PHILOSOPHY OF HANDWORK

- Religious Crafts in India
- Craftsperson as Teacher
- Craft-Socio Economic Status
- A Village Council of All Beings
TREE OF THE ISSUE

FLAME OF THE FOREST

Dhak, Palas (Hindi), Palashpapra (Urdu), Palas (Bengali), Parasu (Tamil), Muriku (Mali), Modugu (Telugu), Khakda (Guj.), Muthuga (Kan.)

The Flame of the Forest is a medium sized tree. From January to March it truly becomes a tree of flame, a riot of orange and vermillion flowers covering the entire crown. The flowers are scentless. The leaves, which appear in April and May, are large and trifoliate. When fresh they are like soft suede; thick, velvety and a beautiful pale, bronze green.

That the flowers contain much nectar is evidenced by the frequent visits of many species of birds; sunbirds, mynahs and babblers. To the lac insect it is a most important tree, providing a plentiful supply of lac.

The Flame of the Forest is a very popular tree with many uses. From the flowers a brilliant colouring matter can be obtained, which may be made into water paint or a dye. Cotton, prepared with alum, can be dyed a bright yellow or orange.

From the seeds a clear oil is obtained and the gum which exudes from the stems, known as Bengal Kino, is valuable to druggists because of its astringent qualities, and to leather workers because of its tannin. Young roots make a strong fibre which are used for rope sandals and the inner bark, a coarse fibre, for caulking boats. The leaves are used by our village people to make plates and the lovely flowers are popular with Indian women for adornment of their hair. The wood, being durable under water is used for water scoops.

The Palas is sacred to the moon and to Brahma and is said to have sprung from the feather of a falcon impregnated with Soma, the beverage of the gods, and thus immortalised. It is used in Hindu ceremonies for the blessing of calves to ensure their becoming good milkers. When a Brahmin boy becomes a sadhu, his head is shaved and he is given a Palas leaf to eat - the trifoliate leaf formation representing Vishnu in the middle, Brahma on the left and Shiva on the right. During the thread ceremony he must hold a staff of Palas wood.

The tree is a native of India, most common in Central India and the Western Ghats, but also found in the dry districts of Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab.

(Flowering Trees and Shrubs in India - D.V.Cowen).

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ABOUT THE COVER

This cover has been specially designed to harmonise the many themes that have been touched upon in this issue.

The choice of indigo symbolises the struggle initiated by Gandhi for better working conditions of those who toiled in the indigo plantations of Bihar. Indigo blue is a favourite colour for vegetable dyes and handblock printers.

The backdrop is a cotton chadar (sheet) with a phulkari embroidery design from Haryana. The simple act of spinning cotton to make yarn leads to the next step of weaving on a handloom. The cloth is then hand embroidered. Thus the evolution of a handcrafted object starts with simplicity leading to creativity, artistic beauty, decoration and celebration.

The cover evolved through the combined efforts of Jaya Jaitly and Sitt Nyein Aye.

ABOUT SITT NYEIN AYE

Sitt, 36, is a renowned painter from Mandalay in Upper Burma. He graduated from the prestigious State School of Fine Arts and exhibited widely. Sitt's nationalistic feelings began to take shape in his fight against the army which was destroying democracy in Burma. His main contribution to the cause of democracy was the Red Galon newspaper which he edited. He had to flee Burma when the army took power in 1988. He, along with several students who were fighting the Burmese cause, stayed in the refugee camp in Manipur. After that, he came to Delhi. Sitt's fight is for human dignity and a democratic future for Burma. He often projects the emotions and aspiration of Burmese youth in his paintings.

Dear Editor,

I speak for very many in thanking your team for the fulfilling issue on Mysticism in Christianity. All the articles are good, but I found Jyoti Sahi and Father Gispert's articles particularly illuminating. Inevitably, I want to know more.

I am doing doctoral research on Ethel Wilson, a Canadian writer, from the standpoint of Indian philosophy. She believes in the way of 'works' and in getting 'involved' with the 'other' as 'we' are the other. Therefore feel that the information on Liberation Theology was relevant to my research. I would like to know whether Dr. Sauch's Ph.D dissertation on Ananda has been published and is readily available.

I also loved reading Jyoti Sahi's sensitively written article, Designing Spaces. Has Sahi Ji written any brief article on Indian Christian culture?

