



*The 45th Shodhyatra took place in the snow-filled, hilly terrains of Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. While pursuing the 112kms walk, the Yatris tried to understand the creativity displayed by the local communities in technological, educational, institutional, and cultural aspects of survival strategies. Among the many scholars who joined the walk, a few prominent ones were: Dr. Viswajanani J Sattigeri, Herad, TKDL, CSIR; Prof. V Ramgopal Rao, Director, IIT Delhi, Prof. Thomas P Tomich, Professor, University of California, Davis; Dr Subiodh Bishnoi, Agri University, Bikaner, Shree Dharamveer Kamboj, Shri Chetan*

The Shodhyatra began from Dalhousie, a beautiful place right in the middle of Dhauladhar mountain ranges. Located on five hills (Kathlong, Potreyn, Tehra, Bakrota, and Balun), this hill station is a part of the Chamba district. The British settled and developed it in 1854, and the place was named Dalhousie after the then Viceroy Lord Dalhousie.

Forty-five action-research travelers crossed twenty villages in six days walking through continuous snowfall. From 17 different states, Yatris walked about 112 Kms with a foot and a half of snow to continue the learning tradition from the four Gurus—the teacher within, among peers, in the nature and among common people. The learning did not stop even when the initial two days had heavy snowfall preventing the team from walk.

On the first day in Dalhousie, discussions with local writers, administrators and other knowledgeable people made Yatris aware of the local culture and heritage. Shri Koshi combined the community culture, diet, nature of the place beautifully in a poem. The Shodhyatris had not encountered such roads with heavy snow on them earlier and had to change routes to avoid slipping on the old hardened snow.

On our way, we encountered Mansingh, a local construction worker who had temporarily switched to working as a blacksmith. He made various agricultural tools using the axle of the Bolero vehicle of the Mahindra company. He informed us of the differences between his tools and the ones available in the market. He also customised tools for the farmers and others as per their needs.



The shodhyatris then proceeded, on foot, to Chil Bangla. It snowed when they reached the school, so they could not conduct the meeting. Yet, Dharambir, one of the most regular shodhyatris and a Presidential awardee grassroots innovators, made a delicious Carrot Halwa using flour made from corn kernels with the help of local resources. The following day, local farmers mentioned how monkeys and bears were damaging their maize cultivation. They also told how the increased snowfall was damaging their crops, sometimes leading to total failure of the crop. Some of them had taken to mushroom cultivation, which proved to be beneficial. They also made and sold mushroom pickles, which doubled their income while also getting these pickles a unique identity in Chamba City. This business eliminated both packaging costs and shopkeeper



commissions, as people used their own household utensils and sold them directly in the markets. Many farmers did not prefer farming here due to the extreme climate conditions, low production, and disturbance caused by wildlife but had little choice. They shared their farming practices, revealed an ongoing crisis being faced by climatic fluctuations.

As Yatris moved on to Bhiloli Village, they encountered many fabricators surrounded by people seeking heat and warmth. The only way to the village was a trail covered entirely with snow.

The Yatris conducted a meeting with the local teachers, shared educational Innovations elsewhere and displayed





various experiments pursued elsewhere. Bhiloli did not suffer from educational problems, as 100% of the children attended school and that they thoroughly enjoyed studying. A teacher, Karma Sherpa (who got recently President award for community engagement) from Sikkim displayed his innovation that used corn kernels and corn peels, which attracted the attention of the children.

Through the Shodhyatra, the yatris were informed about the education experience of two states and how Bhiloli's discipline and sustainable tourism have influenced other schools In Himachal. Sandeep Kaushik, an old Shodhyatri, had donated 50,000Rs, which was used to make three libraries, one of which was in Bhiloli. All the books bought for this library were selected according to the children's needs. The villagers made a room for this purpose in which 5-10 children could sit and study.

The second library, which was in Chiminu, had a poster display of small inventions/Innovations. Manubhai arranged a book cupboard and seating arrangement for the children in this library. The library was inaugurated



by the Forest Officer of Chamba and Prof. Tom Tomich of University of California, Davis. The third library, which was in Chamba, was frequented by older people, as new books hadn't been purchased in 20 years there. The Yatris added new books about general knowledge, preparation for competitive exams preparation, etc. In doing this, the motive was to attract the youth to the library.

Yatris had felicitated thirty innovative teachers, eleven experiment-oriented farmers, and a child who had made a multi-purpose device to avoid short-circuit. Dharambir, inspired everyone by telling how he had started processing apples and kiwis and that the cost of processing was comparable to the costs of transportation of these fruits to market.

