

Backwaters of creativity: So-called 'backward' tribals

One's assumptions about people's motivations change while passing through tribal areas of Gujarat and moving into Madhya Pradesh



It is generally believed that people can only seek to attain higher-order goals when their basic needs are met. The legacy of Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs has been unfortunately accepted uncritically by a large number of people.

But when you pass through the tribal areas of Gujarat and move into Madhya Pradesh, you begin to see a different world. One's fundamental assumptions about the motivations of common people change. Recently while going through Ghojjiya village in Dahod, as a part of the 23rd Shodhyatra, we met Kanubhai Kagubhai, who had made an extraordinary wish. He had resolved that if his particular wish was fulfilled, he would get his wall painted.

Pratapbhai Dhirabhai Lakhara of Jipatiya village, a tribal artist was then invited to paint the wall with stories, traditional and modern motifs and a commentary on social evils such wife beating etc. The Shodhyatris were wondering why Kanubhai had his house painted when he had hardly any belongings in his house.



Participants at a drawing competition

This way of fulfilment made his own life colourful and also provided employment to an artist. Under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, only work that planners in Delhi can think for Babubhai is breaking stones and digging earth. If art can be conserved by people who don't have enough to meet their basic needs, does it not show that higher-order goals can indeed be pursued without meeting the basic needs. In fact, much depends on the value context in which the knowledge system evolves in different localities.

The aesthetic sense of people on the edge of survival under harsh economic and social conditions need not be poor. While there may not be any public policy at the state or central level to conserve such arts and artistic traditions, local communities are trying to their bit as long as they can. In the entire walk of about 100 km, we came across only one more household just at the base of Ratanmahal sanctuary on the MP side, in which similar paintings

If art can be **conserved** by people who don't have enough to **meet** their **basic** needs, does it not show that **higher-order** goals can indeed be pursued without **meeting** the basic needs

were seen, though with lesser quality of detail.

During the course of the Shodhyatra, we passed through many villages in and around Ratanmahal sanctuary. It did not require a great deal of analysis to notice that that this region has not received the attention

of those who matter, be it in the field of education or economic development, water supply or health. The only redeeming feature of this walk on the Gujarat side was that many drinking water wells were being dug under the employment programme - something that had not happened for a long time; and people were happy that it was happening at long last.

But there were also villages where water was being brought from distant small springs - having not very clean water. It was embarrassing to see so much hardship in a region that was not too far away from highly developed urban enclaves.

May be Gujarat also needs an employment guarantee programme such as that started in Maharashtra after the 1972 drought, funded through the professional tax on Mumbai residents. There is no reason why we all living in major cities of Gujarat should not pay a tax which would not become part of the common budget of the state. This should remain dedicated and earmarked for alleviation of poverty and for infrastructure improvement in such disadvantaged regions. The PURA model (providing urban amenities in rural areas) advocated by Dr Kalam or 'rurban' development suggested by the state government could become prime movers in this direction.

NEXT WEEK MORE ON THE 23RD SHODHYATRA

**IGNITING
MINDS**