It would be lovely to meet all the wonderful people who write for THE EYE, including, of course, Malcolm Baldwin, one of your regulars. Could you attach a bibliography at the end of every article, so that one can explore on one's own?

Many of my bright, young students enjoy THE EYE. My best wishes to the team!

Anjali Bhelande, 
Lecturer, English Dept. 
Ruia College, 
Bombay

Dear Reader,

We need more letters from you! THE EYE invites your reactions, comments, suggestions, criticisms and opinions. This written-word movement will cease to be one without your response. Well written, interesting and thought provoking letters will be published. Send them in to THE EYE, 39 Anand Lok, New Delhi-110049

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When governments become monolithic and overcentralised, the first victims are small communities which have derived their strength from their self-sustaining characters. These communities have broken down over the years and find themselves looking increasingly at our centralised structures of power for political, social, economic and moral definitions.

From these small communities, dotted all over the country, come our artisans who produce not only functional things with the highest aesthetic merit, but who fashions his tribute to the undying spirit in every conceivable material. That handwork, under the new global mechanisation agenda, stands threatened, is something we cannot afford to ignore.

This issue on crafts and handwork tries to go beyond the 'beautiful object' to the person behind it. The different articles deal with the linkages of craftsmanship to agriculture, local industry and economy, architecture, education, the arts and moral values. Once again our contributors have been lavish with their time and energy.

But first, we acknowledge our gratitude to Jaya Jaitly, a friend of this issue and also its Guest Editor. Without her sensitive help this issue would have been all the poorer.

Let us bring handwork back into our lives. By doing so, let us remember that we are in effect helping at least one precious craftsperson from being reduced to an unskilled slum dweller or preventing a starvation death. Let us collectively play a role in influencing the market forces that threaten to wipe him out. Let us try and understand the philosophy of handwork.
Technology is the most powerful spearhead of cultural change. And when we try to define what culture is, we find that it is all pervasive, a way of life, and yet nothing we can really grasp or delineate. With the introduction of an 'international' model of development and its attendant gadgetry, our entire way of life subtly changes.

However, some things in India do not change at all. The crafts of India - handmade items of domestic, social and religious utility are transfixed in a strange paradigm. While the Rig Veda and the Code of Manu divided Indian society into categories according to professional calling, they also unfortunately graded it on the basis of caste hierarchy according to social status - high and low, auspicious and untouchable, superior and inferior. The craftsperson is at once guided by Vishwakarma, the universal deity of all artisanal activity and at the same time immobilised him within this caste system. He nurtures and preserves the finest skills, techniques and forms, yet never benefits from the advances in learning that are accessible to the upper castes. Nor have they ever had a share in the power structure to control their economic advancement.

Today, in the new climate of economic reforms and liberalisation, a renewed western thrust with its mechanised synthetic culture is sought to be cloned to our way of life which is of infinite variety. Instead of releasing the latent energies of the vast numbers of our traditional rural producers, we keep turning elsewhere for the keys to progress.

The traditional craft sector is not just a small island of emporia, bazaars and melas. After the farm sector, its practitioners constitute the largest number of self-employed people. They can create huts and palaces, agricultural implements, fabric and clothing, footwear, vessels and utensils, tools for hunting or fishing, containers for packaging and transporting, toys for fun and learning and innumerable objects of ornamentation for decoration. They use the least energy, infrastructure and raw materials. They bear their own training costs. Most important of all, village crafts and industries provide creative and dignified employment to the mass of our people. Employment, which at the same time, encompasses the myriad streams of heritage which is typically Indian. In whatever field of study or work we may be engaged in, there ought to be a place for our crafts. The windows of possibility open here.

Jaya Jaitly
Vishwakarma is the executor of a thousand handicrafts, the carpenter of the gods, the fashioner of all ornaments, who formed the celestial chariots of the deities, on whose craft men subsist, and whom, as a great and immortal God, they continually worship.

THE MAHABHARATA
SEEING & KNOWING

From the Zen State of mushin (no mind) springs the true ability to contact things directly and positively

SOETSU YANAGI

Seeing and knowing are often separate. Nothing could be more admirable than when they coincide, but only too often they remain estranged. In some fields this does not matter, but in the areas of aesthetics or art history or the like, any gap between perception and knowledge assumes fatal proportions. This is an obvious fact that is too frequently overlooked. Similar cases are common in other fields as well.

