

Sowing Seeds (Beej Bonna) 2010

An International Artist Village Residency, Andore

Indian daily life style

Colourful nuances of life unexpectedly shade the slow-paced rural India even in this information age. Along with numerous small and big grass fields, several mountains and swinging trees, the chirping birds hum the tale of languishment and love to the big and clear blue sky, giving a mesmerizing, captivating and bewitching effect to the villages in Rajasthan state of India.

Village life is a mixture of several moods, such as tranquility, harmony and innocence. The participants are the flora, the fauna and the humans. Camels lazily chewing on fodder, a boy gathering his cattle – goats and cows considered the real wealth are sights. While one may see a woman milking the cow early morning, there are many women who walk few miles to and fro just to fetch their daily ration of water from the nearest river. A maiden wearing a colourful swirling skirt and blouse walks by, wearing sandals or sometimes barefoot, carrying on their head a pot filled with water, a basket full of vegetables or dried sticks used as winter bonfire. Their sense of dressing is simple, unique, and colourful. Bangles worn on each wrist match their outfits. A round bindi on their forehead symbolizes the Indian beauty.

The women spend a lot of time helping around the house performing their daily chores. When cooking in the open, they indulge in small banter that brings life to their daily routine of cleaning, washing laundry, looking after their cattle and children. Present seems to catch up with them as cement ovens have replaced the more traditional mud ovens, though the fuel remains the same - coal, cow dung cakes and dry wood. Evenings are filled with folk songs, sung by these groups of women while they engage in churning fresh butter from the milk pot to pass their time.

The tweeting of countless birds is a rare mellifluous music to the urban dweller's ears. An occasional song fills the air with sweet melodies. One can trace it to the radio blare in full volume at the ubiquitous tea stall round the corner, serving piping hot tea in the cold. People, young and old huddle around the man selling tea, asking for more. Small and medium shops dot the main road, selling groceries, vegetables and other necessities for a living. These shops extend inside their humble homes, which are out of bounds to the outsider, unless you are their guest. Even guests are ceremoniously welcomed in this village called Andore respecting the Indian belief, "guests are like God." The auspicious ceremonial rituals involve a conch blowing, garlanding the guests with marigold flowers and applying a red dye called "tilak" on their forehead that makes Indians proud for their hospitality.

Everyone is an artist here at village Andore. The women use clay, cow dung and hay to make beautiful patterns on the mud walls. Ornamental traditional motifs are painted on their front door, windows, cupboards and kitchen walls that display their zest for life. But most

villages also have specialized traditional artists, well-known as sculpture artists, terracotta artists and potters. They create decorative as well as utility items, using century old skills. These artists also make colourful and native clothing that identifies their community. However, like any other village influenced by waves of economic challenges, they cannot afford to indulge in artistic pursuits to satisfy their creative urges. Besides this, they also lack awareness and knowledge of contemporary art practices. Hence they work with art for commercial purposes only, using art just for their living. This has resulted in a drain of indigenous, cultural and traditional talent.



Their necessities of life are minimum and not materialistic like the urban dreams. There are times when the services of various castes and communities are required to provide customary ritual goods that form part of the traditional ceremonies and practices. The traditional artists like potters also contribute their services. This can be seen in religious and spiritual practices, and occasions such as weddings, child birth, welcoming guest, death, local fairs and festivals. Villagers find their rhythm and happiness by expressing themselves in these different facets of existence. Even social beliefs find company in their colourful traditional customs and behaviors, which paint a complete picture of this genre called 'life'.

Unlike the artists, the youth are slowly being exposed by the media influence and economic changes in the nearby cities of Jodhpur, Jaipur and Udaipur. These big cities are their window to the world, a world that fuels their youthful dreams, desires and aspirations to be a part of this contemporary world.

Rural Art

The art forms being practiced in villages are inherited and have been passed down for generations. The prevailing village social structure in the form of caste system also does not permit villagers to choose professions as per their choice. Professions are hereditary, related to their castes. There are potter castes, weaver castes, etc. Their next generations also practice the same traditional jobs. Though it did provide them with job security in ancient times, as services of their castes could be evoked in times of festivals and religious occasions by the upper caste and rulers, there was practically no scope for a transformation in design, form, application and meaning.

