

Knowledge trapped within glass walls

Push the walls of wisdom to include women's creativity



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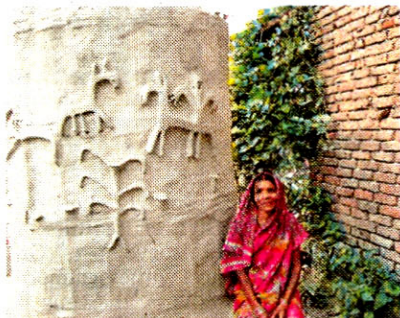
Our Shodh Yatras took us to different parts of the country where we discovered tremendous richness of creativity, local knowledge and wisdom among rural women. And yet when we look at different programs, processes and perceptions about developmental opportunities, this rich knowledge resource of creative women seldom becomes a point of reference or departure.

I wish to pick up some outstanding examples of such creativity in different fields, mainly arts and culture and then argue that both state and civil society must consider recognition, respect and reward for such expressions. Entrepreneurial opportunities for disadvantaged sections of society will then have to be tailored to the potential I submit exists in abundance. Challenge before us then is obvious - how do we become inclusive without incorporating women's creative potential?

While walking from Motihari to Bettia in Champaran district, we were stunned by the sheer beauty of a simple grain bin. Its creator, Ram Tewari Devi, had utilised the limited space on the wall of the grain bin to unleash her creativity in an outstanding art work. When asked, all she said was: "What else could I have done?" Art becomes imperative - where was the choice?

Imagine the cultural richness of a community which sees art as imperative. For another hundred-odd kilometres we could not find any more of such artistic grain bins. Did Ram Tewari Devi know how unique was her artwork was?

In another Shodh Yatra which took us from Patmada in Jharkhand to Puruliya and Bankura in West Bengal,



Ram Timari Devi, Champaran

another wall of art halted us in our tracks - a commonplace partition made interesting through creativity. A whole wall was used as a canvas by Bhabi Mahato - the artist herself, however, nonplussed by excited clamour!

Sitting with a broom besides her creation, she was awestruck at our admiration for her work of

art. In Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh, a lady used the dung cakes storage's walls as the canvas for her art.

Why should there not be more space for such arts to be expressed in more appreciative and rewarding contexts? Which state government has a policy for providing encouragement to such street/backyard art and culture among various communities and make these a basis of entrepreneurial empowerment?

Why shouldn't employment programme be built upon such skills and artistic talents, rather than making such artists, singers,

performers, and other creative knowledge experts break stones and dig earth? Why should not Ahmedabad have walls in the city where such art can be displayed from all over rural and urban Gujarat as well as from other states? Unless the aesthetic domains are fertilised by the so-called unschooled minds, how will new visions and opportunities emerge, how will our imagination become more inclusive? Their smiles should not be confused with satisfaction. This is a challenge to the way we govern ourselves.

MINDS ON THE MARGIN

