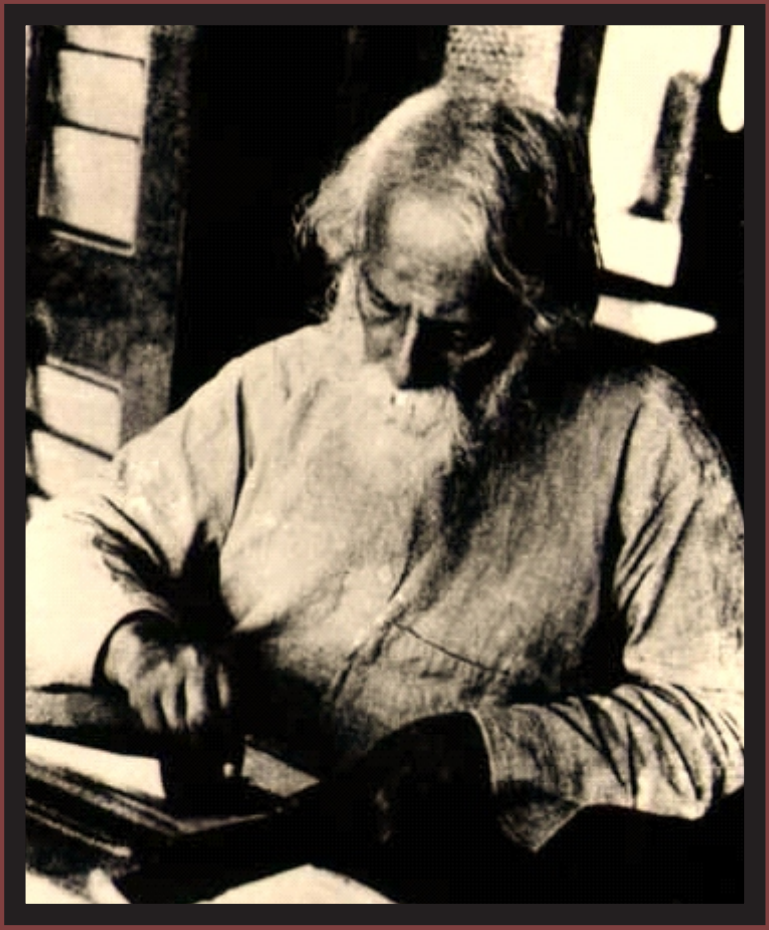

“LIFE IN ITS COMPLETENESS”

Rabindranath Tagore's legacy of thought and action on artisans and crafts

CCWB

For Ruby Palchoudhuri, in recognition

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"LIFE IN ITS COMPLETENESS"

RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S LEGACY OF THOUGHT AND ACTION ON ARTISANS AND CRAFTS

A SEMINAR HOSTED BY

VISVA BHARATI UNIVERSITY

AND ORGANIZED BY

CRAFTS COUNCIL OF INDIA &
CRAFTS COUNCIL OF WEST BENGAL

Kala Bhavana, Visva Bharati
Santiniketan, April 6-8, 2016

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FOREWORD

Crafts Council of India (CCI) held its National Meet 2016 (April 7 and 8) at Visva Bharati, where almost a century ago Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore pioneered a system of life-centric education "in harmony with all existence". Visva Bharati extended an invitation to CCI to meet on its campus through the Crafts Council of West Bengal (CCWB) and most generously shared its infrastructure as well as its craft, cultural and scholarship resources to enrich this opportunity for learning.

Craft was integral to Gurudev's approach to progress and toward "the best of all-around culture" that could provide economic value through handmade products of "real use at home and commanding ready sale outside". The Sriniketan campus became Gurudev's laboratory for experiments that were far ahead of their time, extended through Silpa Sadan, Kala Bhavana and other expressions of Visva Bharati scholarship.

In this inspiring setting at Santiniketan, the National Meet thus drew on the experience of the Visva Bharati community and on the resources of this craft-rich region. It renewed partnerships, forged new ones and shared experiences since the last National Meeting held in Santiniketan in 1986. The Meet gave CCI a unique opportunity to reflect on the beginning of a national renaissance, and to draw on history to help re-position artisans and their crafts at the centre of Indian development. Discussions re-visited the legacy of Tagore and Gandhi within the competing notions of modernity and progress that prevail today. The challenge these present to the future of India's artisans and craft cultures were reviewed within a contemporary context of both crisis and opportunity in the sector. 2016 was also the year in which the world community put into action UN commitments for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) accepted as a 15-year roadmap toward a better future for the planet. This 2030 Agenda challenges earlier perceptions of both development and progress, and reaffirms the vision of both Gurudev and the Mahatma. India was a major influence in the long process of identifying 17 Goals and then building a consensus around them. The first SDG is to end poverty in all its forms

everywhere. Other SDGs include "full and productive employment and decent work for all" (Goal 6), ensuring "sustainable consumption and production patterns" (Goal 12), protecting terrestrial ecosystems, and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

The Inauguration of the National Meet

Crafts directly support these as well as other Agenda 2030 goals, and the SDGs have links with CCI's own efforts at articulating a development approach. This began at a sector conclave arranged in Kolkata by CCWB in 2008. That led on to CCI's **Craft Economics & Impact Study** (CEIS) in 2010, to its influence on the national Economic Census 2013-14, and on all that is still emerging from that milestone research. This document attempts to share the National Meet's effort to address how past values and approaches for world harmony and progress, enshrined at Visva Bharati, can now be linked to India's future and to the global opportunity of 2030 Agenda.

RETURNING TO ROOTS, REPOSITIONING PRIORITIES: A NATIONAL MEET AT SANTINIKETAN

ASHOKE CHATTERJEE

Thirty years ago a team of younger hearts and energies (including two nervous males within a hugely imbalanced cohort) assembled at Howrah Station to take the train to Bolpur, Santiniketan and Visva Bharati. The setting had been chosen by Ruby Palchoudhuri as an appropriate way to celebrate two decades of the Crafts Council of India. Globalization, liberalization and free market economics were lapping at the edge of India's recent experience of the Asian Games and colour TV. As we toured Gurudev's campus, few could have anticipated the tidal wave that was soon to overturn so much of India's economy and politics. Indian craft in 1986 still seemed secure as an undisputed priority linked to a heritage that was cultural, social and spiritual. Three decades later we came back. This time, not to bask in the Abode of Peace but to draw from it protection, inspiration, guidance and partnership in a struggle for craft survival in a transformed India. The need now was to revisit Tagore's vision and mission, as well as his dialogue with Gandhiji, in a search for elements that could provide artisans with endurance and relevance within different dreams of modernity and progress.

A JOURNEY IN TIME AND THOUGHT

More than a century ago Gurudev established cultural and educational centres that came to be identified as Visva Bharati, Silpa Sadan and Sriniketan. These separate and collective identities were of an approach to education that was intended "make our live in sympathy and harmony with all existence". Tagore was critical of a worldwide greed for material riches. With Gandhiji, he advocated an ethic of trusteeship: caring for nature's resources as a legacy of future generations and putting people at the centre of all decisions for change. This ethic regarded development as wellbeing: social, cultural and environmental. That perspective has now returned in a new century as the 2030 Agenda, adopted by the United Nations as its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to which all member nations are signatories. CCI's return to Santiniketan was thus a return to the past in order to understand the present, and to apply that wisdom to a leap into its future.

The UN's 2030 Agenda for sustainable development comprises seventeen goals that are seen as integrated and indivisible. They balance economic, social and environmental issues. At the core is a concern for human rights, equality and empowerment for all.

Education is accepted as the key driver. Development understood in these ways provides key opportunities for craft cultures and activities. Yet the visions of both Tagore and Gandhi were focused on an India that lived in its villages. It was the village economy that both believed crafts could regenerate and revitalize. In the context of a rapidly urbanizing India --- even Bolpur and Santiniketan are less villages and more semi-urban communities --- how can those early visions impact the quality of life across the spectrum from villages to metros? A priority for crafts and for artisans must now fit the new priorities driving national transformation.

CRAFTS: A SECTOR OF CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY

The Gandhi/Tagore legacy of craft revival and relevance was linked to a Freedom struggle in which swadeshi and village industries were a central strategy. That legacy was transferred in 1947 into independent India's planning efforts. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was at the forefront. For her, "the artisans' tender care of the substance of everyday life and of nature's own rich storehouse adds a final dimension to our being". Not for sentiment alone, but as an Indian capacity for problem-solving and survival --- Kamaladevi first used craft to help those displaced by Partition to find opportunities and hope as well as sanity. In the craft renaissance which followed, handicraft became an indispensable element in the landscape of an emerging society, as well as in its message to the world of identity and transition. It was unthinkable then that there could ever be an India without artisans and without crafts.

Yet all this while other perceptions of modernity and progress were silently gathering steam. Not long after a new century dawned, the Crafts Council of India and other activists found it increasingly difficult to find official funding for their development needs. Discussions in New Delhi provided a shock. Planners in high places told CCI that craft was a 'sunset industry', out of step with new visions of world power now inspired by Singapore and Silicon Valley --- fit perhaps for decorative use at museums, festivals and melas but inappropriate to any core contemporary purpose. What had happened to the power of swadeshi, khadi, cottage industries, the demonstration through many Five-Year Plans and in many export markets of craft as an economic force and as India's second largest source of livelihood? What would a 'sunset' attitude do to millions now at stake? That question also provided a significant clue.

CRAFT ECONOMICS

Conversations in New Delhi in 2008 revealed that Government data on the handmade sector was hopelessly inadequate. It recognized some 11M artisans, over 6M of them weavers. These numbers were reported dwindling, therefore 'sunset' was assumed to have begun its inevitable journey into night. Activists challenged the data which left out hundreds of crafts and millions of artisans including women responsible for 50% of craft processes. India's second largest industry was therefore being 'managed' with substandard data incapable of revealing its size, significance and economic impact. The possible exception was craft exports, where data was reasonable and indicated rising demand in worldwide markets despite recessional storm-warnings of that time.

Thus in planning circles if craft had any significance at all, it was the export potential. A colossal domestic market remained unaccounted. Another clue was emerging to the crisis: for all these decades, economics had been avoided by most craft activists. So who now would do a re-counting? Wise counsel recommended that facts would speak louder than sentiments, and economic arguments on behalf of India's artisans must now be marshaled. Without such data, how could the sector attract the investment and entrepreneurship upon which its future would depend?

Risking the absence of experience, CCI then plunged into what was to be a seminal exercise in craft economics. Partnerships were forged and a Craft Economics and Impact Study (CEIS 2012) undertaken in two craft-rich locations: Kutch (Gujarat) and Tirupur (Tamil Nadu). The search was for a methodology that could be extended nationally to bridge the data gap and offer a foundation for future policy and investment. An inspiration for this effort came from an unlikely source: the European Union. Activists there had coined a new slogan ---- "The future is handmade" --- to demonstrate that craft cultures are indispensable to national capacities for creativity and innovation. Without these capacities, survival in tomorrow's competitive markets may be impossible. The contrast to New Delhi's 'sunset' syndrome could not have been more striking. Lessons absorbed by Europe and Asian neighbours could be ignored only at India's peril.

As the world's largest resource of living crafts, it was now at risk of throwing away a gigantic advantage. The CEIS would lead to artisans being incorporated for the first time in the national Economic Census 2013-14. This in turn is expected to lead to a census specific to the hand sector in all its diversity and potential. Meanwhile, informal estimates are emerging. The 11M figure is moving up to over 70M and some say to 200M. Nowhere else in the world is there an artisinal force of this scale to support development understood in terms of the 2030 Agenda, and as envisioned by Gurudev in the years which made Visva Bharati a reality.

CRAFTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE SANTINIKETAN LEGACY

R SIVA KUMAR

It is only appropriate that the national meet of the Crafts Council of India is being held in Santiniketan this year considering that sustainable development and social transformation through crafts is high on its agenda. This is an idea that was also high on the agenda of this institution in the early years of its existence. How artisanal skills and knowledge can be a part of modern India and contribute to its shaping was perhaps first explored here. The institutions that came up in post Independent India committed to the nurture of crafts and craftsmen, including the Crafts Council of India, are in a way the inheritors of this legacy. Thus on this occasion a brief look at the history of crafts-nurture at Santiniketan and what lessons we can draw from it may be in order.

The first seeds of the involvement with crafts in modern India were sown by members of the Tagore household in the early years of the last century. Colonial interventions they realized had among other things alienated Indians, especially the urban elites, from the cultural practices of pre-colonial India. The new practices were not as refined or subtle as the traditional practices they were replacing, but crude western substitutes. At the same time they realized that vestiges of India's traditional achievements were still alive in its villages. Abanindranath and Gaganendranath, largely inspired by Rabindranath, began to design for a new India which was spearheaded not by royal patrons as in the past, but by a culturally enlightened section of the middle class like themselves. By designing their own dresses, interiors and furniture they gave themselves a distinct and elegant identity. Simultaneously they also began to document the artistic and literary practices of rural Bengal, and this led them to notice that these were not discrete practices but a coherent cultural expression of a people.

At Santiniketan their efforts and the lessons learnt from them were further extended. Rabindranath realized that colonialism had created not only a hiatus between India and her past but also between her cities and her villages. He tried to heal this divide between the city and the village on the one hand with an educational programme which ensured that young people from the city came into intimate contact with the rural community and its concerns, and on the other by initiating a programme of planned rural regeneration which would bring the village closer to the city. Though they were mutually complementary he did not mix them up,

he saw them as two distinct projects each with its own focus, and one had its seat in Santiniketan and the other in Sriniketan. The crafts though played a substantial role in both.

Nandalal Bose who was in charge of the arts education programme at Santiniketan recognized early in his career, through his encounters with the work of scholars like Ananda Coomaraswamy and through his own study of Indian art, that traditional India art was characterized by a continuous spectrum of skills and expressions that moved from household and ritualistic arts, to community based folk expressions, to artisanal production of functional and decorative objects, to professional art production and personal expression at various levels, each addressing patrons with different social, economic and aesthetic susceptibilities. During his 1916 visit to Japan Rabindranath too recognized the existence of a similar continuity in the art practices of that country and noticed that in Japan the same high level of aesthetic refinement ran across the entire spectrum.

Compared to this, professional training offered by the colonial art schools was highly limited. It segregated art from the crafts and turned the art school trained artist into a limited specialist. As an educator he wished to remedy this and began to introduce his students to an array of crafts and communicational needs. Besides painting and sculpture the students at Kala Bhavana were encouraged to do print making using the techniques of lino cut, wood engraving, lithography and etching. They were also encouraged to do alpona, embroidery, batik, woodblock printing, book binding, leather and lacquer work, as well mural decoration using traditional Indian and European techniques. Besides Nandalal, Pratima Devi, Andree Karpeles, Sukumari Devi and various others contributed to this expanding field of practice.

The training in crafts at Sriniketan started under the aegis of Silpa Bhavana or the Hall of Industries in 1922 and was part of the Rabindranth's effort to breathe fresh life into village life and crafts. The crafts programme at Sriniketan began with weaving, tannery, carpentry, and expanded in a short while to include cotton and silk weaving, duree weaving, calico printing, woollen rug weaving, wick weaving, manufacture of straw mats and carpets. These were followed with experiments in indigenous dyes, wood block printing, gold smithy, pottery and so on.

The engagement with crafts at Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan and at Silpa Bhavana in Sriniketan had different goals. At Kala Bhavana the exposure of arts students to an array of art and craft practices was aimed at making them responsive to evolving communicational and design requirements, and thus averts them from becoming narrow specialists with limited sensibilities, make the art scene less insular, and the art objects themselves less autonomous.

The aim was primarily to broaden the student's outlook, enhance his linguistic felicity, and adds to the cultural resonance of his work rather than to enhance his employability, although these did eventually contribute to it. A second goal of the Santiniketan programme was to introduce a certain amount of non-professional practice of crafts into the community's life. This was, Nandalal believed, essential for the creation of an audience who valued creative work and responded to it sensitively. In contrast to this the craft programme at Sriniketan was undertaken to economically and socially re-empower the village artisan and to make him more employable within a new cultural ecosystem. Although their stress was different both strove to make the artist and the artisan responsive to the emerging lifestyle of a new society.

This is reflected by the kind of training offered and the kind of objects that were produced at Sriniketan. The staff and the techniques were not all traditional or Indian. A Japanese carpenter, German potters and Swedish weavers and Indians trained abroad were all part of the training team. The effort was to put together a programme to design objects that will be attractive to a new generation of Indians and fit in with their lifestyle. The transformation of Silpa Bhavana from a training centre into a production centre employing a large number of craftsmen and running a chain of outlets by the late 1930s point to the favourable response the programme received in pre-independent India. And both Santiniketan and Sriniketan did contribute to shaping the taste of the middle class in India between the 1920s and the 1950s. For a while it even became a brand name across India and 'Santiniketan' came to represent a certain aesthetic or image quality in design. But this did not last for long.

A look into why Sriniketan's success did not last longer than it did might have a lesson or two for those who are involved in the promotion of craft practices today. Firstly it was not built upon existing traditional artisan practices; it was an attempt to create a craft practice through a training programme where none existed. This meant that there was no great depth of skill on which the designers and organizers at Sriniketan could draw on. This is not a problem its successors in modern India should face because they have a whole range of traditional craft practitioners from across the country to work with, and they possess a vast repertoire of specialized skills and forms perfected over generations of practice. But the new bodies too face some of the other problems that were encountered here and are indeed unavoidable in a changing world.

Any attempt to secure livelihoods through craft production cannot ignore the market. And the market today is made up of a clientele who do not share the same social or cultural milieu as the craftsmen. The market for crafts today is linked to a commercial world where calculated change is the driving force, and taste is unstable. This does not allow the kind of balance between materials and skills, skills and form, form and function, function and ornamentation through which traditional craft practices are established and perfected. The adjustment of hand skills to sensibility in traditional craft practices are achieved through changes induced by enlightened patronage rather than by analytical configuration of practice at each stage or instance—and therefore can be easily ruptured. This is something that needs to be kept in mind by the modern designer or craft promoter who wishes to be effective in nurturing craft production. One should not only think of what the market demands or how to raise the interest of consumers, but also how the skills and understanding of the craftsmen can be put to new use without upsetting their inherited aesthetics, and how new form-images can be grafted onto existing work methods.

This is where part of the Santiniketan experience, especially as exemplified by Nandalal can prove useful. He collected exemplary samples of traditional crafts, studied their techniques, and analysed their configurational principles. This made him a perceptive artist-craftsman and allowed him to innovate and address new functional needs where others only managed to learn old formulae and repeat ancient repertoires. It is true that not many of his students and successors learned from his example. But the few who did have made important contributions to keeping the Indian craft traditions alive and robust.