Rural art is still commonly practiced during social gatherings. It is limited within a boundary, stuck to religious and social traditions only. It is limited to objects of daily use, such as wooden ornamentations, door decorations, terracotta pots, metal and stone objects etc. Though the possibility of new forms exists, the villagers have not been open to this idea of experimentation. For example, rural art if mixed with symbols, forms or ideas, generated more meaning. Limitations are ideas and experiences. Generation gap, lack of awareness of contemporary revolutions in art forms combined with rigid ways of life have proved to be the limiting factors in design development and evolution of rural art.



Rural art has to undergo a metamorphosis to become contemporary art in a contemporary way. Therefore a change is needed with time. Thoughts, positive energy, and attitude can bring about changes. This will also lead to social development process in the villages.

Through this medium of rural art, “Sowing Seeds”, intends to create conscious awareness about the environment, and the issues that concern villagers and their surroundings in relation to the contemporary world. Art is a medium to express these issues, but if the contemporary art process is communicated in their own language, it effectively addresses their sensitivities. The messages do leave an impression on their minds.

Contemporary artists are limited to their studio spaces. A platform like Sowing Seeds intends to expose the artists to the village world where social development is the need of the hour. Through the medium of art, it intends to show new ways to the village artists to practice traditional arts with the help of contemporary ideas. Artists are encouraged to define new ideas, use locally available objects and raw materials in their creation. This exchange of ideas with limitless communication methods would generate awareness and when practiced, would bring about a social revolution in the form of social development.

“Sowing Seeds-2010” ARTIST PROJECTS

Chiman Dangi (INDIA)

Chiman Dangi The quaint little village of Andore was filled with cries of laughter and happiness. The hustle and bustle of life indicated a new activity garnering the attention of the usually somnolent villagers. Children looked around inquisitively at the artist **Chiman Dangi**,



Who went around the village nonchalantly, circling dumps of garbage with locally available pink powder. Then he installed a board in the garbage highlighting the village name, “Andore” to transmit a message. There were initial awkward reactions, and raised eyebrows.

Children of the village were curious to know why a pile of garbage was being associated with their village name. But they soon got involved. As the onsite installation replicated around the village, the underlying social message dawned on the villagers after some introspection, that they would soon be welcoming international guests into their village who were participants of the workshop “Sowing Seeds”. The local civic authorities set to work immediately to free the village of filth and garbage lying around, signifying the triumphant success of Chimam Dangi’s project for the workshop.

Benjamin Faga (GERMANY)

Benjamin Faga’s project highlighted both the simplicity and the complexity of rural Indian societies along with the issues faced as they receive more urban influence. The rural society and the traditional roles of women and children at Andore inspired his installation. Installed in a beautiful rural landscape was a floating green screen that is used to juxtapose two different scenes in the digital world. Here, this green screen represents today’s contemporary world, and symbolically brings it into the rural environment. This creates a contrast by subtly hinting at the aspirations and desires of the youth for a contemporary culture and lifestyle, while they are still bound to the traditional ways of life. Thus the green screen metaphorically attempts to juxtapose the rural life along with highlighting the idea of growth and existence of countless possibilities in a contemporary world.

