

Seeds of Freedom: The 2008 Bija Yatra

From Tinkathia to the Seed Bill

In the months of March and April 2008, Navdanya, together with the help of several partner organizations, completed the 2008 Bija Yatra throughout seven states in Northern India. By distributing traditional indigenous seeds and promoting seed sovereignty during this 18 day long yatra, Navdanya strived to protect farmers' freedom to save and share their seeds, because we believe that keeping diverse and indigenous seed in farmers' hands is a crucial aspect of protecting sustainable livelihoods in agriculture.

This year's Bija Yatra was started off in the Gandhi ashram in Champaran, Bihar, where Mahatma Gandhi had launched the *Champaran Satyagraha* to end the *tinkathia* system of indigo cultivation. At that time land tenants were forced to grow indigo –used for producing dye for the textile industry- on a fixed portion of the land for an unfair wage under this unjust system. At this place of historical importance for the fight for farmers' freedom, Navdanya's managing director dr. Vandana Shiva addressed farmers from the area's villages, schoolchildren and local activists on the importance of saving local seeds as the alternative to the unreliable and costly seeds that are being pushed by multinational seed companies. Dr. Shiva related to them the threat of the 2004 Seed Bill which is looming over the future of free and sustainable farming in India and which will, if passed, render it illegal to save and exchange seeds without registration, effectively putting the age old practice of seed sharing by small farmers into illegality.



Dr. Vandana Shiva hands over seeds to two young school girls at the Gandhi Ashram in Champaran.

As was to happen at each of the innumerable stops of the Bija Yatra, the vast majority of which took place in villages, the Navdanya team freely distributed seed to the people who took part in the meeting, about 2000 of them at Champaran. A second action undertaken during the entire length of the Bija Yatra lay in the signing of a pledge to:

- Practice organic farming methods, not to use chemical but natural fertilizers & pesticides.
- Save their own seeds and share it with their community.

Navdanya offered all farmers they met with during the yatra the opportunity to sign this pledge for a nonviolent and humane agriculture.

From this auspicious gathering, the Bija Yatra set off on its 4000 km long and winding course which would lead it through the villages and farming communities of Bihar, Jharkand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and finally Delhi.

Throughout the yatra, these were the actions which were undertaken to promote sustainable agriculture:

1. Distribute organic and indigenous seed.
2. Let farmers sign the pledge to farm organically and conserve their seeds.
3. Educate and sensitize the larger public on the issues of sustainable agriculture through large public rallies and press conferences at several stops along the route of the Bija Yatra.
4. Meet with decision makers to raise their support for a more natural and humane form of agriculture which benefits farmers and the environment, rather than big corporations.

Bija Yatra 2008 Factsheet

-18 days of yatra

-Total distance covered was 4000 km

-Meetings were held in over 200 villages

-Seed distributed to more than 50000 farmers

-42 quintals of seeds distributed

-Reached an estimated 1 lakh people/families through signed pledges

-Reached an estimated further 2 lakh people through the spreading of information, in particular through media coverage

Bihar & Jharkand

Stopping and distributing 9 different varieties of seeds at numerous villages along the way, the Bihar leg of the Yatra also passed by the towns of Bhetia and Potodi, where large rallies to promote seed freedom were organized. These gatherings were joined by around 15000 people as well as the farmer's union BKU.



Women farmers from the Bihar Nav Nirmaan Samitti have gathered to receive the Bija Yatra in Pawapuri village.

At Samistipur, farmers, school children and their parents joined together in a celebration of biodiversity. After the children took a pledge to stay away from fast foods and soft drinks, seed was handed out by the yatris and together they planted trees and medicinal plants in the school sagwadi.

Patna, Bihar's capital, was the location for a meeting between dr. Vandana Shiva and former chief minister of Bihar Rabri Devi, an enthusiastic seed saver herself.

One night in Gaya

There are times during an ambitious yatra like this when the amount of organization and effort which it requires, takes its toll on the yatris' morale. One such night was when the Bija Yatra reached Gaya, where it seemed that the plans for the next day's activities were about to fall through due to miscommunications. But when moods get low, that's usually when out of nowhere something or someone appears to revitalize everyone.

