

**Radha**

Hi, Minakshi Welcome to Mrigashira It's great to have you here

**Radha**

So, you know, I, the first obvious question, which is that what prompted you to take this up? You know, and how did it all begin for you?

**Minakshi**

Okay, so it's very interesting, I mean, how it all started, I was, basically was doing programming making a lot of content, which was related to new social economical development. And, and we were making documentaries, and suddenly, you know, the, the media house I was working for, started this venture called MOJATO. And it was, like, be like, what is meaning of MOJATO. And then they says, find your mojo in art, which was interesting, and I was a little skeptical in the starting, and they told me that you have to have the art programming. And I was like, Dude, I don't know anything about art, not even a so like, you know, you will get a hang of it, you have been there, you have covered few festivals, so you'll understand it's okay, we have faith in you, you go ahead and do it. And there'll be like, a lot of parties, you'll get to attend these exhibition, you'll meet some cool people. So that's how I was lured into it, and I got there. So when we started doing the programming, so the the whole thing was MOJARTO was like, you know, giving platform to a lot of people like, you know, there are only limited number of galleries, you can, the they can represent a certain number of artists. And there are so many artists, like how to give them the platform. And that's how the mojarto was born. And it was like, you know, and people who have some, you know, caliber, and talent can showcase their work and people can buy, it's an E commerce platform. So that's how Mojarto started. And what we it was content led commerce. So we were creating a lot of content around it. It wasn't just the you know, the business of doing selling and, you know, buying the art, it was like giving a platform to all those artists who never get the chance to showcase their work, to showcase their talent, their thought process, like whatever they were making, they were able to explain also, so we were making really small little video, there was a full magazine show, we were doing five shows in a week, it was all coming on the channel, and people were like, you know, it had got the highest ERPs we did a lot of work with different galleries. In fact, we did a show with Peter and Aparajita Jain also, they're like big names in the industry. And in between came, what color my city, this was a show, which we did, it was a you know, 30 to 16 part series, we were trying to cover the street art and and there was start which was doing the Delhi art district. So we sort of like, you know, I got interested in that. And things kept moving on and on. We were doing a lot of content creation. And suddenly we realized, like, you know, one thing which I realized is that, you know, the fun part of working with the artist. So if they, and what curators and critics does, is

**Minakshi**

Hello, yeah, so what critic and curator sometime does it make it sound so difficult, or

**Radha**

Yeah

**Minakshi**

Not understandable? Then, you know, people get very scared of art. So that's where the whole point of you know, bringing art in public spaces. The idea came and we started thinking that you know, why not