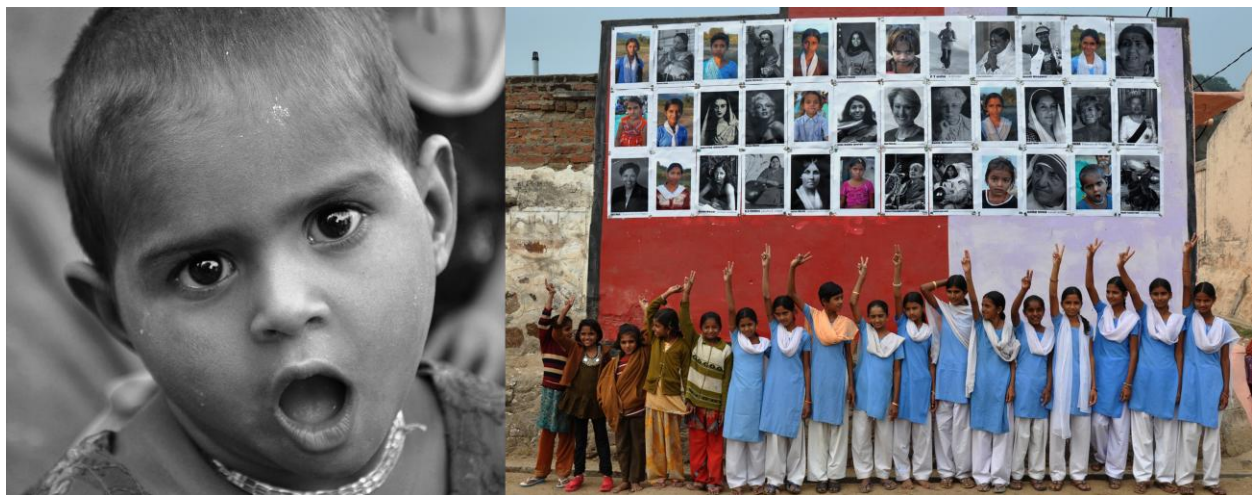


The most important timing of this project was the photo shoot which captured children in front of the green screen consuming custom made green candies. This image reflected “the hidden potential of Andore” that symbolically represents a pulsating energy throughout the country. The consumption of green candies reflected consuming the idea of the possibility of a different world, and a possibility of owning a future far different from their parents.

Bhupat Dudi (INDIA)

Bhupat Dudi's project was meant to eradicate a social problem –of neglecting the girl child. Through the platform of sowing seeds, he presented a slide show and site-specific work of famous women personalities to the villagers and propagated the social message of educating and encouraging the girl child, promoting her wellbeing and all rounded development. his project was inspiring to the villagers as he promoted my belief that educating a woman will build a healthy society and a healthy nation free of social problem. The project encouraged women to seek their own fortunes. Only then the women of Andore village would find a place for themselves among world personalities.

Project was related to the common Indian mindset that deprived a dignified social status to womenfolk and denied them education even in today's age. Through his interactions with the villagers at Andore Bhupat observed that the progress of women was overshadowed by the traditional social evils that still prevail in remote Indian villages. The social wellbeing of women was grossly neglected, as they were conditioned to think that a girl is a liability, meant to be married off. A girl requires a huge dowry to give her in-laws. Child marriages and female infanticide though banned in India often went unreported. Even though there were good government run primary schools in the neighborhood, the illiterate women and girls were confined to their household chores. Participation of women in the village electoral decisions was unheard of. It was an urgent need to change the outlook and gift her fundamental rights enshrined in our constitution, especially - RIGHT TO EDUCATION.



Bhupat's project sowed the seeds of a mass movement that would begin the eradication of these social problems. The cultural program event of the Sowing Seed's itinerary was the chosen day to begin his project as families from the entire village showed up. The project- a slide show projected images of world famous women with their names who were educated, empowered, and proficient in their fields. Amongst them were the nameless images of village girls. Bhupat explained that he wanted Andore village girls to be renowned and famous in future. So he questioned the notion why boys and girls are not treated as one. Why the birth of a boy should be celebrated but not a girl, when our mother, India is also a woman? Thought

provoking questions promoted the message to parents and families that educating a girl is a sign of progress for the society and the country. It will promote a society free of social vices and crimes.

The remaining artists too voiced their concerns on the girl child's welfare by giving their unified opinion supporting Bhupat's project. Bhupat's site specific installation was done on the walls of a house facing the road. Portraits of women and girls from the village were posted on the wall to give a strong message to the families, parents and guardians of girls, advertising this new movement that had taken root and the awareness generated in the village. This aroused the curiosity of every passerby who was new to the village. Bhupat hopes that this message will spread like a movement to mitigate this social evil and result in bringing a change in the outlook of the villagers, so that the future brings more favorable opportunities to our women in rural areas.