In Gaya, this happened when all of a sudden an unknown man came knocking on the doors of the hostel where the yatris were about to spend the night. He announced that he was employed as the nightwatchman at the campus, that he had seen the Bija Yatra's truck outside and felt inspired by it. He shared the story of his life: that he and his family are lifelong organic farmers, seed savers and that he has nursed many trees into maturity throughout the city of Gaya. For his farm, he collects rainworms during the rainy season and brings them to his land where he waters them throughout the dry season, just in order to bring life to his soil. He was given plenty of seed packets to distribute in his family and village. This kind and selfless man was an inspiration to us all.

In the state of Jharkand, among the many meetings, one of the most memorable was the one held with a tribal farming community in the vicinity of Dumka. Here, the villagers had created a water reservoir for the entire village in a joint community initiative without any outside help. This initiative would hopefully improve their living conditions and allow them to reap more than one harvest per year in this region where water is so scarce that many of the farmers find themselves with no other option than to do seasonal labour, often subjected to woeful exploitation, in Bihar's brick kilns.



Farmers from the tribal communities in Jharkand signing the pledge to farm organically and save their seeds.

Navdanya's coordinator Darwan Singh Negi addressed the community about sustainable farming techniques –using drought resistant crops, mulching, composting- that could give them more food security in their difficult circumstances and the Navdanya team distributed indigenous seed -adapted to the dry conditions of the region- that would assist them in their struggle for self sufficiency and dignity.

Another stark illustration of the plight of small farmers was offered to the yatris in the village of Panchamhadev in the Hazaribah region of Jharkand, where the yatris were initially received with mistrust by some of the local farmers, who assumed that whichever outsiders that approach them must be 'loan-wallahs', out to lead them into debt and extort them. After hearing about the Bija Yatra's mission to actually free farmers from the debt trap of dependence on costly seeds which in turn require costly inputs, the yatris were received with warmth and gratitude.

The Seed

During this Bija Yatra a total of 42 quintals composed of 32 different varieties of seed was distributed to more than 50000 farmers. The seed was organic and indigenous and the varieties were selected to suit the local environments, for example in Bihar a flood resistant variety of rice, Senghra, and in Bundelkhand, a drought resistant variety named Muskan was distributed. A large portion of the seed was handed over directly to the farmers by the Navdanya team at the many meetings that were held during the Yatra, and more seed was handed over to local partner organisations which in turn distributed the seed to their farmer members.



School children in Jharkand pose proudly in front of the Bija Yatra seed truck.

The seeds :

<i>Rice</i>	<i>Bakhla</i>
<i>Basmati</i>	<i>Jowar</i>
<i>Corn</i>	<i>Bajra</i>
<i>Tor Dal</i>	<i>Ragi</i>
<i>Khisari</i>	<i>Shawa</i>
<i>Mung</i>	<i>Arhar</i>
<i>Kulsi</i>	<i>Urad</i>
<i>Moth</i>	<i>Til</i>
<i>Chana</i>	<i>Moot</i>

UP & MP

The Bija Yatra made a stop in the holy city of Varanasi, where in front of the Mother India Temple a meeting with members of the farmers' organization Chandra Parva Krsi Vikas Samiti was held which was attended and supported by prof. UP Singh, reputed plant breeder of the university of Varanasi who throughout his career has developed 20 new varieties of crops.

In Allahabad, the Yatra team addressed 200 students, lecturers and researchers of two agriculture colleges on the importance of organic farming, seed saving, safeguarding farmers' rights and the protection of agricultural biodiversity. A farmers meeting in Lalitpur was attended by Mr. Bundela, former MP for UP. They were addressed about the issue of the Seed Bill, after which Mr. Bundela joined the farmers in receiving seed and signing the pledge.

After travelling through the drought-stricken region of Bundelkhand, the Bija Yatra entered Madhya Pradesh. In Lodi and Maurani, the Bija Yatra team met with the district magistrate, local politicians and other officials in order to raise awareness amongst them and to convince them to promote sustainable agriculture and farmers' rights.



