Report & Resources
India & Sri Lanka Extended Study Leave
Andrew Kang Bartlett; January 19 – March 17, 2015

“It is only by mixed organic farming in harmony with Nature that India can sustainably provide abundant wholesome food, and meet every basic need of all – to live in health, dignity and peace.”

~ Bhaskar Save

_Bhaskar Save launched India’s historic Ksan Saraj Yatra – journey for farmers’ sovereignty – across the nation under the umbrella banner of ‘Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA); Oct. 2, 2010_

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These were the overall goals for the extended study leave
1) Increased knowledge and deeper analysis of nexus of food, water and climate, with special focus on adaptation solutions for farmers, ranchers and fisherfolk in the face of climate chaos and changing weather patterns.
2) Better understanding of the spiritual motivation behind and the varied organizing approaches by faith-based and other civil society individuals and groups around hunger, food and climate change.
3) Document and share the perspectives and approaches of South Asian Christians and people of other faiths through portrait photography and video interviews.
4) Spiritual, emotional and intellectual renewal and reinvigoration.

Interviews with villagers, farmers, trainers, activists and theologians
The questionnaire that I ended up using in many of the interviews and conversations was short and simple. The questions I asked were based on the following three, and then I could follow up.

1) Can you tell me about your life?
2) How are things going with your work/farming/herding/family...?
3) What are your dreams?

Often one or more of the following questions were part of the conversation:
Where did you grow up? What do/did your parents do? What inspired you to get involved in ______? How are things going with the people you work/live/farm with? How do you stay healthy?

The videos capture much of what I heard from people, but here are some notes from other conversations that were not recorded.

The following are a few themes that emerged for me – some work-related, some more personal or philosophical. I may elaborate on these further in blog posts linked from the interactive journey map, http://bit.ly/india-mapping

Reflections

Global Poverty is an Abstraction
The Issue
Just as focus on the future can wreck havoc with positive action in the present (see Wendell Berry’s recent article!), focus on global poverty will likely be disempowering.

Why it matters
Global poverty is an abstraction. Though I don’t question the experts who tell us that about 3 billion people live in poverty, the unimaginable scope of this turns it into little more than a concept, an abstraction. Abstractions are mental constructs and are only addressed by the mind. But since we know that individuals living in poverty often experience anxiety, fear, hardships, disease, and even premature death, poverty is something compassionate people should attempt to reduce. How can we do this in a way that actually impacts people struggling to escape from poverty?

What Matters? Or Essentials versus Fluff
The Issue
The contrast could not be more stark between the hundreds of millions of Indians and Sri Lankans struggling to make ends meet, and the lifestyles of most Americans filled with endless entertainment, sports and social media distractions, an abundance of material goods, an overabundance of food, and the cramming of busy days with ever more activity.

Why it matters
I will not presume that the south Asians are more connected to the spiritual because of the relative simplicity of their livelihoods, but I do suspect that the distractions and fluff of the 'Late American Civilization' make it harder for us to identify the essentials and move toward higher stages of spiritual growth. [Blog post to come...]

Equanimity versus Empathy + Action
The Issue
Equanimity could result in complacency. Achieving equanimity comes, at least in part, with a realization that we humans can't fathom the deeper reasons for why things happen to us and to others. Yet equanimity should not result in a disinterest or lack of empathy for the pain and suffering of others. Rather, action to ameliorate suffering out of love is the most noble of human endeavors, as Jesus Christ demonstrated. Navigating all this can be a real challenge.

**Why it matters**
One goal for Buddhist practitioners is to achieve a mindset of equanimity where experiences simply are and one is not thrown off center by the bad or the good. Liberation results because the desire is lessened for good and comfortable and 'positive' experiences, and one is neither held captive to such expectations nor the frustration or pain when expectations are not met. How does such liberation equip us to be more effective in our responses to suffering and destruction around us? [Blog post to come...]

**What is Success?**
**The Issue**
Especially during the 'field days' visiting with rural people - Dalits, farmers, herders and Adivasi tribal people - we experienced a completely foreign take on achievement, effectiveness and even time itself.
*Coming...*

**Asking Pharoah or Just Doing It**
**The Issue**
The Forest Rights Act was in the end an appeal to government to create a law that would return huge amounts of land to the Adivasi people, the approach they took was radical - as in they knew their only power was in the strength of their truth and the numbers of fellow tribal people who would insist on this truth with action.
*More coming...*

**The Unknown: Fear or Freedom**
*Coming...*
Is that scary?

**Asking the Right People**
You may have the right question. For example, where does my greatest gift meet the world's greatest need? Or - Where is the bus for Avadi? But you can inquire all day in vain if you don't ask the right person. How do you find the right person?
*Coming...*

