

Art under the open sky

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Paradsinga in Madhya Pradesh.

The land art piece grown in the village of

The local community and a group of artists in the village of Paradsinga in Madhya Pradesh are sculpting a rural revolution.

In Paradsinga, a small village in Madhya Pradesh, the confluence of art and agriculture is leading to a transformation. A group of artists is employing artistic interventions to highlight concerns related to agriculture and farmers.

The artists work not as outsiders but as equal partners with the village community. The village will soon be host to a wax museum but unlike Madame Tussauds that celebrates the rich or famous, Paradsinga's museum will focus on traditional food of the region.

Traditional all the way

Artist and activist Shweta Bhattad is training young women in the village to create 300 wax sculptures of traditional crops and dishes based on local recipes. The plan is to turn the village into a site for exhibitions, workshops and seminars.

Just last month, Ms. Bhattad and the village community unveiled their first 'land art' by growing leafy vegetables on a farm patch in the shape of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's face. It was accompanied by the slogan 'Dear Prime Minister Please Grow in India', echoing the 'Make in India' slogan.

The vegetables were grown from traditionally harvested seeds.

The community wanted to send out a message on the importance of traditional farming methods that did not involve genetically modified crops.

The idea of the wax museum stemmed from the land art piece developed for the beej utsav (seed festival). The programme attracted 50 visitors to the village for all the seven days it was on.

"The museum will connect the village directly to the rest of the world. And our villages should be the cultural hub," says Ms. Bhattad, who is gearing up for the bigger edition of the land art festival in October.

"Just like there is artists' exchange, we thought of creating a platform for farmers to exchange and meet and get involved. I realised that today a farmer feels very lonely," says Ms. Bhattad, who holds a Master's degree in sculpture from M.S.U. Baroda.

The artist has been literally camping at the village since 2013. She brought several other artists, including Lalit Vikamshi, Aditi Bhattad, Tanmay Joshi and choreographer Parvinder Singh, on board. As part of a collaborative effort, Italian artist Virginia Zemati taught dance to the young girls of the village on Skype.

Ploughing on

The movement is inspiring the local community in different ways.

Recently, Ganesh Dhoke, a 21-year-old farmer, constructed a 500-metre road that connects about 50 farms with his village. During the monsoon, farms used to get cut off from the village and Mr. Dhoke had approached the rural administration and panchayat authorities to solve the problem. When his appeal yielded no results, he got his fellow villagers to help him with money and labour. Ms. Bhattad provided the machinery and equipment to complete the task.

Close to her heart

Ms. Bhattad's roots lie in Paradsinga. The Nagpur-based artist's grandfather lives here, making it easier for her to blend in with the community.

"I saw the bio-diversity of the village get killed because the farmers were encouraged to grow only Bt cotton. It also led to fall in the water table. The youth in the village were frustrated. We wanted to address all of this and I felt that if there is an art angle to what we say it will reach out to more people," she says. Their efforts are reaping benefits but slowly. "As of now there are four farmers who have quit growing Bt Cotton completely and moved on to other crops," says Ms. Bhattad.

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