bring the artist in the public space so that they can connect directly with when you will talk to an artist you'll connect directly you'll understand the art, what the thought behind them, but you talked to a critical curator, it'll be like, No, I don't know It's a jargon which you are using. So it started with namami Gange Our first project, which was in Haridwar. And they were, there was this, I went for Racky with the SunJin team of namami gange. And we saw the place and there was this beautiful clock tower, and it was in that same black and white or sorry, red and white color, which was always generally see all the you know, block towers. So we thought Yeah, it's such an interesting canvas. Why can't we do something with it? Then Then they took me to Chandighat and so it was barely the flow. Why not flow? So we were choosing all these canvases which were unusual and and then I started hunting for the artists. So for Clocktower, we thought you know, it's very mythological, you know, the story should come so Harshvardhan Kadam who is an artist from Pune, he came on in my mind and said I'm suddenly picked up the phone I said, Harsh, I have some really amazing canvas. The visibility is really high. You can see from Highway and any One will go to Har ki Paudi, he will see that it's there. It's standing. So he agreed. And we started working on the concept. Then there was this Mexican artist called Sen Kui. He works on a lot of flora and fauna, and you know, animals. So I started talking to him. And luckily for us, he was planning to come to India. Okay, it was like, you know, you come to India, and we'll do something together. And then whole exchange of ideas started working on he said, we were since we were working on Ganga. So it was not like, just mythology not like, you know, just Ganga as a river to there is a lot of wildlife, there is not an aquatic life, which is there. So we thought that, you know, these turtles, which are in endangered species, why not, you know, have something on that on the floor. So I asked San kui, can we do it? He said, I have not done it, but let's do it. So it was like a challenge is like, you know, fun. Let's do it. So that one thing which got sorted, I said, Joe, fine. Let me send, you know, send me a mock up here with the Harsh, we started talking and he sent me a mock up. And for the whole pillar, he created a really beautiful story around it. So if you see a clock tower is like a Shivling. It's way, like if you know it's standing. So he thought there is a whole story that Brahma and Vishnu river once you know, saw a light, it had no beginning no end. So both of them went on this, you know, different sides, but they couldn't find the end. And that's where the Lord Shiva, he appeared. And it's, he said that it's me the pillar of light. I have no end. I have no beginning. So, you know, with lots of illustration, he painted it golden. I mean, if you see, if you ever go to Har ki paudi, you'll see a lot of illustration is golden. You know people would like when they were like people were very skeptical when we started coming. There's one thing which I actually wanted to add here that we generally go as an outsider's people are very skeptical. Like, I know what they want, what their motive is. But when we start working there, they see the change. They see how people are attracted towards us, because they want to know the curious, I won't say attractive, but they're curious, what do you want to do? And how we are going to do how we're going to change the space, all those things they have in mind. And when, with the conversation with working together, the whole community we, we make, and then people start coming in helping us like they were those pandas who were thinking, yaar pta nahi ye kya krne wale hain, you know, what they'll do with a pillar, the clock tower, but when we started working at we painted, started painting it golden. They were like Mam koi sone ka smjhkr eent na nikal le jaye iski they would send us, you know, Chai and, you know, the samosa which they would eat in the evening. And they were volunteers who came. So this is how we started, like, you know, this was first experience. Then we went to Varanasi, there, we got eight artists, from eight different countries. So there was never crew from Switzerland. There was Kenzie Chai, from Malaysia. Good and from Naipaul, Neelesh, from India. And then we had Baki backing from Japan. And she flew me from France, they were like eight different

national, different people from around the globe coming together and creating something beautiful on the garden. They was David hooks from Australia was the most popular guy among the volunteers, like he was super sweet. He would like hang out with the kids have Chai, maybe smoke a beedi, which is you know, all those things. And we realized one thing, all those kids because we were working on guard, two cars were clean, but then people would pee sometimes because of the lack of the you know, toilets or whatever. And these kids were playing pub G all the time, or doing tick tock suddenly realized that we from outside have come and making their guard beautiful. Why not help them. So, and suddenly these all youngsters so 20-25, who, you know, left a pub G live there, tick tock came to us and started volunteer, they were painting, we got some school kids also. And it was a community who would like sometimes eat together, play together work together. And we got such a emotional farewell when we went. And, you know, while even FFO for example, when we work also it's not because we have worked in mostly religious cities. And we have gone to tier one, tier two and I mean, tier two and tier three cities. If you see see Street Art, you will see that people generally, you know, be they think that only Metro City people will understand it. Yeah, but no, we are USP that we want to go to tier two tier three cities where people may not understand it, but slowly you're introducing a concept to them, where they can appreciate the art, the whole motive of doing these public art projects, with the government and with mojato is to bring art in public life. You and me I can go to the museum. The people lose, you know, Sadhu aur sant, aur Gaay aur chaiwala, who is sitting there will not go to a museum.

