

Krishi evam Adivasi Swaraj Samagam – 2023

A Call to Rejuvenate Tribal Sovereignty

September 20 to 22, 2023

*हम है रक्षक, हम है पोषक, हम संरक्षक प्रकृति के, आदि अनादि हम अविनाशी, हम संवाहक सृष्टि के।
परहित चिंतन मनन हमारा, हम पुरोधा समष्टि के, वसुधा के हित जीवन अपना, हम राही सुख समृद्धि के ॥*

*It's we who nurture and guard the nature. We are the eternal conductors of our Mother Earth.
With selfless contemplation, we lead the masses for a lofty cause, and prosperity is what we endeavor.*

The indigenous way of life embodies Mahatma Gandhi's ideology of Swaraj in its purest form. These indigenous communities not only have steadfastly adhered to the principles of Swaraj in their lifestyle and philosophy, but they also acted as the custodian of their traditions, culture, and natural resources for generations. While similar communities can be found across the globe, they are now facing the threat of endangerment due to the rising tide of modernization. It's important to recognize that tribal life thrives on principles such as hard work, collectivism, sensitivity, simplicity, equality, and truthfulness. If the principles of Swaraj are integrated into human life, it has the potential to address various challenges such as ecological imbalance, unemployment, hunger, inequalities (economic, gender, caste, race, religion, colour, language, region, etc.) and others. The way in which indigenous communities utilize agriculture, animal husbandry, and traditional knowledge for their livelihood, it minimizes the exploitation of nature. In nature, the seed is the origin of creation; the soil serves as the nurturing mother, water embodies the life-sustaining force, and land provides sustenance and shelter. Animals are seen as integral to creating biodiversity and balance in nature. For the existence of all living beings, it is imperative to have these five components - water, forests, land, livestock, and seeds, and only by protecting, conserving, and nurturing them, Swaraj can be achieved for all these components. It is essential that local-level individual and community initiatives are taken towards Swaraj, creating a foundation between the indigenous and other vulnerable communities in central India. With the aim to engage the community members to discuss their practices and issues with key stakeholders and rejuvenate the tribal sovereignty, thousands of indigenous farming community members gathered in **'Krishi evam Adivasi Swaraj Conclave-2023'** an annual colloquium at the famed Tripura Sundari in Banswara, Rajasthan.

Key Objectives

- Encourage the convergence of collective wisdom, facilitating a meaningful exchange of ideas and the establishment of linkages with key stakeholders.
- Fostering a sense of ownership among community members through the *'Jan Manch'* model in the process of identifying potential issues and disseminating them to various stakeholders.
- Consolidate and disseminate the outcomes of discussions on effective practices along with potential local-level solutions for the identified challenges, at both the state and national level.

This 3-day event organized between **September 20-22, 2023** observed the participation and contribution by thousands of men and women from indigenous community, wherein they discussed and deliberated on the four themes:



Photo 1: Topics of Jan Manch Session

Process

This annual 'Krishi evam Adivasi Swaraj Samagam' of indigenous community was meticulously organized through a collaborative process. Members from people's organizations (*Jan Sangathans*) hailing from Southern Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat played a pivotal role as jurors. They engaged in extensive discussions with thematic experts who had come from different parts of the country. This entire setup was aptly named the '**Jan Manch.**' One member for a theme was identified from each of the 26 Krishi evam Janjatiya Swaraj Sangathans (KASS) of three states, resulting in a total of 104 Jan Manch members from all the 26 KASS. Each KASS was represented by four members, each focusing on one of the four themes. Initially on Day 1, an orientation session was conducted for the selected 104 Jan Manch members, followed by a preparatory session of Jan Manch with all other members. On Day 2, all the experts presented their insights on the assigned theme from the perspective of indigenous communities and climate change. Following these presentations, the Jan Manch members (the jurors) shared their viewpoints and questions, connecting the experts' perspectives with the indigenous community's way of life. The experts addressed their queries and also provided suggestions to enhance their practices. Once the dialogue between the Jan Manch members and the experts concluded, the discussion was opened to other community members who served as both the audience and observers, allowing them to express their perspectives.

Jan Manch

- *Jan Manch is a platform that provides the general public with the opportunity to collectively learn, discuss, and find solutions to the challenges faced by the society.*
- *Comprised of community members, this platform makes decisions on policies that they deem appropriate and necessary.*
- *Jan Manch members gain an understanding of various issues through the guidance of different experts.*
- *They present their perspectives and engage in discussions with fellow members regarding their suggestions. After listening to various options and viewpoints, Jan Manch members arrive at a well-considered decision.*

Bringing together the various perspectives, it was time to engage in a broader community discussion. All the four Jan Manch members (one from each theme) from every KASS presented the processes and viewpoints that had emerged within their respective groups, which consisted of hundreds of KASS members. Through this method, the Jan Manch process was disseminated to over 6,000 community members, enabling them to actively participate in shaping the finalization of their issues and demands. Following their deliberations, they collectively drafted a charter or the *Agrah Patra*.



