

I'm trying to revive the dying tribal art of Jererd Santal mural: Dr. Steffy Teressa Murmu



Dr. Steffy Teressa Murmu

Beneficiary TEDP

Tribal Artist

Social Entrepreneur & Founder,

Rasik Besra Memorial Trust

Jererd Santhal Mural Artist

Dr. Steffy Teressa Murmu (35), a Ph.D holder in the 'Oral Tradition of Santhals', is a woman of multiple talents. She is a professor, author, writer, social activist, and a *Jererd* Santhal mural artist. She also knows eighth languages like English, Hindi, Urdu, Ho, Bangle, Birhorn, Mundari, and Santhali.



The professor, who teaches at Ranchi University, also runs a non-profit social welfare program, Rasik Besra Memorial Trust, in Santhal

Pargana. She and her team work for the upliftment of indigenous women, health, and agriculture among other things. Her love for her art and culture made her come up with this trust to work for the indigenous identity and help educate the rural people.





Talking about her trust initiative to bring back the indigenous way of farming/agriculture, Murmu elaborated, “This organic agriculture method is not new to us indigenous people, we’ve been cultivating with this method for centuries. But with modern technology, we have forgotten the values and use of organic fertilizers like *gobar* (cow dung) and *raakh* (ashes). We are trying to bring that back”

She added, “We are also promoting group agriculture method. In ancient times, people didn’t have a money system and depended on barter system. For instance, you work in my field for two days and in return, I will do the same for you. We are trying to bring that system back, because if we talk about tribal communities today, not many have the same income. There are still some families who cannot afford labourers, so this system of *shramdaan* (work for work) will help them in the long run.”

Murmu informed that in Santhal Pargana, women would get murals done on the walls of their houses right after the harvest, however, the art is dying now. This has spurred her to take some steps to preserve it. “I am trying to revive *Jererd Santhal* mural art form and bring it back to its former glory. Every year, I make sure to visit the village after the harvest and train the women on this art form. Once a message goes that educated people are also taking up the art to save it, they will follow.”



According to tradition, *Jererd Santhal* murals are usually done only on the outer walls of mud houses. This, perhaps, is the reason for the art taking a backseat as most mud houses have been transformed into concrete under the AWAS Yojana. Murmu is trying to convince them that the artwork can be recreated even on the walls of a *pakka* (concrete) house. “I am not telling them to stay in a mud house, they have all rights to live in concrete ones as they are good and hygienic, too. All I am trying to tell them is to try to preserve the traditional art by decorating the front wall,” she added.



She is also working to save the indigenous dance forms and songs by creating awareness among people through various programs to preserve their culture and essence. The *Jererd Santhal* mural artist also runs a school in Paanjo village in Dumka district. They educate children who are unable to access the school facility as some of them cannot afford it and the distance. They have appointed a teacher who teaches them in the evening.

Talking about her participation in the Tribal Entrepreneurship Development Program (TEDP), she said, “Talking from the tribal artists’ point of view, the workshop was a great opportunity to learn and enhance the skill. I took the training, because if I am not aware of these things how will I inform or educate the people there.”