### **Minakshi**

So this is Museum in public open spaces. This is what we are creating. And now people appreciate it. They those people, the people, they don't letter, they keep it clean, and they take care of it, we leave, but the ownership stays with them. Now, when we were doing Banaras, they will take seven eight paintings together. People, those kids who were, you know, who came to us volunteer, they were they were there, they were staying there. So sometimes people would put a foot on them to click a picture because they were like, huge, and you know, a lot of kids started coming, they were making music videos and all. So they would come and tell them yahan per matt rakhiye deewar par, dekhiye kisi ne bhut mehnat se kiya hai us matlb, you know, all those things come. And we were not all our work, generally. I mean, I apart from Ayodhya, but very indirect, because we work very closely with namami gange and thanks to DG Mr. Rajivranjan Mishra Who showed faith in us like and said, you know, go ahead. So the concepts were very, very different. They didn't have any direct connect with mytheology, except Haridwar, we did in Ayodhya two paintings, like never grew, when they came, they work in the ecological system. So they made this beautiful whale in a rubber, I'm in like a balloon. And inside, there was a fish. And it was crushed, the balloon was sort of like crushed and the message was that this is our ecosystem, we are crushing it, we are sucking the whole resources. And if and the balloon where the where you blow it from was open. So there is still some chance for you blow it, make it full, you know, those direct deep meaning and your next the guards are the richest reflection of that blue whale in the water. All those things are very beautiful Kiran, for that matter, he did something a half body. And his was like, you know, Manikarnika ghat is very famous for this last ritual, right? Will people you know, come for the last ritual, and he was roaming and he suddenly has been, we are dying. Also, we're leaving a lot of plastic behind because when they bring the arthi, there is a lot of you know, these nylon thing which were there. And he was like, at least while we are leaving our body 75% Water 67% Water. So those are the things which we painted in directly. So they will indirect message, you're beautifying

the space. So and I believe the the power of this whole you know, public art is the street artists, nice. The community, they learn a lot from it directly indirectly, while they're working with us. Or looking at the painting. Like Ayodhya, there we are now in Ayodhya right now doing public art project, it's called Ayodhya arts projects. So there are two or three different things we have restored Ram ki Perry, it was earlier yellow and color. So we have these stolen, it's trying to original colors, the motives were broken. So we restored them now looks like a you know like an ancient historical place now. And then there was this beautiful pump house which was next to the Saryu ghat where artists Shifumi came from France and painted Shree Ram in a horizontal position because the it's in a rectangle shape and he read Ramayan look at the console like how do we try to get to you know, to get what we want to do. So, he read the Ramayan and we realized that on the Saryu ghat bhagwan Sriram took the Samadhi and no one knows where he went. So, we saw that he melted in water. So that's him lying on that you know pump house his eyes wide open in blue color and picking part of the water. So, these are indirect messages which we are trying to create them we are working on these eight ponds which are there 108 ponds now they said they can be more also we are going to work on the eight ponds to start with. And we these are all water resiorviors they were abandoned and you know not in good position. Now the cleaning has started happening and the player plan is to make these public spaces into a cultural space. Okay, and to get these people because the incoming days are there we'll see a lot of crowd and apart from mandir and few things there is has to be something to you know, retain people to retain tourists, too, there is lakes and there is River all those things. So, these will become those cultural spaces where you can have some peaceful time there was like you know, these cures, there is some art which you can see. So there'll be sculpture there will be you know, street art which you can see So, it's like, you know, bringing lots of things together. And one, I mean, we can talk about the content creation also here. So whatever we do, we do, we do archive, we do document our entire projects. So there is a cloud and I keep saying that, you know, if we don't do the social media, and if we don't do the video archiving, it will be like jungle mein mor nacha kisne dekha Yeah. So, this these small videos get viral people get to know what we are doing and then people come from far to see them. So, these small small videos, which we have created for all our projects, they give a really good insight on what is what we are doing, what we are what we have achieved. So, these are like you know, content lead is like an IC I was like, No, these are gone content lead awareness, those people who are FARC and see what we have done. And through this, we get more traction, like we connect with more good people, they see our work they want to ask to come and do more work. So there is you know, the power of communication and content you see in this. And in India, we are very bad with archiving. Now we do documentation or we have been. So this is where you know, the the communication or the archiving the documentation is very helpful. You get to know who has done it, what were the thought behind it. For example, if you see, and we are trying to do a bar coding also. Now if you you know, sort of like scan the bar, you'd get to the video, you get to know state from the artists, what they were thinking. Yeah, while doing this, yeah. Okay. So, I mean, you scan it, you see the video, you get to hear from them what they were thinking. So all these things are like, you know, an amazing experience for the people who are not there at the point of time. So yeah, that's, I've spoken a lot.