Photo 2 and 3: Experts sharing the views to the Jan Manch member.

Photo 4 and 5: Jan Manch members discussing in a larger group in their respective KASS.

The subsequent day, during the culmination event on Day 3, community members presented the theme-specific issues and demands to a distinguished group of guests, including ministers, political leaders, thematic experts, academicians, media professionals, and others. Additionally, the 'Swaraj Agrah Patra,' prepared by the community, was officially released by these esteemed guests during the event.

Various exhibition booths were set up to showcase soil testing procedures, seed treatment methods, watershed management, child-friendly villages, community radio, and circular farming practices.



Photo 6 and 7: Hon'ble Minister of Water Resource Department visiting the exhibition booths



Photo 8: Release of Swaraj Agrah Patra by Hon'ble Minister of Water Resource Department Mr. Mahendrajeet Singh Malviya, other guests and Jan Manch members

Views of Experts

Group 1: Integrated Actions for Seed, Food, and Plantation Diversity led Nutrition Security in Context of Climate Change

1. **Mr. Sanjay Patil**, *BAIF Development Research Foundation, Pune* – We have to combine all the factors like nutrition, climate, knowledge and science with our seeds. Earlier the home-made seeds used to give good quality crop for years but now the seeds available from the market are weak and less productive after one year. It is important to map and document the knowledge that one has so that it can be shared with everyone and especially with the new generation.
2. **Mr. Jacob Nellithanam**, *Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch, Raipur* - Our ancestors had all kinds of seeds, even the wheat seeds that could ripen without water. They used to go to market to buy only salt and pepper. Everything else was available at home. There was neither shortage of livestock, nor dependency on government. To bring back the swaraj of the community, it is necessary to first bring back the swaraj of farming and end the market-based system.
3. **Mr. Sabyasachi Das**, *RRAN, Hyderabad* - In traditional farming, there was a system to face climate change. There were livestock, mixed farming but now the natural system has been destroyed due to monocropping. We need to see that what to demand from the government and how to demand it. The government should invest in creating community seed banks to grow this method and save them.
4. **Mr. Prabhav Garuda Dhwajan**, *Easy Krishi Pvt. Ltd, Bangaluru* - Barren land can be made fertile at very low cost with the help of micro-organisms. Its research has been done in India, South East Asia and Africa. Organisms like earthworms can transform the soil and softens the soil which increases its water carrying capacity. Manure prepared using bacteria and micro-organisms can improve climate change.

Group 2: Efficiency of Energy, Water and Soil Management for Sustainability in the Context of Climate Change

1. **Mr. Ranjan Panda**, *Combat Climate Change Network, Odisha* – We need to understand the situation of natural resources of our area and their need for sustainable ecosystem. We are not using our resources equally and as per requirements. It is needed to adopt our traditional techniques and methods.
2. **Dr. M.S. Rathore**, *Center for Environment and Development Studies, Jaipur* – We need to understand the changes we see in the climate and need to analyse its root causes as well as the responsible cause behind it. There are some changes due to natural environment and climate changes which are not in our hand. We have innovated new technologies and resources for our comfort zone which are consistently harming the environment.
3. **Mr. Sandeep Khanwalkar**, *EcoSoul Enviro, Indore* – Energy, Soil and Water – all three of them are very important for sustainability. In current scenario, we have avoided and reduced the use of natural resources and have become dependent on technologies and methods innovated by humans. We need to adopt the traditional practices, save rainwater and other methods to save these resources for longer time.
4. **Mr. Ram Kishan Verma**, *Agriculture Department, Banswara* – It is required to understand about the soil. The farmers need to be aware of its various nutritional components and try to use it in a best way. Farmers need to reduce the use of Urea, DAP. The Unbalanced climate change is one of the biggest reasons for it. Adivasi youths should be motivated to increase their interest in farming and agri-activities.