**Feeling Fear**
Fear was an emotion I rarely felt while in India and Sri Lanka. I had sought and achieved a degree of surrender to time, the unknown and the unexpected, so rarely was anything scary. A ride on the Delhi subway was an exception.
*Coming...*
Food Sovereignty Alliance Gathering
Medak, Telangana, north of Hyderabad; Feb. 10-12, 2015
foodsovereigntyalliance.wordpress.com

For the tribal (Adivasi) nomadic sheep herders (who are about 400 in number spread out in 8 areas), access to grazing land is critical to their livelihoods and has been a growing challenge. Passing on the culture and skills from elders to the next generation of youth and young adults is of great importance.

For the Dalit communities (10 villages), they have made some progress in securing rights and title to land and this is essential to their agrarian lifestyles. Land is life, food and dignity. Yet the land situation in the area and India overall is still terrible, where 5% of the population owns 60% of the land. Women Dalit farmers are playing a crucial role in growing food and saving seeds to give them greater food sovereignty and independence. In society, Dalits play a critical role in public health and stewards of nature.

I got a partial translation of the song that one of the Dalit woman sang:

We are indigenous people.
We are indigenous people.
Together with the forest and the hills, we live close to nature.
We produce everything equally and we share our happiness and sorrows.
We protect Mother Earth and the riches therein.
We are indigenous people.

The group launched into a discussion about the challenges of GMOs. There are 33 GM crops in line for field trial approval in India, including brinjal (eggplant), tomato, papaya and many other fruits and vegetables.

At the same time, the Indian Supreme Court is still in the process (7 years!) of determining whether GM should be allowed. The Technical Committee issued strong recommendations to establish various regulations and a testing protocol with a precautionary principle approach, which is encouraging, but the overall decision is still pending. Nevertheless, field trials of GM rice have begun in the state of Maharashtra.

[More on this in the audio of Sagari Ramdas, co-coordinator of the Food Sovereignty Alliance]
PHP Joining Hands / 18th Annual Chethana Gathering  
Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh;  Feb. 26-28, 2015  
Two days of meeting and a day-long Seed Ceremony/Festival in Bhudevi’s village

At this gathering, the Chethana Network (family) welcomed 4 new groups into their midst. Many of the Chethana groups are focusing on seed saving and this area is becoming an important aspect of their networking and collaboration.

Chinaya, directed by Bhudevi and Kailesh, was one of the new groups and also the host of the excellent field day on Feb. 27. They are Adivasi and we were able to participate in one of their Seed Ceremonies and the festivities throughout the day and into the night.

They are trying to restore some of the 36 original varieties of millet, most of which are not in production and some that perhaps have been lost. They are now producing 5 varieties of millet, many pulses (red and black grams/lentils) and collecting wild seeds as well.

Food sovereignty is at the core. Land, seeds, food are life for their communities. They have succeeded in retrieving the land that was grabbed from them in the past, but the government had been promoting and spreading cashew, casurina and eucalyptus. Now they are focusing more on saving their own seeds and are growing 15 varieties of pulses. There are 200 small villages tucked in the mountains and they are cultivating food on about 2,500 hectares using sustainable, organic methods. The goal is food sovereignty for their 3,000 members.

The advocating for and passing of the Tribal Land Rights Act, with help from Yakshi and others, was critical and a great success.

AKB Reflections to Group:
As we create strategic and action plans, may we also incorporate communications. Encouraged ongoing sharing of stories, struggles and with video ‘postcards’ as an ideal way to convey. Then we can share and apply/respond based on our context. Answering these questions: “What are your main struggles, campaigns and initiatives?” These stories are how we may compel others to engage.

Feb. 28, 2015  Chethana Field Visit southeast of Bangalore part way to Mysore: Young farmers training others to transition to agroecological organic farming

Thomas, Valery and I visited a village called NIJAYAPPANA DODDI, which is 10 km from Ramanagara. Mr. Surendra and Mr. Siddaraju are the young organic farmers have started NAMMOORA SIRI (means OUR VILLAGE WEALTH), a registered
institution, is also a brand name of Organic products, produced by a team of young farmers. They are producing millets - paddy - vegetables - pulses - fruits etc. and marketing them through their forum. These two youths are part of KRRS movement (One of the powerful farmer’s movement in India and a Via Campesina member). They were influenced by the leaders of KRRS, related to GMOs and especially BT Brinjal.