Today's designers, if they wish to serve our craftsmen well, will have to be artist-designers with a keen sense of the skill/image nexus within which traditional craft practices operate. If they fail do so and become entirely market driven they may sooner or later drive our craft traditions to extinction. And conversely if we wish to see a growth in sensitive artist-designers who can help our artisans to innovate and survive in a changing world, then we have to revisit Nandalal's approach to art education—or similar ones—and see how it can be adapted to our times.

Like every legacy of history, the legacy of Santiniketan in the field of craft-nurture too is one waiting for us to discover and make real. I hope the proceedings of this meeting will help us do that.

TAGORE'S LEGACY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE 21ST CENTURY

ARUNENDU BANERJEE

In the year 1867, an art and craft exhibition formed part of a 'Hindu Mela' organized in Calcutta (now Kolkata) at the initiative of Nabogopal Mitra, Dwijendranath Tagore, Shyamacharan Srimani and others. We can look back at that event as a seed from which flowered an approach to reviving the culture and commerce of crafts which retains extraordinary relevance in today's competitive environment. Dwijendranath was the eldest son of philosopher Debendranath Tagore, Rabindranath's father and founder of the settlement at Santiniketan in 1862-63 which was later to shelter Visva Bharati. The Tagore family was actively involved in the success of the Mela. Debendranath had been inspired by the lacquer craft of Birbhum villages surrounding Santiniketan, and used a collection for reference and display at the Tagore ancestral home, or Thakurbari, at Jorasanko in Calcutta. Santiniketan was where the Poush Mela was introduced by Debendranath in the 1894. The Mela brought the region's craft heritage into a direct contact between buyers and artisans, today described as 'buyer-seller interface'. Village crafts began to be widely appreciated and local artisans gained economic benefits from the Mela, now an important annual event that attracts visitors from the world over.

By 1897, a Swadeshi Bhandar was opened in Calcutta to retail a wide range of crafts and other items of daily use, sourced from all over India. This marketing initiative by Rabindranath and his artist-nephews Gaganendranath and Abanindranath was followed by the efforts of his niece Sarladevi, who opened the Lakhsmir Bhandar in the city. The Jorasanko Thakurbari was thus emerging as the seat of an inclusive craft movement in which designers from distant Japan participated with artist-disciples of Abanindranath. Soon, Bengal Home Industries assisted in the revival of the Baluchari saree tradition, involving Gaganendranath. By the late 19th century Jyotirindranath (elder brother and mentor of Rabindranath) and Rabindranath had set up weaving and woodcraft centres in their Shelaidaha estate (now in Bangladesh) and launched the Katyani Mela there to encourage village artisans. By 1901, Rabindranath had started his ashram school at Santiniketan. Its first foreign student, Shitaku Hari of Japan, installed handlooms in 1902 while Soudamini Devi, mother of Gaganendranath, was known for her skill in weaving. In 1905 Rabindranath invited Kusumato, then working as

a designer at the Jorasanko Thakurbari, to teach crafts in Santiniketan. The swadeshi movement followed and 'Swadeshi Shilpa' products started gaining wide acceptance. The movement was encouraged in Rabindranath's paper, Swadeshi Samaj which also carried Abanindranath's famous painting of 'Bharat Mata'. Crafts were now emerging as the creative expression of a national aspiration for freedom.

Another initiative was a Bichitra movement of art and craft that started from the Jorasanko Thakurbari and had multiple expressions, expanding the space for craft innovation. Bichitra Studio, Bichitra Club and Bichitra Collectors (1915-16) actively worked under the leadership of Gaganendranath, Abanindranath and Rabindranath. Collectors from Jorasanko travelled to distant rural areas to collect and document crafts and products of daily use --- the foundational practice of 'craft documentation' now familiar at institutions of design learning. Appeals were made through newspapers to assist this process of finding locations of artisans and their crafts in Bengal, and of collections and documents. The poet himself collected items from east Bengal while Abanindranath's book Banglar Bratakatha presented an illustrated collection and narration of varieties of ritual alpanas (or rangolis).

After Rabindranath was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913, work from Santiniketan received international attention. By 1912, Rabindranath had acquired Surul Kuthi in Sriniketan, where rural reconstruction work was started. A twin campus was created, incorporating a universal learning centre of Visva Bharati in Santiniketan and a centre for rural education, reconstruction and production at Sriniketan. The work of Bichitra was extended to Santiniketan in 1918 by the artist-designer couple Pratima Devi and Rathindranath (daughter-in-law and son of Rabindranath). Inspired by the poet and supported by Abanindranath and Gaganendranath, they worked on batik, leather work and other crafts in a two-way participatory mode of learning and production that we now recognise as the contemporary concept of co-creation.

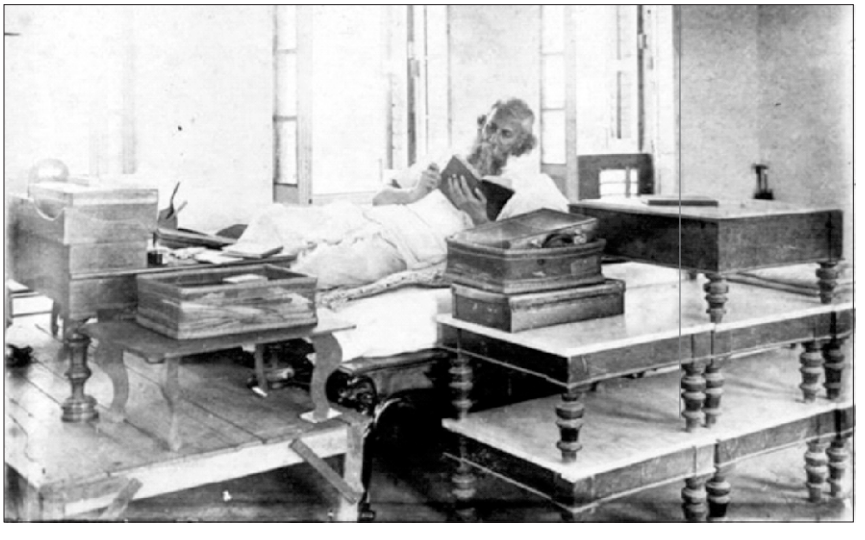
Kala Bhavana was started in 1919, reflecting the holistic glory of 'shilpa-kala' inspirations from Jorasanko and Bichitra. The eminent

artists who now joined included Suren Kar, Nandalal Bose, Asit Halder and others, many of who were disciples of Abanindranath. Visva Bharati was formally established in 1921 and Sriniketan in 1922. The Bichitra Karu Sangha (1923) extended its art-craft range with designed products, assisted by Andrée Karpelès, the French painter. A published prospectus noted that 'we have plenty of ideas…. goodwill…. We need orders to keep our place going' and 'to prevent as far as possible the harmful separation between art and crafts which is quite contrary to the Indian spirit and deprives art of all decorative qualities…..' as well as 'to establish permanent co-operation between the artists, the craftsman….to keep up love of beauty in the simplest objects of daily use which was so characteristic of Indian life and which provided the artists and craftsmen with such a wide field of creative expression….' This philosophy and approach mirrored the Bauhaus movement in Europe, which also began in 1919 and would offer yet another seminal experience of exchange and partnership that would have a profound influence on India's design future.

Abanindranath wholeheartedly supported these initiatives with an article in the journal Ayan. Rabindranath wrote a letter to Rathindranath from Porbander (Gujarat) on 27 November 1923 encouraging him to establish production units at Sriniketan for large-scale art-craft products, as well as a furniture factory and production units suitable for designing interiors so as to reach wider markets throughout India. In this letter he explained his approach letter as a vision and mission for design and product development at Visva Bharati, stressing the importance of 'our design'. A Hall of Industries was created in stages under the initiative of Rathindranath, with initial design and planning by educator-environmentalist Patrick Geddes.

Through these developments, working principles were emerging that would influence the future of Visva Bharati's craft movement. Among these was a creative unity between Kala Bhavana and Silpa Bhavana, with the participation of talent from nearby villages. To this creative unity was added an effort to harmonize creative life with daily living. A participatory and inclusive model of education was promoted to respect both codified and uncodified knowledge

in education, design and production. Talents from the east and west were brought together in an ever-creative Geddesian triad of 'folk-work-place'. Marketing was made the bridge for interaction between education and production, bringing the marketplace into spaces for learning. Outreach to national and international markets was conducted through exhibitions, emporia, workshops, fairs and festivals as well as publications. The education programme thus included business outreach, practical demonstrations and survey reports conducted by artists and designers. Tools and raw materials were made available to encourage home production at the village level, with careful attention to artisans' earnings and socio-economic welfare. The cooperative principle was also tested by Rabindranath as part of his rural reconstruction programme. A Santiniketan-Sriniketan creative culture was now reaching international levels, anticipating the concept of creative and cultural industries that was to gain worldwide acceptance in the 21st century --- already practiced successfully at Visva Bharati from the 1920s onward as an initiative for a creative and participatory economy that was decades ahead of its time.



Silpa Bhavana was established in Sriniketan in 1928 as a planned extension of Bichitra Karu Sangha through the efforts of Rathindranath and his colleagues. Craft centres, or Palli Kerukari Kendras, were established in nearby villages. These were later renamed as Silpa Sadana, and remain today as an active as part of the Rural Reconstruction Programme. Right from its inception, Sriniketan's work supported a market for quality products made by hand. The crafts brought together included weaving, dyeing, tanning, leather craft, woodwork, pottery, lacquerwork, book-binding, handmade paper, basketry and cane work, batik, lace work, and kantha embroidery. Modern looms were imported. To provide advanced training in weaving, Manindra Sen was sent to Japan. Soon Japanese artist and woodwork specialist Kasahara and Konosan joined in the work in Sriniketan, where Lakhiswar Sinha wrote a popular book on woodwork which had a foreword by Rabindranath.

Trainers in Swedish Sloyd (a handicraft-based education system that originated in 19th-century Scandinavia) arrived at Silpa Bhavana to demonstrate a floor-work programme. For this Santosh Bhanja, Lakhiswar Sinha, Ms Jeanson, Ms Cederblom, and others joined together to follow the co-operative principles of Rabindranath. Lakhiswar was later sent to Sweden for advanced training on an exchange program that was once again far ahead of its time. A lady expert in silk-weaving from Assam joined Silpa Bhavana. By 1940, a modern furnace, pottery shed, glazing units, machine shop and smithy shop had been installed. A sales emporium, industrial training school, product display spaces and exhibitions marked a developmental pace that continued as long as 1953.

Rathindranath was the bridge of design unity in education and production between Jorasanko and Silpa Sadana, and in inter-connectivity with the design world across borders. His structured reports to the Ministry of Commerce (Govt of India) on Silpa Bhavana and Visva Bharati during 1947-1951 period remain important documents that offered project schemes as a road map for the development and growth of these centres as local-level

participatory models that offered a future to Indian craft and design. Those early efforts continue to inspire Silpa Sadana today, and have guided the present author in his own efforts to design and implement an Art & Craft Village – Srijani, Silpa Gram (East Zone Cultural Centre, Ministry of Culture, Government of India).

This experiment at Srijani in Santiniketan brings together the arts, crafts and architecture of the eastern region as well as folk and tribal artists from each state in a collaborative effort that strives to follow the co-operative participatory principles of the Tagore model. Structural designs from across the region, interior details reflecting craft traditions, performance spaces, craft stalls, work spaces, an exhibition gallery, artists' cottages, open-air interactive spaces, landscaped gardens and rainwater harvesting come together as 'Tribute to Tagore' activities. Now an important tourist destination, Srijani offers artisans the opportunity for direct interaction with buyers in an eco-friendly village space. These themes have also influenced the recreation of Bengal village clusters at the Surajkund Mela in Haryana, at Aaheli, Peerless Chowringhee and Rajarhat New Town in Kolkata, and the Adivasi Silpa Kendra at Pearson Palli and Balipara. At the art and craft museum gallery of Banghya Sahitya Parishad (Kolkata) and a local museum at Halisahar the objective has been to revisit Tagore's legacy in a contemporary context of design and structure.

In his last days, Rabindranath spoke with Pratima Devi in 1941 of his hope that future generations would test the essence of his "Santiniketan laboratory", each in their own way, so that a river of ever-flowing ananda could take the joy of creative living into perpetuity. As we look back, Rabindranath's prescience is astonishing. His efforts and arguments move easily into a future of sustainable production and consumption cycles envisioned in the global 2030 Agenda. Today craft activists everywhere recognize the importance of a creative unity between artisans, designers and artists and of inclusive models of production, distribution and marketing that can respect the earth as well as the needs of humankind. From his Abode of Peace, the relevance of Tagore's legacy calls out to the world with amazing immediacy.

CRAFT ACTIVITIES AT VISVA BHARATI: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

RAJ KUMAR KONAR

Before I share the contextual experience of my long association with crafts at Silpa Sadana and of Visva Bharati, I would like to say a few words on my previous association with two other premier design institutions of India – the Industrial Design Centre (IDC), at IIT Bombay (as a first-batch student of M Des. in Industrial Design), National Institute of Design (NID, Ahmedabad) as a faculty member of Industrial Design from 1981 to 1987.

We all know that India has a vast traditional wealth in design in almost every sphere and for centuries its man-made environment remained craft-based. But there was no exposure to different craft materials and practices in the curriculum at IDC. This was because the modern concept of 'Design' in India is borrowed and was not conceptualised for our needs and culture. Thus, as a trained designer I was faced with this challenge and the creative task of serving our society with a huge gap in this industrial age.

However, at NID I learnt that 'Craft' is highly respected in our country. I was exposed to and involved in many craft related activities, workshops and projects. It gave me opportunities that were to influence my future work and career. These included working with the late and highly reputed designer Raghunath Goswami and with him to design the Permanent Gallery on the life of Rabindranath at Rabindra Bhavana for Visva Bharati. I also had the opportunity to work with the 'Dokra' craft community of Dariapur, near Santiniketan, and then to independently design the interior of the Central Cottage Industries Corporation (CCIC) emporium at Kolkata. I was invited to become the external member of a newly-constituted 'Board of Studies' of Silpa Sadana at Visva Bharati, and to start a Diploma Course in Wood Work. This is how my journey in crafts began. In 1987, I joined Silpa Sadana, the craft wing of Visva Bharati, as a faculty member in Design.

BACKGROUND

Few of us know that Visva Bharati initiated the process of humanising man-made products several decades ago by using human-centric techniques and craft skills through its craft wing, Silpa Sadana. Sugata Dasgupta, in his book A Poet and a Plan, wrote, "Tagore drew great inspiration from history while framing his plans of industrial reorganisation and recalled that the village artisans in India had, once upon a time, sent their wares all over the country

and earned immense wealth thereby." The disintegration of this process started during British rule in consequence of industrialisation. Gradually the machine started taking over the tasks of human-centric skill. Fortunately, a rich creative atmosphere and Indian awareness arose in Bengal in the beginning of 20th century. This led Rabindranath to lodge traditional craft activities into the mainstream of education and training at Visva Bharati, where craft activities were initiated in 1922 under the name of Vichitra Studio at Santiniketan.

A PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment of Santiniketan has evolved gradually over the decades. In its architecture, sculpture, reliefs and fresco work on façades, outdoor and indoor furniture, campus planning, landscaped garden - everywhere we find careful assimilation and blend of design elements, forms and features taken from diverse cultures. These shaped its environment with a distinct Indian character. Improvised vernacular architecture was considered for its school and academic environment to make it a tapovana-like ashram in a rural setting. Only a few of these exist today.

Modern materials with cultural features taken mostly from Indian traditions were considered for its administrative and other important buildings. The furniture and interiors of such buildings were designed using Japanese design principles, Buddhist features and Indian habits. All exterior and interior spaces were jointly conceived, designed and implemented by Rathindranath and Suren Kar. Rabindranath also introduced many festivals and fairs throughout the year to show highest respect for agricultural work, craft and of local traditions.

RATHINDRANATH AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A RURAL INDUSTRIES CENTRE AT SRINIKETAN

Soon the craft activities were shifted to the spacious 'Hall of Industries' at Sriniketan. Rathindranath, the poet's son, with his training abroad, was exposed to the Arts and Crafts Movement in England, the famous Bauhaus movement through Andrée Karpelès and also the prevailing Art Deco Style, which was a nationalistic approach to design to convey national identities by using decorative images and motifs from tradition. The Wall Street Crash

of 1929 was said to have had a devastating effect on the luxury market. There was a demand for inexpensive consumer goods, which accelerated the move towards Art Deco all over the world. Craft activities gained tremendous momentum after Rathindranath took charge of Sriniketan, and Silpa Sadana was born in 1927. Silpa Sadana's mission was to rejuvenate dying craft and rural industries and develop appropriate cottage and small-scale production-based business activities in various craft disciplines for economic regeneration of villages. Several craft disciplines were introduced, such as handloom weaving, pottery, lacquer work, carpentry, durree making, calico-printing, book-binding, block-printing and artistic leather craft. The products made soon became popular across India and abroad because of their uniqueness. Professional attitudes to craft at Silpa Sadana have evolved through the decades, coupled with aesthetic finesse under the leadership of Rathindranath. Silpa Sadana provided experimental laboratories to many innovations. Rathindranath was a highly skilled artist, woodworker, and furniture designer. He also had undergone training in leather craft in London, and brought a few sets of tools and introduced artistic leather craft at Silpa Sadana.

THE PROCESS OF EXPERIMENTATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Visva Bharati never followed any conventional path to carry out an important institutional task or an activity related to basic education, training or socio-economic development. It has always looked to traditional knowledge and wisdom to find an alternative or a new direction. Some initial experiments were made to decide on the quality and specifications of raw materials to be used and to ensure their level availability. Appropriate hand-tools, machinery and facilities for the purpose were developed in consultation with artisans and manufacturers of machinery for small-scale industries. A few simple machines were imported from abroad. A dynamo was installed to operate some electro-mechanical devices simultaneously. An electro-mechanical wing was established.

CREATING RESOURCES FOR TRAINING AND PRODUCTIVITY

Rathindranath designed and introduced a full-time apprenticeship-based craft-training programme to create skilled workers in the trades. It followed the age-old gurukul system of training along with

necessary theory and practice. Links were established with the nearby villages and energetic young people from them were inducted into the training programmes. For the first time in India, traditional caste taboos against the practice of leatherwork were removed and candidates from all over joined the programme. Trainees were given freedom to innovate. Usually they began earning after a year of training. Rathindranath ran Silpa Sadana as a model technical institution by simultaneously giving technical training to apprentices and conducting commercial activity as a complementary endeavour in the same shed.

