

Bring order into things to uphold law



When physical, cultural and social environment of a region indicate enormous opportunities for learning and development, quality of the environment for governance becomes the pivot for future choices. In Bastar, we saw many examples of excellence, which were rooted in its natural and socio-cultural environment. Can we conserve biological diversity and physical environment without paying simultaneous attention to institutions which, so to say, format hard disk of mind of both the individuals and the communities?

Let me illustrate examples of excellence woven into local resources and institutions. Sampatnal Bhangiram Sahu, a fifteen-year-old boy brought a collection of 115 plants with their uses, highest in this shodh yatra.

Sukaloram of Markabeda was an outstanding wood-carver recognised by the community locally. Bula bhai was recalled for making beautiful sculptures on *samdhi sthal*. Dasu Ram and Budhu Ram Lohar were the only one left in the entire stretch of 175 km who still retained the traditional technology for smelting iron ore to make iron (said to be of high quality, deserving further research).

LESSONS FROM BASTAR

Devdutt from Ekda had trained a whole generation of prajpatis in clay pottery and sculpture. His excellence was recognised by former President Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma. He might not live very long. Have we made the video



Devdutt (l) trained generations in clay & pottery, while Sampatnal Sahu (r) collected 115 plants

based instructional material of his skills, and key indicators used by him to judge the quality of process? Obviously not. That alas will not happen till the polity of the nation, aspiring to be a knowledge society, will continue to treat them as unskilled labour, as la NREGS. Erosion of knowledge, skills and values took place at a rate, never so high in the history of mankind, as in the current generation and this is not unfortunately an issue that many will visit on World Environment Day.

Let me recall another example of excellence blended with environment manifested through numerous recipes of curries, drinks, sherbats and other dishes. We relished dishes made of koliari, karmatha, chirota, behar, kheda bhaji, tikhr etc., besides health drink made of minor millets like mandwi. There were many local rice varieties, on the brink of extinction.

Unless we build upon this rich knowledge system, and reciprocate their generosity in sharing so much knowledge, wouldn't they feel short-changed. Will the environment and the excellence really be nurtured? We have to rethink our approach to economically poor and knowledge and culture rich regions like Bastar. Else, state will not be able to go beyond just the law and order approach. Let us bring order into things, law will be upheld then.