

WELCOME STEP Women Empowerment: Role of Krishi Sakhis in Agriculture Development

The recent installation of a comprehensive CCTV surveillance system at the revered Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine is a commendable and much-needed initiative that reflects a progressive step toward enhancing safety, security, and efficient management of one of India's most significant pilgrimage destinations. Nestled in the Trikuta Hills of Jammu and Kashmir, the shrine attracts millions of devotees annually from across the country and abroad. The influx of pilgrims, particularly during peak seasons, necessitates robust infrastructure and vigilant oversight to ensure a smooth and safe experience.

The implementation of an advanced CCTV surveillance system is a response to growing concerns regarding crowd control, safety, and emergency preparedness. In recent years, incidents of overcrowding and occasional stampedes have highlighted the need for real-time monitoring and swift action. With hundreds of high-resolution cameras strategically placed throughout the route from Katra to Bhawan, including checkpoints, resting points, and the main temple premises, authorities now have better control and visibility over crowd movement and potential bottlenecks.

This system not only enhances physical security but also acts as a strong deterrent to unlawful or suspicious activities.

In a place visited by lakhs of pilgrims daily during the festive season, having an eye in the sky is indispensable for preventing mishaps and ensuring adherence to rules and guidelines.

The footage from the cameras is monitored round-the-clock by trained personnel, enabling real-time alerts and prompt action if any untoward situation arises. It also facilitates better coordination among security forces, medical teams, and shrine board officials.

Another major advantage of the CCTV system is its contribution to overall crowd management.

The real-time data helps authorities regulate the flow of devotees, thereby reducing long wait times and congestion.

This ensures that the spiritual experience of the pilgrims remains peaceful and unhindered.

In addition, in case of lost persons, children, or misplaced belongings, the surveillance system can play a crucial role in swift resolution.

Importantly, this initiative aligns with the broader goal of digitizing pilgrimage experiences and upgrading infrastructure using modern technology.

It is also in step with the Shrine Board's ongoing efforts to enhance facilities and ensure the highest standards of safety and hygiene for pilgrims.

Public response to the installation of the CCTV system has largely been positive, with devotees appreciating the increased sense of security and organization. Many have also acknowledged that such steps are necessary in today's times, when ensuring safety at mass gatherings is of paramount importance.

The installation of the CCTV surveillance system at Vaishno Devi Shrine is a timely and welcome step. It not only strengthens the security apparatus but also enhances the overall pilgrimage experience, making it safer, more organized, and more comfortable for millions of devotees each year.

PROF. POONAM PARIHAR
 Empowering Women in Agriculture means empowering the entire Nation".



"Women in Agriculture are driving change, ensuring Food Security for generations to come".

Krishi Sakhi is a Community Care Service Provider (CASP) which will enable the last mile coverage in rural areas where farm-based services for agriculture activities are not available on time or expensive to afford for rural poor. Krishi Sakhi is a rural woman community leader or agricultural extension worker in India who plays a significant role in empowering other women and farmers, particularly in rural areas. The term "Krishi Sakhi" can be translated to "Agricultural Friend" or "Agriculture Companion". The role of a Krishi Sakhi involves a variety of activities, aimed at improving agricultural practices, promoting sustainable farming, and enhancing the livelihoods of rural communities.

The Programme was launched on Aug 30, 2023 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW) and Ministry of Rural Development jointly. First Implementation: It has been rolled out in 12 States in Phase-1: Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Odisha, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, and Meghalaya. Over 34,000 Krishi Sakhis out of 70,000 have been certified as Para-extension Workers.

Krishi Sakhis are the practicing farmers and trained para extension professional in agriculture at grass root level. Considering the importance of Natural Farming, Krishi Sakhis role is envisioned to be as farmers' friend at their door step with all necessary information, skills and abilities to guide farmers on various aspects of Natural Farming, providing capacity building and skilling in emerging areas of Natural Farming. Natural Farming is a holistic farming system which helps in improving soil regeneration, water and air quality and produce nutrient-rich food. Krishi Sakhis will be mobilized to work in harmony with nature, while also maintaining and improving economic viability.

Krishi Sakhi Convergence Program (KSCP) was launched through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on August 30, 2023, the KSCP is a key component of the broader 'Lakhpati Didi' program. This initiative aims to create three

crore Lakhpati Didis by training and certifying women as Krishi Sakhis, thereby enhancing their agricultural skills and providing new employment opportunities. This convergence aligns with the objectives of the Lakhpati Didi Program, focusing on the empowerment of rural women and the sustainable development of rural India. This initiative, supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and the Ministry of Rural Development, aims to improve rural livelihoods and standards of living.