PRODUCTION PLANNING, SALES AND MARKETING

Initially products were made on an experimental basis. From 1937 onwards, production on a business scale started after obtaining market feedback. Products were planned for different segments of user groups. Tapping the huge domestic market was given equal importance as penetrating the export market. Products for the special needs of the university were also planned and manufactured. A few trained personnel were employed to coordinate production and to control product quality and craftsmanship. Apart from the persons in charge of various trades, there were in-house instructors, artists, craftsmen, engineers, draftsmen, labourers, supervisors, other technical staff, in-house temporary workers and village-based piece-rated extension workers.

Production was decentralised in order to reduce costs. Several trained persons from nearby villages were encouraged to work from home to make and supply finished products at piece rate or on contract. A principle of 'carrying work to the people' rather than 'carrying people to the work' was followed. The concerned department issued to the artisans, against a nominal deposit, the requisite hand tools, equipment and sample designs, and provided them the necessary raw materials and marketing facilities to make and sell their products. In 1937 a marketing wing was set up with three sales emporia at Sriniketan, Santiniketan and Calcutta. Apart from these outlets, periodic sales counters were set up at various fairs through the year. A separate central store unit for purchase and distribution of raw materials to the craftsmen was established.

DESIGN INPUTS

Rathindranath formed a multidisciplinary team of creative and skilled persons for each craft discipline to develop the items for production and sale. He created posts of Designer for the first time in India, to set up design banks in artistic leather craft, hand batik, lacquerware, cane and bamboo products, handloom textiles and other items. Some creative trained craftsmen were also employed and sent to places like Japan and Scandinavia for exposure and design training in the areas of furniture, interiors and textiles.

The creation of curios or repetitive industrial products were discouraged. Rathindranath advocated creating products and artefacts that followed craft methods to create products that were similar but not identical, were functional, aesthetically pleasing and also possessed indigenous features. Emphasis was given to non-traditional items to cater to the needs of different user groups. These were sold as an indigenous substitute for imported goods from Europe. Feedback from other Visva Bharati stalwarts like Nandalal, Suren Kar and Ramkinkar was solicited from time to time. The outcomes were evaluated and tested.

Rathindranath at work at woodwork section, Silpa Sadana.

Rathindranath was a collector of the most beautiful craft objects, man-made products and natural form-related objects from various countries. He often showed these to his creative craftsmen and advised them to learn from these articles. He was particularly fond of the art and craft of northeast Orissa. He liked dark shades and earthen colours, and disliked bright or multi-coloured objects. He advocated single colour with some variations or minimal colour combinations.

A GOLDEN ERA FOR SILPA SADANA AND THE SANTINIKETAN STYLE

The market demand of Silpa Sadana ware increased in leaps and bounds in India and abroad between the years 1937 to 1951. Soon it was converted into a full-fledged autonomous institution with a managing board of its own, and named Silpa Bhavana. This was done to enable it to function more effectively. The scope of work was extended to textile dyeing, woodcraft, furniture making, toy-making, handmade paper, tailoring, bakery, goldsmith, cane and bamboo besides women's crafts such as hand-batik and embroidery. Gradually it gained further strength in professionally running a production centre.

Rathindranath never ran Silpa Sadana as a business organisation to make profit. That it did make considerable profit for six consecutive years in the 1940s is incidental. It was during this period that Silpa Sadana developed a distinct style of its own. It embraced handcraft and machine production simultaneously, using equipment imported by Rathindranath to help reduce drudgery and prepare materials for craftsmanship. The result was a range of exclusive craft objects at affordable prices, which rapidly gained popularity. Rathindranath had played a pioneering role in rediscovering Indian taste and style in the area of handloom, handicrafts and artistic products to fulfil contemporary needs. He believed that acceptability of a product in the market does not depend solely on trends. People's tastes can be changed and new tastes created. In artistic leather, he did not follow the streamlined Italian style then in vogue. Instead, he looked towards design idioms and visual vocabulary from indigenous culture to create an alternative style. This is how Santiniketan's own distinctive 'Art Deco' style was created, representing a particular aesthetic taste or a distinct style, which belonged to our culture, while also reflecting some of the principles and practices of the Art Deco movement that was flourishing overseas.

During this period, more than 500 craftspersons worked for Silpa Sadana, of which more than 60 per cent worked from their homes in nearby villages. It is documented that in those days most of these trained personnel from nearby villages earned more than most clerical and academic staff at Visva Bharati and elsewhere. They led economically and socially satisfying lives.

Kalo-Bari : A hostel for visual arts students
built in 1931 by Nandalal Bose and his students.

Chaitya : A typical hut-like structure built to exhibit
innovative work of students.

Udayana : Dining Room designed by Rathindranath
and Suren Kar.

THE SCENARIO AFTER 1951

The activity of Silpa Sadana went through difficult phases after Visva Bharati became a central university in 1951. The activity of Silpa Sadana did not fit into the academic framework of a typical university; so it had to continuously suffer a crisis of indecision and lack of clear-cut directives from the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Government. In 1951, its Institute status was reduced to that of a department of the Institute of Rural Reconstruction. During this period, Rathindranth was the first Vice-Chancellor of Visva Bharati, yet his most beloved unit was made to suffer. Silpa Sadana faced further problems after 1954, when Rathindranath left in disgust. Before leaving, he drafted a detailed scheme of craft training programmes in several disciplines, in keeping with the then-crystallising norms of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, for the continued survival of the institution. Since then the production activity of Silpa Sadana has lost its direction and objectives and the emphasis has become biased in favour of training. On what this means for the craft community and design professionals, the less said the better.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Santiniketan now is a craft township and the making of crafts is part of its culture. If we look around any craft fair, emporium, or even a wayside shop in and around the place, we notice that many of its products are sold under the brand name 'Santiniketan Crafts'. It is because an individual, group of craftsmen or local community have started their own venture. Most of them have learned the trade from the trained personnel of Silpa Sadana. They mostly work in the villages around Visva Bharati and manufacture these for their livelihood. They are no more dependent on outside agencies to sell or promote their wares. They compete with other products by virtue of their uniqueness and craftsmanship. The activity has now been taken over by the local community. Still it is an acceptable product style and has a good market. Its demand is gradually increasing. More and more people are engaging in Santiniketan crafts, which have brought financial independence to many families. Rathindrananath is no more, but there are many to carry forward his task. One now feels confident that his legacy is in safe hands.

GI CERTIFICATION

'GI Certification' helps the producer/craftsperson to highlight the product's superior quality and earn more in the present competitive global market. In 2007, the Government of India (Chennai-based Intellectual Property Appellate Board) identified Santiketan leather craft as an original and authentic product style belonging to a particular place, innovated by Visva Bharati and awarded a registered GI (Geographical Indication) tag in its name for protecting the interest of the makers. While the GI of other Santiniketan crafts has not yet been registered, I had the opportunity to draft the report on the leather craft and prove its authenticity with evidence. This has helped the local leather workers in enhancing their economic status.

THE EXISTING SCENARIO OF INDIAN ARTISANS

Let us now examine the present scenario on Indian craft practice to find answers of some of the many questions asked about Indian crafts, the people who make them, their social order and economy. What are the present threats and opportunities and how do we revive practice in realistic terms to keep the crafts economically viable and sustainable ?

It is very unfortunate that most craftsmen work in isolation rather than in clusters. They are physically cut off from one another. This is why they face enormous difficulty and are not at all happy in this age-old profession. Economically, too, they are not in a position to think of satisfying their needs. They cannot bridge the gap by themselves unless they form an association. The main problems of the craftsmen are several. These include getting the right price for what they produce. This compels them to compromise quality. They lack ready funds as well as the non-availability of quality raw materials and hardware from nearby areas at the right price. The absence of marketing facilities makes them victims of dishonest middlemen. Artisans are unable to invest funds and manpower to experiment to create new and appropriate products using craft methods, as authorities are unable to look into their interest objectively. They hesitate to take loans from nationalised banks because they lack the minimum basic education to run a business set-up.

Fortunately, there are exceptions and a very few artisans are doing reasonably well because they have shifted to a city or to a well-known location, which enables them to directly market their produce. They have also learned and successfully applied advanced techniques and methods of producing craft articles that have high market demand. They make decorative and 'fancy' craft products that may command a high piece and which are doing well as art pieces and not just as useful craft objects.

PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES

The taste of contemporary Indian consumers is in transition. They are no more satisfied with just modern form, function and finish. They are becoming more sensitive to the human attributes of indigenous handmade crafts. Cultural and creative industries are slowly emerging as a concept and an economic force. They may soon become powerful and dictate the terms. The contemporary lifestyle product manufacturing methods are transiting from mass-scale mechanised to micro-cottage and small-scale production techniques. The market has now expanded to a large scale because of market forces shifting from local to global. Demands for local and export markets have substantially increased and globalisation has to be treated as a boon. Creative and culture - related practices like craft are gaining more importance all over the world for economic regeneration including in the developed countries. Craft is still a living tradition and an integral part of the Indian economy. People have become more receptive to our heritage and culture. There is high demand for some of our exclusive handloom and handicraft products for individuals and for the contemporary interiors of residential and public spaces. This seems to be the right time for creating new craft-based opportunities at the village level for economic regeneration and sustenance.

KEY ISSUES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE CRAFT SECTOR

It is a pity that no serious attempt has ever been made even by the Government to bring traditional craftsmen and cottage-level technology into the mainstream. Economic decisions taken by authorities are not scientific and practical. There is hardly any investment in the craft sector compared to investments made elsewhere.

Craft was never considered for development in an economic context and it was allowed to suffer. Now the gap has widened and it is very difficult to re-engineer and reconstruct the process. Artisans have to be helped to form associations at the local and regional levels.

The immediate tasks are to provide the requisite basic education in all respects to generate confidence amongst crafts people to run a business set-up. Today's priorities include the need to:

- Ensure broad-based distribution of the national income and sustain comprehensive economic growth. Gainful employment opportunities for the masses are essential. All the decentralised craft sectors including handloom should be reorganised on sound co-operative basis.

- Attend the problems of village women in lower-income groups, which remain awful. Creative cottage industries can play a very vital role in providing productive work for women. Rathindranath and his wife Pratimadevi had created a lot of opportunities for the hapless village women in and around Santiniketan by offering them short-term training in hand weaving on hobby loom, hand batik, embroidery, kantha-stitch, artistic leather craft, block printing and pottery.

- Ensure fair economic gain. Traditional craftsmen must learn proper packaging and provide the requisite textual information on the product. A large range of artistic craft and household textile products require such value-addition to fetch better prices. This training could be imparted through short creative workshops by experts.

- Encourage in-depth research, study and documentation. This is necessary of crafts belonging to a particular place/ community, along with similar knowledge and experience from other traditions. Short-term design training is needed on how to generate new product ideas for contemporary needs from their own tradition and cultural roots. This would help the craftsmen to understand and innovate within a contemporary context and to fully utilise their creative strengths toward marketable and cost-effective solutions.

- Encourage craftspersons to be aware of how to plan new non-traditional items. Indigenous substitutes for selected imported items must also be planned, designed and produced in response to market demand. Popular demand should also be taken into consideration. Catering to contemporary needs of upper and middle class people from within the country as well as export market must be given equal priority. Finally, a product brand has to be created collectively by the craftsmen themselves, incorporating cultural ingredients. Curio-type products and traditional items can be produced selectively according to demand.

However, nothing should be imposed. It should be the craftperson's own awareness, confidence and responsibility that should decide on priorities, on what sort of strategic partnerships could be formed, which policies are needed and adopted to break the current deadlock, and to help artisans emerge as self-reliant and in control of their quality of life.

THE DREAM

In this era of fierce global competition, it is imperative to ensure that the fruits of economic growth should not benefit only the middlemen or others not directly involved in the core activity. We also need to revisit our own cultural wealth like craft and rural industries, rediscover our traditional strengths in a contemporary context, and reinvent our uniqueness for the economic benefit of the craft community.

Santiniketan craft products could remove from people's minds the misconception that craft is primitive, outdated and against the progress of a nation. Why, then, can we not bring in a new system of craft-based productivity to remove this misconception? We need to recognise craftspeople as a valuable human resource and ensure that fruits of economic growth benefit the core people who are directly connected with the profession. This was the dream of Rabindranath and Rathindranath, and it remains a dream which continues to challenge us in a new millennium.

SILPA SADANA: RE-POSITIONING ARTISANS AND THEIR CRAFTS WITHIN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

PADMINI TOLAT BALARAM

At a time when issues of sustainable development and empowerment are central to the discourse around 2030 Agenda, Silpa Sadana, a pioneering effort by Rathindranath Tagore assumes fresh significance. Set up in 1922 as an integral part of his father's Sriniketan experiment in rural reconstruction, Silpa Sadana's purpose was to train village communities in various trades, and crafts to create skilled manpower in rural settings that they could offer productive non-agricultural vocations through independent production units. Silpa Sadana's role was to provide a resource of technology and training, as well as access to distant markets. Let us remember today that all this was being attempted while the swadeshi movement was stirring and while Independence, concepts of community development through Five-Year Plans and even ideas like 'Skill India' were unimaginable dreams. Today Silpa Sadana continues to be known for its design, technical training and production activities in craft-based trades for the benefit of the rural sector. Yet the leadership Silpa Sadana once represented is in need of restoration, task that is not only in the national interest but represents an opportunity unique to this sacred and inspiring location.

THE INSTITUTION

Silpa Sadana is a department under Palli Samgathana Vibhagaat Sriniketan. It offers a 4-year course leading to the Bachelor in Design (B.Des) degree with specialisation in Ceramics and Glass, Furniture and Interiors, and Textiles and Clothing. The first two years are for Foundation and next two are for specialisation in one of the three mentioned above. During the Foundation year of Silpa Sadana B.Des courses, workshops are offered by craftspeople themselves, sharing their knowledge of tradition and materials with students. An example is the sholapith workshop where students learn the traditional techniques to make ornaments and the beautiful sholapith flowers sold during Rathindra Mela and Paush Melaat Sriniketan and Santiniketan respectively. Silpa Sadana also offers 2-year a certificate course in a range of craft techniques, materials and applications, in hand-made paper-making, artistic leather craft, batik work, handloom weaving, pottery and woodwork. For the Certificate course, the first year is a hands-on training followed in the second year by activities targeted at products designed and marketed through the Silpa Sadana emporium. Learning from craftspeople and offering training to them is a motto of Silpa-Sadana. In addition to craftspeople invited to offer workshops

(see above), short-term courses are offered to them. Extension and rural development activities provide raw material, designs, know-how and wages to craftspeople for creating the textiles and other products regularly sold at the Silpa Sadana emporium to create income-generation. The focus is on handmade products suitable for local use as well external markets: hand-woven textiles, batik, paper, pottery and ceramics, and Santiniketan's signature leather craft. These keep in mind Gurudev's ideology of self-reliance that can provide economic value through handmade products of "real use at home and commanding ready sale outside".

Silpa Sadana's current B.Des course combines knowledge of materials and methods with skills in developing models and prototypes. Craft documentation deepens an understanding of crafts that can range from traditional favourites to broom-making and to surgical instruments. Entrepreneurship development through industrial visits and internships offers insights into professional practice.

Current challenges include a decline in certificate courses due to an age limit of 27 years and a fee of Rs1250 per semester, modest by most standards yet still difficult for rural candidates from deprived families. Stipends are needed for artisans not only to cover fees but to compensate for workdays lost to the requirements of education. The quality of products brought to the Silpa Sadana shop has declined with a salary system and casual employment rather than the earlier piece-rate system, which needs revival with modifications to include benefits now restricted to salaried staff. Costing and pricing systems require greater realism. Presently dyed yarn is provided to weavers working in their villages on a piece-rate basis. Salaries of the dyer, the stock-keeper, store and shop staff etc are paid by the University and are not reflected in the costing of goods sold except for a 5% mark-up to cover raw material and labour costs. Hence Silpa Sadana seems to be selling woven goods at prices far less than the cost, a practice that may appear supportive but is unsustainable. Perhaps a more practical alternative could be for Silpa Sadana to adopt a village or two and concentrate on basic skills and a larger range of quality products that can compete successfully without subsidy. The talents of faculty, staff and the students could be utilised for this purpose, providing students with

live projects and actual market experience for both students and artisans. Silpa Sadana presently retails products only at its shop in Sriniketan and during Poush Mela. However exhibitions in Kolkata and other places are needed both for exposure and earning, while a Visva Bharati shop at Kolkata could be considered, backed by on-line marketing facilities, perhaps in collaboration with the Department of Rural Development.

DESIGN CHALLENGES

Design courses at Silpa Sadana needs to be lifted to international standards. In the current faculty mix, design faculty is inadequate, leading to vital design elements taking a back seat. Somewhere this reflects a basic misunderstanding of the difference, as well as of the synergy, between design and fine art. This confusion can seriously impact the application of design as a problem-solving discipline that demands analytical skills, technology and aesthetic as well as cultural sensitivity. A certain disrespect for design as a calling results in Silpa Sadana students aspiring to salaried jobs in government departments, unlike their peers elsewhere who today thrive in India's growing design industry. This situation can seem surprising since India's earliest experiments in design took place here under the pioneering leadership of Gurudev, Rathindranath and others.

The design history which Prof Siva Kumar shared with us yesterday was also later reflected in the contribution of Visva Bharati-inspired artist-designers and design thinkers like the late Prof K G Subramanyan and Riten Mozumdar. The hope must be that design leadership will return to Santiniketan, not just as an aesthetic but as a value essential to India's future as a sustainable and harmonious society. Today the technology inputs try to override the design inputs at Silpa Sadana. In leading design institutes, technologies are taught in a manner that supports and strengthens design education and practice,while at Silpa Sadana, the present Foundation course teaches maths, statistics and science like any other school or college. The time allotted for an important course such as colour is only for 3 days in the entire 4-year curriculum, in contrast to at least 4 weeks in the Foundation year at other design institutes. As the present 2-year foundation takes away a major chunk from specialization, a 1+3 year course was suggested in 2014 by Silpa Sadana faculty trained at NID and IDC. This is yet to be taken up.

"IN HARMONY WITH ALL EXISTENCE".

Almost a century ago Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore pioneered at his institutions in Santiniketan a system of life-centric education that could be "in harmony with all existence". Simultaneously Gandhiji boycotted the foreign goods pumped into India by colonial power and called for a swadeshi movement with the charkha at its centre. One of the reasons for both the Mahatma and Gurudev was the need to give sustainable livelihoods to rural masses so that they can work and earn in a home environment, away from the miseries of hunger and migration. Another was to preserve fast-disappearing crafts and protect great skills against the blow of cheap mass-production that came in with the onset of industrialization. Today these reasons take even greater significance in the search for 'sustainable development'. Home-level production encourages decentralisation and the even spread of populations, offering happier and healthier environments than those in crowded city slums. Home production retains skills, gives a boost to crafts, and protects artisans from turning into unskilled daily labourers. Most importantly, it encourages 'slow production', a concept now gaining worldwide priority. What do we mean by slow production and why must we encourage it? For answers we need to return to Gurudev and the Mahatma.