Surendra: Farmers don’t look only at income. They know they must work with nature. Agroecological farms have multiple crops, so not about yield only. But also about the quality of the soil and overall farm health. In conventional farming, farmers only have 3-month plans. Instead, a farming plan should span from one day to 100 years. This is the perspective, and diversity is key. Yes, this type of farming is labor-intensive, but it is not costly.

There are 13-14 excellent varieties of cotton, but now 95%+ is GM cotton in India!

I asked what are the 3 companies that provide the greatest challenges to farming and spreading agroecological ag. The answer – “Monsanto, Monsanto and Monsanto.” (Maiko 25% owned by Monsanto. Also Syngenta and Bayer.

Concerns mentioned:
- Buffer zones around GM field trials are totally insufficient.
- DCN Cotton, bought up all the other cotton seeds and hid it away so only BT cotton was available on the market.
- Majunat: biofertilizers scientist; Plants and Pest Control book; 3 years later joined Monsanto.

**March 2, 2015  Chethana-convened Sow No GMOs Consultation**

Karnataka State members (Facilitated by SA GMO convener Mr. Srinivas Vasu)

The Land Acquisition Law is one of the key struggles for many farmers and was on the front page of newspapers during much of the trip. The government wants to take away farmer consent to land grabbing.

[I have more notes from the Oxfam rep about the history of GM ag in India, but here are a few highlights.]

- Supreme Court case just keeps getting delayed and delayed.
- Karnataka and most states had said no to GM field trials, but recently Maharashtra said okay – for rice, chick peas, brinjal, maize and cotton. Way conducted causes contamination, and in 2009 this happened with the GM rice trials. They disregarded controls and NGOs found almost all farms around were contaminated. And even in followed, especially with maize, the buffers
are probably insufficient. Should be done inside, in controlled greenhouses if at all. (No need since varieties cover the traits GM has.)

ORGs involved – Save the South Against GMOs; GM-Free India Coalition

Dileep Kamath gave a theoretical critique and I have notes on that. The basic principles or criteria around any technology is:

1. Just
2. Cultural plurality
3. Ecologically sound
4. Economically viable
5. Materially and non-materiually science-based
6. Appropriate technology (Gandhi – technology as extension of human hand)
7. Empowers humans and is democratically controlled

KP Suresh Comments very interesting. Notes on paper.

NUTRITIONAL SECURITY (not Food Security)

GMOs to solve problem of hunger. FALSE solution. We have sufficient food to feed global population; more is not needed.

And the focus should be on quality. Low glycemic carbohydrates should be promoted, grown and eaten. Red and black rice! Blood cannot hold more than 5 g of sugar at a time. For 2.7 million years we have been fructarians. Only after 15,000 years drinking cow milk can we now produce lactase (some of us).

Ex. All this about Omega 3s. You only need 1 g per day and you can get that easily in herbs. Mustard has 14%, flax has 53% per weight.

“The only time my education was interrupted was when I was in school.” – George Bernard Shaw

**Woman with White Shawl:** Slow food. Included discussion about public distribution system PDS of wheat and rice. Ragi and jabar are traditional grains that are healthy and resilient. People pushed, gov said yes in Karnataka, and then reneged.

Laura: consideration of labor hours for woman of cooking millets and sorghum. If paid housewives, GDP would grow by 60%.

Gender justice would be less drinking and more playing with children. Mechanization of farm = woman out of jobs. (Sharon talked about this in her video too)
Woman: “Not food security. Starch security!” A mountain of grain is a symbol of poverty and of state power.

Andrew presented some of the major areas of work in the United States –
1. Grassroots and popular education (Yakshi, Dana)
2. GM and Seed Policy (State and National) & Trade
3. Food/Farm System – resistance and alternatives
4. Food/Farm labor rights (unions supporting farmers and visa-versa)

**SOLUTIONS?**

Get into local language newspapers; write and create buzz to raise consciousness and debate among people.

Organic rules in India don’t include anything about GM because they are old laws. Inclusion could be a preemptive measure? Same for labeling, but must be able to do labeling in a way that wouldn’t hurt small farmers – especially when they may have been contaminated!

Must get food packets stopped.

**Chethana On-Farm Field Day and Demonstration**
**Keeranoor village Pudukottai district, Tamil Nadu**
Field day event at Ms Dhanalakshmi’s farm. Valery, Jacob and Thomas participated. 7 paddy varieties being cultivated, including red rice.

**Meeting with Dr. Brigitte, French Institute of Pondicherry**
March 6, 2015

She, along with the French team (agrobiz), researched public/grassroots perceptions about millet. Studied Siddha, which is the older esoteric, alchemical, tantric and ayurvedic biomedicine. With roots in Arab, Chinese, Mecca and North India.