Sweety Joshi (INDIA)

Sweety Joshi's works show a deep rooted connection to India philosophy which is based on the principle that self-realisation is a process to seek the truth through intrapersonal conversations. Her artistic inspirations were derived from her intrapersonal conversations, thoughts, senses, feelings and visuals created within her. So her creative expressions and choices portrayed to the world reflected her inner-self. She found beauty in the simplicity of nature and its forms. The down-to-earth and frank culture of the village impressed her.

Experimenting to enhance the beauty in Andore village, she tried to connect rural tradition to the modern flavors. Her team work experiences in the project were expressed in beautiful artworks created by combining cow dung cakes with mirrors. Each represent two different energies and strike a balance between independent and team work to generate a creative expression. The dry, arid, empty and lonely feel around the village, motivated her to fill colors and change the look and prickly feel of acacia thorns. In her creation, she used cozy colored and golden threads around the thorns to soften the look and feel around it.



With her belief, 'there is a very thin line between two cultures, which merge to become one when the line disappears, and fuse to give only one art and culture,' she **created** an abstract composition of **a map of Andore village. By using colourful threads of small stitches**

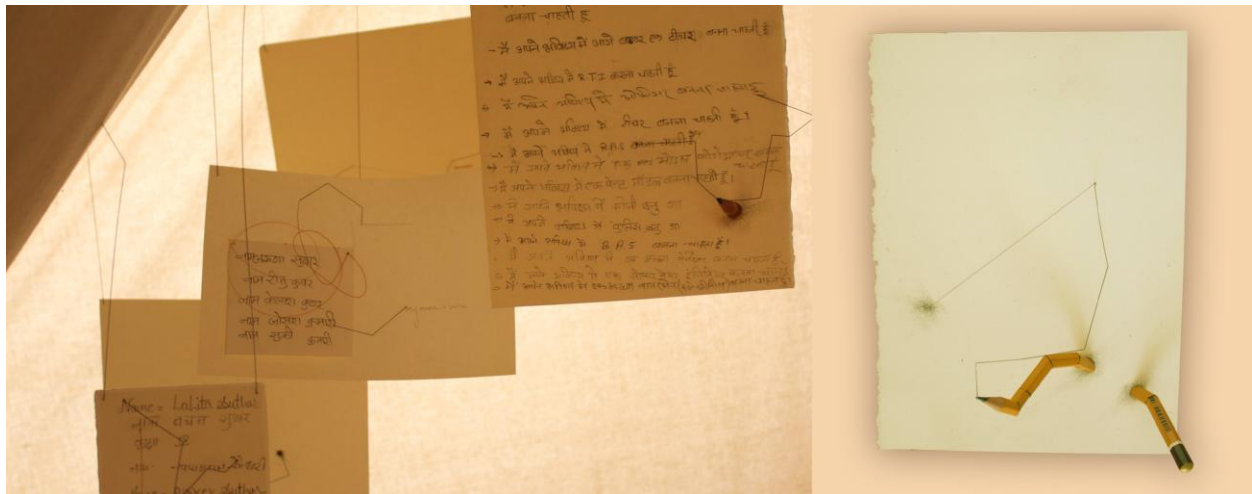


In his work, artist Harendranath Mahato has tried to give the impression of such illusionary platform that gives support. So when he found a plant emerging from nowhere and growing on a wall, he immediately drew a graphic pot around it with locally available red dye. This gave it a sense of growing on a platform that has been created temporarily, giving an illusion of support. But in reality our mother earth gives unconditional support to myriad forms of life. Through his work, the artist seeks this unconditional support and strength to every life.

In a city, land is a valuable commodity. So plants are potted and kept in the balcony for decoration. By creating a city balcony in an old building wall, he tried to decorate the old building and replicate the city's experience in the rural setup. Decorating was the purpose on the rural wall. In his perspective, everything is connected to the roots; the platform that supports us, so one must give due importance to each and every creation of nature, only then everything becomes valuable.