Krishi Sakhi Convergence Program, supported by the Indian government, aims to improve rural livelihoods and environmental sustainability through comprehensive training and community engagement. Under the Krishi Sakhi Convergence Program, grassroots-level practicing farmers and trained para-extension professionals, known as Krishi Sakhis, are playing a crucial role in transforming agricultural practices in rural India. Their role as farmers' friends at the doorstep encompasses providing essential information, skills and guidance on natural farming and soil health management.

Why Krishi Sakhis?

► Krishi Sakhis are selected as para-extension workers due to their established status as trusted community resource persons and their extensive farming experience.

► Their deep connections within farming communities ensure they are well-received and respected, making them effective in their roles.

► This community trust is crucial for the successful implementation of agricultural extension services.

Selection Criteria of Krishi Sakhis:

Krishi Sakhis are selected as para-extension workers in agricultural lands because they are community resource persons and also farmers in their own ways.

The target consumer base that these brands have is one that is inherently tied to farming, making them accepted universally.

They have already been trained on various extension services for 56 days in basic and advanced modules including Agro ecological practices, Farmer field schools and forums, permits and seed banks Business planning and operating control, Role of Agri inputs and e-commerce in agriculture and allied sectors, Learning about soil, Health importance and Management of integrated farming systems, Basics of livestock management and Bio-security, Vegetable production, agri product marketing management and Rural entrepreneurship.

Training and certificate for Krishi Sakhis:

► The Krishi Sakhis have been trained in different extension services which were completed for 56 days. At present they are again

receiving training on their respective fields with additional stalks on Natural farming and soil health cards through the DAY-NRLM agency.

► After completing the training, the KRISHI SAKHIS shall undergo a test to ascertain their level of comprehension.

► Successful applicants shall be trained and accredited as Para-extension Workers to allow them to carry out different tasks under the MoA&FW sponsored programs for a predetermined resource fee.

Types of training being provided to Krishi Sakhis:

The training program for Krishi Sakhis is extensive, lasting 56 days and covering various aspects of agricultural extension services.

Key training modules include:

► Agro-Ecological Practices: From land preparation to harvest.

► Organizing Farmer Field Schools: Facilitating practical learning sessions for farmers.

► Seed Banks: Establishment and management.

► Soil Health and Conservation: Techniques for maintaining soil health and moisture.

► Integrated Farming Systems: Combining various farming practices for sustainability.

► Livestock Management: Basic management practices for livestock.

► Bio Inputs: Preparation, use, and establishment of bio-input shops.

► Communication Skills: Essential skills for effective communication with farmers.

Currently, Krishi Sakhis are receiving refresher training with a special emphasis on natural farming and soil health cards, facilitated by DAY-NRLM agencies in collaboration with MANAGE.

Benefits of Krishi Sakhi Convergence Programme:

The KSCP offers several benefits to rural women, including:

► Economic Empowerment: Krishi Sakhis can earn up to ₹80,000 per year, making them economically independent.

► Skill Enhancement: The program enhances their skills in various extension services, enabling them to provide better services to farmers.

► Community Acceptance: Krishi Sakhis are trusted community resource persons, ensuring they are welcomed and respected by the farming community.

► Job Opportunities: The program creates job opportunities for rural women, enabling them to contribute to their families' income.

Key ways in which a Krishi Sakhi can both Promote Entrepreneurship:

1. Promoting Organic Farming and Sustainable Practices:

► **Organic Produce:** By adopting and promoting organic farming, a Krishi Sakhi can enter the niche market for organic produce. She can sell organic vegetables, fruits, or herbs directly to consumers, health-conscious buyers, or organic food markets.

► **Eco-friendly Products:** She can create and market products such as natural pesticides, fertilizers, or compost, which are in demand by farmers looking for sustainable solutions.

2. Creating Value-Added Products:

► **Processing Agricultural Produce:** A Krishi Sakhi can promote entrepreneurship by creating value-added products from raw agricultural materials. This could include making pickles, juices, sauces, snacks, or packaging spices. The added value boosts profitability and opens new marketing opportunities.

► **Dairy or Poultry Farming:** She can start small-scale dairy or poultry farming and process milk into dairy products like curd, cheese, or ghee. This could be marketed to local communities or sold in local markets.