**Radha**

Correct

**Radha**

what prompted you to go to tier two tier three kind of cities, because I guess a project of this nature would have been easier if you had focused on the top cities of the country. And second is that, how many such rather towns have you covered so far.

### **Minakshi**

So what led us to, I mean, thought only that it's easy to do in tier one cities in the metro cities, and whatever, we are equally responsible to our other fellow citizens who deserve the same what we deserve here. So and what I mean, it was difficult, but there were two people who came to our help. One was namami Ganga second was Nerolac. So they supported us. They said, Okay, go ahead. We'll support you. So Nerolac was our way you know, I was a big support and namami gange. gay, being from the center. namami. Gange is called national mission for clean Ganga. It's a government organization, which is part of the water ministry. They showed a lot of faith. And they were looking, they were already doing some of those work. But the kind of quality which we got, they were super impressed. So they said, Okay, fine, let's give it a shot. So Haridwar, it started with, then it was a big huge success. They were five artists who came, I have already named them harsh. Mexico, from Mexico, we got Sen kui then from Puerto Rico, we got Valentina. Then there was Mr. Cofield who did typography. And then there was Rajvardhan kadam who did this. So that was a good hit. And they saw the power, what we can do, and the and the documentation, which sort of like created a buzz around the town. That was very good. And then we went to Varanasi, see, the same year. And, again, they were eight artists from, you know, different countries. And why we keep going because we had this, you know, we had their support. And what happens if the government support it's easy to do whether, because the, you know, getting the permissions from Nagar Nigam and from the DM it's, it's, you know, it's a big deal. I worked in that system. So I know what's it like to being from the center, it's sort of like, you know, the backup or the backing, it helps. So varanasi you when we wanted to go to Patna, so that was one place, and then Ayodhya So what I mean, generally, they want to work for, you know, Ganga, but they also are now working on the tributaries. And right now Ayodhya is like a hot place. So, and there's a lot going on, and we thought before you know, the whole Janta jumps in let's just create some magic and Let's go. So next we are planning to do something in Srinagar.

### **Radha**

Okay.

### **Minakshi**

So I have to go for Racky very soon. It's with Nerolac and the, the government there. So, we, I mean help off, you know, government and some supporters, you definitely need them. And artists that I mean, you know, we are we are getting paid. But the whole plan is to get artists also well paid, sometimes it's an irony that, you know, they work really hard, they don't get what they deserve. So that's what our main motive also that, you know, just let people have what they deserve. That's, that's also and sorry.

### **Radha**

I just wanted to understand how easy or difficult it is to get corporates to support you right because some of these things need a kind of a funding support. So

### **Radha**

How difficult has it been for you?