Gandhiji encouraged the charkha as it could be used for spinning yarn by each individual at home. Each individual produced less, but more people could be employed to produce the amount of yarn made by a spinning mill which also uses large amounts of electricity and water while adding far greater pollution. Charkhas did not need any energy or water to spin yarn. They created no pollution and could be transported anywhere, as required. People could attend to the home and enjoy social interaction along with spinning. Thus the charkha not only gave employment but delivered 'sustainability'.

Similarly, natural dyes can be eco-friendly and the use of certain natural dyes is also extremely sustainable. For example, natural indigo is also a natural fertilizer. It can be cultivated as rotational crop with paddy, while assuring an excellent paddy crop. The best part is that while extracting natural indigo using traditional extraction methods, the water used for extracting the dye is drawn to the paddy fields and the used plant can be placed into the

paddy fields for use as green manure. This is thus a zero-waste process, followed in the craft sector. Due to this reason, the author decided to document the entire process, when she realised that the use of natural indigo was stopped at kalamkari centres in Andhra Pradesh, leading on to experiments with indigo and various resist methods for the design and production of prototypes. She then also documented the natural dyes used by 16 tribes of northeast India, natural dyes used by tribes of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, and later the uses of natural indigo and resist methods prevalent in Japan, as well as among 16 Chinese tribal minorities and in other Asian countries. They were all found to be using craft techniques and completely natural processes which were sustainable and eco-friendly.

SUSTAINABILITY: THE ETHIC OF SLOW PRODUCTION

This experience brings one to issues of ethics in design. The global debate on sustainability raises a question as to whether a designer should only follow orders that satisfy markets? Should textiles and crafts be manufactured just to earn the revenue? What is really profitable in the long run? In answering these challenges, can design lead the market rather than merely follow it? Consider the water, soil and air pollution created by the dyeing industry. Presently most textiles are manufactured using chemical dyes. This has turned precious waters and the land of many states of India as well as in other countries unusable. A Chinese official of Shaoxing County, where more than 30 percent of China's dyeing houses are located, said in 2010 that "The dyeing industry has made the cloth beautiful but turned the clean water black."

This is equally true in India. In the famous printing town of Sanganer in Rajasthan, effluents had coloured the soil of the river bank and turned it unfertile, even as long ago as in the 1980s. In Tirupur in Tamil Nadu, chemicals thrown in the river turned not only the water of the river black, but the groundwater from bore-wells became dark and carcinogenic. An article published in ET Bureau on January 29, 2011 announced that 'HC orders closure of Tirupur dyeing units' and further that "The Madras High Court has ordered the closure of all dyeing and bleaching units in Tirupur, which

generates a fifth of India's textile exports. The move will affect around 720 units, employing 40,000-50,000 workers, and cause an estimated loss of Rs50 crores a day."

Such situations proliferate across the country, leading one to question whether GDP is the right measure of development? The GDP of a country is counted by the amount one produces and the revenue one earns in a year. Faster the production and sale, faster is the revenue generation. But economists appear to have forgotten to take into account that faster production results in faster consumption, faster wastage and faster exhaustion of the earth's limited resources of land, fresh water and clean air. These are not just limited. They also need thousands of years to replenish. To make products cheaper, many Indian industries are not taking care of treating effluents, thus polluting the soil and the water bodies. If the cost of replenishing the soil and cleaning the water bodies is added to the cost of producing these textiles, it would be enormous and the whole textile industry would be seen as running at a great loss. We are selling our land and water cheap when we sell products which create such pollution and irreparable harm to the land, water and air which are our lifeline. Thus ruining our land and water cheap is equal to selling our lives.

Padmini working with an artisan

As both Tagore and Gandhi understood in their swadeshi movements, change must begin in the minds of the consumer. Awareness generated among buyers makes it possible to sell eco-friendly textiles at a premium in many markets overseas. The Japanese buy eco-friendly textiles at much higher prices because awareness has spread in that society. Slow production can raise the market price of a product, but not if compared to societal savings from having to clean waterbodies, soil and air. Indeed, in comparison slow production can be extremely cheap because it delivers a healthy environment for living. The need of the day for all technologists and designers is to research and design for slow and eco-friendly production, and this must be both the design ethic and the design practice at an institution created by Gurudev to demonstrate to the world what a harmonious lifestyle really means.

In conclusion, advocating a harmonious lifestyle is a marketing challenge, just as it was when Gurudev Rabindranath organized melas, emporia and exhibitions to take crafts created at Santiniketan in those early days to buyers in Calcutta and in the world beyond. Silpa Sadana must encourage handmade products that are unique in their ability to satisfy the demands and needs of users, and to save materials and energy. This challenge must be met with inputs that are world-class in terms of design and technology, shared alike by both artisans and design students. Elsewhere in India, trained and educated artisans are flourishing. To make that a reality in this region, marketing institutions of professional excellence will be indispensable to the great task of education that returns artisans to the centre of human development and honours Tagore's legacy of commitment to life-centric learning that is “in harmony with all existence”.

COLLABORATION TOWARD CRAFT RELEVANCE: THE BANDHEJ STORY

ARCHANA SHAH

I have been working in the craft sector for over 30 years and will share a few of my experiences, and how these might relate to the transition between craft tradition and our times.

I studied at the National Institute of Design (NID) where I developed a fascination for Indian textiles and traditional craft skills. Soon after graduation, I decided to pursue this interest by collaborating with craftspeople to develop a range of contemporary textiles products for an urban market using handcrafted skills. So many years ago, Ranbindranath Tagore did the same at a time so different from my own, and yet the challenges within the sector of craft relevance and craft livelihoods remain the most critical today.

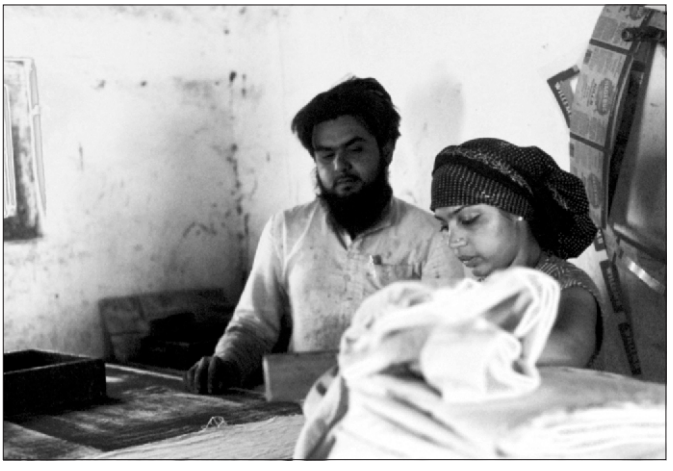
In the initial years, I travelled to remote corners of the country to study and understand the vast variety of weaving, dyeing, printing and embroidery skills practiced by artisans. I discovered that each region offered its own unique skills, distinctive colour palettes and motifs. This was an enriching journey and has had a great influence on my visual language and design practice. In many ways this exploration became the base for my future work.

During this journey, I had the opportunity to interact closely with many artisans, often spending days at their homes and workplaces. This association and close observation of their production processes helped me understand the nuances of what they created. Early on in my interactions, I realized that it would be best to work within the constraints of a craft technique, of skills known to the artisan instead of imposing my own ideas and trying to change their ways of production.

In the past, the artisans understood their patron. They created textiles of great beauty commissioned by royalty and rich merchants or for religious institutions and for the export market. Later, they lost this patronage, and now had to find new markets just as Gurudev tried to do.

Larger number of artisans produced for local communities. They were in close contact with the users and understood their requirements. By the mid-1970s, many communities had started giving up the use of local fabrics, opting instead for the cheaper mill-made materials that were flooding the rural markets, and the craftsmen lost their clientele and hence a means of livelihood.

The artisans now needed to look for new markets. The fashion driven, urban markets constantly need something new, a concept that is alien to the traditional artisan. There is an abundance of skill but applications have changed and the craftspeople can be unable to adapt to new market requirements. This is where a sensitive and responsible design intervention can become meaningful by creating new applications for these large varieties of craft skills.



Mohammadbhai Siddikbhai and Archana

One of my early experiences in the 1980's was working with a block printer in Kutch, Mohammadbhai Siddikbhai at Dhamadka, a village famous for Ajrakh, the block-printed chadors used by the Maldhari men. Initially I used his traditional blocks and colour palette to create new surfaces by changing the placement of blocks to produce a range of home furnishings. There were always a few pieces that had some printing variation and could not pass my strict quality requirement. I felt it would be difficult to just reject these prints and burden the artisan. Instead, I decided to cut these pieces into garments, using the parts that were useable.

I showed the collection at exhibitions in Ahmedabad and Bombay. Encouraged by the positive response, I started regularly ordering fabrics from Mohammadbhai, and this working relationship has continued till the present day. Gradually, I expanded this base and started working with weavers in Bhujodi, dyers in Mandavi and with embroidery in the Banni and Pachcham areas in Kutch.

In many ways, I consider Mohammadbhai as my mentor – as he had a wonderful insight and traditional wisdom about the relevance of his craft. He was far-sighted and wise to start teaching his young sons about the traditional ways of production and talked to them about their history and craft. He realized that visitors would come calling only if he adapted the age-old processes with innovations in design, and saw the value in his collaboration with designers. Today, good quality Ajrakh printing in Kutch has become synonymous with the Mohammadbhai Siddikbhai family. All three sons and his grandsons continue the family tradition and over the years the quality of their work has only improved. A craft skill would flourish only if there is an appreciation and sustained, regular orders. After the success of a few exhibitions in Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Delhi, I felt encouraged to set up the first Bandhej store at Ahmedabad in 1985.

Bandhej was started with a vision to uphold, preserve and sustain the precious hand skills and inherent knowledge of the indigenous artisan through collaborative design intervention. Over the years, Bandhej has created a distinct idiom in its design, offering a range of handcrafted, eco-friendly and sustainable fashion clothing that has an understated elegance with a contemporary appeal.

Even as the main business of Bandhej has been to design and produce a range of clothing for its retail outlets catering to an urban market, the underlying concern has always been with the diverse traditions of fabric-making and embellishing in India. Over the years we have strived to work with artisans towards building upon their skills and knowledge by suggesting fresh design directions and providing a market for their produce. In the process, Bandhej has played a modest role in rejuvenating many traditional craft techniques. Today, the large network of artisans developed over the years allows us to produce what we design. Without the dictates of any external pressures, we sell our products through our own retail stores. This sounds wonderful, but there is a great responsibility. The most challenging task has been to constantly find new design directions for the same craft skills and create fresh collections every season, maintaining quality as the scale expands.

Another meaningful collaboration has been with a Bandhani artisan Khatri Ismailbhai Nironawala, living in Mandavi (Kutch). I was able to

persuade him to educate his children, as well as teach them their traditional craft, convincing him that his craft has a bright future. Today all his sons are involved in Bandhani production.
Their education and exposure has helped them to experiment and adapt to the current market requirements and expand their business. Together with Ismailbhai and his sons, without a break, over 30 years, we have managed to create more than 80 collections, using the same Bandhani dot technique, adding new colours, rearranging old patterns and in the process, developing a new design vocabulary, without ever compromising on quality.

Mandavi had traditionally been a center for cotton Bandhani production. In the 1980s, when I first started interacting with Ismailbhai, I discovered that there were very few good Bandhani craftsmen left in this region. Little that was produced was of poor quality as the local market was not willing to pay the price. In trying to make the product cheaper to suit the market requirements, the artisans had to compromise on quality. In the mid-1990s we started a mail-order business. Bandhani outfits were prominently featured in our catalogues, and the catalogues were distributed all around the country for over seven seasons. In many ways, the catalogue helped build the Bandhej brand, and popularized Bandhani nationwide. Mandavi became known as a center for Bandhani production and merchants from various towns and cities, carrying copies of our catalogue, travelled to Mandavi to place orders.

Our intervention at Mandavi has had a rolling effect. Over the years, we have been able to revive and popularize many such dying craft techniques. Bandhani fabrics continue to retain its charm and the dyers of Mandavi have had more work than they can handle. Today, over 25,000 people in Kutch earn their livelihood from tying Bandhani fabrics.

I believe, design and marketing support can rejuvenate the craft sector. Apart from beauty and the romance of the handcrafted, production done with hand tools assumes value and relevance today because it is eco-friendly and can offer employment to very large numbers, next only to agriculture. It is most unfortunate that over the last many years, the handloom and craft production were considered as a sunset industry by some planners and hence left to their own devices, eventually to be absorbed as labour by new industries.

I understand that now for the first time we have some concrete data and the initial reports suggests the artisan numbers could be close to 200 million. The significance of these artisan numbers should provide some understanding of India's stake in its craft economy. The irony of our times is that a highly skilled craftsperson is considered less productive than a mere operator of machines. Lacking in modern education, their traditional wisdom and sophisticated hands skills are considered irrelevant. They are made to feel redundant in the new scheme of things.

Designers and craft institutions work with the established master craftsmen, and this handful of very skilled artisans now have more work than they can handle. Yet the market needs to be expanded to benefit larger sections of the craft community.

We find uninspiring, heaps of monotonous products at various handloom and craft melas. It would take the same number on man-hours to create interesting sellable merchandise. The real impact of design intervention would be perceived when quality and aesthetically appealing handcrafted products are available at handloom and handicraft fairs, providing a sustained regular income for large numbers of artisans.

Most places in the world have lost their traditional hand skills. We are fortunate. Our large variety of crafts skills are not all lost; only the craftspeople have lost their traditional patronage and therefore commercial viability – just as Tagore found a century or more ago. He knew that artisans would continue their traditional vocation only if it is financially rewarding and they are appreciated for their labour. In a time when most artisans earn less than a person working at a construction site, there seems little incentive for them to continue their ancestral profession.

I believe the craft sector needs to be repurposed to become relevant today. For this I would suggest four broad directions to help revitalize the craft sector:

- Sensitive design intervention that retains the identity of a particular craft, offering a range of products with a contemporary sensibility, suitable for an urban market.

- Exhibitions such as Vishwakarma conceived by Mr. Martand Singh in the early 1980s need to be commissioned once every few years to give new fresh direction to the craft sector as well as build an appreciation and patronage for our rich craft heritage and an admiration for our artisans. A recent Working Hand-in-Hand show at NID conceived by Craft Design Society is another good example to promote artisans and sustainable fashion.

- Create a new patronage by appropriate media promotion to spread awareness about the value of the handcrafted, offering suitable range of products to make handcrafted products aspirational.

- The craft sector needs innovative management and unconventional marketing platforms for a variety of use and purpose, from the high-end couture to massmarket, a different range of products and marketing spaces, catering to a wide cross section of customers.

For a larger impact there needs to be a clear vision and above all, political will. Government intervention would help facilitate proper raw material supply chain, access to easy soft loans, technical help and a system of monitoring impact and growth.

The Weavers Service Centers played an important role in the past and need to be revived again. These Centers helped artisans to resolve their technical problems and were information centers for new innovation in tools, materials and dyes. They could become active local centers for design innovation and technical support. The Centers could be empowered to solve craft-related problems as well as to organize exhibitions to create awareness and promote crafts within their region.

At a time when we are concerned about the health of our planet and equitable growth, handcrafted, ecofriendly means of production could have a lot of value and offer a dignified livelihood to many. We need to applaud and celebrate our artisans – the recent custodians of our rich heritage. Gurudev's mission still awaits us.

CRAFTING A FUTURE:
ELECTRIC FANTASIES FROM CHANDANNAGAR

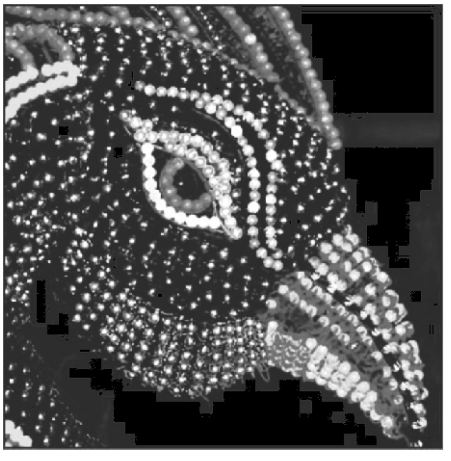
NANDITA PALCHOUDHURI

Prof Raj Kumar Konar's paper recalls the amazing innovations in craft that Visva Bharati witnessed under the inspiration of Rabindranath, Rathindranath and other stalwarts. They collaborated with artisans and with materials and techniques that were new to those times. My story is a continuation of that journey of craft imagination and of the innovative genius of our people. My story is about the illuminated panels that dress the streets of Kolkata during Durga Puja and Christmas each year, through the genius of new-age artisans from Chandannagar, a small town in West Bengal once occupied by the French. Between 1960-65, as a result of the ingenuity of pioneers like Sridhar Das and a handful of others, decorations using large electric bulbs began to emerge. They were created in order to embellish the temporary cloth temples (pandals) that house the Goddess Jagadhatri and Goddess Durga during the Dussehra festival each year. With passing years these panels have become very intricate and cleverly designed, and now occupy an integral part in the making of Durga Puja, Diwali, Christmas, wedding marquees and other festivities. A large number of contractors creating these light panels thrive in Bengal, largely centered around Chandannagar.

The panels are essentially made of a bamboo grid on which strings of mini bulbs, hand-wrapped in different coloured paper, are strung according to the design to be portrayed. These bulbs are very small and use 4-6 volts of current each. The string of bulbs is plotted one next to another, to convey simple movements as the circuits change e.g. the waving of a hand. Using this method a variety of movements is generated. The circuits are powered by an indigenous mechanism: a simple table-fan motor that turns a roller anchored by an elastic band. Each of these motors can run 4-5 simple circuits. An average panel of 4ftx4ft could use 5000-7000 bulbs.

The subjects conveyed by these panels range from floral decorations to addressing contemporary social issues and to reporting international events such as the death of Princess Diana, the 9/11 bombing in New York, natural disasters, cricket, or the football World Cup.

The first significant initiative to present these techniques to a larger audience was made in 2001 by Sridhar Das and by me as the Kolkata-based curator. A peacock-shaped boat, 7mts x 4mts x 5mts using 1,35,000 micro bulbs, was made in Chandannagar in 16 parts and shipped to London in 2003 and installed as the centerpiece for the local Mayor's Thames Festival.



