

B R A H M A K U M A R I S

*Brahma Kumaris at the United Nations in cooperation with the Rural Development Wing*



## SUSTAINABLE YOGIC AGRICULTURE

*INTERNAL REPORT*

*Tour of Maharashtra and Goa, 2013*

Author contact:

*Tamasin Ramsay*

*projects@un.brahmakumaris.org*

# Sustainable Yogic Agriculture

## Internal Report<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Agriculture is one of the biggest and far reaching industries around the world, affecting every living being on the planet. Today's agricultural practices, greatly influenced by the "Green Revolution," have resulted in poorer food quality, inappropriate use of chemicals, a decrease in the health and wellbeing of farmers and an increase in their depression and suicide. Food prices have gone through the roof in recent years and food security and hunger are some of our world's most pressing problems.

Representatives from the Rural Wing and the office to the United Nations spent 6 days traveling through Maharashtra and Goa exploring the growing fascination with SYA through the eyes of the farmers who practice it. Interviews, farm visits, and meetings with dignitaries filled the days, as many people came forward to support the work of small-holder farmers whose lives and livelihoods have been, and are being, transformed through the practice of SYA.

### *Sustainable Yogic Agriculture*

Sustainable Yogic Agriculture or "sashwat yogic kheti" is a process that includes seed empowerment (through meditation), mind and heart development of the farmer (through meditation) and integrated organic farming (through cow products, crop rotation and integrated pest management). As farmers gain confidence, the impact they are able to have on their crops through meditation is enhanced.

In India, between 500 and 900 farmers have adopted SYA methods of farming with success. All have chosen a traditional vegetarian lifestyle. They have returned to traditional farming methods, incorporating kind and ethical animal husbandry as part of their sustainable and successful farming, a practice that has brought significant change in their lives.

### *Brahma Kumaris: perspective on climate change and agriculture*

In our work as an NGO with general consultative status to the Economic Social Council of the United Nations, we have become increasingly involved in discussions around climate change and the environment, in recent years. The connection between human behaviour and

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<sup>1</sup> A full research report with references will be made available. For a copy, please contact the author.

the natural environment has become a clear area of focus, particularly in light of the most recent IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report. The report states that, without doubt, human activity is 95% responsible for the detrimental effects of climate change and its perpetual impact on our natural world. In the last 200 years we have seen the development of industry, rearing and slaughtering animals for food, artificially modifying seed - the very essence of natural life, and the mining of natural resources to create the built and technological environment. This has all happened with little reflection on the values that have underpinned this rapid development. The values of greed, 'me and mine', and the need for immediate satiation or satisfaction have informed many of societies collective choices. It is clear that the values of our minds and hearts are responsible for the world we live in today. The problems are multifold: social, economic, political, spiritual, mental, interpersonal, industrial and environmental. SYA, in the most humble and powerful way, addresses the heart of these matters.