Navdanya coordinators Darwan Singh Negi and Chandrashekhar Bhatt gifting seed, straight from the Bija Yatra seed truck, to a farmer from Madhya Pradesh.



In front of the Mother India Temple in Varanasi, UP, farmers hold up their pledges to farm organically and to save and share their seed.

The Bija Yatra encountered another remarkable and hope-giving story of the power of community when they reached the village of Mirchwara. Here the head of the village had rallied his community to relentlessly press the government to fund the construction of an open farmer's market. Here the farmers gather to sell their wares without having to resort to middlemen, resulting in a fairer price for their produce, both for the farmers and the consumers. The market has grown into such a success that by now farmers from more than 30 villages come to this market to

offer their produce for sale. In this empowering place, around 1000 people from 30 different villages gathered to receive the Bija Yatra, hear its message for farmers' empowerment and receive seed.

Rajasthan, Haryana & Delhi

The Bija Yatra entered its final stage whilst crossing the states of Rajasthan and Haryana. A big gathering was held in Diggi Jhar Dharamsala where farmers from 42 different villages had gathered to receive the yatris, and in Jaipur the Navdanya team met with field workers of the Rajasthani ngo CECEODECON, sharing knowledge, expertise and seed which was to be distributed among the partner organisation's farmer members.

The final act of this year's Bija Yatra took place at Raj Ghat in Delhi, where the yatra team, having reached the end of their 4000 km long yatra, were offered a welcoming scarf by school children from Delhi. People from many walks of life – farmers from the areas of Baroth and Haryana, ngo activists, leaders of farmers' organisations, lawyers, bureaucrats, politicians from all sides of the political spectrum as well as school children- had all gathered at Raj Ghat and made a flower offering at Gandhi Samadhi in memory of the man whose ideals and methods inspired this Bija Yatra.

Darwan Singh Negi adresses a farming community in Rajasthan.



On behalf of Navdanya, dr. Vandana Shiva presented the Bija Yatra team to the crowd and adressed them about the goals of this Bija Yatra and the problems confronting Indian agriculture with regards to biodiversity, GMO's, water and the dealings of multinational corporations. Each and every one present that day was united in taking the pledge to protect the sovereignty, freedom and conservation of seed. And on this hopeful final note, this year's Bija Yatra came to an end.

*Many thanks to our partner organisations who helped
make this Bija Yatra possible:*

Bihar:

1. Vishal Audrogikh Krsi Vikas Sastaan
2. Jaivi Kheti Abhiyaan
3. Param foundation
4. Chakriya Vikas Sastaan
5. Magdh Jal Jamaad

Jharkhand:

6. Manvi
7. Bihar Nav Nirmaan Samitti

Uttar Pradesh:

8. Krishnamurti Foundation
9. Raghovansi Krsi Sood Sastaan
10. Aazadi Achaon Andolan
11. Akhil Bharati Samaaj Sheva Sastaan
12. Manui Sikcha Sastaan
13. Grameen Kallaa Evam Takneec Sastaan

Madhya Pradesh:

14. Gandhi Smarag Nidhi
15. Rasti Uva Sanghatan

Rajasthan:

16. Nehru Nao Uvak Mandal
17. Deshma
18. CECEODECON

The yatris:

- Dr. Vandana Shiva
- Darban Singh Negi
- Chandrasekhar Bhatt
- Hanuman Prasad
- Nalini Kant (Bihar, Jharkhand)
- Ravinder (Bihar)
- Arminster Srivasta (Bihar)
- Vikash (Bihar, Jharkhand)
- Ajay (Bihar, Jharkhand)
- Bharti Shushma Ranjana (Jharkhand)
- Khanti Prakash (Bihar)
- Dr. Ravinder Kumar Pathak (Gaya, Madhanpura), director of Magdh Jal Jamaad
- Viram Chaureshia (Benares)
- Prakash Singh Raghavanshi (Benares)
- Dr. Swapnil Srivasta (Allahabad)
- Prem Singh (Chitrakoot/Bundelkhand)
- Gopal Bhai (Chitrakoot)
- Saraswati (Chitrakoot), Mahila Jagrti Mandal
- Hari Soni (Lalitpur/Madhya Pradesh)
- Lalit Singh (Lalitpur/Madhya Pradesh)
- Sanjay Singh (Madhya Pradesh)
- Ghandi Smarak Nidi (Madhya Pradesh)
- Balram Soni (Rajasthan)
- Kailash Gujer (Rajasthan)
- Ishan Lal Deshma (Rajasthan)
- Alka Avasti (Jaipur), director of CECEODECON
- Dennis Cardoen