It was very successfully exhibited to thousands of Londoners as it travelled along the banks of the Thames mounted on a flatbed truck. The rousing reception that this 'Bajra' received from London's discerning public prompted the Thames Festival to restage the Peacock Boat in 2005 at the London Eye, so that many more Londoners could view the spectacle. Thereafter the installation was transported to Blackpool to be displayed as a special exhibit as a part of the 125th year of the Blackpool illuminations.

As a part of an initiative to promote artisan and health partnerships, a popular 'Buladi' mascot for HIV awareness, a 9ft high and 3-dimensional animated doll, has been located at major festival locations during recent Durga Pujas in Kolkata. In the UK, arched gateways were created on the 17th century Elvet Bridge in Durham in November 2008, incorporating a local iconic design as a part of the Enlightenment Festival.

The design innovations brought in through international collaboration to enhance longevity of the panels and to comply with western health and safety issues included the introduction of electronic circuits, slotted angles and insulated wires for the framework and a knock-down design of the structure to enable economical transportation, with silica gel-filled bulbs that could be water and sleet-proof. This has led to the Chandannagar lights becoming a viable export-worthy commodity. The best practices that have been introduced through the travelling technicians have also led to the enhancement of the quality of the product in India itself and year-round employment opportunities for skilled producers.

Sadly today this artistry, based on 'tuni' filament bulbs hand-wrapped with coloured paper, is giving way to an easily mass-produced recyclable, low-power consuming LED bulb panels. A handful of artisan-technicians are still available, but without the required infrastructure they are bound to be entirely replaced by the LED technicians in the near future. What is needed is an immediate studio facility to document and perpetuate the practice of the old filament-style method and some industry-led innovations to create bulbs that run on LED technology yet have the shape and light quality of the filament bulb. These are the needs of the hour.

Recognition to the pioneers of this craft will go a long way to infuse pride and motivation to retain this 'lights' craft, and to demonstrate how tradition can become a delightful modernity.

IT'S TIME FOR INDIA'S CREATIVE WORKERS TO GO GLOBAL

NEELAM CHHIBER

More than a century of manufacturing growth has been led by a move towards centralized mass production and increasing mechanization. Rabindranath Tagore foresaw the economic, social and cultural implications of this change, which today is becoming even more profound.

Today technology has delivered efficiency and consistency, but often at the cost of meaningful work, fair wages for laborers and large externalities such as poor environmental impacts. Traditional, localized and often labor intensive manufacturing, collectively termed as creative or artisanal industries, have typically been relegated to exotic and niche status.

This underestimates the importance of the artisanal industry sector as a key source of viable and long-term livelihoods for millions across India, even as we seek to join the league of advanced industrialized economies in the world. In this new millennium we need to recall the practical value of Tagore's approach to craft regeneration, with its emphasis on livelihoods and wellbeing.

India wants to increase the share of manufacturing livelihoods from 16% of GDP to 25% in the next decade. Meanwhile, high-end manufacturing is transitioning to fewer jobs on the shop floor. The majority of jobs in manufacturing will be created by industries where human-powered, intensive manufacturing is both necessary and seen as an asset. This points to creative sectors such as fashion and lifestyle products, with a quick turnover of design, as major sources of manufacturing jobs in the future.

AGE-OLD CREATIVITY, MODERN MANUFACTURING

India has the widest variety of hand skills and intellectual property, along with 60% of the global workforce in the informal sector of creative manufacturing, which spans materials such as textiles, wood, metal, ceramics and natural fibers. (http://epch.in/projects/Handicrafts%20Final%20Report_August,%202005.pdf) Not only is this a great resource for low-carbon- footprint production, but a great employment generator. There are reasons why India still holds just 2% of global market share in this space. The lack of organized and compliant supply chains with the ability to supply at scale is key. Larger corporate players who are concerned with ethical buying are unable to engage with the scattered, largely rural skill base.

The fear of labor management has further stunted growth in the sector. There is a pressing need to view this sector from a different lens. This sector requires significant creative input and quick turnaround in design, within a relatively low cost, fixed framework of investment and production infrastructure, with a significant contribution of handwork. The creativity is embedded in stories and techniques that are age-old, but once in the hands of modern designers, can be transformed into products with great depth and vision for the discerning customer. A case in point is the intricate double ikat, tie and dye fabrics hand woven by thousands of weavers in southern, central and eastern India. Crafted with natural dyes, the weft and warp yarns though independently tied and dyed, when woven together magically reveal the most intricate motifs.

As we discuss the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) we see that across Asia, Africa and Latin America, indigenous populations can cater to modern consumption economies, out of their village production centers, using the best of modern technology and digital solutions. Globally compliant supply chains can be designed that are decentralized, as has been done in India.

Built on the backbone of financial inclusion, groups of micro-entrepreneur women can be aggregated into their own businesses that are professionally managed and can reach scale. Banks should lend to these businesses at lower rates of interest than micro-finance institutions, since collectivization and improved management mitigates risk. Partnerships with ethical buyers leads to sustainable business, reducing migration from rural areas, improving gender parity and alleviating poverty, which are all part of the SDGs. Harnessing the creative power of India's hand manufacturers will help us build a more resilient society for the future, one that can demonstrate the contemporary relevance of our precious legacy.

SHILP SHAKTI:
A LEGACY MIDST CRISIS & OPPORTUNITY

ASHOKE CHATTERJEE

Thirty years ago the Crafts Council of India (CCI) held its 1986 National Meet at Visva Bharati. Our journey then was a gesture of respect to a profoundly influential craft ethos. Perhaps we were also in search of tranquility in a year that altered history with its turbulence: the siege of the Golden Temple and injustice to Shah Bano. Gurudev's vision of an India unbroken by "narrow domestic walls" was under siege. Today, that respect and our quest for harmony is reinforced by a new need for partnership. India's artisans and their crafts are in crisis. In the struggle ahead, allies are needed.

Artisanal wisdom and skill were central to the vision on which Visva Bharati, Sriniketan and Shilpa Sadan were founded. India's craft renaissance began here, and at a distance away at Sabarmati Ashram. Dialogue between the Mahatma and Gurudev on India's craft heritage was linked to their concepts of freedom and modernity, and to the catalytic role which hand production would play in the struggle for independence. When freedom came, Nehru integrated crafts into development planning, the first demonstration of its kind anywhere.

A SUNSET SYNDROME

To succeeding generations, including those brought together by Kamaladevi Chattophadhyay in CCI, artisans and craft were as indelible as the tri-colour. Then about a decade ago, something changed. Craft heritage was rapidly becoming an empty mantra. From high places we were told that hand-made products and their makers comprised a "sunset industry". Indeed, India's global image of handcraftsmanship had become an embarrassment, akin perhaps to snake charming. Progress was now imaged as Singapore or Silicon Valley. Handicrafts were clearly out of step, and should be allowed to fade gently into the night. Artisans should look to contemporary 'sunrise' callings that embrace those Silicon Valley dreams. The shock to CCI was profound. India had demonstrated that crafts were not just beautiful products, but a strength that had helped topple an empire and had then grown in creativity to help communicate India's message to the world. Acknowledged as the second largest source of Indian livelihood, artisans also represented communities and locations still at the margins of development. To what alternative occupations could these multitudes flock? New technologies were already demonstrating models of jobless growth.

The IT industry, so ingrained in that Silicon Valley mindset, represented less than 3M jobs. If not food and hand production, what else was India suggesting as a future path for millions? Now a penny dropped. Neither the Government nor any of us had an accurate idea of the size and economic significance of the sector we wanted to protect. Without robust data, dismissive attitudes could flourish and disastrous decisions made with impunity.

In 2008 the 'sunset' syndrome brought CCI and partners together at a Kolkata conclave. There Gopalkrishna Gandhi reminded us that Government's heart could only be influenced through Government's mind. Without economic evidence, all other craft arguments --- social, environmental, cultural, political and even spiritual --- would fail. The immediate task was to demonstrate craft impact on the economy. Yet Council experience had been driven by cultural and aesthetic values, not economics. Economists were now needed as partners. Three years followed of research, methodological experimentation and advocacy. Finally, the national Economic Census 2013-14 included artisans and crafts for the first time ever.

"LIFE IN ITS COMPLETENESS"

While Economic Census numbers are under review, preliminary indications of scale far exceed the official estimate of 11M artisans. Other calculations reach over 70M, with some reaching 200M. Clarity is expected from a census designed specifically for this sector. It will go beyond the Economic Census constraint of independent entrepreneurial establishments in selected crafts. A watershed in sector awareness and action may be ahead. That prospect brings us to re-visit, within a changed India and in another century, Gurudev's mission of transformational livelihoods.

Tagore rejected progress understood as accumulating material riches. Like Gandhiji, he advocated an ethic of trusteeship: protecting nature's resources for future generations and putting people, particularly the deprived, at the centre of decisions for change. For this, Gurudev advocated an approach to education that "makes our life in sympathy with all existence". Visva Bharati, Sriniketan and Shilpa Sadan were expressions of this dream. Its endurance requires tested relevance as well as courage and stamina. Aspirations throughout our land are not just of the Silicon Valley/Singapore kind. Village communities have urban ambitions,

fueled by competing lifestyles. Contact with the earth, the element that brought Tagore to Bolpur, is being lost as countrysides decay and migration thrusts millions into urban slums in search of survival.

Hazardous notions of progress are imbedded elsewhere as well. One example emerged in the midst of CCI partnership with Economic Census authorities. The Ministry mandated to protect Indian craft issued an unusual directive. An electric motor was recommended for handlooms. The stated objective was to improve 'productivity' and 'incomes' for languishing weavers, through handlooms converted into 'modern' power-looms. At one stroke, an astonishing Indian advantage with global demand would be destroyed. Weavers were not fooled by crocodile tears, or by the powerful pro-mechanization lobbies operating from the wings. Throughout the country, weavers rose in revolt. Possibly because a national election was around the corner, this idiotic scheme was dropped. Yet the threat remains, reappearing with regularity.

Livelihoods give real meaning to sustainability, as well as to those other qualities that make craft unique as a force for development. Responding to craft threat with craft opportunity demands thorough comprehension of the values upon which Gurudev's efforts were founded. He wanted "to bring life in its completeness into villages". How can that mission be sustained within rapid urbanization and new aspirations? How can Tagore's ideal of education as 'learning by doing' be taken not just to villages but also to towns and cities? Can handcraft become an engine for self-reliance, with creativity and aesthetics making artisans job creators rather than job seekers? While Gurudev spoke more eloquently on aesthetics, Gandhiji too regarded creation as an art. For both, craft as art had to have profit-yielding livelihood at its base. Tagore wanted handmade products to have economic value "at home and commanding a ready sale outside", embracing utility with creativity and drawing for inspiration on universal sources. We need to remember this because a century later professional marketing remains the greatest of all challenges for the future of Indian craft. Hand production must be founded on systems that deliver sustainable livelihoods within change and competition.

As early as 1924 Sriniketan was conducting market studies, and by 1937 Netaji had inaugurated a Sriniketan emporium in Calcutta. For both Tagore and Gandhi, craft productivity required both responding to demand and the capacity to mould it.

WHERE 'THE FUTURE IS HANDMADE'

At the time the Council and its partners were trying to recover from that 'sunset' shock, a more pleasant one emerged from sources within the European Union. There a new slogan was heard: "The future is handmade". On enquiry, it was explained that today survival in competitive markets requires creativity and innovation. These resources and capacities are rooted in craftsmanship, as demonstrated by Japan and the Asian Tigers. Unless revived, the loss of Europe's handicraft traditions can mean sacrificing tomorrow's markets for quality products. Yet another surprise came at the World Crafts Council 2014 assembly in China. Delegates heard that a decade earlier China had identified two "sunrise industries" as essential to its dominance as an economic power: IT and crafts! The contrast with India, the largest craft resource in the world, could not be more striking.

A TRANSFORMATIONAL AGENDA

Another opportunity comes this year with the signing by member nations of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Several of its 17 goals --- integrating economic, social, environmental and rights issues --- offers an agenda for restoring Gurudev's understanding of crafts as an opportunity for "life in sympathy and harmony with all existence". The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recall the holistic understanding of human wellbeing that impelled his efforts here at Santiniketan. The Goals reflect a growing consensus on progress and modernity understood as decent lives lived in equity and justice: "where the mind is free and head is held high". SDGs offer both relevance and urgency to the vision that created Tagore's institutions.

Turning away from glitzy images of Singapore and Silicon Valley, tomorrow's dreams could be of a transformed Bolpur and of a myriad settlements just like it --- transformed if key issues are confronted with Gukrudev's wisdom and courage:

- What is the modernity India should seek in this new millennium?
- What actions can restore crafts as central to Indian wellbeing?
- Can crafts have relevance outside village societies and economies? Can Gurudev's objectives be brought to crowded urban communities?
- How can education help foster a value for crafts within today's attitudes, aspirations and priorities?
- What can be done do to provide dignity and respect for artisans and for their wisdom, and for building their capacities as job-makers?
- What collaborations can help move artisans from 'sunset' to 'sunrise', toward a future that is 'handmade in India'?

Confronting these questions and the challenges within them is the purpose of our joint reflections here at Santiniketan today.

"LIFE IN ITS COMPLETENESS": A SUMMARY OF NATIONAL MEET DISCUSSIONS

CCI's National Meet, located where Gurudev commenced India's craft renaissance, was an effort to draw strength and relevance from that history in a time of unprecedented challenge as well as of huge opportunity. At the opening event on 7 April 2016, Visva Bharati **Vice-Chancellor Swapan Kumar Datta** and **Prof R Siva Kumar** reminded the audience (see Contents) of the seeds of modern India's craft movement that were sown by members of the Tagore household in the early years of the last century, of Rabindranath's attempt to make crafts a bridge between colonial India and her past, and between the city and the village. In an era of globalization and preoccupation with sustainability, symbolized by the UN's transformational 2030 Agenda, Gurudev's endeavour takes contemporary significance which this discussion would explore. Guest speakers participated with representatives of seven Councils in an exploration of key issues and the charting of future directions for a sector second to none as potential for national wellbeing and contribution to the global goals of 2030 Agenda, to which India is signatory. Represented were Crafts Council of India, Delhi Crafts Council, Craft Councils of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Crafts Council of Karnataka, Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu, Craft Council of Tripura and Crafts Council of West Bengal. The sessions were steered by **E. Rajeshwari** (Secretary, CCI) and chaired by **Ashoke Chatterjee** (Hon. Adviser, CCI).

Invited speakers included:

Padmini Balaram (NID graduate, researcher in textiles and natural-dye traditions in India and overseas, currently Professor at Silpa Sadana, Visva Bharati).

Arunendu Banerjee (Consulting engineer, environmental designer, artist and writer. Member, Board of Studies, Silpa Sadana, Visva Bharati).

Neelam Chhiber (An industrial designer from NID, Neelam is co-founder of Industree/Mother Earth, a hybrid impact model building an ecosystem for artisanal micro-entrepreneurs promoting financial inclusion aggregation, up-skilling, design, enterprise incubation and acceleration made possible through links to capital and markets).

Raj Kumar Konar (Associated with both Silpa Sadana and Visva Bharati, Raj Kumar studied at Industrial Design Centre (IDC), IIT Mumbai and taught Industrial Design at NID in the 1980s. Participated with the late Raghunath Goswami on the design of the Permanent Gallery on the life of Rabindranath at Rabindra Bhavana, Santiniketan, and other projects in the region)

Nandita Palchoudhuri (Cultural and craft activist, curator and researcher based in Kolkata).

Archana Shah (NID graduate who has collaborated with artisans to create textile products for an urban market, Archana established Bandhej, a renowned label influenced by craft traditions. She is the author of Shifting Sands – Kutch: A land in transition).

Reflections on the theme of these discussions have also drawn on papers contributed by **Tanishka Kachru** (Associate Senior Faculty, NID, Ahmedabad), Ashoke Chatterjee and **Samit Das** (artist and author, New Delhi) on the role of exhibitions in issues of national identity between 1850 and 1947, the Bauhaus exhibition in Calcutta in 1922 that was facilitated by Rabindranath Tagore and Stella Kramrisch, and the architectural idioms created by Tagore and his associates at Santiniketan. (See Annexes)

The Seminar

SESSION I

Launching the proceedings, Ashoke Chatterjee (AC) recalled the guidance which this gathering had received at the opening ceremony from Vice-Chancellor Prof Swapan Kumar Datta toward understanding Tagore's vision and the foresight with which he had anticipated so many of the crises that now beset humankind. Prof R Siva Kumar had provided an overview of how that vision had been translated through Visva Bharati into an educational philosophy and pedagogy, within which artisans and crafts were catalysts in an integrated understanding of nature, livelihood, social and cultural identity, and a self-confidence that was open to the world for its enrichment. Some critical questions had arisen last evening, and participants might want to hold them in mind in the explorations which would now follow:

- Artisans and crafts are moving to cities. Is there a relevance for crafts outside the village communities within which both Tagore and Gandhi envisaged their future?

- What is the role of education in fostering the values on which craft cultures are based?

- What kind of partnership and collaborations are needed to secure the future of Indian craft?

- What skills do artisans need to become job-makers and not job-seekers? What do they need in order to be self-reliant?

To set the tone of today's opportunity as well as crisis, AC shared an anecdote from the inaugural ceremony of the World Crafts Council conference in China in 2014. The representative of the host country mentioned that ten years earlier, the Government of the People's Republic of China had identified two areas as 'sunrise industries' critical to that country's future. These areas were ICT and Craft. It was in these two areas that China intended to invest for its future as

a global power. The Indian delegation at the ceremony was astonished, coming from a land where decision-makers in New Delhi had dismissed the nation's crafts as a 'sunset industry'. The Indian delegates wondered whether they had heard right, and some even checked with the translator! This sombre reminder on the status of crafts in India in contrast to some other parts of the world set the tone for the Meet.

Arunendu Banerjee (AB) made a comprehensive presentation titled Tagore's legacy and its relevance to the 21st century (see Contents). His emphasis was on Tagore's contribution to the development and revival of traditional crafts in India. He listed Gurudev's various initiatives, including the setting up of Santiniketan School, Visva Bharati, Silpa Sadana, his literary and artistic achievements, and above all his pioneering effort to introduce a life-centred education "in harmony with all existence". AB opened with the statement that Tagore's legacy and its relevance to the 21st century were the craft products that ran through his life like rivers. In conclusion, he suggested that India's participation in the global UN 2030 Agenda for global transformation should be based on a creative assessment of our glorious legacy of Gurudev, for whom the livelihood of artisans was of primary importance and craft was an integral approach to human development.

Ashoke Chatterjee (AC) summarising and commenting on AB's presentation, made the following observations:

- To AB's statement that crafts ran through Tagore's life like rivers, he added: "Now the river is being dammed!"