**1 tour!**

**6 Days!**

**27 farmers!**

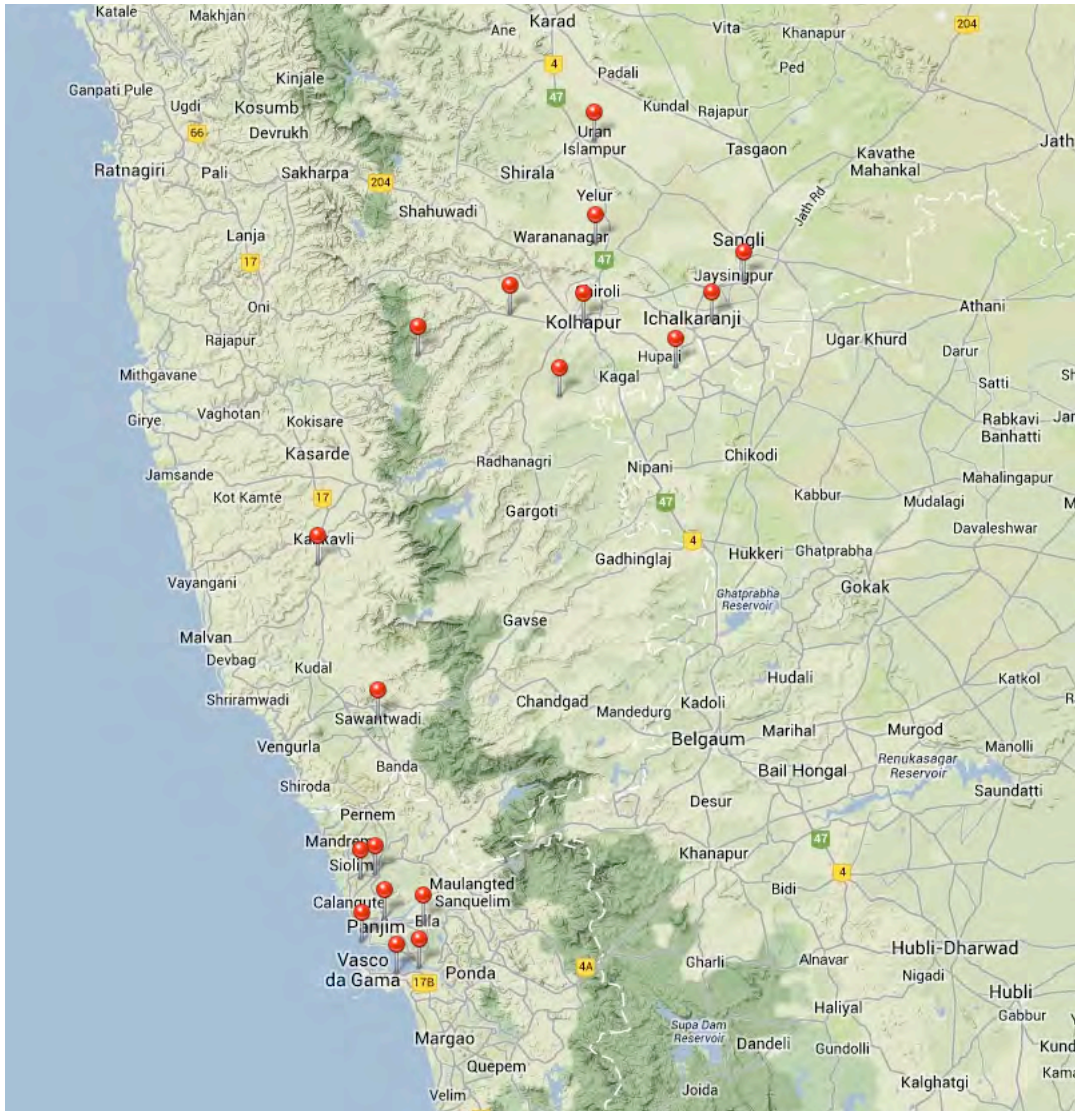
**4 dignitaries!**

**100's hundreds of BKs!**

**100's of family members!**



## Tour Locations



On the full 6-day tour were: Bro. Sumanth bhai (BKIVV Rural Wing, Madhuban), Sis. Dr Tamasin (Brahma Kumaris office to the United Nations, New York), Sis. Sunita (State Coordinator BKIVV Rural Wing, Andhra Pradesh).

Accompanying us along the way were: Sis. Sunanda, (Kolhapur); Sis. Manisha (Creator of SYA, Shirol); Sis. Asha, (Co-creator of SYA, Ichalkaranji).

## Tour Activities

### Goa

#### 26 August

Our first stop was to visit BK Dharati, her yogic farm and the new centre in Punola, Goa. We met with the class and introduced SYA to them.

Just after we arrived at the centre in Goa, we received a visit from the Assistant Director of Agriculture, Government of Goa. He shared his recent success in experiments on government land. The Director has now donated land for SYA experimentation at the Directorate of Agriculture, Goa.