CHECK NUMBER OF SEED VARIETIES
FAMILY NAMES of PARTICIPANTS

Beej Yatra 2008 Report

A. Participants (and the area they covered):

Dr. Vandana Shiva, managing director of Navdanya
Darban Singh Negi
Chandrasekhar Bhatt
Hanuman Prasad
Nalini Kant (Bihar, Jharkhand)
Ravinder (Bihar)
Arminder Srivasta (Bihar)
Vikash (Bihar, Jharkhand)
Ajay (Bihar, Jharkhand)
Bharti Shushma Ranjana (Jharkhand)
Khanti Prakash (Bihar)
Dr. Ravinder Kumar Pathak (Gaya, Madhanpura, Bihar), director of Magdh Jal Jamaad
Viram Chaureshia (Benares)
Prakash Singh Raghavanshi (Benares)
Dr. Swapnil Srivasta (Allahabad)
Prem Singh (Chitrakoot/Bundelkhand)
Gopal Bhai (Chitrakoot)
Saraswati (Chitrakoot), Mahila Jagrti Mandal
Hari Soni (Lalitpur/Madhya Pradesh)
Lalit Singh (Lalitpur/Madhya Pradesh)
Sanjay Singh (Madhya Pradesh)
Ghandi Smarak Nidi (Madhya Pradesh)
Balram Soni (Rajasthan)
Kailash Gujer (Rajasthan)
Ishan Lal Deshma (Rajasthan)
Alka Avasti (Jaipur), director of CEOCEODECON
Dennis Cardoen

B. Partner organisations:

Bihar:

1. Vissal Audrogikh Krsi Vikas Sastan
2. Jaivi Kheti Abhiyaan
3. Param foundation
4. Chakriya Vikas Sastan
5. Magdh Jal Jamaad

Jharkhand:

6. Manvi
7. Bihar Nav Nirmaan Samitti

Uttar Pradesh:

8. Krishnamurti Foundation
9. Ragovansi Krsi Sood Sastan

10. Azadi Achaon Andolan
11. Akhil Bharati Samaaj Sheva Sastaan
12. Manui Sikcha Sastaan
13. Grameen Kallaa Evam Takneec Sastaan

Madhya Pradesh:

14. Ghandi Smarag Nidhi
15. Rasti Uva Sanghatan

Rajasthan:

16. Nehru Nao Uvak Mandal
17. Deshma
18. CEOCEODECON

C. Distributed Seeds

In total 32 varieties of indigenous seeds were distributed. The amount of seed distributed is 42 quintals.

Bihar, Jharkhand, Benares & Allahabad:

1. Flooded area rice variety (Senghra) and rainfed rice
2. Corn
3. Tor Dal
4. Khisari (millet)
5. Mung
6. Kulsi
7. Moth
8. Chana
9. Bakhla (gram)

Bundelkhand:

1. Rainfed rice (Muskan variety)
2. Corn
3. Tor Dal
4. Khisari (millet)
5. Mung
6. Kulsi
7. Moth
8. Chana
9. Bakhla
10. Jowar
11. Bajra
12. Ragi
13. Shawa (barnyard millet)
14. Arhar
15. Urad
16. Til

Madhya Pradesh:

As for Bundelkhand, but also including Desi Basmati

Rajasthan:

- (No rice)
1. Jowar
 2. Bajra
 3. Moot
 4. Corn
 5. Urad
 6. Til
 7. Arhar

8. Channa

Haryana:

As for Rajasthan, but also including rice

D. Daily Report

26/3

Beej Yatra started in Bihar in Vitiharwa, Gandhi Ashram (Champan District).

The inauguration of the 2008 Beej Yatra took place at the Gandhi Ashram.

