

Chaff Cutting Machine

For many, western Uttar Pradesh is synonymous with the badlands, where kidnapping and killing is cottage industry and falling in love often means signing a death warrant. But there's another side to the sugarcane stretch that doesn't make headlines. Unknown to the larger world, a few good men and women living in its small towns and villages have devised handy tools and machines, developed indigenous cuisines and raised agricultural output with innovative changes.



In Muradnagar qasbah of Ghaziabad district, Kamruddin Saifi, a 60-year-old retired mechanic, has developed a chaff-cutting machine that gets locked immediately if a hand gets stuck. In an area, where hundreds lose their limbs to the dreaded contraption every year, the machine is like God's gift. Similarly, Niruttam Kumar, a Class X student from Bulandshahr district, can charge a mobile phone from cowdung. And Sarita Saini, a teenager from Laliyana village in Baghpat district, has created a new dish: palak barfi (spinach sweetmeat). There are many more. Making a cheap paddy transplant machine, developing a lemon tree that bears fruit all year round, creating a new variety of mustard

— these invisible innovators have done it all. “Through these innovations, people are addressing specific problems of a locality or an occupation on their own, something the state and the market has been unable to do,” says Anil Gupta, executive vice-chairperson, National Innovation Foundation, who carried out a shodh yatra in western UP last month and helped discover these unknown inventors.

Over the years, the shodh yatra has helped spot and nurture such rural talent in different parts of the country. None of them are trained scientists; In fact, a few are drop-outs from primary schools. These are tales driven by the power of an idea and the passion to see them come true. And even absence of state patronage and rebukes from their own family - members couldn't stop them in their tracks. Saifi was pained to see a newly wed bride lose her hand in the chaff cutter machine in his village Kanojia. “Every village in western UP has one or two unfortunate persons who have lost their hand to the machine. When I saw her amputated hand, I decided to do something,” says Saifi, who dropped out in Class V but has worked as a fitter and technician in factories for 40 years.

Over the next six months, he put in his own money to buy a pulley and took from iron from the kabadiwallah's heap and got down to creating a safe chaff machine. “I worked day and night. Everybody said I had gone mad,” he says. But the efforts helped create a machine that incorporates the safety features missing from the model sold in the market. “We will provide Saifi financial support so that he can demonstrate his innovation in different villages. This will hopefully generate a demand for the product. Once that is done, we can raise money to make the product,” says Gupta, who also teaches in IIM, Ahmedabad.

It's their inner urge to do something different that makes them chart new terrains. Sarita says wanted to do something more than palak-paneer. “Even creating original recipes are part of our knowledge base,” says Gupta. Niruttam, who is preparing for his board examination right now, was aware that cowdung is often used to generate power in rural north India. “I am happy to have discovered something that will be useful to others,” he says.