#### 27 August



Brothers and sisters meeting with Chief Minister of Goa, presenting SYA.

We visited the Department of Agriculture, Government of Goa, and the Director and Deputy Director of Agriculture took us on a tour of SYA plots. We then inaugurated the SYA training room, dedicated for SYA training. There was a full audience and a complement of news media in attendance.

By invitation of the Director of Indian Council of Agriculture Research (Goa), SYA was presented to 16 senior scientists.

We then visited the Chief Minister of Goa. Apparently this was the first time the Brahma Kumaris had been granted an audience with the Chief Minister so it was quite an event. We almost missed the appointment because we were running late as a result of the earlier inauguration and presentation. He finally agreed to meet us and, although he was cautious about believing SYA, agreed to read the material. He softened after five of us kept sending him good vibrations!

Later that afternoon we visited Raj Bhawan, the Governors House in Goa. The Governor has requested that his farm-hands be trained in SYA and has donated a cottage for permanent



Young female farmer (R) with family members near Anjuna village. Yogic crop in background.

SYA training. We went to the training cottage and met with 9 brothers and 5 mothers, all of whom are learning SYA methods... The sisters say that there is a bird who flies in whenever sisters are reading murli and teaching SYA. He flew in when we were there and circled around the head of each of us in turn!

### Maharashtra

#### 28 August

Early in the morning, we visited a lovely farming family near Anjuna. We met the grandparents, parents and three daughters. The 28-year-old daughter (pictured above right) is taking the lead.

She only started SYA farming two months ago and she is enriching the soil with natural cow products. The height of the rice is less but because they are transferring from chemical

processes, she feels it is a good result.

We then met a mother farmer in Anjuna who farms with two neighbor brothers, and his farmed all her life. She recently transferred from chemical to SYA. "Good result so far," she says. She is waiting to see the final result before committing to a complete change to SYA.



Tour group with SYA farmers. The farmer of this land, which included sugar cane, soya beans, and

We were very happy to meet senior sister Sunanda and her yogic farm at the Kholapur centre. She accompanied us as we interviewed three farmers all of whom were working with SYA crops. We were all struck by the farmers sense of pride and purpose. That evening we were especially invited

to one farmer's house for a special welcome. We thought his entire village had turned out to welcome us, but it was just his extended family. He keeps his cows in a room in his home. They are treated like family members. A wonderful example of a kind, vibrant and holistic approach to farming.

Later that evening we met with a group of about 40 mothers, sisters and kumaris at the centre in Nagav, to introduce yogic farming methods. They were very interested and many knew at least one person who was experimenting with SYA.



Centre in Nagav. Meeting sisters, mothers and kumaris

### ***29 August***

We celebrated Janamasthmi at Kholapur centre with great splendor. Sunita bhen took the chance to give a clear and powerful introduction of SYA to a full audience. When she asked who was experimenting with SYA, around 16 mother and brother farmers stood up. The farmers spoke of their strong desire that the world should be healed by the restoration of Indian villages. The village life is traditionally one that looks after all its people as well as the elements and creatures of nature, with ease and comfort.

Later that morning over breakfast, we met with a very cooperative businessman. A very close contact, he is offering financial support and practical help to farmers undertaking SYA.

We then drove to a remote SYA farm and interviewed Ashok bhai and his wife on their farm (see front cover). Such pure pride they have in their work! The farm is now sacred and they do not allow anyone who is not vegetarian on the site.

We visited another farmer's place - he lives with his wife and son who both help in SYA. He lives next door to his crops so it is easy for him to meditate on site. Last year when his crops were ravaged by insects, he sat in special meditation and after two days they disappeared. As he was telling the story, he kept feeding us his yogic crops... Groundnuts, peas, sweet corn. Mmmmm!!

### ***30 August***

We visited and stayed at Shirol centre where SYA all began 10 years ago!