Why do NGOs/academics/church want to keep people in rural agriculture? Young people are not interested in farming, but they may be interested in artisanal and value-added businesses.

Self-help groups, coops, sanghams yes, but entrepreneurial efforts also.

Farmers can supply local and regional, but India is intent on export market, especially to the U.S.
MILLET
Prices at 60-100 INR per kilogram. People can’t afford. National Food Sec Bill. Check out Jean Dreze (Belgium) macro study on youtube. Increased nutrition from coarse cereals.

More in notes about local grains, subsidies and food programs, but it all came back to increased food sovereignty. 2014: APL Above – wheat subsidies (not rice); BPL – rice free, 20kilo(?); Subpoverty AAY – 35k rice max (w 5 people), less for fewer in family. Thinking about cooking rice first – a terrible idea leading to much waste and more food insecurity!

Meeting with Priscilla Claeys at French Institute of Pondicherry
Post doctoral researcher; March 6, 2015
Telephone: 2231632; prisclaey@yahoo.fr

Great conversation with Claeys who shares an office with Brigitte. She had just arrived 2 weeks prior. She worked with De Schutter, UN Special Rapportour to the Right to Food.

She was at the Yale Food Sovereignty Conference in Sept. 2013 and presented a paper From Food Sovereignty to Peasants' Rights: an Overview of La Via Campesina’s Rights-Based Claims over the Last 20 Years at the Agrarian Studies Conference "Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue". She did this paper too, "Liberation Theology, ecology and social movements," But it is in French.

Claeys received her PhD in Political and Social Sciences from the University of Louvain (UCL) in 2013. Her research interests include transnational agrarian movements, human rights, alternative food economies and the ecological transition. She co-chairs, with Geoffrey Pleyers, a research group on social movements in the global age (SMAG). http://www.uclouvain.be/smag.html

Priscilla worked as an Advisor to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food from 2008 to 2014 http://www.srfood.org/en. She previously worked for a number of human rights organizations and development NGOs.

Priscilla holds a MA in management from the Louvain School of Management (UCL) and a MA in environmental management from the IGEAT (ULB). Her latest publications include: "Rethinking Food Systems. Structural Challenges, New Strategies and the Law" with Nadia Lambe published by Springer (2014) and "Human Rights and the Food Sovereignty Movement: Reclaiming Control" published by Routledge (2015). She has published in international peer-reviewed journals such as Sociology and Globalizations, and taught two online courses on the right to
food at the Open University of Catalunya (UOC), in partnership with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. For more information on her research and publications, see: https://uclouvain.academia.edu/priscillaclaey

**Sri Lanka**  
**February 12 – 24, 2015**

1) **Three days with Joining Hands Network / National Fisheries Solidarity Organization**

2) **Two days volunteering at the Sarvodaya International Headquarters, Moratuwa**

3) **Meetings with Maia Fitzstevens, Researcher at Sarvodaya**

**Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown Etiology (CKDu)**  
Meetings with Fitzstevens on Feb. 14 and 15, 2015

CKDu is asymptomatic until almost too late. Hopefully with the new president Sirisena – who is from NE where concentrations of disease are numerous – we may see more action. It is a huge problem in Sri Lanka, Central America and Egypt.

**Groups working on this:**

1. Terrance Amini, *Collective for Poison-Free Farming*
2. Anaradhapura, mobile clinics for screening (2000 people); sus ag
3. **Kidney Patients Protection Society** in Anaradhapura.
4. 183 machines in Sri Lanka; 2000 would be needed to fill the demand.
5. MONLAR and Sarvodaya only involvement has been in the research and paper that Maia Fitzstevens and Lakpria Nanayakkara worked on.
7. M.K. Jayathissa ~ Hingurakgoda farming collective
8. Soorasena – working in Kandy. Another patient protection society there also.

**Researchers:**

1. Peradenia research board of nephrologists, chemists, min of ag, registrar of pesticides, min of health. Focus on groundwater. Political/money influential.
2. Dr. Tilak Abeysekera: former head nephrologist Kandy hospital.
3. Ranjit Mulleriwaya: retired expert rural agronomy and community organizing. (google him for articles- the island newspaper)
4. Dr. Rohana Chandrajith: geochemist.
5. Rajarata University – Prof. Jayasumana publishes and says it is all about arsenic. Glyphosate connection. But data not submitted.
6. Sri Jayawardenapura University- in Colombo
7. Sri Lanka – Vedda people are the tribal group here. Not sure if this is an issue for them.