One local school, farmers from 5 or 6 villages and a local social organization (NAME?) took part in the inauguration. Dr Vandana Shiva addressed them about the purpose of the Beej Yatra: to save local seeds, stop MNC seeds, to counter the use of chemical fertilizers, to promote sustainable agriculture, to raise awareness about the 2004 Seed Act (which will render it illegal to save and exchange seeds without registration, which will put small farmers and the seed they save into illegality). Seed was distributed to the school kids, who will use them to grow vegetables on their school grounds. All the school kids took the pledge to save the school seed, to grow vegetables for the school (sagwari: vegetable garden) meals and to save their own seed and distribute it to the local village farmers. All the farmers present took the pledge save and share seed. Navdanya distributed 9 different local seeds of rice, millets, pulses and oilseeds. Around 2000 people (including the kids) received the local seeds. After distributing the seed, the yatra team started off on their tour.

The yatra stopped in 5 or 6 villages stopped and distributed seeds in these villages. Approximately 1500 farmers received seeds.

Bhetia town was reached at 4pm.

A local organization (NAME?) arranged a gathering which 5 or 6 more local organizations and more than 15000 people attended. Dr. Vandana Shiva delivered a speech to them. The farmer union BKU joined in the meeting and received seeds from the BY. In total around 8000 or 10000 people and 400-500 local farmers received seeds at this event.

The event was followed by a press conference in Bhetia.

The Beej Yatra spent the night at a farmer's home in village Motipur.

27/3

In the morning, a meeting was held in Ratanpura village with farmers from 5 different villages. Dr Shiva and the Yatra team met with them and distributed seed.

Afterwards the Yatra made stops in 3 or 4 more villages, where seed and the message of the Beej Yatra was spread.

At 10 am in Muzafarpur a press conference was held.

Stops in 3 more villages.

At 1pm Samastipur was reached, where an event took place in a city public school. 500 kids and their parents together with local farmers from 10 villages held a meeting on the topic of biodiversity conservation. The school kids and their farmer parents took a pledge: to save seed and water, to refuse fast food and coca cola,... Together with the Yatra people everyone planted medicinal plants (like neem, basil, lemon grass, mint) in the school garden and talked about Sagwadi. The Yatra team was treated to lunch in the school hostel.

Stops in 6 more villages.

The Yatra reached Potodi at 6pm. Near the railway station, the organization Manui arranged a meeting with people from 15 different villages (many women, 500). In total the crowd numbered around 15000. Seed was distributed to the participants.

The night was spent in Patna.

28/3

Press conference in Patna. Dr Shiva met with ex-prime minister of Bihar Ravri Devi and other officials and had lunch with them. Dr Shiva learned that Ravri Devi also saves seeds for her garden.

At 9am the Yatra team left from Patna.

Between Patna and Pawapuri, stops were made in 10 villages as arranged through a partner organisation (Bihar Kalyaan ... NAME?);

In Pawapuri, with the Bihar Nav Nirmaan Samitti organization, a meeting was held with 100 women farmers, pledges were taken and seed distributed.

Stop in Nawada.

Night in Jumai.

29/3

Yatra enters Jharkhand.

Dumka: Press conference, Demonstration at the court, village meeting with farmers who had constructed a village water reservoir.

Madhupur: With local organization (NAME?) the Yatra visited Kolhua vilage in the evening and met with the farmers.

Night in Giradhi.

30/3

Traveled through Jamua. Kodama. Jhumri Talaya and reached Barahi in Hazaribah, where the Yatra team was hosted by a school for orphans and labourers' children.

From the school we visited two villages, Sevapur and Panchamhadev. We had a meeting and distributed seed.

31/3

To village in the morning (NAME?).

Reached Bodhgaya.

Night in Gaya. Insert here the story of the fantastic organic farmer.

1/4

From Gaya.

With the help of the organization Magdh Jal Jamaad, meeting with farmers were held in Maddanpur, Sassaram and Mohiniya.

The Yatra enters UP.

Night at Krishamurti school in Varanasi.

