

**THE ESSENCE OF LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GRASSROOTS  
INNOVATORS  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

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## Certificate of Original Authorship

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I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Date:

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## List of Journal Articles, Conference Papers, Reports and Presentations Arising from the Thesis

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- Joshi, R. G. 2015, “Fostering rural development through the mobilisation of the grassroots innovations (GI)”, Transformations for the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific Regional Report, UNESCAP Report, Available at : <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/RRSOED-Fostering-transformation-through-the-mobilization-of-grassroots-innovations-by-Rajul-G.-Joshi.pdf>
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- Joshi R. G., 2015 presented “*Phenomenological approach to study the essence of grassroots innovations*”, in the session Indian Ecosystem for Inclusive Innovations, at the Third International Conference on Creativity and Innovations at Grassroots (ICIG-3), Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, India January 19-23, 2015
- Joshi R.G., 2012 presented ‘*Diffusion of Traditional Knowledge (TK) and Grass root innovation (GRI): Market-driven and Benefit sharing aspects*” in the session “Ethical knowledge management & Intellectual Property’ at the Indigenous Knowledge and Biodiversity forum India and Australia, UTS Law, Australia, August 2-4, 2012
- Joshi R. G. 2014, presented extended abstract “*Indian grassroots innovations are spinning yarn of rural development*” in the 5<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Innovation Conference at University of Technology Sydney, 2014, November 27-29, 2014



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## List of Abbreviations

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ABS: Acrylonitrile-Butadiene-Styrene  
BoP: Bottom of the Pyramid  
DFO: District Forest Officer  
GDP: Gross Domestic Product  
GEB: Gujarat Electricity Board  
GEDA: Gujarat Energy Development Agency  
GI: Grassroots Innovation  
GIAN: Grassroots Innovation and Augmentation Network  
GIMs: Grassroots Innovation Movements  
HBN: Honey Bee Network  
ICT: Information and Communication Technology  
IE: Informal Economy  
IIM-A: Indian Institute of Management-Ahmedabad  
IIT-B: Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay  
ILO: International Labour Organisation  
INR: Indian Rupees  
IPA: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis  
IPR: Intellectual Property Right  
JAU: Junagadh Agricultural University  
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation  
NIC: National Innovation Council  
NID: National Institute of Design  
NIF: National Innovation Foundation  
NIS: National Innovation System  
NPD: New-Product Development  
PTO: Power Take-Off  
R&D: Research and Development  
S&T: Science and Technology  
SNM: Strategic Niche Management

SRISTI: Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and  
Institutions

TBGRI: Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute

TK: Traditional Knowledge

TRIPS: Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

UK: United Kingdom

USA: United States of America

VFPMC: Village Forest Protection and Management Committee



## Abstract

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Farmers, peasants and people from the marginalised and informal sectors have long exhibited grassroots creativity that has the potential to enhance rural economies. Little is known about the experiences of these people. Further, a humanistic, bottom-up, inside-out approach to understanding the essence of these grassroots innovation (GI) phenomenon is absent in the literature.

The primary purpose of this thesis is to explore the essence of Grassroots Innovation (GI) and gain an appreciation of the subjective reality of grassroots innovators. The overarching research question is: What is the essence of the lived experiences of GI for Indian grassroots innovators? To answer this question, the researcher had to discern innovation decisions and actions of grassroots innovators along their innovation journey vis-à-vis ideation, opportunity recognition and commercial scaling.

Through phenomenological exploration and detailed thematic analysis of the innovation experiences of the thirteen Indian grassroots innovators, the research determined the nature and spirit of the relational commercial exchanges entailing and fostering GI. These participants identified as grassroots innovators by the National Innovation Foundation (NIF), an autonomous body of Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, were interviewed for this study. These innovators are all different, and the lived experience of each is unique.

Examination of cognitive and social-relation dynamics and the dominant form of exchange and socio-economic organisation embedded in innovation action provide an understanding of the nature and spirit of the GI phenomenon. This study confirmed that no single unilateral theory can fully explain the lived experiences of grassroots innovators. Rather, it is quintessential to have an integrated holistic perspective for understanding GI. The subjective reality of the GI phenomenon was inquired through the non-reductionist, inductive logic and a phenomenological approach. Such an approach provided a rich, contextually situated and an inside-out understanding of



underlying individual as well as interpersonal dynamics shaping GI in the commercial space. It is evident from the findings that GI is a mind-set driven practical solution science, with a complex mix of livelihood matters and intra and interpersonal innovation behaviours. Unlike mainstream innovation, GI involves non-linear informal processes of ideation and opportunity recognition. These findings reveal the situated reality of Indian grassroots innovators' lives. Therefore, Indian government institutions such as the NIF and non-governmental organisations could use the findings of this research to devise bottom-up policies that embrace grassroots innovators in an inclusive, participatory and empowering manner.