

Innovations in small scale industries: Listen to workers

Democracy can be sustained best if there are large number of actors contributing to growth



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Economic development need not register only aggregate growth but also should be characterised by a distributed nature of growth. Micro and small scale industries play an important role in creating large number of spurs for entrepreneurial development. Democracy can be sustained best if there are large number of actors contributing to the growth instead of only few mega large corporations. Unfortunately, the clout small scale industries need is seldom proportionate to their contribution to the economic and social development.

One way in which small scale industries associations can become competitive is by collaborating among themselves to learn from each other. Their competition should be at global level supplemented by cooperation at local level. The cooperation should not only be at the managerial level but also at the worker level. Innovations by workers and users can be a major driver for transforming locally cooperative and globally competitive edge of MSME. Let me share a few examples of creative ways in which problems are being solved by small entrepreneurs.

Two years ago, Prof von Hippel from MIT was travelling with me to meet creative farmers and entrepreneurs. On the way, Mahesh Patel of GIAN took us to meet Shrinand Palshikar of SKP Bearing Industries in Surendnagar.

While interacting with his workers, he narrated a very interesting innovation. In one of the processes, he had to grind small about an inch long pins in a machine wetting them in oil. He needed a medium to clean the oil in a manner that the surface of the pin did not get abraded.

They tried various materials but the surface quality could not be maintained. A worker from the Panchamahals, familiar with hulled corn suggested that the white fibre left on the corn after removing the grains could be used for the purpose. It worked perfectly fine. It was non-abrasive and absorbed the oil very well. It is possible that many other industries might be facing similar problems and such a solution might not have occurred to them. Farmers in dry regions might get more income from the hulled cob of corn rather than from the grain itself. Every industry would

have workers who would be equally creative.

I have not heard about many awards for recognising such workers at different levels in the state or central level. SRISTI would be very happy to hear from other entrepreneurs who have come across creative examples of such workers so that we could recognise them and create new role models of innovations from below.

It is equally creditable that Palshikar has also taken the initiative for replicating a windmill originally developed in Assam by Mehtar Hussain and Mushtaq Ahmed and modified by GIAN for salt workers. More about it next time.

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