
NAYAKRISHI ANDOLON, STARTED IN THE EARLY NINETIES, IS AN AGRARIAN AND COMMUNITY MOVEMENT LED BY BANGLADESHI FARMERS WITH MORE THAN 300,000 DIVERSE AGRO-ECOLOGICAL FARMING UNITS AND EXTENDS TO FISHERS, TRADITIONAL HEALERS, RURAL ARTISANS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS



NAYAKRISHI ANDOLON

CULTIVATING 'ANANDA': JOY OF FARMING AND HEALTHY LIVING

Nayakrishi Andolon (New Agriculture Movement) is the farmer-led movement in Bangladesh for Shohoj way to Ananda, or simply, joyful living through the practice of biodiversity-based ecological agriculture. Nayakrishi Andolon represents peasant's resistance against the corporate takeover of global seed, food, and health chain, an assertion that it is the farming communities of small holdings, not the multinational corporations, that feed us.

The immediate ecological management of food, nutrition, and health directly constitute the biological foundation of the local communities and dictates them to avoid various fictitious notions of 'development' instead of what they must deal with as real problem. Farmers combine the traditional and historical wisdom of their local life practices with the advance in empirical science to solving their problems and meeting community needs. As a broad movement, Nayakrishi represents peoples' resistance against the destruction of the 'local' by privileging the 'global' and against effacing of the 'real' by installing 'virtual'. Nayakrishi is an eco-political way to return to our common sense and free us from the tyranny of hierarchy, power and technology. The movement constantly explores alternative life-affirming relations and community building practices through the critique of ego-centrism, oppressive social hierarchy and the industrial notion of high-tech lifestyles and consumerism.

Nayakrishi practices agriculture as a way of life. Our joy lies in our sense of unity with nature a necessary sense of belonging to the soil to fight against the structural violence of modern economy. Farmers practicing Nayakrishi show economic viability as well as environmental sustainability in their production. They are self-reliant and can produce healthy food for others.



'SHOHOJ' : TOOL FOR THINKING AND LEARNING

The word 'shohoj' is grounded in the powerful spiritual tradition of Bengal, generally meaning intuitively simple but transparent way of being in the universe. Philosophically it implies learning to relate to internal and external realities with all our human faculties in a unity, allowing no hierarchy between our sensuous, intellectual or imaginative faculties. So, 'Shohoj', in practice, explores the bio-spiritual potential of human communities in the real material world to transcend the oppressive, painful and dehumanized existence.

Focused and comprehensive in practice, Nayakrishi Andolon is an open learning process, a movement of mind enjoying its 'freedom' remaining self-consciously critical of everything including its own practices. It learns from everywhere and from anywhere. Nayakrishi over the years has learnt intensively and extensively from various renowned 'organic' and ecological approaches to farming; for example, it learnt from Islamic notion of "Ashraful Maqlukat" as conserving and regenerating the domain of creation as an obligation to the creator; Bengal's Bhakti-Sufi movement that treats seeds as spiritual manifestation of recurrent eternity and food consumption as nature's ritual to bind human beings with the living universe. Nayakrishi learns from Permaculture, Biodynamics, no-till farming, ancient Indian practices of forestry, Ayurveda, various ancient and modern home gardening and of various other moral and spiritual systems of practicing self-conscious lifestyles enabling the cosmic or unitary energy of nature to express concretely in particular place and time.

Nayakrishi attempts to design households, villages and unions as ecological production systems at various levels and scales. Innovative and diverse ecological designs and practices are promoted in order to achieve higher yield both in terms of individual species and varieties as well as system yield. Minimum general indicator to assess the performance of the system is to ensure the reproducibility of the systems, generally known as sustainability.



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BIODIVERSITY

In addition to well-known practices of ecological agriculture, Nayakrishi is based on conservation, regeneration, and enhancement of biodiversity and genetic resources. The objective is to (a) reverse the aggravating loss of biodiversity, (b) reducing stress of climatic variations and biotic disruptions and risks triggered by market, (c) transforming so-called 'weed', 'pests' of 'modern agriculture' into valuable biological resource of farming systems, (d) increasing source of uncultivated food, fuelwood, medicine, green manure, etc., as well as efficient management of uncultivated space, and (e) ensuring more productivity and economic return to local communities.

Hundreds of local varieties of rice, vegetables, fruit and timber crops, etc. have been reintroduced in the Nayakrishi villages. At present, farmers in Nayakrishi areas cultivate varieties of rice, vegetables, fruits and the number is increasing. The farmers are happily sharing and exchanging seeds among themselves and increasing the genetic resource base of their community.

TEN SIMPLE RULES

To realize the principle of biodiversity-based ecological farming, Nayakrishi farmers follow ten simple rules following the ten fingers of two hands. Fingers facilitate memorization and constant monitoring of the practice. Farmers develop the capacity of their indigenous knowledge system and day to day practical experience to engage and appropriate the latest advances in biological sciences, enabling them to gainfully participate in the market. The economy is considered as the site where social exchange takes place between life-affirming activities of diverse communities.

Rules 1 to 5 are entry level practices and essentially learning the art of producing soil through natural biological processes. Rules 6 to 10 relate to surface and aquifer level water conservation, cultivating diverse fish species in ponds and raising animals and poultry with farm produced organic feed, as integrated and advanced practice. Developing integrated and complex ecological systems maximizes systemic yield and contributes in innovating ecological designs, proving the immense economic potential of biodiversity-based ecological farming. It constitutes a powerful practical resistance against capitalist globalization dominated by transnational corporations.

