

The broom as an art form

It is impossible to start this article with a sentence like 'When you think of brooms...' Because you simply don't think of brooms. Brooms simply are. They don't have to be thought about. Except once in six months maybe, when you have to go out and buy one, when your maid gets on your nerves telling you repeatedly how the old one is worn out and needs to be replaced.

So you don't think about brooms. But there are some people who do. And it is not as if they just think about brooms — they even create works of art out of them. If you are finding this hard to believe, meet Kanta Khadar from Mandla district, MP, who is displaying her artistic brooms woven out of date-palm leaves at the Hindi Mee Bhuvan currently.

Kanta's brooms are every bit useful as brooms, but they are not your ordinary, run-of-the-mill brooms. Each of these brooms is a work of art that takes sometimes as much as two days to complete.

Priced at anything between Rs 10 and Rs 150, these brooms are collectors' items, what with the sheer beauty of their craftsmanship.

Kanta, who comes from the Mang community — a Dalit sub-caste, had a life like any village woman till she met with a voluntary organisation called Mahakaushal Mahila Samiti. "Making brooms was one of the traditional occupations of our caste, but we had long since lost interest in it," says Kanta. The samiti encouraged the women of Kanta's village to start mak-



Brooms made by Kanta and her SHG members and (right) a 'flower pot' and an artistically crafted broom. ■ LT photo

ing brooms again, and even helped them market the same. They also suggested that the women experiment with the idea of making artistic brooms, as souvenirs and decoration pieces.

"The members of the samiti and the members of my self-help group — Mahakalshmi Swayam Sahayata Samoh — began to experiment with designs in brooms," says Kanta.

Till date Kanta and her SHG have evolved a total of 118 designs of artistic brooms. Kanta has travelled all over the country with the members of Mahakaushal Mahila Samiti, displaying her artistic ware at craft exhibitions and events of social significance. The cur-

rent exhibit has been put up on the occasion of the national convention on social security for the organised sector.

According to Kanta, while the demand for the artistic brooms is high at craft fairs and other such places, there is no stable market for them at the local level. "There is income only when the brooms are taken outside for sale or when orders come," she says.

Meanwhile the actual source of livelihood for the women of Kanta's SHG is making ordinary date-palm leaf brooms. "Each member of my group makes around Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 per month from the sale of the regular brooms," says she.

Aparna Tambe talks to Kanta Khadar, a rural artist from the Mandla district of MP, who has chosen the unlikely artistic medium of a broom, and made a success out of it.

The work of making artistic brooms is carried out only during leisure time or when there are orders. "When we know that the week's quota of ordinary



Brooms made by Kanta and her SHG members and (right) a 'flower pot' and an artistically crafted broom. ■ LT photo

brooms is ready, we women sit down to create some good designs for brooms," says Kanta smiling. "It is also not much use making too many brooms and storing them, because the date leaves from which the brooms are made tend to loose colour and become yellowish. So we make them only when there is a batch needed."

Kanta's group has now branched out of artistic brooms into other date leaf artefacts and show pieces. Sitting at the table beside her is what she calls a 'flower vase'.

It is a very intricately woven, undulatingly designed vase, with a thick shock of hair-like finely

sticked sheaf of date leaves pouring out from inside. The entire creation has a very delicate and fine look about it, but is very strongly built. "You can hang it to the ground twenty times and nothing will happen to it," says Kanta with a broad smile. "All our products are like that — made to last."

The brooms on display are equally strong.

They can very well be used for the original purpose for which they are designed, but with their intricate designs and flower-like appearance, you simply do not have the heart to see them as cleaning devices.

They are a reminder of the fact that art, like music, can exist anywhere.