

Sowing seeds of inspiration

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An organisation that helps keep a range of traditional crops and seeds alive in their farms.



DRAWING LINKS: Traditional and nutritious

For the past six years, it has been my wish to visit the place. But, each time I planned it, the trip had not worked out. Beej Bachao Andolan (Save the Seeds Movement) has been such an inspiration and this time I was determined to make it.

Beej Bachao Andolan (BBA) has its home in the beautiful Hemwalghati, in the Tehri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand. Let me share with you why it continues to be a source of motivation for many of us. BBA is a small but strong-willed effort by small farmers to keep a range of traditional crops and seeds alive in their farms. As a city dweller I had been exposed to one or two varieties of Rajma beans in my growing years, BBA showed me over 200! As someone who had never heard of a crop like *naurangi* (a mix of nine coloured lentils), I got to eat it.

There is more to all this than what simply meets the taste-buds. It is the link it draws with our traditional ways of farming and the most nutritious foods that we've forgotten in today's times. Most of us do not go beyond eating polished rice and wheat flour in our routine diet. This is what has been made available to us post the Green Revolution from the 1970s. Millets like *ragi*, *bajra*, *jowar*, which are far more nutritious, have little or no space in our ration shops or our eating patterns.

There is another important element in the farming of these traditional crops. Today there is talk about organic food everywhere.

It is food produced without using pesticides or chemical fertilizer and thereby is supposed to be healthier and better. The irony is that traditional farming like that being practised by BBA never uses these external inputs.

It was and continues to be organic. Yet, it has seen deep neglect by our government. And now there is a sudden splurge of organic in the market, only it comes with a heavy price in monetary terms, and has also neglected our farming heritage.

Today, efforts like BBA across the country are tackling this. It is a small sign of hope struggling to hold its ground with little support from policy makers of our country.

It is their complete belief in their farming system that keeps them going, and one wishes them success in their endeavour. And it is this belief that I imbibe in my life and is the essence of my existence.

What can I do?

1. Try and learn more about your traditional foods from your parents and grandparents.
2. Find out about efforts like BBA in your city, district, and state. Try and visit them and promote their produce
3. Buy organic, through direct sales from farmers rather than completely commercial outlets
4. Spread the essence of this belief system to the people around you

In collaboration with Kalpvriksh Environmental Action Group