3. Setting Up a Rural E-Commerce Platform:

► **Digitally Connecting Farmers:** A Krishi Sakhi can start an online platform or use social media to help local farmers sell their produce. By learning digital marketing and e-commerce skills, she can create a local online marketplace where farmers can list and sell their goods, offering a wider reach and more customers.

► **Promoting Local Produce:** She can also help other farmers promote and sell organic or region-specific products via online platforms, providing a much-needed marketing channel.

The role of Krishi Sakhis in agriculture development is pivotal in advancing women empowerment within rural communities. By providing essential knowledge, resources, and support, they empower women farmers to make informed decisions, enhance productivity, and improve their livelihoods. The presence of Krishi Sakhis fosters an environment of collaboration and capacity building, enabling women to challenge traditional gender roles and engage actively in agricultural practices. As they become leaders in their communities, they not only contribute to sustainable agricultural development but also inspire future generations of women to participate in and benefit from the agricultural sector. Ultimately, investing in the skills and potential of women through initiatives like Krishi Sakhis is essential for achieving broader economic growth, food security, and gender equality. By recognizing and amplifying the contributions of women in agriculture, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future for all.

Historic Aghar Jitto Mela-Remembering to a Legendary Farmer

DR. BANARSI LAL

In India various international level fairs and festivals are organized such as Mahakumbh Mela, Pushkar Mela etc. which are attended by millions of tourists, traders and devotees across the globe. Union Territory of J&K is also famous for various fairs and festivals as they are the integral part of the people of its inhabitants. In J&K various types of Melas are organised such as Jhiri Mela, Bahu Mela, Hemis Gumpa Mela, Dera Baba Baisakhi Mela, Baba Jitto Mela, Sankari Mela, Sudhmahadev Mela, Moungrri Mela etc. which attract thousands of people across the nation. These events add colour and vibrancy to the lives of the people of J&K. These fairs also help to showcase the rich culture of J&K at national and international level through folk songs and dances. Celebration of fairs and festivals in different parts of Jammu region indicates the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the province. The celebration of such fairs and festivals help to unite the people from all the sections of society. These types of events help us to preserve and transmit our rich culture from generation to generation. Reasi district of Union Territory of J&K is considered as the hub of religious spots. This district is blessed with numerous religious spots and every year thousands of devotees across the nation visit this district. Various religious places such as Vaishno Devi Shrine, Shiv Khori, Baba Dhansar, Nau Devian, Dera Baba Banda Bahadur, Siad Baba etc. are situated in this district. These places are of great religious importance. There are various other religious places in this district which are not frequently visited by the pilgrims but they can also attract more and more devotees from far and wide. This district is visited by the pilgrims and tourists across the nation throughout the year. Reasi district of J&K is also known for various fairs and festivals.

Aghar Jitto Mela is an important Mela in Reasi district of J&K which is attended by thousands of devotees across the nation. Every year a three days Mela is organized at Aghar Jitto village in Reasi district with great enthusiasm. This year this event will be commenced from 10th of June at Aghar Jitto village of Reasi district in J&K which is about 6 Km away from world famous Katra town. This ancient religious place is situated in the lap of Trikuta Hills on Katra-Reasi road where thousands of devotees from within Union Territory of J&K and outside of J&K assemble at this spot during the Mela to pay obeisance to Baba Jitto. This mela is organised to salute the courage of a legendary Dogra hero Baba Jitto Mal. As per the religious rites, the devotees of Baba Jitto perform the rituals on the bank of river Chenab. Safe drinking water, sanitation, medical services, un-interrupted power supply, security, adequate provision of essential commodities, fire services, transport arrangements etc. are provided to the devotees by the district administration. Agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and other allied departments



actively participate and exhibit their stalls to showcase the various technologies during the mela. Wide publicity of mela through print and electronic media well in advance is also done so that more and more pilgrims participate in the event. People from every nook and corners of the country participate in this event with full enthusiasm and zeal. Different events like Arti, Kirtan, Sobha Yatra, folk songs, plays, sports etc. are organised during the mela.

The Aghar Jitto Mela is an important annual congregation of farmers and other pilgrims who assemble at Aghar Jitto village to pay homage to Dogra folk hero Baba Jitto. Baba Jitto was born in Aghar village of Reasi district in J&K which is situated in the lap of the Trikuta Hills, an abode of Vaishno Devi in J&K. Baba Jitto was a great devotee of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi. He was a farmer who sacrificed his life to get his due share of agricultural crop from landlord Bir Singh who denied him to give the committed share. After that he became famous among the farmers community. This place has its own charm and pilgrims from all over the country are attracted towards this spot. On this spot Baba Jitto statue has been constructed and natural source of water is really the centre of attraction. The mela is held

every year to honour and celebrate the memory of 15th-16th century folk hero Baba Jitto, who laid down his life to defend the values of honesty and justice. Like many other folk heroes who begin their life as an ordinary person but are transformed into someone extraordinary by performing significant life events in their lives.