- Tagore's vision and extraordinary foresight included emphasising marketing and market research. Today we know that without marketing management, crafts cannot deliver sustainable livelihoods. Yet an attitude persists in some circles that management is an insensitive intrusion into a cultural sphere, rather than an essential support to the concept of creative and cultural industries that is now accepted worldwide.

- Tagore put livelihood of artisans first. Creativity and aesthetics were seen as its driving forces.

- The link between aesthetics and design was the ideology on which institutions such as the National Institute of Design (NID) were later to be established.

- Crafts as a link to providing harmony in life is now acknowledged in the concept of sustainable development.

- The role of educational institutions in sustaining craft cultures and heritage remains key. Gurudev's experience is a reminder that today this remains a need of the hour, demanding collaborations and partnerships. While the NCERT syllabus on craft education is excellent, only a handful of schools are using it owing to the lack of trained teachers.

- Tagore wished to position artisans and their crafts at the centre of human development. His foresight returns in 2016, the year when the world community will put into action the UN commitment for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that have been accepted as a 15-year road map towards a better future, expressed as the global 2030 Agenda. Several SDGs relate directly to the craft sector, offering an immense opportunity for advocacy.

- The SDGs reflect the contribution of two economists from this subcontinent: Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq. They helped create and were advocates of the Human Development Indicators (HDIs) as a better criterion for assessing progress and development rather than traditional dependence on per capita and GDP statistics, opening the door for the concept of creative and cultural industries.

- Issues such as wellbeing, cultural confidence, cultural communities, minorities and marginalised groups are addressed in the global shift to Human Development Indicators by the UN and in its SDG thrust.

- The list of SDG objectives include ending poverty in all its forms and everywhere, full and productive employment and "decent" work for all, as well as ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns. These Goals can be used as guidelines for the future of Indian craft. With the largest concentration of artisans in the world, India should be evidence of a slogan that has emerged from the European Union: 'The future is handmade'!

- The Economic Census 2013-14 has been an important opportunity to improve the national understanding of artisans and their crafts in the economy. While this remains a work in progress, it has also raised important questions of definition that need to be answered: Who is an artisan? What is a craft? How do we count and arrive at numbers of those engaging in craft processes? Are all handmade activities to be included --- what about the making of papads, pickles and bricks ? EC 2013-14 looked at the limited list of crafts under the jurisdiction of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), leaving out scores of artisanal activities. These are now to be addressed through a separate census focusing exclusively on the handmade sector, providing a major opportunity for craft activists to support a national endeavour.

- Powerful lobbies have other agendas. An example was the recent attack on handlooms by competing lobbies. It included a suggestion to connect 0.5 hp motors to handlooms, on the excuse of increasing productivity and therefore incomes. The obvious result would have been to destroy the USP of hand-weaving, converting handlooms into powerlooms. The most astonishing factor was that this incredible suggestion was recommended by the Ministry of Textiles, which has the official responsibility of protecting and enhancing India's craft advantage. The response of protesting weavers at a national andolan was one of anguish and hurt: "If you want to kill us, kill us. But don't insult us this way". The proposal was finally shelved, thanks to intervention by the Planning Commission and activists.

- Taking on from the term 'Creative Economy' used by AB, AC added that 'Cultural and Creative Industries' are together the largest industrial sector in the world today. He wondered whether it was possible for Bolpur/Santiniketan to emerge as India's 'Kanazawa', the Japanese city renowned for its artisans, and protected and promoted by organised industry to strengthen Japanese crafts and Japanese creativity. These are respected as national assets, with a relevance well beyond handmade products. Can India re-create the Kanazawa concept for its own conditions?

- While the approaches of Kamaladevi and Pupul Jayakar were similar to those of Tagore, Gurudev's vision was to see life in its completeness in our villages. Many artisans are today moving towards cities and slums. How then do we bring them 'life in its completeness'? The need seems to be to create livelihood opportunities for people in their own locations, including non-agricultural opportunities in rural environments.

- The irony is that on one hand, at home crafts and artisans are not given the respect and priority that is their due while and on the other hand, the market for their skills and products is exploding at home and overseas, powered by new awareness of sustainability, climate change and equity.

The Q&A discussion that followed raised other concerns:

Q: The spirit of Tagore is not found in so much of sub-standard craft production. Is there a quality assessment needed of handmade products?

A: Creative economy is an inclusive economy and crafts need to be brought into the mainstream. Quality checks at every stage of the production and distribution process become essential and need to be rigorously pursued. Unfortunately the sector lacks adequate certification systems.

Q: Why did the early thought processes not continue to the present, as they are relevant even now?

A: Even in 1933 there was an exhibition of Santiniketan products in London. There were exhibitions in other places as well, including Calcutta. It was always a two-way learning process – what one learnt in Santiniketan and what one learnt from outside. Issues of consumer demand, quality and price were recognized by Tagore and his associates, and these continue as prime elements in creating and satisfying demand for handmade quality.

Q: Do artisans/shilp gurus teach students in Santiniketan?

A: AC replied that artisans have been appointed as faculty in Sriniketan, and Prof Siva Kumar had shared that experience in his paper as well as some of its constraints. Prof. Raj Kumar Konar argued that there was little respect for crafts, or for Sriniketan. This despite Tagore's driving concern that crafts get their due. Unfortunately all over the country, including at Visva Bharati, crafts were looked down upon. Even in a craft mela, the attitude is to look for cheap bargains. AC cited other instances where the artisan community does not get the respect it deserves. At an NID convocation, a government official objected to an artisan participating as faculty in the convocation procession! The renowned master craftsperson of Kutch, Dr Ismail Khatri, was awarded an honorary Doctorate in Science by the De Montfort University (UK) for outstanding work in natural dyes. No Indian university has so honoured the wisdom of an artisan.

Q: Why not ask the artisans directly what they want rather than decide what they need in forums such as this?

A: Ruby Palchoudhuri responded that she had invited artisans to take part in the National Meet. AC added that there can be challenges of translation when artisans participate, and these should be addressed. At the 'Freedom Cloth Seminar' organised by CCWB, the power of the seminar and its message came from the artisans present. Discussions can help only if the issues do not remain within meetings and are taken out as action. The need is to respond to a young generation of artisans who are articulate and know what they need and want.

Archana Shah (AS) shared the Bandhej story on Collaboration toward craft relevance (see Contents). Earlier artisans understood their patrons and created products for the élite and for the local communities and markets. By the 1970s, many communities started using mill-made fabrics, and local artisans had to look for newer markets. Fashion-driven urban markets are constantly looking for something new and this is where sensitive and responsible design intervention can be critical. Craft skills can only flourish with sustained and regular orders. The Dhamadkha collection under the Bandhej brand started 'sustainable' clothing, and has played a role in reviving many artisanal products and the skills of many villages. Design innovation to create fresh collections and maintaining quality is the most challenging task. Archana has influenced artisans to give their children a modern education and to pursue their craft tradition. In 1995, Bandhej introduced a mail-order catalogue. Today over 25,000 people earn their livelihood tying bandhani (tie & dye) fabrics. The craft sector needs to be repurposed to make it relevant to today. This requires sensitive design intervention, craft appreciation/ exhibitions to help revitalise crafts, media promotion to make handcrafted products desirable and innovative marketing platforms to attract young customers. The past impact of Weaver's Service Centres as a resource of expertise for the sector needs to be acknowledged, brought back and rejuvenated. Government intervention is necessary to ensure proper supply of raw material and to help establish pricing policies that can encourage cultivation of raw materials and their sustained supply. The concept of 'eco-friendly' demands an integrated understanding of raw material, production and livelihood issues.

Summarising this discussion, AC highlighted these points:

- As a result of Bandhej's efforts, artisans' orders exceed their capacity to deliver. This indicates what design and marketing management can achieve as sustainable livelihoods.

- Artisans need good wages, and minimum wages need to be defined for the craft sector.

- Hunting for mela bargains and the attitude that craft products should be cheap, must change.

SESSION II

This session began with a recommendation that a conference be organized at Santiniketan to honour great artisans. It could also reach out to artisan communities, helping them to understand the changing environment within which their livelihoods must now be sustained.

Neelam Chhiber (NC) made a presentation on going global (see Contents) and changes witnessed over a century of manufacturing growth that has led to centralised mass-production and mechanisation, as well as to the impact of automation in the 21st century. This has delivered efficiency and consistency but often at the cost of meaningful work, fair wages and negative external impacts such as environmental pollution and loss of livelihood. Traditional localised, labour-intensive industry, collectively termed 'creative' or 'artisanal' has been relegated to exotic or niche status. A majority of jobs in high-end manufacturing are declining owing to mechanisation. Artisanal industry is a viable source of livelihood for as many as 40 million people across India. The country has the widest variety of hand skills, intellectual property related to crafts, along with 60 per cent of the global workforce in the informal sector of creative manufacturing. These have great potentiality for their low carbon footprint and for generation of employment. Issues that must be addressed are:

- Lack of organised and supply chains that assure mandatory compliance.
- A skill base scattered across rural India.
- Entrepreneurs' fear of labour disputes can restrict scaling-up of employment opportunities and entry into what is regarded as the formal sector.
- Significant creative input, quick turnaround in design within a low cost, fixed framework of investment and production infrastructure, with a significant handwork component.
- The craft sector is characterised by openness often misinterpreted as informality. Artisans seldom have patience for intellectual conversations with customers.

- Tagore had a strong sense of process and process is critical to understanding craft methods. Process is what we all have to work with. Understanding and building process is the craft journey. It brings us to the changing face of craft. The sector cannot be the way it was before Independence. There is constant flux and change in this sector, and that is not new. Remember that Kutch weavers were originally from Saurashtra and Pattamadai weavers were from Burma!

- Two things that can be changed in the changing face of society: (a) Ownership needs to be vested in artisans (b) Creativity, which artisans have always possessed. They are used to working with customers directly. A new customer base has evolved in recent years and artisans are unable to harmonise with it. How is it possible for artisans to design a table mat without having eaten at a table? So there is a need for para-design courses.

- The Amul success story points to the importance of producer cooperatives and organisations that can link producers with customers.

- Industree has contributed through incubating producer cooperatives entirely owned by producers/ privately owned. A board of producers run the company.

- Industree Crafts Pvt Ltd has a CEO to run the company. Eighty per cent of the members of these producer companies are women.

- Self-help Groups (SHGs) are not always the solutions as they can be set up as a loose entrepreneurial model dominated by powerful (often male) entrepreneurs.

- The farm sector is very strong in India. If the farm sector decided to have 2,000 producer companies, then they have to own a brand for each of these companies.

- There is a dearth of Government funding.

- 40 years ago there was no digital revolution, which has been such a transforming influence.

- All mainstream industries need to help the craft sector - for example, can we get 1 lakh weavers on an Uber/ Ola App to give them inputs/ aggregate the artisanal community?

- SDG 17 is 'Partnerships for the Goals'. India cannot meet the SDGs without partnerships. All of us have to align with development inputs and work together.

- Our language in the sector may need to change --- use right terminology: 'creative manufacturing' instead of 'craft'!

- CCI can have a role in developing an alternative model. A 10-year strategic plan designed in cooperation with major buyers may provide stable orders, help build globally complaint supply chains, and the capacity of local artisans located in village production centres to cater to modern consumption economies within and outside India.

In his summarising comments, AC made several points:

- 'Working with the head' vs 'working with the heart' is often seen as a tension within craft activists. The presentations have demonstrated that these are not competing concepts but complementary attitudes to be integrated in craft efforts.

- If things need to change in New Delhi, the sector will require robust data to back its arguments. This is why CCI's current efforts with statistical authorities is so important.

- Like Tagore, Archana and Neelam have a strong sense of process, with emphasis on aesthetics and on quality. Setting up processes is a non-negotiable requirement. The need of the hour is to build the comprehensive processes that should attend all craft journeys, rather than continue with ad hoc interventions. Tagore's interventions demonstrated his understanding of craft processes.

- Market research is a neglected area without which it is impossible to understand consumer behaviour or to seize the opportunities of influencing it.

- The Amul example is often raised in the context of rural industries, including crafts. While there is much to be learnt from that experience, milk has the advantage of being a standard product while craft is not. No two craft products are the same, and this makes craft management an even greater challenge.

- The Industree experience highlights the concept of producer companies, finance management, compliance and quality control as well as the ability of the sector to use today's vocabulary of creative and cultural industries to demand the priority it seeks.

Other ideas emerged in the Q&A:

Q: Sashidhara (CCK)– Don't we need to have a standard for eco-friendly dyes and a quality tracking mechanism? How do we judge quality?

A: Certification efforts have been made through Craft Mark, Handloom Mark, Silk Mark etc. While these are available, their use and their enforcement are negligible.

A: NC -- We don't require any more marks. It is more important to have a process, like IKEA compliance checks. Artisanal production comes from the informal sector. Even though marks are available, who is going to do the checks? The task is to educate consumers so that they understand the craft process when they make buying decisions. The market wants greater quality. Pride in one's work should be as important as the time spent on making a product. We need to examine why so many feel that the domestic market can be given low quality, and 'export quality' means a better product. An example comes from banana-fibre baskets ordered by IKEA. The fibres were of two different colours. A creative solution was reached by IKEA– a store would stock only one of the two colours. So we need to set up our own quality parameters and strategies.

Q: AC – Exports have strong requirements of compliance. The domestic market too is becoming more conscious. Are such issues emerging at CCI's KAMALA stores?

A: Purnima Rai (DCC) -- The KAMALA experience is of product sourcing/ buying that is still relatively small and intimate. We are the interface and understand what the customer wants. The Council is the link between the artisan and the customer. An outstanding example is the work of Delhi Craft Council in developing and promoting quality chiks through innovative design, training, marketing and exposure. Today the ripple effect can be seen at every urban street corner. Chiks are being exported to UK and elsewhere. Build orders for handmade quality ! AC recalled a recent incident of visa applications rejected for Jawaja artisans invited to participate in a global craft event in Vancouver, for the reason that they had no "legitimate business reason" to visit Canada. While the Canadian High Commission later apologised, it was too late for the artisans. Yet when they were asked by their hosts how Canadians could compensate for such behaviour, the artisans responded at once. They said they were used to being rejected; they just wanted orders! In the search for a vocabulary that can better serve the sector, there was perhaps a need to also re-visit our own linguistic resources. We were challenged by this at the time of working with Government on the Economic Census 2013-14. What is a 'craft'? What is an 'artisan'? Again, it was the colonial influence that made a distinction between 'art' and 'craft' while the traditional concept of 'kala' is unifying, bringing together art, craft, engineering, architecture, music, dance, design…..or as a great artisan once explained, "Kala is everything that lifts the quality of human life and is of a standard fit to be offered to the gods".

SESSION III

The session began by revisiting the four key questions raised at the opening session.

Padmini Balaram (PB) spoke on Silpa Sadana as repositioning artisans and their crafts (see Contents). This was an account of the history, ideology, objectives, courses offered, products and activities of the institution. Padmini made a strong point urging the protection our fast-disappearing crafts and skills from being swamped by mass production. To this end, she emphasised the importance of home-level production, which helps decentralisation, creates a happier work environment, retains skills and gives a boost to artisans instead of turning them into daily labourers. Strongly advocating

'Slow Production', she cited its merits of being amenable to energy conservation and waste minimisation: Slow Production = Saving in Cleaning = Healthy Environment. She indicated the need to promote research and design for slow/eco-friendly products. To reinforce her argument, she asked whether GDP was the only measure of development, asserting that faster production resulted in rapid consumption and exhaustion of resources. Giving the example of the closure of the Tirupur dyeing units, she also called for the inculcation of design ethics, pointing out that profit in the long run was rendered futile by the huge costs of cleaning up pollution of water, soil and air created by industry. Advancing the idea of enhancing quality instead of cutting prices, she proposed educating consumers to accept eco-friendly textiles at higher prices as a way of promoting protection of the environment and natural resources. The chair then suggested careful understanding of these issues of slow production and pollution control in a sector that promotes itself as 'green', through examination and reform of craft processes that can lead to pollution. This would help sustain the 'green argument' for the sector.

Raj Kumar Konar (RK) followed with his historical perspective on craft activities at Visva Bharati (see Contents) which developed on the overview of Tagore's efforts at craft/artisan-centred education shared at the National Meet opening by Prof R Siva Kumar. RK analysed the history of craft within the larger history of Visva Bharati, and of the elements in Tagore's legacy which have had such a lasting impact on the nation. Highlights from the presentation included:

- Practice as an integral part of innovation is basic to the educational philosophy at Silpa Sadana and at Sriniketan.

- The challenge Tagore faced as craft production declined in the face of imports and colonial influences.

- Tagore's ability to draw on many disciplines and sources, including architecture and industry. He brought in experts from various fields. The influence of Japan was significant as Japanese master craftsman Kim Taro Kasahara taught woodcraft and initiated a culture of 'environmental design' through landscaping in Santiniketan. Craft was linked to core issues of education, health, shelter and livelihood.

- Tagore introduced and integrated the performing arts – music, dance and drama – not previously included in Indian school education.

- Training programmes were by apprenticeship. He tried to remove caste distinctions and to inculcate a respect for the hand through a mix of artisans with other professionals and learners.

- Tagore was fascinated by products and production processes, which encouraged India's first experiments in industrial design and first contacts with the Bauhaus influences that were spreading in Europe and North America. When Gurudev saw an interesting product, his instinct was often to try and replicate it!

- Tagore felt a craft product cannot be replicated in its entirety as there will always be a variation. He thus understood the fundamental USP of craft marketing: the sense of an exclusive product, one of a kind, offering a customised solution to the buyer that should command both respect as well as a fair price.

- Happiness of the people and economic growth were the twin and integrated objectives, not competing concepts. Today, the SDGs reflect that early wisdom rooted here in Santiniketan over a century ago.

The discussion which followed took up the implications of sustaining the integrity of Gurudev's vision as craft training and design education proliferate, and caste biases seem to deepen. The challenge to institutions is whether that openness to innovation, teamwork and multi-disciplinarily can be sustained within the rigid UGC framework of degree-granting institutions. This challenge remains at Visva Bharati and Silpa Sadana of retaining the integrity of the Tagore legacy, and at every institution which seeks inspiration from that legacy.

Nandita Palchoudhuri (NP) spoke of crafting a future (see Contents) through embracing non-traditional technologies with a new understanding of both 'tradition' and of India's innovative and creative skills. Her presentation on Chandannagar light-makers focused on taking a 'new' craft and aesthetic based on electric

bulbs and wiring systems to events and opportunities within and outside India. In Chandannagar, a suburb of Kolkata and the former French colony of 'Chandernagore', these lights are created with ordinary filament bulb clusters wrapped with coloured paper, plotted on bamboo strips, and motor-powered to create a an animated spectacle of lights in motion.