RULE 1: Absolutely no use of pesticides & harmful chemicals.

RULE 2: No use of chemical fertilizer and external inputs

RULE 3: Keep seeds in farmers' hands

RULE 4: Stop the use of deep tube wells and extraction of groundwater.

RULE 5: Produce both cultivated and uncultivated food, fodder and manage spaces for the both.

RULE 6: Copy the forest and produce biodiversity

RULE 7: Learn to calculate total yield of the household, community and the eco-systems

RULE 8: All domesticated and semi-domesticated animals and birds are members of the farming households

RULE 9: Water and aquatic diversity are integral to agricultural practice.

RULE 10: Integrate non-agricultural rural activities of potters, weavers, blacksmith, crafts and all forms of livelihood

IMMEDIATE GOAL AND STRATEGIC FOCUS

Nayakrishi's immediate goal is to demonstrate that bio-diverse ecological farming is more productive in qualitative and quantitative terms of what we could harvest from an agrarian system and also what we gain through the economic exchange in monetary terms. Experience shows that this could be achieved only through the ceaseless struggle to defend seed and food sovereignty.

Nayakrishi's strategic focus is 'seed' in its innovative farming practice; non-farming activities include household and village-based weaving, pottery and artisan skills. By encouraging traditional healers, particularly birth attendants, called the Dai Mas the movement strengthens national health system. The overall objective is to demonstrate the shohoj way to a joyful living ensuring biodiverse ecological regeneration of nature to receive food, fiber, fuel wood, medicine, clean water and many different bio-material and spiritual needs of the community.

The 'seed' is the powerful metaphor of continuity and history and identifies regenerative space as the site where the invisible, manifests as the visible, and potential is realized as reality. Agriculture is defined as the management of both cultivated and uncultivated space and not a 'factory' merely producing consumer products or commodities. As a practice, Nayakrishi celebrates the moments where we are sensuously engaged with nature both externally as well as internally with our laboring bodies. This is necessary to understand and transcend the limit of abstract intellectualism. Nayakrishi is grounded in the powerful spiritual traditions of Bengal where Islam has met creatively with indigenous religious traditions and practices to give rise to bhakti movements such as Chaitanya (1486 -1534) and in its apex produced great saints like Fakir Lalon Shah (1772 - 1890).

Nayakrishi proves that biodiversity-based ecological production practices are not only ecological but economically more efficient than modern chemical-pesticide-based conventional farming. Nayakrishi can feed the Country.



NAYAKRISHI SEED NETWORK

The innovation of the Nayakrishi farming is the development of farmers' collective action called Nayakrishi Seed Network (NSN) with the specific responsibility for ensuring both in-situ and ex-situ conservation of biodiversity and genetic resources. Farmers maintain diversity in the field, but at the same time conserve seeds in their homes to be replanted in the coming seasons. The NSN has three levels:

First, Nayakrishi Seed Huts (NSH) are established by the independent initiative of one or two Nayakrishi farming households in the village, willing to take responsibility to ensure that all common species and varieties are replanted, regenerated and conserved by the farmers.

Second, the Specialized Women Seed Network (SWSN) consists of women who are specialized in certain species or certain varieties. Their task is to collect local varieties from different villages in different parts of Bangladesh. They also monitor and document introduction of a variety in a village or locality, and keep up-to-date information about the variability of species for which they are assigned.

Third, Community Seed Wealth Center (CSWC) is the institutional set-up that articulates the relation between farmers within a village and between villages, in other districts and with national institutions for sharing and exchanging of seeds. The CSWC also maintains a well-developed nursery. The construction of CSWCs is based on two principles: (a) they must be built from locally available construction materials and (b) the maintenance should mirror the household seed conservation practices. Any member of the Nayakrishi Andolon can collect seed from CSWC with the promise that after the harvest they will deposit double the quantity they received. In the CSWs, there are at present (2017) collections of over 2700 rice varieties, and 538 varieties of vegetables, oil, lentil, and spice

UNCULTIVATED FOOD

Nayakrishi encourages the growth of various plants including herbs that are uncultivated but are good as food sources for humans and other animals. The more environments are made free from chemicals, the more the uncultivated foods are found in the surroundings. Such assessment is done through cultural practices of celebrating Chaitra Sangkranti, last day of the Bengali calendar year having food with at least 14 different kinds of leafy greens (shak). This is a natural auditing that ensures renewable food sources for future. Resource-poor farmers can collect nearly 40 percent of their food and nutritional needs from uncultivated sources.



NO TO GMOs

In recent years biodiversity and food security are threatened by the introduction of GMOs such as BtBrinjal, Golden Rice, RBPotato etc. Bt brinjal seeds, having no agronomic value, are given to farmers for cultivation despite the massive failure in field cultivation and in violation of environmental and biosafety concerns. BtBrinjal is sold in the market without any labels. Such introductions directly threatens Bangladesh with biological pollution and destroy the genetic base of Bangladesh agriculture. This may severely disrupt farming communities' efforts to achieve seed and food sovereignty and survive in their present practices and interest. Farmers have already demonstrated a better way to enhance both productivity and agro-biodiversity. To the peasants, GMOs are 'bikrito' entity – something which is not natural, absurd, degenerated and potentially harmful. Nayakrshi farmers have opposed the introductions of Golden Rice and BtBrinjal in the farmers' fields.

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