

## The Arna-Jharna Oasis

My visit to the *Arna-Jharna* Desert Museum of Rajasthan in April 2009 has been a rewarding experience for me. It is because of the things which are being done, and the way they are being done. This novel project of the Rupayan Sansthan is unique in its scope and methods. I see it as a successful and much-anticipated departure from the age-old conventional museum practices in India.

The *Arna-Jharna* phenomenon seems to be significant against the larger scenario of museum-making in India in current times, where the classical and object-oriented museum edifice is still serving as the only norm for museography. Though increasing number of scholars and professionals have been talking about the necessity of embracing the new museological experiments in India, a practical demonstration in that line has not been visible so far, apart from the famous Korlai experiment in Maharashtra by Professor V. H. Bedekar. Even in many of the theoretical discussions, favouring new museology or ecomuseums in India, too much emphasis seems to be given to the western ways of doing community museums and ecomuseums – as if they are the standard models to be followed in the Indian context.

I am happy that *Arna-Jharna* defies both these stereotypical categories of museums. While the object-oriented classical museums are clearly obsolete by virtue of their own characteristics, it would be equally an impractical proposition to dream about having the Mexican community museums or the French ecomuseums on Indian soil. For instance, one can hardly aspire to have a museum truly *initiated by people and run by people* in rural India where uneducated poor masses are still deprived of their primary needs of life; and thus, this can not be a parameter for judging the typological correctness of a museum in this country. The situation-specific factors have to be respected in formulating the course of the musealization – which I think – is being done meticulously in the *Arna-Jharna* museum.

The presently undertaken project on brooms by the museum provides alternative and very crucial avenues to peep into the interconnected issues involving society, environment, economy and politics in the context of Rajasthan. I was also touched by the carefully worked out architecture of the museum cottages. While the application of the traditional architectural patterns and painting styles of Rajasthan has made the premise a venue to *feel at home* for those *active bearers of traditions*, the whole arrangement has resulted in a highly integrated and organic execution of environment, practices and people's aesthetics.

For those who want desperately to see museums carried out *differently* in India addressing the issues specific to local factors, the *Arna-Jharna* endeavour should provide a breath of relief. It would be like a rare oasis in the desert of colonial and bureaucratic museography.