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New Delhi, Jan 22 (IANS) We talk about soil and clay. She says that working with them heals -- emotionally and physically. There is talk of childhood memories. She says all the dust had vanished and her memory is now crystal clear. She recounts the watermill back in her village in Bihar. A composition of water, sound, light, the splash on the iron sheets - the entire musicality of it. "In the evening, when you looked down the well, there were innumerable fireflies hanging there. How does one describe that?," smiles Shambhavi.

It's a hectic day for the painter, printmaker, and installation artist whose non-figurative work has always dwelled upon the condition of the farming community. As she takes a break from guiding her staff for the upcoming solo exhibition Burukuwa Dwan which will be shown at Shrine Empire in the capital, as a collateral event of the India Art Fair 2020 from January 25 to February 24, the artist, whose work Cosmic Seeds Light/Beej Brahmaand Ek was acquired by the prestigious Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, says, "You'll see the mud-and-hay textured walls of their houses, the grey mist that rises from the field on winter mornings explores various facets of interplay between man, nature and art."

In fact, "Bhoomi", another solo show by her will be running simultaneously at Gallery Espace, which will have her iron sculptures and installations.

Interestingly, the conversation with Shambhavi is not linear, her striking work at 2018 Kochi Biennale "Maati Ma", featuring four of her works - "Lullaby", "Water Garland", "Rippers Melody" and "Brail" takes the conversation forward and what the viewers will experience in her forthcoming exhibitions as she exhibits in the capital after a gap of six years.

The artist, whose poetic work forever carries social undertones says, "Burukuwa is the last star. The moment villagers see it, they know it's 4 am and time to start the day. It is a magical hour. When you're half asleep, the kind of sound that comes with their activities of getting ready for the day is reminiscent of musicians on the stage getting ready for a performance. The sound, the light, the last musings of the night, and the farmer's first glance at the fields early morning - these are the connections I have grown up with as I would frequently go to my grandparents' place in the village. But these are also the relationships people are increasingly refusing to see -- that's where my work Braille comes in."

In many ways, when Shambhavi takes the farmers' tools from their world and makes sculptures out of them, she is in fact pleading for them. This Patna College of Arts and Crafts pass-out adds, "But remember, my education is mostly from experience rather than reading."

For someone who now lives in Delhi's urban landscape, there is no dichotomy.

"I am clear that I don't see here. I want to say something here, about them. And maybe my art can make a bridge."

Talking about her association with Takshila Foundation's programme in Bihar's countryside, the artist says, "We run long-term residencies for international and national artists and students at Siwan, so that they actually get to connect to rural landscape at all levels and understand the multiple dimensions of living that life."

Back in the late 80's when she was a scholar at Lalit Kala Akademi Regional Centre in Luck now and painted huge canvasses, most people called them abstracts.

"Believe me, at that time, I didn't even know the 'A' of abstract. I painted the riverbank and my village engulfed in darkness - when there was no electricity. The drawings were realistic, but they were covered with dark, and everyone read it as abstract art. Yes, I painted very clear dark because let's not forget, darkness is transparent, you can see through."

Travelling abroad extensively for residencies and shows, and the consequent "distance" from home allowed her to see things here more clearly.

"When you travel you read your homeland much better, perceptions change. When I am in Bihar, I am not Bihari, when I am out, I am. The moment I leave India, I am more Indian. Out there, you're questioned about India and not regions. When such questions are posed, you embrace the whole country. And I cherish the fact that I got such experiences from a very young age -- a time when I was not very politically or intellectually charged. You know, I made it a point to travel to most countries without reading about them. When I came back, then read. It has always been the other way round for me. This way, it becomes a fresh experience with the land - travelling to the unknown."

Insisting that art and music makes one understand a country much more effectively, she adds, "It was a huge experience to see people going to the museum as if it was a temple -- something completely absent here. That gives you a kick to keep working. In India, we may have a very small art world, but the world we live in is amazing. Connection with creativity is so well presented there which inspires you. Here we are still distant."

As the conversation veers towards the need for an overhaul in art school curriculums, she asserts, "It is in such a run down state. We haven't come out of the British system yet. It's shocking to see that they don't even understand the difference between art and decoration. And not just art schools, the entire school curriculum needs to be looked at. We all study math in school and realise that everyone doesn't become a mathematician. But at least when a mathematician is sitting with me, I understand who is he. Then why is it that when an artist or musician is around, we tend to think that what he does is some kind of an "extra-curricular" activity?"

The countryside may have always inspired Shambhavi, but she also sees how it has metamorphosed over the years.

"Now when I go, I can experience the emptiness there. The warmth has faded, of course my grandparent's generation is no longer there, cousins have scattered. There is a strong isolation, a feeling of being left out. The pressure and crisis of currency is now very visible."

(Sukant Deepak can be contacted at sukant.d@ians.in)

--IANS

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Woman, minor son stabbed to death in Delhi's Jahangirpuri



Woman, minor son stabbed to death in Delhi's Jahangirpuri

New Delhi, Jan 22 (IANS) A woman and her minor son were found murdered in their flat in northwest Delhi's Jahangirpuri on Tuesday, said police.

The deceased have been identified as Pooja (36) and her son Harsh (12). The incident happened at their flat in Jahangirpuri's K-block.

Pooja, whose husband died about two years ago, was an employee at a private company.

"The deceased's neighbours, after noticing a foul smell, had called the police control room on Tuesday. After reaching the spot, police broke open the flat and found the dead bodies of the victims," a Jahangirpuri police official told IANS.