The critic of religion, for example, who has no religious feelings has no force in his criticisms. In the same way, the moralist who does not live by his theories carries no weight, however brilliant he may be. I know many famous art critics who have no feeling of beauty, and I cannot therefore respect their knowledge. They may be learned, but it avails nothing; it is the same with philosophy and history. The student of philosophy and the philosopher should be distinguished; a person who knows a great deal about history is not necessarily a historian.

Doubtless many would reply that intuitive perception of beauty is incomplete without learning, that without knowledge one does not see a thing as a whole. Socrates saw the identity of action and knowing. To see and at the same time to comprehend is the ideal, but in practice we are far removed from this unity. The things to be seen and the knowledge to be gained have so vastly increased in this modern age that man’s activities have been pushed either into one direction or the other. But of the two, those forced into the field of knowledge are in the worse position as far as beauty is concerned.

To be unable to see beauty properly is to lack the basic foundation for any aesthetic understanding. One should refrain from becoming a student of aesthetics just because one has a good brain; to know a lot about beauty is no qualification. Seeing and knowing form an exterior and an interior, not a right and a left. Either way, they are not equal. In understanding beauty, intuition is more of the essence than intellectual perception.

The reversal of these two faculties nullifies vision. To ‘see’ is to go direct to the core, to know the facts about an object of beauty is to go around the periphery. Intellectual discrimination is less essential to an understanding of beauty than the power of intuition that precedes it.

Beauty is a kind of mystery, which is why it cannot be grasped adequately through the intellect. The part of it available to intellect lacks depth. This might seem to be a denial of aesthetics, but it is as Aquinas said: “No one shows such a knowledge of God as he who says that one can know nothing”. Aquinas was one of the greatest minds of medieval times and knew well how foolish his own wisdom was in the face of God. No one could rival the wisdom with which he acknowledged the poverty of his own mind. Though he is renowned as a theologian, he was surely still greater as a man of faith; without that fact he would have been a commonplace intellectual.

He who only knows, without seeing, does not understand the mystery. Even should every detail of beauty be accounted for by the intellect, does such a tabulation lead to beauty? Is the beauty that can be neatly reckoned really profound? The scholar of aesthetics tends to base his ideas on knowledge or rather, he tries to make seeing proceed from knowing. But this is a reversal of the natural order of things.

The eye of knowledge cannot, thereby, thereby see beauty. What is the beauty that a man of erudition sees as he holds a fine pot in his hands? If he picks a wild flower to pieces, petal by petal, and counts them, and tries to put them together again, can he regain the beauty that was there? All the assembly of dead parts cannot bring life back again. It is the same with knowing. One cannot replace the function of seeing by the function of knowing. One may be able to turn intuition into knowledge, but one cannot produce intuition out of knowledge. Thus the basis of aesthetics must not be intellectual concepts. For this purpose all the classification in the world avails nothing, and the scholar does not even become a good student of aesthetics. There are so many whose voices invariably rise around works of art, trying to pin them down in neat categories, always preceeding the verification of beauty with such question as “who made it, when, and where”. The recognition of date and school, etc. is a matter of pride for them. They are intensely ashamed of leaving any mystery unaccounted for in their explanations. This is com-
monly referred to as the "academic conscience". In fact, I suspect it is because they have not better work to do, or cannot do it properly.

The man in the street is hoodwinked, he thinks he is being informed by a man who really does know everything. Should we apply the adjective "good" to such critics and art historians? How their writings on art are flooded with exaggerated and strained expressions. They use words, too, in remarkable numbers. They cannot suggest beauty without great heaps of adjectives.

When the power to see does not accompany the power to know-when the power to see is blunted- art historians, critics, and collectors all fall into the same kind of confusion. Even assuming that they correctly praise beautiful things, they will also, without fail, praise the ugly as well. This shows that ultimately, they are not even prizing the beautiful for the right reasons. Their blurred eyesight is incapable of distinguishing beauty and ugliness. They have not grasped the yardstick of beauty. They study things that have no place in history and cheerfully rank the good and bad side by side. They have no sense of values, when they are right, they are right by luck. Beauty is essentially a matter of values; if values are confused, if there are no standards, if valueless things are admitted among the valued, judgements of beauty lose their basis.

