nutrition or water because of bending or withering.

Hurulihakkalu Vasudhevarao, a farmer, hung a small bottle of water and put the branch of the vanilla not receiving sufficient water into the bottle. So instead of the ground, the bottle was now the source of moisture. This was an interesting way of providing water to the plant. In Shanthigrama village, we found that the local community members used *hagdumbe* (*Lobelia nicotinaefolia*) as weedicide and *chagtesapu* (*Cassia tora*) for piles.

### **Innovation in root grub management by a farm worker**

The visit to village Vejane on the fourth day was very eventful. We met some outstanding innovators in this village. Mr Kadappa, a local farmer with a large estate, had come up with an innovative solution to a bothersome problem. Root grub, a serious pest, was affecting large number of areca trees. Mr Kadappa asked one of his workers, Krishna Moili, to observe the behaviour of the pest very carefully. Since chemical pesticides did not work on the pest, the farmer paid the workers 25 paise for collecting male pests from the burrows in the ground, and two rupees if they collected a female pest. Moili developed a quick way of identifying female insects. This led to workers getting eight times more wages than earlier, since they could now focus on female insects rather than on male insects.

### **It's a yatra of odd balls**

During the *yatra*, one always comes across a variety of highly interesting, and often, inspiring, people. On the very first day itself, in Gudde Thota village, we

met a lady contractor who had earlier been a worker with a building contractor. Being a woman in a male-dominated field, she had to bear with remarks about her alleged inefficiency and incapability. One day, exasperated with this behaviour, she decided to form her own group and started taking orders for building bus stands, school buildings, small bridge culverts, and so on. She became a successful building contractor, probably the first woman contractor in the region.

In the same village, we also met Mr Sheshgiri, a newspaper reporter who is known as 'moving library' in this area. He had christened Mr Ratnakar 'Turbo'. In another village, we met Kencha, an expert in catching snakes. He always leaves the snakes in the forest later, thereby effecting social necessity without harming biodiversity.

### **Tales of courage and conviction**

On the fifth day, we met an extraordinary farmer whose vivacious spirit and positive attitude impressed everybody. Mr handrashekher had lost his legs 25 years ago when he had fallen from a mango tree. But he continued to remain engaged in agriculture and maintained his extraordinary sense of humour and purpose. One of his younger brother practiced *Mirundanga* in a nearby mutt.

He also showed us a plant, *sithedeepa* (meaning light for Sita in Ramayana) which when dipped in oil and burnt, emitted a green light. None of the *Shodhyatris* had ever heard or seen such a plant before.

In Hariharpura, we learnt the story of Mr Chand Hussain. Two years ago, his daughter had gone to fetch water from a neighbour's well. For some



reason, the neighbours did not like it and even beat the girl. When she came back crying, her parents were very upset. Some of the neighbours suggested complaining to the police.

However, Chand Hussain and his wife Iysha Beevi resolved to do something else. They had half an acre of land. Chand Hussain was a mason and his wife rolled beedies for a living. They decided to dig a well in their own land.

Everyday, they would come back from work by six in the evening and then start digging. They had no rig and no major tools. They could only use a spade, hammer and pick axe. After having dug around 38 feet, they came across hard rock. They had no access to dynamite and they could use only a hammer. They continued digging. While Chand Hussain would work on the well, his wife would lower the bucket to fetch the debris. Even after reaching 70 feet, they did not strike water.

They went to a priest, performed some prayers and finally one day, after toiling for a year, they found water. While they had been denied water by their neighbours, they did not say no to anybody, not even to those who had beaten their daughter.

Initially, only Chand Hussain along with his son was invited for the felicitation function. But having heard his story, we felt that his entire family should be invited. Accordingly, they were invited and honoured. With tears in his eyes, the silent Chand Hussain spoke volumes. Everybody was overwhelmed and this became one of the high points of the *Shodhyatra*.

Honouring a Muslim couple for their fortitude and courage and communitarian spirit in a Hindu temple was the best symbol of what India was and always has been – a deeply secular society.

#### **A transport workers' cooperative**

Another unique phenomenon that we came across was the Transport Cooperative Society, Koppa.



Krishnamurthy Bhar's arecanut peeling machine

When a private transport company was being wound up because of low income and heavy debts, Chike Gowda, its current head, and his seniors decided to take over the debts and the fleet of five buses to preserve their jobs and also to become a workermanaged enterprise. The previous owner also helped them in this enterprise. Today, they have 75 buses, four of which were inaugurated by us. Even today, every office bearer performs routine technical and administrative tasks and also helps in managing the

cooperative as a whole. While all members are owners, they are also involved in cleaning and driving in addition.

#### **Sharing of knowledge**

Mr. Babugoda, a 65 year old herbal healer, doesn't want to reveal the medicine he uses, as he fears nonsustainable exploitation of the plant in question. In another village, a healer said he would not mind sharing knowledge with us provided no local person was sitting there. He said the problem was that many of the plants they used for their medicine were very common and widely used.