2/4

In Varanasi, at the mother India temple, a meeting with farmers and a press opportunity was held. In attendance was prof. UP Singh. The farmers organization Chandra Parva Krsi Vikas Samiti (president: Santaram Pande) brought their farmers to the occasion. A lot of seed was handed over to them for them to distribute to their farmers. It was Viram Chaurasiya who arranged the press conference. Lunch was offered at Ragovansi's home/seed conservation farm, were the Yatra team left seed and also received seed.

Night in Allahabad.

3/4

In 2 Allahabad agriculture colleges, a meeting with 200 students, scientists and professor was held in order to bring them awareness about organic farming, seed saving, farmers' interests, nature protection.

3pm to Chitrakoot. Covered 1 or 2 villages on the way.

Night in Chitrakoot.

4/4

Between Chitrakoot to Bandha, 6 meetings were held. People from 40-45 different villages attended these meetings.

Night in Prem Singh's farm in Bandha, village Baribarokhar.

5/4

Press conference in Banha.

Rivayi village meeting, 1000 people received the yatras.

Enter Madhya Pradesh

Reached Lodi, met with the district magistrate and other officials.

Night in Nayagaon

6/4

From Nayagaon to the Ghandi Ashram in Chatarkur (50 ghandians had invited the yatras to come there on the previous day)

Maurani town: big gathering, awareness program and seed distribution, local politicians attended the gathering.

Mirchwara, head of the village (insert the story of his initiative of the open farmers' market funded by government, for farmers from around 30 villages, no middlemen). Meeting with people from 30 different villages, 1000 people.

In Lalitpur (UP), yatra met with former MP of UP (mr Bundela) as well as with village farmers, and explained them about the Seed Bill. Seed was distributed, pledges taken. Bundela also took the pledge and the seeds. Press conference was held.

Night in Lalitpur.

7/4

In the morning the yatra went to 10 villages in MP, amongst which Chandoori, Dakhori, Mahoragaon, Sarora. People from 46 different villages were involved in these meetings.

Stayed at Chabrha, had meeting with locals and distributed 2000 seed packets. People from 25 different villages were there, 600 people in total.

8/4

Entered Rajasthan

In Bamori Dawal village, 1000 people received seeds.

Reached Tonk for night

9/4

Tonk, Darda, Peeplu, Jhrna.

Reached Deshma.

Reached Diggi and held a big gathering in Jhar Dharamsala. Farmers from 42 villages gathered there. They welcomed and received the yatris who were joined by a CEOCEODECON field worker (NAME?). Both Dheshma Sikas Sastaan and CEOCEODECON joined gathering. Seed distribution took place.

Night in Dheshma village

10/4

Between Dheshma and Jaipur: 6 meetings in 6 villages.

Jaipur by lunchtime. CEOCEODECON had brought their coordinators and farmers from different areas (10-15 villages) for sharing of knowledge with the yatris and to receive seeds.

Press conference in Jaipur with CEOCEODECON.

11/4

Entered Haryana

Between Jaipur and Delhi: stops in 3 or 4 villages.

Reached Delhi in the morning.

Rest for the yatris in Delhi.

12/4

In the morning, at Raj Ghat (Gandhi Samadhi), people from Delhi (dr Shiva and navdanya staff), many other ngo-people, farmer organisation leaders, lawyers, bureaucrats, politicians (opposition and ruling), 50 farmers from Broth area and 25 farmers from Haryana, and 200 schoolkids welcomed the yatra team. All together they put a flower offering in Gandhi Samadhi. Dr Shiva introduced all yatris to the attendees and told them about the purpose of the yatra. The schoolkids offered a welcoming scarf. Seed was distributed to the farmers and each and everyone took the pledge for seed sovereignty and freedom, conservation, preservation. MNC, water, gmos,... (all connected).

E. Summary:

18 days of yatra

Seed distributed to more than 50000 farmers.

Reached estimated 1 lakh people/families through pledges and 2 lakh people through the spreading of information (media coverage).

42 quintal of seeds distributed

Which media covered?

Number of villages in which meetings were held during the Yatra: 200.

Total distance covered was 4000 km.

Ajay: 7.Total out reach of the yatra- Met more than 5 lakhs people during 18 days of yatra.