Group 3: Leadership Building of Youth for Climate Change Actions and Sovereignty

1. **Ms. Moreshwar Uikey**, *Gram Sabha Sepecialist, Maharashtra* - The path of development becomes easier by taking responsibility and working at the village level itself. The youth of the village should join the Gram Sabha as soon as they complete 18 years of age and themselves go ahead and take responsibilities related to development. Areas like water, forest, land, all these areas come under the purview of Gram Sabha. A strong Gram Sabha can develop the villages, then dependency can be reduced.
2. **Ms. Lopa Shah**, *Elicit Foundation, Ahmedabad* - Teachers should know, understand and carry forward the learning processes in the classrooms on the basis of local knowledge and experiences while children should develop the feeling about his village and its development. Work has to be done to save it. In true sense, leadership starts from childhood itself.
3. **Mr. Krishna Allavaru**, *Political Leader* - Leadership can be better when any kind of work is being done with joy, interest and responsibility. For this it is necessary to get opportunities and take responsibilities. Trainings will have to be organized at a regular and consistent level. It is necessary for the youth to have open dialogue with the elderly people and work on ensuring development issues.
4. **Mr. Soumya Ranjan Biswal**, *UN India YuWaah Advocate, Odisha* – There are 135 million youth in the country and by working together with them by taking revolutionary steps, it will be possible. A lot of work will have to be done for the land because disintegration is happening on a large scale. Struggle need to be done at the policy level. Education and employment are fine but every youth must have to think ahead and join efforts to save the climate

Group 4: Rejuvenation of Tribal Culture and Circular Lifestyle in the Context of Climate Change

1. **Mr. Ganga Bhai Paikra**, *Chaupal, Chhattisgarh* – The major reason for the change in tribal lifestyle is the change in crops, techniques and methods of farming. We were dependent on forests for nutrition, now they have become commercial forests. Government and companies are taking advantage by reducing the rights of Gram Sabha. Tribal society is being smashed as part of a political conspiracy.
2. **Smt. Kusum Tai Alam**, *Social Worker, Maharashtra* – In earlier days, due to community regulations, there was no need for money, but nowadays, the local community markets (*Haat*) have been replaced by shopping malls. We are forgetting our own identity due to which other cultures are dominating us. This is where the distortion comes from.
3. **Dr. M.P. Singh**, *Former Director, GGTU, Banswara* – Modern culture is changing our ways of thinking and ideologies. Our language, dialect and beliefs are our identity, if we feel embarrassed of it then our culture will be destroyed. Our livestock need to be treated as precious resources.
4. **Mr. Moreshwar Uikey**, *Gram Sabha Specialist, Maharashtra* – There are many people who speak but a very few who do it. We need to become the doer. It is needed to move forward by combining modernization and the history. Make alive the justice and protection system yourself. According to the needs of the village, create committees in the village and manage issues like education, health, police protection, justice etc your own.

Conclusion

This conclave provided the community members a platform to identify and discuss their key issues with the subject experts. Jan Manch members discussed with the experts of different viewpoints such as academics, scientists, government officials, political leaders, independent practitioners, decision makers from Samaaj, Sarkar and Bazar (Society, Government and Market) as well as deliberated amongst themselves and within their larger communities, and finally presented their recommendations through *Swaraj Agrah Patra*.

This conclave boosted youth involvement by shedding light on their concerns, offering a more profound comprehension of government programs and policy matters, ultimately resulting in the creation of an impactful *Agrah Patra*.

Based on community recommendations, a series of action research and data analysis initiatives will be undertaken. These efforts will be aimed to inform and shape policy recommendations in the future.

Key Recommendations by the Community



Promote production of high-quality indigenous seeds through traditional methods in order to reduce the impact of climate change and ensure the livelihood and food security of farming families. Establishment of Community Seed Management Centers at Panchayat level to make farmers self-reliant in seed matter



Special programmes to promote traditional food crops need to be designed and implemented in the tribal region. Promotion of mixed cropping to enhance food diversity and establishment of integrated farming training centers in the region.



Integration of the components of solar energy and biogas into lifestyle of indigenous communities for establishing regularity of power supply in tribal areas.



Promote Rabi crop cultivation through soil and water conservation to strengthen local livelihoods and prevent migration. A comprehensive water conservation and minimal irrigation program need to be planned.



Designing of skill development programs integrated with traditional farming practices to strengthen local livelihoods for reintegrating youth into agriculture.



Special programs should be prepared for tribal youth to provide opportunities for local livelihoods through activities such as animal husbandry, organic farming, local seed production, participation in local markets, and eco-tourism, among others.



Incorporate aspects of tribal lifestyle viz. food habits, living style, community interactions, outfits, arts, traditional farming, etc., into education so that traditional knowledge can be passed on to the next generation through various programs.



Development of programmes to reinstate the circular nature of agriculture in tribal culture supporting various aspects of farming e.g., composting, seed treatment, encouraging women's groups for organic manure production, promoting bio-gas programs, soil improvement etc.



Participation in the Samagam

- Subject experts across 14 states.
- Highly experienced moderators.
- Political leaders and Government Officials.
- Above 6000 members of indigenous communities.
- Members of 26 Peoples' Organizations across 3 states.
- Members of women and youth groups.
- Representatives of various civil society organizations.
- Representation by Tribal and Agriculture Universities
- Key media houses of the State.
- Individual practitioners, experts, thinkers

Glimpses