Innovative method of providing water to vanilla plants

He feared that if people came to know that some of the most common plants were used for treating ailments, they might lose respect for the knowledge itself. In Bandigadi village, we had asked one of the old healers whether he had taught any young person what he knew and his reply was that there was no young person interested in learning from him. We asked the villagers whether the knowledge of this old healer was important.

Most people thought that the knowledge was useful but had no clue as to what would make it worthwhile for young people to acquire it. Such aspects highlighted the question of knowledge sharing.

In yet another village, Dhayamballi, the issue of the correctness in honouring a particular healer for a particular knowledge which is actually shared knowledge in a community came up. Here, snake bites were a common problem, quite pervasive in the region. Naturally, some people specialised in dealing with snake bites. When we honoured one such healer Ramkrishnan Acharya, a young man, Ratnakar got up and asked how we could honour an individual for shared knowledge and what happened to the rights of the community in such a case. In response, we asked the villagers who they went to in case of a snake bite. Obviously, while everybody shared the theoretical knowledge, the healer in question was the one practicing it. Such people were experts, knowing a great deal more than the average villager.

They were aware of the symptoms, the relationship between the drug and the disease, the doses, possible side effects, remedies for contra indication, if any, and so on. The young man took the point well and

acknowledged the practitioner's special entitlements. We also had discussions on incentives of various kinds which could possibly make it attractive for younger people to take up traditional knowledge. We discussed the possibility of developing a *people's biodiversity and knowledge register* and establishing stipends for such people. The issues of informed consent and urgency in documenting knowledge which might otherwise get lost were also discussed on numerous occasions. We were asked about how NIF dealt with the knowledge contributed by healers and other traditional knowledge holders. We explained about how we try to obtain Prior Informed Consent from the knowledge holders but it had not been possible to do so in majority of the cases. In any case, till we received written consent, we are committed to treat every such contribution as confidential. The idea of developing small, new enterprises by pooling the best practices which would be supported by Micro Venture Innovation Fund, established recently at NIF also came up during the discussions.

### The Cultural Experiences

As usual, the *yatra* lent us glimpses into the rich vein of local culture as well. We met and honoured Mr Puttegoda for *Anteke-Pinteki*, a tribal folk-song which is sung for two hours continuously without any reading. We also had the good fortune of visiting Shringeri *Mutt*, the holy site established by the Shankracharya around seventh century. We had the privilege of having a personal audience with the Holy Shankaracharya who blessed the *yatris*. Most of the *yatris* were happy that they had the opportunity to



Chandhrashekhar holding "stthedeepa"



Chand Hussain and his family being felicitated

absorb the peace and tranquility pervasive in the Mutt.

We visited many other temples and also crossed the sacred river Tunga. In particular, one must mention the Agrahar temple on the banks of Tunga River. In this temple, there is a whole set of stone engravings that is several hundred years old. These engravings depict scenes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

We also saw the *rangoli* patterns that stretched for almost a kilometer. These had been made by people living on the roadside and they had washed the road before putting the *rangoli*. It seemed as if so many people had never so spontaneously participated in welcoming anyone in this manner. The creativity, culture and congruence of a variety of faiths and motifs demonstrated the learning and a sharing of values that need to be deeply embedded in our society.



Chike Gowda (inset) and the new buses launched during *Shodhyatra*

*A letter from a nine year old that deserves its own space in this report. We won't say more, let it speak for itself...*

Dear Anil Gupta Uncle, I had heard about the *Shodhyatra* from my father and wanted to join it. We started from Bangalore on 24th night. First day, I met a girl named Sharadi, and from her house the *Shodhyatra* started.

The first innovation which I saw was a turbo made by Rathnakar uncle. This turbo generates electricity from the water falling there. People from Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and different parts of Karnataka took part in the *Shodhyatra*. There were two small children, Kabir and Amul, who were with me. Kabir was from Bangalore and Amul was from Gujarat. I was playing with them and walking. We walked for few kilometers and when we were tired, we used to travel in jeep or tractor. The jeep and the tractor were carrying the luggage of people who were walking. While walking, I got groundnuts from Amul's grandmother and *kumberkot* chocolates made of jaggery and coconut from an uncle from Tamil Nadu. We stopped in various villages to honour the people who had invented new things, who preserved plants, and who knew about medicines. I saw many old people being honored by the *Shodhyatris* and whenever I saw them, I remembered my grandmother.

**In one village, an old man said that he lived for long because he ate red rice, named *Hegga*. I took few seeds of that for my grandmother because I want her to live a long life.**

Many children also got prizes because they could tell names of several plants. In one village, one girl knew about 150 plants. Of all the people, I was most inspired when I saw a man without legs. He was very happy. He had lost his legs while climbing a tree 25 years ago. Still, he was happy and had a smile on his face. I touched his feet to get his blessings and decided that I will never cry because I have so much. At night, we used to camp in villages. We all used to eat together and the villagers used to cook for us. At night, there were cultural programmes in villages. In one village, there was a drama and dance of bears by villagers. In another village, the villagers danced with fire. I enjoyed the *Shodhyatra* and would like to join it again. *Savi*