After lunch we visited the farm of a brother who grows banana crops. Banana crops in that area had been unseasonably dry, including the SYA crops. The difference was that the SYA crops appeared markedly less affected by the lack of water than the neighboring chemical banana crop. Other farmers also reported that SYA crops have better water retention than either chemical or organic crops.



Standing next to assistant farmer, with sugar cane in hand, undertaking a taste

We then visited a sugar cane crop being looked after by two brothers. Fortunately, we were able to contrast the yogic sugar cane with an adjoining crop of chemical sugar cane managed by the uncle of one of the brothers. The tastes of each were completely different. Both delicious, but the yogic crops certainly had an unmistakable clarity in the taste. Notably, the chemical crops were more prone to flattening during flooding than the yogic crops which remained more upright.



Freshly picked SYA groundnut (peanut)

Our next trip was to visit a group of brothers and sisters who were looking after a plot of land named after Dadi Prakashmani.

We then visited a farm in Chipri Kholapur managed by a family of bks. They served us freshly picked steamed and roasted ground nut. Like nothing I've tasted before.

### *31 August*

Today we visited a farm where they have a little meditation hut that is used regularly for SYA practice. Farmers look for innovative methods of adjusting machinery to fulfill their





Village in Chichwad, Maharashtra. Bicycle front left - invaluable for young innovators, and meditation hut at the rear.

farming needs. Young farmers are encouraged to implement their ideas (like attaching an adjusted bicycle to a horse as a surface level plough). This increases confidence in farming communities and is bringing new workers.

Dr. Vijay Bhatkar, Bro.



Meeting with Dr Vijay Bhatkar, scientist, innovator and educator. (L-R): Bro. Sumanth, Sis. Dr. Tamasin, Bro. Dr Vijay, Sis. Sunita, Sis Manisha, at Dr Vijay Bhatkars residence.

Sumanth and Sis. Dr. Tamasin spoke at length about the problem of agriculture in the world, and the critical need for incorporating spirituality into problem-solving methods. Sumanth explained to Dr Bhatkar the work of SYA and the Rural Wing in India. Sis. Dr. Tamasin then spoke about the importance of local innovations such as SYA at the United Nations. Dr Bhatkar shared his inspiration for education that bring together the worlds of science and spirituality in a way that addresses some of the worlds most pressing concerns. It was a wonderful, lively and happy meeting. Dr Bhatkar was delighted and fully supports the SYA project.

### **Farmer Experiences<sup>2</sup> (interview extracts).**

“I get to practice my meditation and then I feel a response from the plants. I’m not just saying this. Also, although I meditated for myself, I never really believed it would work on plants. I am a senior guy with a good position. I couldn’t just go ahead with what the general farmers think. I was very hesitant to move to SYA. But when you’re there and you do it... well, you have to do it to see. You feel a response from the plants. You won’t believe it unless you try it and see. Then only you will know.” - Farmer (m) Shivaji, 49

“I was very angry. This was my history. My wife knows, my family knows. I would always do my work but was mostly angry about something or other. I tried this SYA because everything was a struggle up to that point. Working on the farm was a struggle, managing the crops was a struggle. At the end of the day I was so tired. Then again I would have to do it. So I thought at least let me try it. This practice changed me. Now my farm has become sacred. No shoes are allowed and I don’t let people on my land who are not yogis. And you can see the results yourself. And I have become so much more patient. Ask my wife. I get angry sometimes still, but so much less and I can manage it now. I feel a connection with the plants. They respond to me. There is no doubt in this. And this really sustains me.” - Farmer (m) Ashok, 43

“There was one time two years back when we got very bad mealy bug. It was so bad I explained to the sister that this was an extreme case and we should act quickly with some pesticide. Just this one time. She was so firm that I shouldn’t do anything but that I should have special meditation instead. So the sisters came to my home and we sat together. For two days we had special meditation that I am received powerful light from the Divine and it was showering on the plants, and that no insect could stand to remain under that light. Within two days the insects were gone. If I hadn’t done it and seen it myself, I wouldn’t have believed it. The farmers on either side of me lost most of their crop for that year. I lost a little, but very less. Majority was saved.” - Farmer (m) Duniya, 42

“I want to continue the Indian tradition of farming rather than go to university. I know I can go to university, but I can’t think of anything better to do with my life than to feed the world, and help restore the traditions of this great Bharat. Only in India would something like yogickheti gain such support.” - Farmer (f) Surekha, 28

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<sup>2</sup> Farmer names are acronyms.

