

Potters' touch for clay griddle makers' kilns

Kilns in Rajasthan villages to be modified to make them efficient, less polluting

MOHAMMED IQBAL
UNCH (BHARATPUR)

Potters from Unch village in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan will travel to Deeg tehsil's Punchari village next week to assist clay griddle makers in fabricating their kilns with a modified design. The furnaces set up with technical upgrade in Unch have helped potters scale up their production of earthenware with better strength and less breakage.

The potters, forming the Kumhar community, in Unch have benefited from design interventions and new baking techniques for their furnaces, making the kilns more efficient and less polluting, as part of an experiment undertaken by Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi's (IIT-D) Rural Technology Action Group (RuTAG).

A total of 14 such kilns have been set up in the village since January this year.

The initiative is being extended to Punchari village, which is famous for the production of clay griddles that maintain the earthy scent of the black soil, procured mostly from local ponds, even after they are baked.

The clay griddles are



Heat loss: About 25% of the clay griddles break during baking in the kilns. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

supplied to different parts of Rajasthan, and as far as Agra and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, and Faridabad and Gurugram in Haryana, generating an estimated annual turnover of ₹1.5 crore.

25% loss

About 25% of the clay griddles break during baking in the kilns. RuTAG is working in collaboration with Bharatpur-based Lupin Foundation to find a solution to the issue and help the potters increase their production. The 14 furnaces installed in Unch have turned out to be

successful in improving the quality of earthenware with a lesser quantity of mustard stubble used as fuel.

Ramsukh Prajapat, 70, in whose household the first model kiln was set up, told *The Hindu* that the baking time for items like cups, cutlery, pans, clay griddles, dishes, bowls and pitchers had been reduced by half in the new furnace because of high and uniform temperature distribution in its chamber. Contrary to the open fire baking used earlier, the new technique has produced encouraging results, he said.

Clay pottery is taken up

in the region both as a traditional occupation and the only livelihood option for the Kumhar community. With the first-ever technical intervention, in which the potters themselves have fabricated kilns under RuTAG's guidance, production has increased manifold and the community's younger generation has evinced interest in the occupation.

Fuel use halved

RuTAG research scholar Yashwant Prasad said trials in the kilns had found that fuel consumption could be reduced by 50% in addition to better results in baking, which would have a cultural impact in terms of lesser quantity of cow dung cakes and crop husk required for combustion.

"Over 35 families of Kumhars in Punchari can benefit immensely from the modified kilns. We are extending our experiment to specifically include clay griddles in order to check the efficacy of our technical inputs," Mr. Prasad said. While a team of potters from Unch would carry out "participatory designing" for their counterparts, the RuTAG would act as a facilitator, he added.