

Yatra to highlight tribal way of agriculture

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Farmers participating in the 'Janjatiya Kisan Swaraj Yatra' in southern Rajasthan.

Water, forest, land and seed were the key elements of the march

A 'Janjatiya Kisan Swaraj Yatra', taken out as an outreach tour in the Vagad region of southern Rajasthan, comprising Banswara and Dungarpur districts, laid focus on sustainable farming through rain-fed agriculture and indigenous tribal practices. Water, forest, land and seed were the key elements of the march.

The yatra, which began on Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary this year and ended at Banswara on World Food Day, covered 101 villages in Vagad and the adjoining districts of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Participating farmers claimed their inalienable right on natural resources.

Cultural identity

The main organisers of the yatra were Banswara-based Vaagdhara group and the Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network. The march also highlighted the significance of tribal farmers as resource-savers and resource-keepers of the country as well as a unique cultural and social entity.

"The government's ongoing programmes for uplift of tribals have undervalued the contribution of rain-fed agriculture and farmers' practices. Tribals have an enormous storehouse of knowledge on food gathering, shifting hill cultivation, pastoralism, labour and handicrafts," Vaagdhara secretary Jayesh Joshi said. Tribal farmers should be encouraged to define their own food and agriculture systems in order to get "healthy and culturally appropriate" food produced in a sustainable manner, he added. The yatra served the purpose of filling up information gaps in these domains.

Sustainable livelihood activist P.L. Patel also participated in the march. He advised farmers to protect their indigenous knowledge and apply it to agricultural practices to reap benefits.

The emphasis was on nutrition-based agriculture rather than market-oriented farming, said Vaagdhara project manager Rohit Samariya. "Some aspects of rain-fed agriculture revealed that it has the potential to protect farmers against the impacts of climate change and promote the rich food diversity still conserved by the tribal families," he said.

Minor foodgrains

The participants also came to know of minor foodgrains such as kuri, kodra, bati, baota, kang, cheena, hama, hamli and gujro, which are on the verge of extinction and have a better nutritional value than wheat. Mr. Samariya said the consumption of these grains and maintenance of diverse food habits based on the locally available oilseeds, pulses, vegetables, fruits and spices kept the tribal people "hale and hearty".

A "tribal conclave" to be organised at the historic Tripura Sundari temple in Banswara on October 31 will consolidate the yatra's findings and examine the issues confronted by the tribal farmers. Mr. Joshi said food policy analyst Devinder Sharma would address the conclave on crop diversity, indigenous practices and climate change.

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