Familiar at urban festivals in Bengal, the craft represented an enormous unused talent bank. The challenge was whether it could be replicated. Nandita's first effort in promoting this craft was the creation of animated story-telling light panels at Belfast Queens Gallery in England. After the Belfast exhibition, where the story of the Ramayana was brought to life with these lights, the Mayor of London commissioned a 3D work on the theme of the journey connecting the Caribbean to India. This project brought about its own challenges in terms of materials to be used that could be acceptable under stringent compliance regulations abroad. These problems were overcome, the panels dismantled, packed, shipped and tested at site, and introduced with proper power distribution and earthing systems. These and other projects proved to be a life-changing experience for artisans, even more important for them than the income that the experience provided. Other innovative ideas included using the traditional shola craft to make backdrops at weddings or office dividers, a 3-year Pattachitra project on HIV-AIDS awareness, setting up a Artisans Chamber of Commerce as a pilot project, English teaching modules for artisans distributed by mobile apps, and cooperation with Switzerland to study the decline of handmade products with those engaged in studio production. Each of these efforts has mirrored the openness to change and innovation that marked Gurudev's approach to making crafts relevant in new circumstances.

They have underlined India's lack of R&D funding for the sector that can encourage new ways of applying traditional attitudes and skills in altogether new circumstances. Nandita felt that often artisans are made to feel that they feel they are only tools of production, rather than co-creators that can be given the appreciation which was the goal of Rabindrantath, Rathindranath and of others who took inspiration from their approach.

AC commented that these experiences, from chiks and textiles to electric lights, demonstrated the relevance of traditional skills when

applied to contemporary need. Would Visva Bharati and Santiniketan be the right space to honour this confluence of tradition and modernity? Perhaps no other place represents India's craft ethos with the same immense power. There are of course other institutions that have made huge contributions such as Kalakshetra, NID, the Weavers' Service Centres, and NGOs throughout the land. Yet here the memory of Gurudev offers a towering inspiration, and the understanding of how crafts represent not just products but human and natural eco-systems.

Archana's book 'Shifting Sand' talks about the transformation that is taking place in rural Kutch – transformation of aspirations, opportunity, threat and impact of all that on craft communities. It is not just about preservation of one region or one craft, but of an entire eco-system that is present in these areas. A telling example is the craft of copper bells in Kutch, now popular at every craft mela in the country. Yet in Kutch these bells were created for a special breed of cattle that go out to graze at night. Each bell has a different sound, enabling the owner to identify his animals in the dark or at dawn. Industrialisation is removing the grasslands that this breed of cattle requires. So what would be the significance of the bell-craft if the cattle and the grasslands become extinct? Possibly each of the crafts we work with has a similar dependent eco-system. Do we need to be sensitive to these connections? They are what Tagore understood long before our time. It brings us to Padmini's reminder of slow consumption and slow production that respect both the user and the earth. The sensibility we need is therefore not just about products but to the processes of creation to which Neelam drew repeated attention.

In the Q&A that followed, participants suggested that the Channdanagar light craft be celebrated at Santiniketan, including the challenge those artisans now face with the introduction of LED bulbs. As many found the idea of 'Artisan Chamber of Commerce' interesting, Nandita intervened to say that it was a cooperative of artisans, sellers and others interested in their products. Others pointed to the need to provide training in understanding sources of raw material, merchandising, packaging, computer skills and English. A proper system of costing and pricing this artisanship is needed. Perhaps a Chamber could function like other Chambers of Commerce but with a focus on helping artisan communities. Marketing strategies needed new ways of thinking. For instance the

poetry of Pattachitra could be provided along with the craft product in the form of a CD that brings the performance dimension alive. Other options to explore could include locating 'mentors' for artisans and 'crowdsourcing' for assignments and for fund-raising.

In a concluding summary, AC underlined these points for follow-up:

- The creation of 'Artisan Chambers of Commerce' as a support mechanism.

- Language and computer skills made available as essential capacities to artisan communities. Today a large proportion of new retail solutions are based on e-commerce, and command of basic English becomes a necessity.

- While not every artisan wants to become an entrepreneur, there are many young artisans who do. They require training in marketing management. How can we empower these communities with management knowledge that also respects their cultures and skills? There are interesting attempts such as NID's craft incubation centre, IIM (Ahmedabad) has a new programme for incubating 'luxury crafts' and there is a new 2-year Masters Programme in Heritage Management at Ahmedabad University. These represent resources which then need to be tailored to suit artisan communities.

- Courses tailored to languages and institutions are needed, while funding for such outreach is often lacking. To attract support from larger systems, local-level curriculum development and experiments in training become essential.

- Geographic Indicators (GI) have emerged in the discussions as a new marketing opportunity. While GI has had an impact in export markets (tea, haldi and basmati rice are examples) and while most of India's GIs are craft-based, to use this advantage requires marketing systems and institutions still lacking in the handmade sector. As an example, Prof Konar stated that GI for Santiniketan leather craft had helped in marketing efforts and perhaps Santiniketan leather artisans is the only community that seems to have benefitted from GI. No other GI has had full success. The GI tag brings its own set of issues. For example, many geographical areas vie for GI in the same craft, such as

jamdani in India and Bangladesh, phulkari and ajrakh in India and Pakistan. The big question is whether we should worry about the geography of a craft or the processes of its creation? AC observed that while GI can be an important marketing tool, it is the artisan who should always be at the centre, not geography or politics. This had come up in the context of Benarasi brocade being copied in China and Surat. What needs protection is the craft culture and its standards of quality, wherever the craft is practiced. Rajeev Sethi describes this as the sensitivity of 'pehchaan', or of the value systems that go beyond what GI can capture.

- Education has emerged as a critical factor and role. This can include:

- Craft appreciation programmes in schools

- Promoting the new NCERT Syllabus which has a craft curriculum, while schools need trained teachers to impart this knowledge. Perhaps the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT, New Delhi) can be encouraged to take on this training role on a national scale, and to sensitise school administrators to the importance of this opportunity. Prof Konar had suggested introduction of creative subjects in Class XI and XII i.e. graphic design, heritage design, drama, dance etc. NCTE, which regulates B.Ed. programmes in India, has been requested for qualifications that teachers can use to teach creative subjects in school. Visva Bharati is likely to start a stream to train teachers who can impart creative knowledge in schools. Padmini had pointed to the Bachelor of Vocational Training (a combination of English, economics and design subjects) which starts in 2017. Those who finish this programme can take up Visva Bharati teacher-training programme. Sashidhara said the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) is funding a Craft Appreciation (Awareness) Programme.

  Sudha Ravi reminded that the World Craft Council had initiated a Craft Education Programme in 2009. The idea was to increase awareness and sensitise young children to indigenous crafts and processes. The programme is successfully running in several schools and the team acts as a connection between the schools and the artisans. It combines hands-on experience with

crafts, interacting with the artisans, viewing craft movies (on both Indian and global crafts) along with talks by eminent persons from the craft sector. The topics cover palm leaf craft, sea shell crafts, flower tying, tie-and-dye craft, Sungudi, and ephemeral arts like traditional kolam/rangoli.

Jayashree Ravi (CCTN) recalled her Council's craft education programme with schools in Coimbatore, where workshops have brought tribal women to teach crafts to children. The output has been showcased in the popular Kovai festival. M S Farooq (CCK) regretted that opportunities given to students for 'socially useful work' had been removed in schools. AC suggested that issues of craft education be taken up at the Business Meet session, including the need to review and promote the NCERT Curriculum related to crafts.

- Careful attention is needed to the issues Prof Siva Kumar had raised in his opening address the previous evening, which recalled experiments in art education at Santiniketan led by Nandalal Bose. These had attempted to create perceptive 'artist-craftsmen', and the need today is for 'artist-designers' who can help artisans to innovate and to survive in a changing world without losing the context within which traditional practices have grown and operate.

The discussions concluded with an appreciation of so much that now lay ahead. The wide canvas that had been covered by these reflections will need thought and translation into options for action. What has emerged strongly is the relevance of the values with which Gurudev initiated India's craft renaissance, and the importance today of those values and of the artisans and crafts who are the carriers of that heritage.

The challenges of sustainable development in a new century remind us that 'life in its completeness' remains the goal of all civilised societies, Within this goal is the paramount need to nurture the craft heritage which Rabindranath fostered in his dreams for Visva Bharati, dreams that resonate with the purpose of this conclave and with what it now offers to the future.

THE STAGING OF INDIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH EXHIBITIONS, 1850 TO 1947

TANISHKA KACHRU

ANNEX 1

(Excerpts from Kachru, Tanishka (2016) "The Staging of Indian National Identity Through Exhibitions, 1850-1947" in Penny Sparke and Fiona Fisher, eds. The Routledge Companion to Design Studies. New York: Routledge, 482-492).

INTRODUCTION

This essay considers the construction of a national identity for colonial India through the staging of exhibitions in India and Britain from 1850 to 1947. It looks at the use of exhibitions as part of the process of constructing an Indian national identity under imperial rule. The first part looks at the staging of colonial exhibitions and coronation durbars developed in the second half of the nineteenth century by the British colonialists to create popular support for colonial empires. The colonial exhibition provided a controlled space where objects and people were arranged to generate a narrative of empire that sought to justify the merit of empire through the presentation and arrangement of objects and people in a certain choice of settings. Saloni Mathur has analyzed the mechanisms of social control behind the spectacle of the colonial exhibitions held in Britain (Mathur 2007). Around the same time colonial exhibitions started to be staged in India as well, and a set of exhibitions of Indian art accompanied each of the three Delhi coronation durbars in 1877, 1903, and 1911, where the grandest spectacles of the British Empire were staged. It was before the 1903 Delhi durbar that Indian nationalists retaliated by staging a competing exhibition of Indian art at the opening of the eighteenth Indian National Congress (INC) in Ahmedabad.

E. B. Havell, an art educator and historian, noted at the time that the Congress exhibitions provoked the colonial administration's fears that industrial development would be given a political purpose by the nationalists (Havell 1907: 59).

The early twentieth century saw the dramatic rise of an anti-colonial movement against the British colonial government in India. It took shape in the heart of its administrative center at Calcutta and was made visible with the rise of nationalist newspapers that debated the policies and critiqued the decisions of the British colonial government. The decision of the colonial government to partition the eastern state of Bengal in 1905 was a turning point that led to a change in how the British were perceived in the country.

It fueled the Swadeshi movement which took shape around Calcutta, the colonial capital built by the British in the state of Bengal. The movement's call to boycott British goods was complemented by the promotion of locally made goods, including those produced industrially. This search for an indigenous modernity was carried out intensely in the field of art education at the art school, Kala Bhavan, with prominent Bengal School artist, Nandalal Bose, as teacher. The art school was part of the experimental Visva Bharati University, located in Santiniketan, in the countryside outside Calcutta, founded in 1919 by Rabindranath Tagore. This is the same year in which Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus in Weimar and art historian R. Siva Kumar goes as far as to suggest that they both developed similar approaches to art education which encouraged the use of craft (Siva Kumar 2012).

In 1936 M. K. Gandhi, the leading figure of the nationalist movement, invited Nandlal Bose to contribute to the design of exhibitions held during the Congress conference. It seems that artists and designers, especially those from Santiniketan, were actively involved in the process of constructing a counter-narrative through the Congress exhibitions. This chapter examines a number of questions that arose in response to the Congress exhibitions. Did they aim to construct a competing vision, or to show an entirely different story through objects on display that supported the idea of India as an independent nation? Did the counter-exhibition by Indian nationalists become a moment for exploring Indian nationalist identity formation under imperial rule? And, in what way did the interactions between the local and the global that took place through the exhibitions affect colonial nationalism and its global perception?

CONGRESS EXHIBITIONS AND THE ROLE OF SANTINIKETAN ARTIST-DESIGNERS

By 1915 M. K. Gandhi had become the leading figure of the Indian National Congress and had begun spreading his ideas on human dignity and freedom through his writings in the nationalist publications Young India and Navjivan. Rabindranath Tagore believed art should have robust contact with daily life and the environment at large, but did not share Gandhi's attitude toward

active politics and disrupting the traditional caste-based hierarchies. Partha Mitter believes Tagore may have been partly influenced by his 1916 visit to Japan, where he saw Japanese artists as keen observers of nature and designers of functional objects (Mitter 2007: 65–6). Teachers and students at Kala Bhavan were encouraged to use craft to re-connect to traditional visual culture. R. Siva Kumar proposes that they were not just artists but also "designers of various kinds, interested in functional designing and communication," (Siva Kumar 2012) including books, stage design, costumes, textiles, furnishings, and shaping public spaces. Nandalal Bose was deeply influenced by Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement and took up the spinning wheel, as Gandhi exhorted all Indian's to do, as a path to self-reliance. Partha Mitter suggests that Nandalal Bose also believed in Gandhi's ideas of equality and described his "artistic nationalism" (Mitter 2007: 81) as an attempt to bridge the gap between Tagore's and Gandhi's ideas.

M. K. Gandhi had visited Santiniketan in 1922 and had seen the work being done through the rural reconstruction program at the university. In 1935 Gandhi formed the Village Industries Association to revive the indigenous arts and crafts that sustained much of rural India, his political power base. In an attempt to educate the largely city-bred Congress leaders about indigenous art Gandhi decided to hold an exhibition of Khadi (hand spun cloth) and village industries at the 1936 annual conference in Lucknow. He invited Nandalal Bose to design this exhibition for the Lucknow Congress. In his speech at the exhibition Gandhi praised Nandalal's efforts in bringing to life the local villagers' crafts through the use of simple artistic symbols. Then, for the Congress session in 1937 at rural Faizpur he gave Nandalal the ambitious task of designing an entire township with economic, local materials to house the delegates.

In 1938 the Congress was to be held in Haripura and again Gandhi asked Nandalal to organize the exhibition, this time in a way that would allow the local villagers to look at the exhibits as they went about their work. Nandalal responded to this brief by preparing four hundred posters (wall panels) at Kala Bhavan, of which he personally produced eighty-one. He adopted a folk style for this purpose, which he was not very fond of otherwise, and embarked on a study of local villagers to achieve an authentic representation of rural life and work. Cobblers, carpenters, drummers, barbers and

nursing mothers were framed by scalloped-arches hinting at a shared Hindu-Muslim heritage. Gandhi held this up as an example of the moral purpose of art and asked delegates to study the exhibition carefully. Gandhi's thoughts on the moral purpose of art are known to have affected Nandalal Bose and some of this influence can be seen in his works at Santiniketan.

Despite his self-professed disdain for art Gandhi involved artists and designers for political purposes in the Congress exhibitions. The scale of the annual meetings grew to require entire townships to be constructed, much like the camps that accompanied the durbars, but these were made with cheap local materials such as mud, bamboo, and straw. Their simplicity and economy is in direct contrast to the pomp and splendor of the colonial durbars. Locating the Congress exhibitions in rural landscapes in a way that connects to the environment also constructs a counter-narrative of the moral purpose of local art and craft. This construction of a self-sufficient economy through the exhibition of Khadi and village industries, which Gandhi attempted to use to support the idea of India as an independent nation, was in direct contrast to the representation of Indian art and craft as a desirable commodity for trade in the colonial economy.

Gandhi's mobilization of artist-designers who were trained in the formal language of art to represent rural India suggests that he was attempting to counter the colonial vision of India given to the world and the colonized elite of India. The later Congress exhibitions can also be seen as attempts to create an alternative vision of India that could be shared by anti-colonialists, including city-bred Congress leaders and simple rural folk. This shared imagination was fueled by the exhibitions in a tangible, experiential manner to become part of a common discourse that was expressed in the narrative of the exhibitions.

CONCLUSION

The Congress exhibitions can be seen as part of the growth of economic nationalism and as a blueprint for economic revival. Congress leaders such as Dadabhai Naoroji, M. G. Ranade and R. C. Dutt, all of them intellectual children of British colonial education, provided the ideology for the growth of economic nationalism

which informed the ideology of Swadeshi. They were trying to counter the view that British rule had brought untold economic blessings to the country and that economic conditions were better in comparison to earlier periods of indigenous rule. The exhibitions were also a way of attracting capital to establish indigenous industries, highlighting the new skills and methods required for industrial production, and were seen as a way of inspiring and disseminating local innovations.

While the counter-exhibition of 1902 tried to construct a different story of Indian art and crafts, it became a moment for the formation of an Indian nationalist identity that went against the grand colonial narrative. The later exhibitions were mobilized by Gandhi's politics to create a shared vision for a reconstruction of the economy through traditional arts and crafts. The question of the impact of the colonial and the Congress exhibitions on the global perception of colonial nationalism can be thought of as aspects of the same reality which, according to Ania Loomba, helped reposition each in more nuanced ways (Loomba 1998: 209). With political action becoming more widespread in the 1940s, and the Congress becoming fractious leading up to Independence in 1947, the focus on exhibitions disappeared until the need to represent the newly formed nation re-emerged in the second half of the twentieth century.

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TAGORE AND THE BAUHAUS IN CALCUTTA: MOORINGS OF INDIAN CRAFT AND DESIGN

ASHOKE CHATTERJEE

ANNEX 2

Calcutta in the 19th century had a commanding position in the world. The city was where the British Empire set in motion a process of modernity as it was understood in those times: colonial domination mixed with the influences of social reformers and cultural critics at 'home' who were confronting the impact of industrialization. Ernest Havell was Director of the Government School of Art in Calcutta between 1896 and 1906. He was influenced by William Morris, John Ruskin and others in Britain who were advocating a return to craftsmanship as a model for harmonizing new ways of living with new methods of production. The Bengal School art movement began under Havell, influenced as well by global developments communicated through Calcutta's museums, galleries and theatres. Within this ferment, imperialism was being challenged by an emerging nationalism. Led by the Tagores, it would compete with western dominance by proposing an alternative, anticolonial modernity that would become the hallmark of Rabindranath's Visva Bharati experiment at Santiniketan.

As early as 1823 Dwarkanath Tagore had employed a European architect to help design spaces that could encourage social exchange. By the turn of the century, contact with Japan's artisans and the simplicity of their taste and design had impacted the Tagore household. Elaborate Victorian furnishings were replaced by low-height furniture designed to suit Indian habits, as an aesthetic emerged which Tagore would carry with him to Santiniketan. His was a fresh spatial imagination expressed through architecture, interiors and products that used craftsmanship to celebrate heritage, to welcome new influences and to unite all the arts in the pursuit of a holistic quality of life. Silpa Sadana established in 1919 at Visva Bharati became the laboratory for this extraordinary experiment in transition.

