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LET'S MAKE IT WORK



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Food for thought

New signatures of sustainability from grassroots to global



Anil K Gupta

Sattvik 2010 was the eighth edition of a traditional food festival organised by the Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions (SRISTI) in collaboration with the National Innovation Foundation (NIF), Grassroots Innovation Augmentation Network (GIAN) (west), and a number of colleagues from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA). While there were a variety of traditional and nutritional foods and other products from Karnataka, Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Rajasthan, Orissa and other states, the December 18-20 festival also had several new innovative products in the central section of innovation exhibition at the new campus of IIMA.

The Dhanuk community brought non-stick clay pots completely natural. While Mansukhbhai was the pioneer of non-stick clay pot (and he also had a stall in Sattvik) but he still used food-grade chemicals to make the plate non-stick. The one by Dhanuk community was based on clay polished by a lac which grows on a 'phoim' tree found in that region. The quality of this lac for cooking has been tested in the SRISTI lab also. The community has been cooking on it for ages and Sadhana has been using it at my home for months. A sustainable cooking pot which is affordable,

safe, and makes food tasteful and of course energy efficient could become a global signature in near future. Once that happens, maybe that community will politely say no to NREGA (the programme which considers 250 million people economically poor but rich in knowledge and skills like that of Dhanuk as unskilled) because they might earn more from these sustainable non-stick pots. The case studies of such inclusive development will then be taught in not only IIMA but also elsewhere.

Let me share some other examples of community knowledge which are changing our perceptions of what is possible through platforms like Sattvik. Panchal Sajeew Khedi Manch brought a large number of women and men farmers to the festival. A community from Lalvadan village, Jashan, has developed soap from cowdung, panchgavya, multani mitti, sesame oil, camphor etc., with extremely good sanitation properties. Likewise, they have made a facial (ubtan) having several similar ingredients including pulses, mustard, turmeric and chandan.

The new revolution in Indian and global markets might be triggered when unlike the strategy of selling things to rural people (a la fortune at the bottom of so-called economic pyramid), we buy things from rural areas and expand their purchasing power. It will help the sellers of other goods also. But today most corporations are mindlessly targeting at only selling things to rural people without looking at what they can buy from them.

Hussian Ajmeri from Shahpur has designed a gas iron for pressing clothes. While NIF had come across a similar iron



by Lingabrahma from Andhra Pradesh, this one seems more tidy and customer friendly. We are testing both but this will expand the options of the washer men community but also that of households which want to iron clothes at home.

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Dhramaveer from Haryana has made a machine for processing fruits and vegetables while Jaydeep and Abhishek from Suryansh group from Uttarakhand have made products based on aloe vera juice pith. Dharamveer does not feel that his products face competition from people whom he has sold machines, he feels happy that better quality products are coming to market.

Collaborative, distributed and horizontal markets will change the polity of the nation as well. More than 10,000 people have voted through their purchase decision that markets for sustainable products and services exist. We have to now create a permanent place where such things are also sold round the year. Maybe some social entrepreneurs will come forward to join hands for innovation exhibitions, sales points and collaborative learning labs for various kinds of products, including food. ■

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