Baba Jitto, originally named as Jit Mal. He was an honest and truthful farmer of village Aghar Jitto in Reasi district. Baba Jitto was a Brahmin and great devotee of Mata Vaishno Devi. His aunt Jojan was having hostile behaviour towards him and finally he decided to leave the village along with his daughter Bua Kori. He went to his friend, Iso Megh at Kalnchak and there he requested Mehta Bir Singh, a feudal lord of the Ambgrota, to give a piece of land for farming. Mehta Bir Singh gave Jit Mal a piece of barren and unfertile land after signing an agreement, that he will take one-fourth of the total produce. Jit Mal's hard work turned the unfertile and barren land into fertile land which finally yielded a bumper crop. When Bir Singh came to know about the excellent crop yield, he arrived at the fields along with his men and instructed them to lift three fourth of the crop yield and leave only a quarter for Jit Mal.

Baba Jitto requested Mehta Bir Singh to follow the terms and conditions of the agreement but Mehta forcibly snatched the major share of the crop. Injustice done by Mehta compelled Jit Mal to stab himself after sitting on the heap of grains which got wet by his blood. Her daughter Bua Kori with help of their pet dog Kalu, found the dead body of her father which was hidden in the Simbal tree trunk by the goons of Mehta.

She then lit the pyre and burnt herself with her father. After that a fierce rain storm raged the area, the blood strained grains were washed away and all those people, even the birds, who had taken those grains later suffered from various diseases, untimely deaths, misfortunes etc. In order to seek pardon from the wrath of the holy great spirit, they not only asked for his forgiveness by worshipping him as a 'Kuldevta'-family deity, but also making it mandatory for their future generations to venerate Baba Jitto and pay annual homage to him.

There is a spring that flows in front of the shrine. It is believed that water of this spring is holy. It is said that if a childless lady takes bath in the pond she is blessed with a child.

Aghar Jitto mela witnesses great hustle and

bustle during three-day festival as pilgrims from diverse communities and hailing from different parts of the country assemble there to pay obeisance at the Baba Jitto temple and seek his blessings and the blessings of his daughter-Bua Kouri. People from every nook and corners have also been visiting this spot throughout the year during their visit at Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and enjoy the unique place of spirituality. Especially the members of local and outside communities, who worship Baba Jitto as a Kuldevta (family deity) come here to pay obeisance on occasions of important events in their families like marriage, birth of child, mundan (tonsuring ceremony) or simply to thank or entreat the Baba for his continuing protection and blessings. Apart from large number of kiosks of eatables and merchants displaying their wares for sale, which include popular electronics gadgets, the fair presents hosts of entertainments for every age group of people. During the festival there is regular recitation of folk songs by Yogis and 'Gardis' in form of Baba's devotional ballads at the main shrine. Many entertaining cultural shows are also staged. The Indian style wrestling (dangals) matches in which wrestlers from different parts of the country used to come here which draw a large crowd of sport enthusiasts. On first day of the mela, a yatra is held at birth place of Baba Jitto which is continued for whole night with bhajans of Baba Jitto. On second day Sobha Yatra is taken out from his birth place in which a large number of pilgrims/devotees participate. On the last day wrestling is organised in which locals and wrestlers from other parts of the country participate.

Exhibitions and stalls are also organized by different government departments like agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, animal husbandry, rural development etc. to create awareness among the people about various technologies, government schemes and incentives. Most of the stalls of eatables especially Jalebi and Pakoras, which is a specialty of the mela, are being run by local people. Other than the shopkeepers, the local transporters like matador and bus owners also earn extra income by bringing large number of pilgrims to the mela site. The Aghar Jitto Mela is one of the most attended fairs in Reasi district. The Aghar Jitto Mela is a major socio-religious event that brings together many people at Aghar Jitto village near Katra where devotees of Baba Jitto forget their caste, creed and language and share an experience of faith with full devotion. The young generation of today remain glued to mobile phones, laptops, TVs etc. rather being a part of such religious events. Parents should encourage their children to attend such events to realize the significance of such events and learn to respect, preserve and transmit our culture. We all must be proud of our diverse and rich culture and we must spare our time from our hectic schedule to take part in such historic events.

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