

Guddi Devi Reborn

“If you stick to one job you can go far but if you do little bits of everything you can’t progress.” Guddi Devi and her husband have spent the last few years putting this belief to test. The results now speak for themselves.

Guddi, a young lady from Madhya Pradesh, had an inherent talent for bamboo work but wasn’t aware of it. Times were extremely hard for her family, who relied on manual labour to make ends meet. But life had different plans for her. She stumbled upon a women’s group in the village of Makara and the inquisitive Guddi discovered that the members would be taught to make bamboo items. To her this seemed intriguing than moving soil all day. However, Guddi’s family and neighbours forbade her from joining the course. After all, bamboo craftwork was not a suitable profession for a respectable lady from the Vanshkar caste. A person with contemporary outlook she persevered and attended the training despite all that was said. And, from that moment, she has not looked back! The late starter became the best trainee, a national craft-fair participant, a trainer and then the ‘master trainer’ for the state.

Behind the scenes:

Central to Guddi’s success story is Preetam Ahirwar, her husband. When Guddi tries to persuade other women (and erstwhile trainees) to adopt bamboo craft, their response is, “You sell things outside the village. Where would we sell them?”—a justifiable one because their husbands barely let them leave the village. However, Guddi has been to Bhopal, Delhi, Digora, Chhatapur Kherai, Jhagar, Bhadora and other places to display her work and train people. Preetam, who was initially against the idea, now not only accompanies her on these tours but is actively involved ever since he quit labouring. Consequently, the attitude of their extended family has gradually softened to the extent that they lend a hand by minding the children when the couple is away. Furthermore, Preetam’s support has helped in counteracting village opposition— a constant obstacle in terms of local success.

For executing training courses on behalf of the Niwari Block, the couple received around Rs.9000 per month. They continue to advance and have been contracted to run a two-month, district-level course and manage a fund of Rs.80,000 (which covers the trainees’ provisions and their own salaries). This is being funded by the former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh.

Guddi, an empowered woman, is continually adding to her collection of useful contact numbers of government officials she meets at the fairs. They are now planning to extend their house to make room for a separate working area. The workshop will be lined and furnished in bamboo.

Guddi believes that if you “stick to one job you can go far but if you do little bits of everything you can’t progress.” What a prosperous region this would be if everyone in Bundelkhand had a single line of work as successful as this couple’s!