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## Dhurrie Dreams

Roopraj Prajapati was hunched over a half-finished dhurrie, his deft fingers, honed by nine generations' of weaving legacy, flying across the loom to complete the remaining half. "The best dhurries could take up to a month to finish," he explained, after welcoming us to his home in Salawas village in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan. He offered us bottled water.

He had quit school after 7th standard, he said. No, let me put that in quotes. "I quit school after 7th standard," he said, in precise English superior to the shaky efforts of the travel guide who shepherded us into the boonies. "I wanted to preserve the legacy of Prajapatis, the weaving clan that I come from." Over the next hour, this remarkable man with a sharp head encased in a colourful Rajasthani turban called safa, held us in thrall with his story.

We were a group of hard-to-impress itinerants. One of my fellow travellers on this foray into the sticks packed an oeuvre of 40 books, half of it travelogues that have taken him to the remote corners of the earth. But even Paul Theroux nodded in admiration at this engaging entrepreneur from the outback who might well be the new face of India. Who says you need to have an MBA from Wharton or Kellogg or an engineering degree from Caltech or MIT to be counted as a global Indian?

Shortly before we hit the hinterland, we had been discussing the Chindia story, the boiling India versus China debate that is being milked by every business publication across the world. Having travelled recently in interior China, I gushed about the single-minded focus, discipline and determination that seemed to be lifting that society compared to the ceaseless debates and bumbling disorder that seemed to characterise India's growth story. "But China is a country without a soul," exclaimed Theroux, whose epic rail journey across China some three decades back resulted in some rather corrosive narrative in *Riding the Iron Rooster*.

With his colourful safa, his crisp English, and his winning manner, Roopraj may have roused the romantic in Theroux, but I was mesmerised by his marketing savvy and PR skills. As he spread out a collection of dhurries in his courtyard, he produced testimonials from celebrity buyers (including a certain Richard Gere). He quoted prices in US dollars. Don't worry about carrying your dhurrie, I can mail it to wherever you want — Boston or Baltimore, he said. And don't worry about cash, he grinned, I take both Visa and Mastercard. Thus saying, he pulled out a credit card franking machine to seal a transaction that left one of us poorer by \$200 and richer from the encounter.

As we left his solar-arrayed home deliberately located in the sticks where electric power lines stopped miles away, he handed each of us a business card that listed a cell phone number, e-mail address, and a website ([www.rooprajdurry.com](http://www.rooprajdurry.com)). When we got back to Delhi (we had left for the boonies almost immediately on arriving in India), I saw on TV the credit card ad with Gere in it that may well have been inspired by Roopraj. I then looked up his website. It opened with lines from W B Yeats: "...But I, being poor, have only my dreams, I have spread my dreams under your feet; tread softly or you tread on my dreams."

I'm told shining India has become a questionable proposition now. But Roopraj's resolve suggests we should not tread on the dreams. India may yet shine.

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