The year 1919 was to become a milestone in the design history of India and world, with two astonishing developments that represented kindred pursuits in radically different settings. Far from rural Bengal, 1919 witnessed the founding of another revolutionary concept and institution: the Bauhaus, established in the German city of Weimar. At this school, architect Walter Gropius began a utopian effort to unite art and design: architecture, sculpture,

painting and the crafts were to be brought together into a single creative expression, with this unity achieved through a radical change in education. Influenced by William Morris and other reformers, the Bauhaus idea was that mass production could indeed be reconciled with individual craftsmanship and artistry, that art should respond to societal needs, and that form and function were united and not distinct. Both Gropius and Tagore acknowledged the heritage of craftsmanship as a bridge between competing concepts, and between the past and the present. At the Bauhaus, artists and artisans were trained to work with industry, as Gropius proclaimed that his goal was to create a new guild of craftsmen freed from artificial divisions between artisans and artists. As at Silpa Sadana, in a search for new systems of living, the Bauhaus too became obsessed with the relationship between usefulness and beauty.

Rabindranath traveled to Weimar in 1921 and took a deep interest in the Bauhaus experiment. Earlier in 1919, while on a visit to Oxford University he met Dr Stella Kramrisch, who had closely followed the efforts of Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus and who would soon have a profound influence on India's art scholarship. Tagore invited Kramrisch to teach at Visva Bharati, where she remained for three years before moving to Calcutta University as its first Professor of Indian Art History. From there she worked with the Indian Society of Oriental Art and the Swiss expressionist Johannes Itten to organize an exhibition in Calcutta in 1922 of Bauhaus works alongside those of contemporary Indian artists.

This aesthetic conversation had a watershed influence on all that would follow in Indian art and design. The work of Nandalal Bose, Sunayani Devi, Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore and others was displayed with 250 graphic works, drawings and woodcuts from the Bauhaus: Itten, Lionel Feininger, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee were among those represented. In her essay for the catalogue of the Calcutta exhibition, Kramrisch referred to the Bauhaus manifesto to realize the "eternal truth of all art" and observed that "Whatever the result may be, this exchange means movement. Movement is a sign of life as productive; whether it is in the purposed sense or by contradiction and reaction, makes no difference".

A Study in Cubes and Angles: Gaganendranath Tagore
Courtesy: Kasturbhai Lalbhai Museum, Ahmedabad

In 2013, the 1922 exhibition and Calcutta as a laboratory of transcultural modernism were featured in a 'Bauhaus in Calcutta' celebration at Dessau (Germany). The event recalled a shared identity as experiments in education, uniting the Silpa Sadana created at Visva Bharati by Gurudev in 1919 with the Bauhaus established by Walter Gropius in the same year. The settings were a start contrast: rural Bolpur on the one hand and on the other, cube-like buildings of Gropius and later of Mies van der Rohe.

Yet both Silpa Sadana and the Bauhaus emerged as responses to 19th century conservatism through alternative approaches to education and a fresh understanding of modernity --- one in a Germany coming out of a dreadful World War with aspirations for a humane future, and the other in an India experiencing the colonial impact of that War and imagining the possibility of its own future as a free society. Their struggles would lead to the closure of the Bauhaus by the Nazis in 1933 and to the impact of the Freedom movement on Visva Bharati in the tumultuous 1930s and 1940s when Tagore and Gandhi shared their approaches to economic and political emancipation.

Both Visva Bharati and the Bauhaus celebrated craftsmanship, gave artisans a position of privilege and rejected any separation between fine art and craft: "a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist" that could create "painting and sculpture rising to heaven out of the hands of a million craftsmen…"(Walter Gropius, writing in 1919). At Visva Bharati, the painter Prosanto Roy was fascinated by the functioning of machines, including the mechanics of cycles and automobiles. He improvised on the operation of two-wheelers, radios and a range of domestic appliances while also exploring carpentry, photography and stage sets. The eclectic approach of Visva Bharati and the Bauhaus would exert a profound influence on successive generations, and on what was then the emerging concept of industrial design.

Almost three decades after the great masters of the Bauhaus were driven out of Germany, their legacy inspired the founding at Ahmedabad of the National Institute of Design (NID) under the

guidance of Gautam and Gira Sarabhai, as the first design school established on Bauhaus principles outside Europe and North America. The Sarabhais had kept contact with the post-Bauhaus movement in these regions and they, like others of influence in Ahmedabad, held the Tagores in deep respect. Among Visva Bharati talent invited to the city was the brilliant self-taught 'Tagorean' architect Suren Kar.

Inspired by India's heritage, his idiom contributed to an Ahmedabad modernity that later carried the imprint of Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn and a galaxy of post-Independence talent. In a city so open to design influences, NID would discover its own roots in the craft traditions of India. It would encounter all over again, as the Craft Councils and other activists have had to do, many of the conceptual, economic and social challenges that faced Tagore over his three decades of effort at Silpa Sadana.

Perhaps the message of these experiences is that each generation will need to re-discover the validity of craft cultures in its own time and setting. CCI has to do this today in an India within which interpretations of modernity and globalization threaten to consign artisans and their crafts to a 'sunset industry' dustbin, even as colleagues in Europe celebrate craftsmanship for tomorrow with the slogan 'The future is handmade'.

Once again, the relevance emerges of India and the West joining together in that movement anticipated by the Bauhaus exhibition in Calcutta in 1922. Inspired by Gurudev, it was a milestone contribution to the cause for which artisans, designers, artists and activists still struggle almost a century later.

SANTINIKETAN'S QUEST FOR NEW FORMS OF ARCHITECTURE

SAMIT DAS

ANNEX 3

The contribution of the Tagore family in the fields of literature, arts, aesthetics and architecture is still relevant and needs to be studied again in the context of today's globalization and the green movement. Rabindranath's experiments in education, art and architecture at his Santiniketan school are particularly revealing and interesting.

In the beginning of the 20th century the Tagores of Jorasanko tried to create India's own identity in many fields. Their contributions to the fields of literature, art, aesthetics and architecture are relevant aspects of our cultural past. Well before Santiniketan shot into prominence as a cultural arena, the family of Gaganendranath and Abanindranath Tagore, as pioneers of the neo Bengal art movement, and Samarendranath Tagore initiated the process of intercultural fusion and assimilation of ideas at their Jorasanko house in Calcutta.

Woodwork by Rathindranath Tagore at the Jorasanko family home in Calcutta, reflecting Japanese influences

Rabindranath Tagore sought inspiration both in the ancient Indian philosophy of the Upanishads and from the modern sources. At least a hundred years before the present movement of environmental awareness, Rabindranath expressed his personal concern for environmental issues through his essays. In Sadhana (1923) he writes “The West seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing nature, as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things…but in India the point of view was different, it included the world with man as one great truth. India puts all her emphasis on the harmony that exists between the individual and the universal”.

This is the primary ideal that was sustained in the architectural idiom developed at Santiniketan.

The primary school was established on some barren land in Birbhum around 1901. Earlier it was just a meditation centre that was started by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore in 1863. It had a single colonial building called the Santiniketan Griha. Later, the glass Temple or the Mandir was added. These two buildings have strong influences of design and architecture from the West. Slowly but very steadily the centre became a beginning point of the Bengal School movement. A group of very talented people -- including Surendranath Kar, Rathindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Arthhur Geddes, C.F Andrews, Ramkinkar Baij and Birendramohan Sen -- translated Tagore's dreams into reality, engaging with their work Tagore's deep understanding of the concept of space and his proposition of living in nature with minimum modification to the existing landscape. Santiniketan architecture also owes a debt to the contribution of photographers like Shambhu Shaha and Raymond Burnier.

What we see of Santiniketan today can be divided into three major clusters of buildings: the teachers' quarters and the students' hostels; the institutional buildings, and Rabindranath Tagore's many residences within the Uttarayana complex. Tagore had a liking for small constructions. We can make this out from a number of letters he wrote describing his forever longing for a little open space. If Santiniketan never had a tall vertical structure, one of the reasons was that he and his architects did not want to break the expansive horizon with a man-made vertical incongruity. The other is that the available material resources did not allow them to build gigantic structures. Around all the institutional constructions, a large expanse of open space was kept, also keeping in mind the tropical climate.

During Tagore's time Santiniketan could not afford the services of a trained architect. It was thus that artist Surendranath Kar stepped in to fill this place. Before the advent of Kar, Santiniketan architecture was devoid of any direct flavor of Indianess. Kar designed buildings which were adorned with an open veranda in front and a rear courtyard in accordance with traditional Bangla-type thatched cottages which allow space and air. Many a times the front courtyard would be surrounded by a low parapet-like structure that could be used for seating. Such an arrangement could have been an influence of eastern temple architecture or Mughal courtyards. Kar also designed small integrated quarters for the Viswa Bharati

teachers, many of them clustered in a 'U' shape to enhance interaction between occupants and inculcate a family feeling.

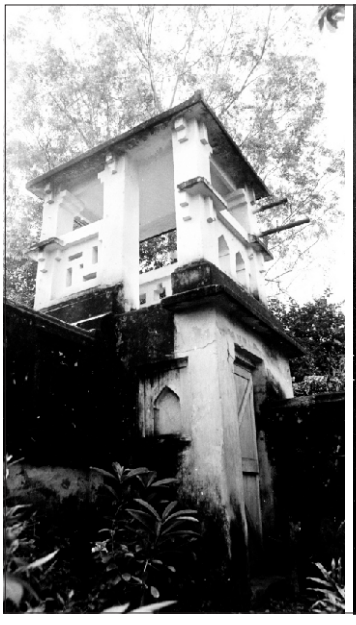
During 1918-19, with the coming in of Nandalal Bose, Santiniketan architecture gathered a distinct and a unique character of its own. This was an eclectic mixture which was immensely influenced by the ancient Brahmanical and Buddhist temples and viharas, like in Ajanta or Ellora caves, and also design influences from the Far East in the interior design of the buildings and through the use of woodwork. Not only this, Santiniketan architecture also derived much from Mughal and Sultanate architecture as well as from the local rural architecture.

In 1928, Surendranath Kar supervised the building of Simhasadana. Its architecture bears the influence of the Atala mosque of Jaunpur, with a domineering façade and an arched gateway. The building also has two ornamental gateways, with toranas that provide a unique symmetrical stability to the central building.

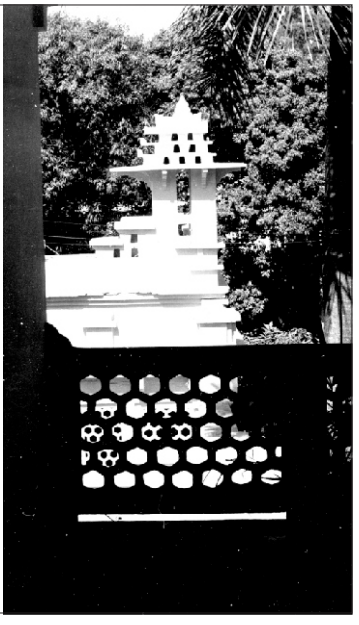
The geographical centre of the Ashram has a central open space called Gaur Prangana, essential to Tagore's philosophy. There are few buildings near the Gaur Prangana and one of them is the old Library Building, which has an open south-facing veranda, profusely decorated with frescos in the Jaipur style by Nandalal Bose and his students. Kar's architecture adapted a number of elements directly from local nature, and we can see this in the easy way he utilized various floral patterns as architectural designs, giving the structures interesting aesthetic qualities. His architecture combined a sound and pleasing design within a mould of utility. The Black House (Kala-Bari, see page 24) shows a striking assimilation of cross-cultural ideas with local building materials. Its external walls are profusely decorated with bas-reliefs from Bhahrut, Mahabalipuram, Egyptian and Assyrian motifs by Ramkinar Baij and Prabhas Sen among others.

Rabindranath never quite liked to live in the same house for long. For this reason the Uttarayana compound comprises five separate Tagore residences -- Udayan, Konarka, Shyamali, Punascha and Udichi -- along with a rose garden and an artificial pond with a built-up island with weeping willows. Keeping in mind the unhindered horizon line of the Santiniketan landscape, Uttarayana grew up gradually on a horizontal plane, in tune with the subtle wave-like undulations of the Khoai fields around.

Udayan, the largest house in the Uttarayana cluster was built gradually over a period of nine years from 1919 till 1929. The interior of Udayan is a fine blend of the Far East and the spirit of Buddhist caves. While the many pillars that support the veranda are styled as a fusion of ancient Indian cave-monastery pillars and various jharokhas found in old havelis at Gujarat, the main room on the ground floor having a wooden ceiling and interior pillars speaks of influences from the caves of Ajanta, Bagh and Ellora, while the use of timber paneling and internal wooden pillars is essentially Japanese in flavor. The set of wooden railings in front and back on the ground floor has hints of Angkor Vat. Konark is unique in a way that here the floors and the roofs are not on one uniform plane.



Chitrabhanu
Studio of Pratima Tagore



Chimney at Uttarayan

There are 14 planes on the roof at the top, and this gives the feeling of establishing contact with nature from all possible angles. In 1934 Nandalal Bose constructed a unique Chaitya-style construction, used to display artworks (Page 24). Rabindranath was so impressed with this Chaitya that he requested a similar mud hut built for his residence. That came into being as Shyamali. Shyamali has a number of bas reliefs by Nandalal Bose and Ramkinar Baij, and the

certain frontality that we find in Shyamali essentially speaks of the influence of ancient Buddhist cave architecture.

In conclusion we can say that in India, the Santiniketan style of architecture brought back a sense of Indianness, derived from a vast history of design and architecture in India. All this was in an era where many welcomed and followed the cultural hegemony of the West. The study of Santiniketan architecture is important to the understanding of Tagore's philosophy. It offers a little window into the mind of the great and many-faceted artist that Tagore was. It is important to return to the study of Santiniketan architecture and to appreciate it to reflect upon the intricacies of human-environment relationships, especially in modern times when our ecology has been so badly destroyed. Santiniketan architecture is an eclectic fusion of art and design influenced from multiple lands ranging from countries far away like Japan to local Bangla traditional households, and by multiple time periods in Indian history, from ancient Buddhist and Brahmanical caves of Ajanta and Ellora to Sultanate and Mughal architecture. It is a unique example of a beautiful blend of various cultural influences, and this blend gives Santiniketan a character of its own that makes it stand out aesthetically and philosophically. It is very important that we return to appreciating it and studying for its purely aesthetic qualities and also as a model of architecture that is in a constant dialogical relationship with nature and ecology, where man-made constructions stand as one with nature and not as intrusions upon it.

Born in 1970 in Jamshedpur, Samit Das' formal art training began in 1994 at Kala Bhavan, Viswa Bharati. Later he studied at the Camberwell College of Art (London). A recipient of the BRIC scholarship, the Pro Helvetica Research fellowship and the Pernod Ricardo Fellowship, Samit Das has exhibited globally. His published works include Architecture of Santiniketan: Tagore's concept of Space (Niyogi Books). Samit Das lives and works in New Delhi.

"LIFE IN ITS COMPLETENESS": A SEMINAR
APRIL 6-8, 2018

PROGRAMME

ANNEX 4

SESSION I

Shri Ashoke Chatterjee - Opening remarks

Prof Arunendu Banerjee - Tagore's legacy and its relevance

Discussion

SESSION II

Ms. Archana Shah – The Bandhej story of craft transition

Ms. Neelam Chhiber – Going global

Discussion

SESSION III

Prof Padmini Tolat Balraman - Silpa Sadana experiences

Prof Raj Kumar Konar – Crafts at Visva Bharati

Ms. Nandita Palchoudhuri - Experiences with Chandannagar artisans

Discussion

Interaction with students, artisans and faculty of Silpa Sadana

Wrap up - Shri Ashoke Chatterjee and Smt. Kasturi Gupta Menon

Vote of Thanks - E.Rajeshwari

CCI NATIONAL MEET PARTICIPANTS

ANNEX 5

INVITED SPEAKERS

Archana Shah
Arunendu Banerjee
Nandita Palchoudhuri
Neelam Chhiber
Padmini Tolat Balaram
R. Siva Kumar
Raj Kumar Konar
Swapan Kumar Dutta

CRAFTS COUNCIL OF INDIA

Ashoke Chatterjee
Bela Khaleeli
E. Rajeshwari
Gita Ram
Gopalkrishna
Jayasri Samyukta
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Jayashree Devineni
Lakshmi Katragadda
Meena Appnender
N Naga Ratna
Nirmala Vasanth Ch
Padma Duvvuri
Pratibha Rao G
Radhika G
Rani Rudrama Devi
Ranjana Sureddy
Rashida Vali

CCI NATIONAL MEET PARTICIPANTS

Renuku Rani
Saroj Bhojania
Sashi Kola
Sharada Aluri
Sharmila Narne
Usha Sarvarayulu
Vakula Kvijayalakshmi P
Vijayalakshmi Prabhakar N

DELHI CRAFTS COUNCIL

Kamayani Jalan
Pratiksha Somaia
Purnima Rai
Radhika Bharat Ram
Sharika Sharma

CRAFTS COUNCIL OF KARNATAKA

Ashutoshkumar
Bharati Govindraj
Bindhu Mathai
Jayanthi Pai
M. S. Farook
Mangala Narasimhan
N. Shashidhara
Padmini Baidya
Parul Shastri Poola
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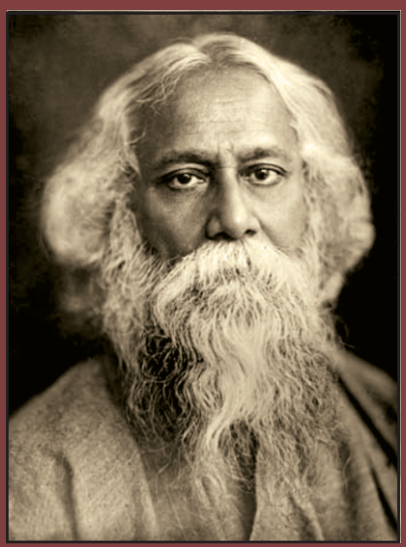
"As the tide of the times change in favour of low-energy technologies the living craft industries of India will come into their own, bringing with them hope of redistribution of wealth in society, of regeneration of nature, of freedom from market domination. Craft skills will proliferate, craftspersons and their abilities will gain respect. Lost or forgotten artisan skills, like blue-glazing of earthenware, or herbal tanning of leather might be rediscovered. Society needs the craftsperson's practical intelligence, gained from constant hands-on interaction with materials.

This will be the greatest contribution to society of a resurgent Indian craft industry[1]..."

Uzramma[2]

1. From "Crafts Show the Way for Indian Industralization", Alternative Futures: India Unshackled. authors UPFRONT 2017

2. Director, Decentralised Cotton Yarn Trust & Malkha Marketing Trust, Hyderabad.



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