Alexis Myre (USA)

Alexis Myre's Installation began as an investigation into the dreams and aspirations of children of Andore. So her installation depicts thought bubbles, with the names and aspirations of children written by them on paper. The artist remembers that as a child, even she had similar dreams, like being a teacher, a doctor, a model, wanting to run a business, etc. She feels these ambitions are also similar with present day children living in her country. This speaks a universal language about similarities in thoughts of children from all over the world. Even the school materials from India like pencil, pen, eraser, and sharpener are universal.



However she realizes that the future of children in Andore is going to be very different than those of USA children. She ponders whether these children can lead lives as individuals, because she feels they are stuck in this mould of social bindings such as an arranged marriage and are bound to follow in the footsteps of their parents in future. But she does hope that these children know that they do not have to remain confined to their predetermined destiny. They can dream and aspire to be what they want.

M.S. Rathore (INDIA)

M.S. Rathore, This added a spiritual touch to the Residency. Rathore's concept highlights the essence and structure of Indian society and derives inspiration from the Indian spiritual values and philosophical ideas, which considers man along with his environment as a whole unit existing in harmony. So this project symbolizes how man's existence achieves harmony with nature, work and self, a philosophy that is relevant even in this contemporary age. He explains that it is important to maintain this harmony as it results in creation, prosperity and peace. Art being the perfect tool and a proper medium to create this harmony inspired his onsite installation through which he also experienced happiness by merging nature's creation with his own.



A part of his installation was made using terracotta triangles and lush green plants growing around it, to form a downward triangle on the soil. The other part was a vertical triangle, made out of a wooden triangular frame, with green and yellow threads, running parallel within the frame. A white circular cloth joined the green and yellow in the centre of the vertical triangle. This symbolizes fertility in Indian philosophy and promotes the thought that creation is possible when one is connected to the roots, and our soul is in harmony with our surroundings. And this is the soul of Indian philosophy, through which we can globally retain our Indianans. According to him, in conjunction with contemporary art field if we keep today's requirements in mind, those values, ethics and thoughts can be interpreted and understood in a contemporary manner relevant to today's age and worked upon. Then our existence in this contemporary culture will get nourishment, a support and a link. The people of the world will understand the reason for our existence even in this fast paced IT world.

Linh Phuong Nguyen (VIETNAM)

Linh Phuong's art works derived inspirations from the mountainous landscape, daily ways of life, Indian beliefs and practices, which she experienced in the village. Her creations are simple and conceptual visuals, created out of materials that corroded, transformed or smelled. She says, "It is exciting for me to see the work's slow transformation."



The people, the vibrant culture around Andore captured her attention. However, the absence of the element water in any form - lake or a river opened her eyes to the ground realities. The arduous journey of women to fetch a pail of water from the nearest river inspired her. So, in an open field, she created a conceptual lake using milk which was her interpretation of a lake. To her, a cow was revered and worshipped with the belief that when a mother dies she becomes a cow and when a cow dies it returns to be a human being.

Through her documentary film and photography project, she communicated her concerns for the trace of things lost in used objects. She asked the villagers to show their daily life objects such as a sickle, a hoe, a plant, a chair, etc. Through these objects she learned a little about their daily life, work, concerns and cherished memories. She took a portrait photo of each person, and of the object that they gave her. They also narrated their stories related with

the object. Using the film as her communication medium she collected the human memory shared by the Andore villagers.

To the artist, the villagers were sharing something very precious from their personal space; that gave them undiluted happiness. For example, an empty chair reminded a boy of his grandparents, a wheat grinder used in a village woman's parental home, reminding her of her youthful days. These objects were signs of bygone times, but bringing them to life were the cherished memories, magnetically recalled by the brain, as these were the connections that became the most intimate moments attached with their lifeline. The villagers were bonded to these memories. Linh wants to share these memories associated with the used objects, just as Linh shared her memory of a T-shirt of her elder sister who was married and lived in a distant land. But the T-shirt reminded her sister's presence, and the small moments they shared as siblings.