**International:**
1. Big issue in El Salvador also. La Isla Foundation in Nicaragua is also dealing with this same problem in C. America.
2. Boston U. – looking at dehydration and malnourishment linkage.

**Glyphosate Connection to Chronic Kidney Disease**
[http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3945589/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3945589/)

**Industry Response**

**Additional Perspectives**
[http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2369/15/125](http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2369/15/125)
APPENDIX 1. RANDOM RESOURCES

BOOKS
Nothing  (about epigenetics)
Earthcare Books:
  o The Vision of Natural Farming by Bharat Mansata about Bhaskar Save
  o The Great Agricultural Challenge, (letters to the ag commissioner S. Swaminathan
  o Vision and Action for Another World, edited by Ulrich
  o Ramakrishna and Christ, or the Paradox of Incarnation, by Hans Torwesten
  o India’s Organic Farming Revolution, by ________

MOVIES: BK, Abi Kahn (actor),
Gangs of WasseyPur, parts 1 & 2, Director Anurag Kashyap. (other stuff he’s done too) – recommended by diamond empire train companion from Jaipur to Udaipur. Like Dev D. Haeja might like.
Damnation (about dams); Farmageddon,

The Anti-Lonely Planet India Itinerary

As recommended by and with thanks to Alicia at Solitude Farm, Auroville.

The Lonely Planet guidebook is highly biased to the north and western parts of India. Here are some recommendations from the child of a military man, Alicia, who has lived and traveled all over the country.

  o Calcutta (2 days) – Siliguri, toy train to Darjeeling; Makaibari biodynamic tea plantation – Kalianpogn (3 days); Tangkha Buddhist writing – Sikkim with organic farming, trekking if up for it would be great; Red Pandas – [GO to Bhutan from there, but $VISA for USA is super expensive] – Assam (NE Assam if daring) – Manipur for the Hornbill Festival, Nagaland in December, in far NE of India.
  o Spiti Valley (cold desert, less developed), where original Aryans? – Milana.
  o Kutch Full Moon in October, and Navratri Festival. January kites festival.
  o Ramishvaran coral reefs on Indian side on way to Sri Lanka
  o Orissa in December – SUN Festival; Juggernaut Temple / Puri
  o Punjab – Golden Temple, Amritsan; butter chicken (Haeja can eat Kolchachuna)
APPENDIX 2. VIDEOS & PHOTO GALLERIES
These are the initial 4 short videos that are ready; more to come.

1) **Dalit Woman’s Message to Monsanto** (1:14 min.)
   Pochamma is a Dalit woman from Sikanlapur village in Telangana, India. She is a leader in the Dalit Mahila Association and was eager to have her voice heard. She speaks of the need to protect their native seed varieties for food cultivation, the problems with BT (genetically modified) Cotton, and has a clear message for Monsanto.
   Presbyterian Hunger Program was there with Nasumu and other members of the Food Sovereignty Alliance, a coalition of Dalit, Adivasi and farmer associations as well as 'co-producer' consumer advocates in Medak as they planned for a Food Sovereignty Summit in Feb. 2015.

2) **Tribal Farmer Shiva’s Message to Monsanto** (45 seconds)
   Madavashiva "Shiva" Prasad is an Adivasi farmer from northern Telangana (the correct spelling) state in India. His group does theater as a form of grassroots popular education about the things threatening their people’s way of life farming and herding. They are part of the Food Sovereignty Alliance and were together with other Alliance leadership to plan a Food Sovereignty Summit in late February 2015.
   Presbyterian Hunger Program was visiting with the Alliance and member groups to learn about their approaches to take back food sovereignty by protecting their land, saving indigenous seeds, and developing their food and farm system in collaboration with other groups and peoples in the region.

3) **Dalit Farmer Explains Why No Food From Walmart** (1:14 min.)
   Nasumu, a Dalit farmer from Telangana, India, explains how the food they grow themselves is healthier, and provides both food for their families and fodder for their animals. He is adamant about not wanting Walmart food. Walmart is beginning to make inroads into the Indian food system at this point not with retail stores but as part of the supply chain.

4) **Children’s Names in Nalweda Village in Rajasthan** (47 seconds)
   Presbyterian Hunger Program visited the villages north of Udaipur, Rajasthan with farmer Pannalal. The women in this village -- this farmer Lakshmi, is one of the first pioneers -- are transitioning from chemical farming to organic, and are creating a cooperative company to market their organic wheat and vegetables together.
   This is just a short video of the children telling their names to the foreigner with the camera who has dropped into their village from far away.

PHOTO GALLERIES