

# 44

## SHODHYATRA

### Creative Gadchiroli: not just a land of disquiet

*Gadchiroli is famous for many reasons. The extraordinary contribution of Dr Abhay and Rani Bang through SEARCH, Shodhgram in significantly reducing infant mortality and malnutrition and im[proving community health in Dhanora block of the District in the last two decades. It is also known for first time full assertion of the provisions of community Conserved areas under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Several villages have taken full control of Forest conservation, harvesting of allowed MFP like bamboo and directly selling it as custodian of this wealth under the local leadership. It is also in news for leftists violence and conflicts around local resources. Walking through such a terrain was a very instructive experience for the shodhyatris who saw both, the deep-seated inertia in the way forest produce was collected and processed by tribal communities and innovations in pest control or some other areas of day to day life.*

With the help of NIRMAN, a social development arm of SEARCH, Bee Network, GIAN and SRISTI organised 44th shodhyatra starting from SEARCH, Shodhgram till Mendha Lekha, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, June 12-18, 2019. Amrut Bang, founder NIRMAN (2008) shared how youth from elite institutions like IITs but also from other less known institutions were empowered in social work through internship and volunteer training program at shodhgram.

#### Yatra begins

When a healthy person dies, you bury him/her and if a sick person dies, you cremate her. An eclectic practice like this is certainly not a sign of a so called backward and less developed community. We had noted this practice is come villages of Bastar ( about 200 km away in Chhatisgarh) as well. Why should a body having germs of disease be buried if you respect the sacred mother earth?

Conserving forest and tribal rights under Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 is a challenge. First time, two sets of communities

led by Devaji Tofa and Devaji Prada have succeeded in getting the rights transferred to the tribal communities fully and completely. They now earn money by auctioning tendu patta and bamboo and get about Rs 7-8 crores for village self-development. What has been the impact of this decentralisation and devolution of constitutionally permitted financial and forest rights- a serious check on extremist violence. Further, in almost every village, we walked through during 44th Shodhyatra, we found farm ponds



Canvas is not a constrain for this little artist

*A Dialogue on People's Creativity, Experimentation & Innovation*

having been constructed by communities from the income they got under the Forest Rights Act. Many of the ponds built last year had water proving that water can indeed be stored in this dry region. Some of the villages in this region get cut off from the rest of the district due to excessive rain but the summer months have had water scarcity.

The people keep a joyful demeanour, no matter how hard is their life. The health services provided by SEARCH founded by Abhay and Rani Bang has had a very transformative effect on the health of the region. The maternal and infant mortality has been reduced drastically. But the strength of the formal system of medicine has inadvertently also led to erosion of local herbal healing tradition. Rabi Bang gave us a book in which she had documented 150 practices in Marathi used by women during pregnancy and child delivery. A very sincere effort to preserve and protect the local knowledge. This brings us to a continuing unfair and unethical exchange of knowledge and ideas between the formal and informal sector of our society.

We had pooled in Hindi several studies done by professional based on the knowledge of Gondi tribal in this region and published elsewhere. But these studies were never shared with local communities. SRISTI and GIAN worked hard to pool many such studies and share their summary in Gondi/Marathi/Hindi language. This is a task which should be done by every academic institution and professional who collects knowledge from local communities without ever sharing the findings in the local language with the knowledge providers. GIAN also distributed vegetable seeds developed by farmer breeders in different parts of the country for local experimentation.



Local language Poster exhibition in different villages besides video presentation in every village in the night (thanks to availability of good power supply) generated a lot of interest in trying some of the new ideas like Gopal Bhise's cycle plough for weeding, Shakimathan's pump for draining/irrigating paddy fields, tree climber, and a few other solutions.

*Babu Ram Pada showing the ingredient of a herbal pesticide*



*Gaurav and Ankush being felicitated for their innovation*

By noon of the first day, we reached Khutgaon. Babu Ram Pada had mixed three different plants viz., neem fruits, flowers of calotropis and fruits of garadi (*Cleistanthus colinus*) to develop a herbal pesticide for controlling pests of paddy crop. Meeting an innovator on the first day enthused all the shodhyatris. Sukhdev Gawade Maharsj was very famous in the region for his herbal healing practices. For dealing with cramps in feet, he would advise crushing leaves of neem and Gloy (*Tinospora cordifolia*) mixed with jaggery formed into tablets. it was to be accompanied by a massage with oil of mustard, sesame and castor mixed together for 2-4 months depending upon severity of the problem.

Our next stop was Mendha Tola village, and like Khutgaon, the village too had its share of innovations to showcase. For instance, we met sanjivani Yadav Chichagare who specialized in making doormats using old clothes. Initially, she would make it by hand; however, it was a time-consuming task. She wanted to make more intricate designs and so developed a tool with a big nail that could hold the piece of cloth tightly. Three students, Piyush Rajiv, Piyush Ashok and Om Yadav managed to develop a mobile battery operated mini fan. Other women participants also showcased craft work made from paper and waste plastic. A few women community members, Sarita, Suman, Neeta, Sumda, and Kiran had also prepared local delicacies, which they shared with us during the meeting.

In Ushirpar village, we saw doormats from waste cloth, organic pesticides and local food items. Gaurav and Ankush, two children made a model of sprinkling water on the newly built road. They had seen a new road having been made up to their village. They were given a certificate of appreciation. First such recognition of their talent, at their door step.

*Contd...on next issue*

*When did you talk to your grandparents last?*