Shinobu Mikami (JAPAN)

Shinobu's art works describe value of humanity. Her art works are connected to each other through the fact of fusion: time, dimension, material, and people. The concept behind Shinobu's work is her encounter with the villagers who are leading totally different lifestyles and have a different rhythm of life. According to her, an encounter itself is like a seed as it gave birth to a whole new experience for both the villagers and the artist. This encounter, even though a simple presence, led to a moment where communication occurred by meeting and verbal exchanges. With the passage of time, these moments might become memory. But this little encounter has sowed the seeds of scope and desire for more such encounters.



Shinobu's art works describes this encounter with the villagers and her creations express her value for humanity and life. She mixed materials brought from the city and elements of people found here in the village to make two sculptures using wax as the basic material. She used paraffin wax as the main material, as being of a transitory nature, it easily moulds, changes its colour, disappears in a casting process, and burns out to mix with the air. With the wax, she took hand prints of the villagers. The villagers participated enthusiastically to melt the wax, pour it into their palms and mould a flower out of it. This was her way of praising the farmers as a consumer and showing value for their life.

By combining wax with an old style chair that was lying unused, she fused dimension, time, material and people to create a sculpture symbolising time without numbers. Small wax pieces were placed in round form in the seat of the chair. Its spaces had wax fillings of handprints of village people. The sculpture named 'Clock' represented her present time spent in the village and time lost by the chair. It evokes a broad notion of people who may have sat on this chair. The wax traces their lives.

Shirin Abedinirad (IRAN)

Shirin Abedinirad gave us peak into the past ties that India had with Iran, as she explored the cultural ties existing during the Mughal-Safavid period. In the 16th century, Iranian ruler Shah Abbas, from the Safavid dynasty and Moghul Emperor of India, Jehangir strengthened their diplomatic relations exchanging embassies. As a result, the relationships between the Mughal and Safavid monarchs were multifaceted in fields such as trade, religion, art, architecture, culture, literature, calligraphy, politics and diplomacy. Emperor Shah Jehan's wife Mumtaz Mahal has Iranian origin. Shah Jehan's court had Persians scholars and poets. Persian was the official and court language under the Mughals. Indian craftsmen also worked with Persian masters to produce masterpieces in art and architecture. Iranian painters introduced the art of portrait and miniature paintings in Mughal courts.

Shirin chose the Mughal-Safavid period for her works as it had a lot of Indo-Iranian connections. A wall painting in Chihil Sutun Palace of Isfahan city, showing tremendous Indian influence in painting techniques, inspired Shirin to create a textile block pattern, which can be used as a design on a bed sheet, coat, bag or even a costume. In her pattern, two kings, Shah Abbas and Shah Jehan and Mumtaz Mahal along with Jodhabai were shown 'celebrating peace', together on "Yalda-night".

"Yalda-night" is the celebration of Persian Winter Solstice which is the Northern Hemisphere's longest night of the year. Occurring around 20th or 21st December each year, it is popular since ancient times. On 21st December 2010, the artist choose to introduce her 'celebration of peace' to the world through the camp "Sowing Seeds" and her textile block pattern showing Indo-Iranian connections.



She also used Persian calligraphy for composing the form of the word “Faghan” meaning Alas!, from the famous poet Bidel Dehlavi’s poem, who was incidentally born in India. She used an Iranian calligraphy form to write this word on canvas as she found it special. After making a composition with this word, she asked Indian children to create drawings on it using mehendi (Henna, *Lawsonia inermis*) as its colour was dark brown and similar to Iranian calligraphic colour. Mehendi has been used since ancient times for temporary tattooing and dyeing skin.

Shirin also took photos of Indian costumes worn by village men, women and children as she was inspired to design clothes for younger generation in Iran. Iranian women cover their head by scarf. Hence she has special interests in designing headdress, which was inspired by the colourful scarves, shawls and turbans worn in Rajasthan.

Organize by: KAMAN ART FOUNDATION

Project: Bhupat Dudi

Curator: Vagaram Choudhary