## **Minakshi**

It is difficult because you have to literally go to you know, different organization as for their CSR funds, we were lucky for. For Banaras and for Haridwar, we had Union Bank of India, we got them. And then we also started working with these art organization, sometimes you have the funds to get the whole thing going. But the, you know, it's since it's on the ground, so there is a lot of cost to logistics. So getting the artists flying staying and also the, for example, pro Helvetia supported us supportive neighbor crew. So their fee was taken care of by them. Then Kenzie Chai for Chandana came from Malaysia. So we, you know, tie up with these people, and how I get good, I mean, you know, I was chosen as one of the member for one of the program in France. So the French Embassy sent me to Paris 15 days, and we met some 15 professionals from different countries, made friends with them, and got to know what they are doing. So a lot of learning from happen from there, since we had become friends. They helped me with lots of other organization who could support the artists, sometimes it's enough, you know, we have the we can take care of the material, we can help you with food and everything, but just to get the artists of all these organizations then come in rescue for rescue, like they are the one who will support you, whatever smaller thing it is, sometimes they're like nine or 10 partners also, which are there. So, I mean, it's just, you know, the whole the bottom line is to make it happen. Yeah. So, we are with all these supporters, you tend to you know, but I, I know that how difficult it is to get funds. And there are times when we have struggled a lot, especially in Varanasi we struggle, the plan was to do something really bigger, but we couldn't because of the lack of the funds, my friend, architect, his name is Quan he came from Spain to do a project we sat in Nagar Nigam of Varanasi, and through these poles light we bend them and mended them and made this these swings, they still lying on that ground. And we have worked hard, really hard for one month to get them made. But we because of lack of the funds, we could not install them so they're still lying, I'm sure they're getting rotten, it's iron. So, there are problems when you sometimes you feel that you have failed, but then there is a learning you learn a lot from you know these failures. So, for next time you look for these you know, there are UN Habitat also sort of like offers one of the few grants you try to get them you try to convince others corporates you have contacts then you know you go and tell them show them work and with the documentation is easier. Now they know what we have done. So that is also the content which we are showing is also sort of like helpful they have an idea I will show them picture does I mean pictures also helps but the whole process of working in how your brand can benefit from it. That's something which is helpful through documentation. So that's where and we are growing. We are just a child is four five years old child and we are growing and there is a class man you know the flight is big would like to fly high.

## **Minakshi**

yes.

## **Radha**

That's interesting. And how do you once you create an art in a city? How do you ensure that you know it? It is maintained it It retains its you know its appeal its quality? And it doesn't get in any way you know damaged?

**Minakshi**

So two things. One is that we use the material, which is long lasting for good for five years, you don't need anything. And I also feel that's a beneficial thing. You can get bored of the art. Seeing them again and again. So four five years, you it's well maintained, you see it, you enjoy it. And then the canvas is, again, why you can paint something beautiful more, and you can. So for example, like 2019, February when we did the clocktower, I don't think so, for next eight years, it needs any maintenance.

**Radha**

Okay.

**Minakshi**

It's hype. So obviously, you know, there are benefits to that as well. On the second part, how to keep it clean, is where the community comes. That's why when we engage with them, they we try to give as much ownership as they can have. So they would come and take care of it, I remember the walls where they didn't Varanasi they get submerged in water for three months. So when the water comes down, there is lot of I would say sun and steel and everything. So these kids come and they wash it, try to keep it clean as much as they can can for other you know, other paintings also for other Street Arts, there is, you know, there are people who love it, they know that it's my place, and I have to keep it clean, you cannot enter my house and you know, dirty, you can't just let her. So the community when we leave, we give the ownership to them. This is yours, you take care of it. And we'll come back. We'll you know, we you we can repair it. So all those things are there. But right now, I don't think so we have ever gone back and done some maintenance, the pains are long lasting, then there is a community involvement. So right now, these two things are going hand in hand with material and people taking ownership.

**Radha**

If I were to ask you to sum up your entire four to five years of journey, in recipes, in one word, what would that be?

**Minakshi**

it's been a roller coaster ride, there has been ups were up like, oh, man, yes, we have done it. We have got it. And then the whole struggle of getting the you know, the funds again, it starts and there are times when I'm like, there are no projects in which I haven't cried. One is Yeah, and I have no feeling I mean, I'm not ashamed to you know, accept it. Yes. One can cry because you, you're so passionate about it that you want to do it. You want to make it happen. Yeah, but then lack of fun, sometimes, lack of, you know, administrative support. But I mean, we have so far been very lucky that we got the administrative support, like the government and these new young officers. They're amazing. Like, we I don't know what notion we have in mind that, you know, people are corrupt, they don't help. But it is amazing. You see, you start working on them, they start recognizing your effort, and they support you. So those are things only it is like you but they've got that ups and downs because sometimes artists are moody. So you have to like, you know, convince them, let's not do this and that they can be some controversy. So yeah, but it's a fun ride. It's a fun ride.

**Radha**

Great. So I hope your fun ride continues for many, many more years. thanks for talking to us on Mrigashira.

**Minakshi**

Thank you. Thank you so much Radha for talking to me. Thank you.