## Key Benefits

| QUANTITATIVE  | QUALITATIVE   |
|---|---|
| Increased crop yield  | Improved family relations   |
| Increased nutritional content   | Increased feeling of connection with livelihood   |
| Decrease costs  | Increased sense of wellbeing and purpose  |
| Increase price per kilo sold  | Increased sense of pride as a farmer  |
| Increased plant resilience  | Improved relationships among farming communities  |
| Decreased vulnerability to pests  | Reduction in emotions such as anger and frustration among farmers                         |
| Faster root germination   | Increase in emotions such as patience and forgiveness among farmers                       |
| Greater root germination  | Incorporates cultural and spiritual meaning into work life                                |
| Easy incorporation with other methods or sustainable agriculture like SRI | Brings together disparate social sectors into a common purpose with wide-ranging benefit. |



Chemical carrots (L), Yogic carrots (C), Organic carrots (R)



Yugic sugar cane sapling (21 days/ 20cm in height)



Chemical sugar cane sapling (21 days/ 6cm in height)

### *Unexpected Findings*

- Significantly different taste between parallel sugar cane crops (chemical cf. yugic)
- Sugar cane stalks were of similar width, however yugic cane remained noticeably more upright during rains, in contrast to chemical canes
- Many SYA farmers maintain chemical crops as well as yugic crops. They feed their families and the Brahma Kumaris ashram with yugic crops and sell chemical crops at the market.
- Improved relationships among farming communities
- Reduction in emotions such as anger and frustration among farmers
- Increase in emotions such as patience and forgiveness among farmers
- Chemical farmers within the community are impressed by the findings. The main reason they don't adopt the practice is because of the spiritual principles involved. All SYA farmers follow celibacy, abstain from alcohol and other recreational drugs, and adhere to a non-violent and vegetarian lifestyle encompassing regular meditation practices.
- SYA grain does not spoil when left in loose-fitting containers. No need to apply chemicals as pests apparently don't enter. Such was the case in one instance.
- Many consider their land sacred now and only those with good intention or following a "pure lifestyle" are permitted on the land. No shoes are allowed and a moment of meditation at beginning and end is compulsory.

### **Further Research Required**

Transferring from chemical farming to organic/yugic farming takes three years or crop rotation and careful crop and soil management due to the depleted state of the soil and the weakened state of the plants, and the lack of symbiotic biodiversity. Therefore farmers are moving from chemical to yugic in stages. Further studies are required to determine:

1. Apparent improved water absorption and retention - requires testing.
2. Determine risks associated with transferring from chemical to organic/ yogic farming. Farmers report three years is required to restore biodiversity to the land and soil. At least 5 farmers are maintaining chemical and yogic crops to ensure continued income, with the aim of complete transference.
3. Is the SYA process replicable outside the Brahma Kumaris?
4. Is the SYA process replicable outside of India?
5. Is the SYA process replicable on small and large scales?
6. Is the SYA process replicable with other types of meditation?



(L-R) Sis. Dr. Tamasin, Sis. Asha, Sis. Sunita, Bro. Sumanth experiencing happiness eating SYA sweet corn.

For further information about Sustainable Yogic Agriculture, please contact:  
BK Sumanth (India) at [ruralwing@bkivv.org](mailto:ruralwing@bkivv.org)  
BK Tamasin (International) at [projects@un.brahmakumaris.org](mailto:projects@un.brahmakumaris.org)

**Enjoy! and Om Shanti!**