



Bharat BEEJ Swaraj Manch

India Seed Sovereignty Alliance

The **Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch (BBSM)** or India Seed Sovereignty Alliance is a nationwide network of Seed Savers for conserving and regenerating crop/plant biodiversity and self-reliance in seeds. The Collective mandate includes: **Promotion, Exchange** and **Sharing** of **Traditional Seeds** of Crops, Allied wild plants, and other Traditionally Useful/Forest Food Species, evolved over generations; and the **Protection** and **Strengthening** of **Farmers' Seed Sovereignty**.

BBSM strongly asserts –

“the rights of farmers to Freely Plant, use, Reproduce, Select, Improve, Adapt, Save, Share, Exchange or Sell our Heritage Seeds, without restriction or hindrance.”

The Alliance advocates the urgent need for Living Seed Banks of Traditional Varieties – *in situ* and decentralized in farmers' fields and forests; and for conserving and reviving the community bio-culture related to many highly nutritious/medicinal traditional varieties, adapted to local agro-ecological conditions. This is essential to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of millions of farmers and the people they feed, especially in a scenario of high soil degradation, water scarcity, climate change, erratic weather, and looming shortages of non-renewable/chemical inputs of modern industrial agriculture in the not too distant future.



Unless our farmers can adopt bio-diverse ecological agriculture with their own locally adapted seeds, severe food scarcity looms ahead.

BBSM opposes any privatization of our seed/genetic resources and traditional knowledge, and calls for their firm protection and regeneration as a collective open-source heritage, free of any exclusive or restrictive Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs), patents, licenses, etc. We are concerned that by making Indian laws compliant to the

TRIPs and WTO regime, and to the ABS (Access and Benefit Sharing) mechanism of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), the Indian government has facilitated the appropriation of the nation's collective heritage resources and knowledge to the private domain, and allowed the erosion of our core values of sharing.

BBSM categorically rejects Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in food, agriculture and environment as an unnecessary, irreversible technology with numerous potential hazards. The open field trials of GM crops pose serious risk of contaminating our priceless heritage of crop diversity. Any subsequent commercial release would only make such contamination inevitable and widespread.

A Brief History

Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch (BBSM) was formed at a **National Seed Savers' meet** collaboratively organized in New Delhi on March 6-7, 2014, by Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA), Organic Farming Association of India (OFAI), Sahaja Samrudha, and Save Our Rice Campaign. The meeting was attended by Seed Savers and Farmer Breeders from 17 states of India. It was followed by the '**India Seed Diversity Festival**' held at Sri Aurobindo Society, New Delhi, which exhibited the seeds of several thousand crop varieties in an interactive space with the people who grew them.

A second meeting of BBSM was held at the **National Organic Farming Convention in Chandigarh**, February 28 to March 2, 2015, which drew 2,500 participants from all over India. The occasion also witnessed a vibrant crop diversity festival, exhibiting seeds of over 2,000 distinct crop varieties, brought by 270 Seed Conservator-Farmers from all over India. It was suggested that every farmer or family should adopt at least one crop variety for decentralized on-farm seed conservation and open-source propagation.

The third meeting was held between 26-27 Sep 2015 at Wardha, Maharashtra with farmers from 11 states participating in the deliberations. The BBSM general body resolved to

- Call upon the GoI to expedite the creation of a National List/Catalogue/Registry/ Compendium of Crop, Plant, Seed Varieties of Common/Traditional Knowledge; and to urgently take all appropriate steps to ensure their protection as a Collective, Open-Source Heritage, free of any exclusive or restrictive Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) or Patents
- To facilitate the access of Farmers, Seed Savers and their organizations to the Seeds/Germplasm in the collection of NBPGR; and also to such Seeds/Germplasm collected

from India by international organizations like IRRI, ICRISAT, etc.

- For awarding of recognition and support to the farmers, seed savers and plant breeders for their invaluable work in the conservation and sharing of traditional/heritage varieties of crops and plants

The fourth meeting was held at Vishakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) between 8-9 April 2017 where 64 participants from 14 states affirmed the above resolution and deliberated on regional strategies towards making farmers aware on the dangers of IPR on traditional seeds and demand regional seed registries as well as access traditional seeds stored in state institutions.

Seed festivals have also been organized by the constituent member of BBSM in various parts of India, including Agartala, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Hyderabad, Golaghat, Hubballi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Mysore, Nagpur, Patna, Pune, Raipur, Thiruvavnthapuram, and Udaipur. Additionally, several training workshops on seed saving have been conducted.



Rich Heritage

Our amazing heritage of seed diversity, adapted to diverse conditions and needs, has the boundless potential to sustain farming and allied rural communities in independence, health and dignity for generations to come! Founded on unique region-specific landraces bred by farmers, these seeds can meet local nutritional needs and adapt to changing climatic conditions.

The Deputy Director General, ICAR, declared a few years ago in an interview to the Wall Street Journal, that India had over 4,00,000 varieties of plant germplasm (both cultivated and uncultivated). These include crops with unique features like nutritional/medicinal qualities; tolerance to drought, cold, flood/submergence or salinity; and resistance to pests and diseases! The National Gene Bank of the National

Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) has base collections totaling 4,02,894 accessions of 1,586 crop species! These include 1,59,569 cereals (including many high yielding varieties), 57,523 millets, 58,756 pulses/grain legumes, 58,477 oilseeds, 25,330 vegetables, 6,872 medicinal and aromatic plants, and 3,847 spices and condiments.

Over the decades, many tens/hundreds of thousands of native crop varieties have been collected from farmers in India by national and international germplasm banks. About 25,000 Indian varieties of dry-land crops are held by ICRISAT alone. A large number of such varieties have since disappeared from farmers' fields under the onslaught of the so-called 'Green Revolution'. Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch seeks to reclaim the rights of farmers over the seeds of all these crop varieties.

Proposed Work Mission

An enormous amount of work lies ahead to strengthen the functioning and inter-member linkages of the Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch; and to spread further afield such work of seed conservation, documentation, exchange and promoting the reintegration of such crop/food varieties in our cultures and diets. We propose to have more collective consultations and sharing, more collaborative seed festivals, more training workshops in seed saving, and more such allied initiatives to meet our common objectives.

At the Organic World Congress (OWC) and at the Pre-Conference event being organized by Organic Farmer's Association of India (OFAI) and International Federation of Organic Farmers Movement (IFOAM) from 8-11 November 2017 at New Delhi--a Desi Seed Mela along with deliberations and interactions on indigenous seeds is scheduled.

We earnestly request all sections of society to encourage and support this collaborative initiative as concerned citizens.

For any queries please get in touch with –

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