The number of collectors of art in the world is constantly increasing, but there are few whose perceptions are developed enough to gather various types of art together with uniformity of standard and taste. This is undoubtedly due to the foot-rule approach that I am decrying. As great an importance is placed on secondary issues, for example the idea that because something is expensive it is necessarily good. It may be rare, or unblemished, or be inscribed with the name of a famous artist, but these are all tradesmen's arguments or tactics, after all, and have nothing to do with beauty. These good people are deceived in this way because they have not got eyes to see with. If they had, they would not be concerned with rarity, perfect condition, or former ownership. There is no real point in collecting unless for the sake of beauty, nor is it truly possible for those who cannot see, for if they

Jar, Stoneware, Karatsu, Saga Prefecture, Seventeenth Century.

To look at the question from a different angle, seeing relates to the concrete, knowing to the abstract. Let us say that we have a painting by Tawaraya Sotatsu in front of us: it is an object that the eyes see and research, and to which one’s heart can respond, but the knower with the foot-rule is immediately busy with a dozen questions as age, authenticity, previous ownership, technique and the like. These secondary and circumstantial matters are all very well only if they lead to a better appreciation of Sotatsu’s painting. Without such appreciation all the knowledge in the world will take one nowhere. Thereby it becomes clear that both to see and to know is best, but that in any case seeing comes first. See first and know afterwards.

Seeing is a born faculty. Knowledge is acquired. To a point, anyone can acquire knowledge, but the potential of seeing is born with us, although some are more gifted than others, it is generally accepted that the musical or the artistic gifts are born with us and that there is nothing to do about it if one is not so fortunate. The gift of seeing is of the same order. This leaves the ungifted forlorn. I would like to give them three pieces of advice.

First, put aside the desire to judge immediately; acquire the habit of just looking. Second, do not treat the object for the intellect. Third, just be ready to receive, passively, without interposing yourself. If you can void your mind of all intellectualization, like a clear mirror that simply reflects, all the better. This nonconceptualization-the Zen state of mushin ("nomind") may seem to represent a negative attitude, but from it springs the true ability to contact things directly and positively.

Soetsu Yanagi was born in 1898 and died in May 1961. During the seventy two years of his life, he founded the Japanese craft movement and the Japan Folkcraft Museum in Tokyo. Yanagi immersed himself in Christian mysticism in his early days. Slowly his thoughts turned eastwards and he began to search his way through Buddhist thought, mainly Zen. Yanagi finally found his truth through pottery and also wrote extensively on aesthetics in art. Yanagi was one of Japan’s most respected Craftsmen - scholars.
THE PHILOSOPHY OF
HANDWORK

JAYA JAITYL

In a quiet corner of Hakone, a weekend resort in Japan, is the Pal Shimonaka Memorial dedicated to the friendship between India and Japan. Yasaburo Shimonaka began life as a potter, and went through life as a philanthropist and a widely respected leader of the publishing world. Dr. Radhabinod Pal represented India as a judge on the Far East International Military Tribunal. A firm believer in Vedanta, he resolutely upheld the integrity of the law. Along with Shimonaka he did much to bring to bear on Japan the teachings of Gandhi. So influenced was Shimonaka, that at the age of eighty two, he went back to making pottery, believing that this was one of the ways to re-establish ‘the Dignity of the Eastern Mind’.

The very basis for any philosophy has to be a moral one, quite unlike a proposition which may be a framework of arguments doing little to raise the moral and spiritual condition of man. The value of handwork, at best, has been placed in the category of the latter and at worst, been relegated to a sectional position within the ‘also ran’ economic alternatives of the past five decades. Yet, if we stand back a little and observe the panorama over which it presides and the range of luminaries who have subscribed to this philosophy, whether the immediate concern was economic, social, artistic or spiritual, we will find that handwork is one of the most potent outer manifestations of a composite philosophy. Thus the simple charkha (spinning wheel) became the single most powerful symbol of the freedom struggle of India.

The leitmotif of Gandhi’s philosophy was that ‘the supreme consideration is man’. This did not mean the individual, egocentric, self-centered man, but the single thread of consciousness that links man’s activities with the Creator who is after all a creation of the mind. If one sees a craftsperson at work one will see this very process in operation - the spiritual process of linking the highly individual inner self to the movements of the hand, to the needs of the community and the larger web of society, to connect with the world and the cosmos.

What is paradoxical about the creation of community products through the hand skills of individuals is the manner in which the craftsperson places the creativity of the entire self into community art - that is, something which results in the effacement of the self. There are no gimmicks or
personalised specialities or even flourishes of signature. Painting of religious themes on walls or on cloth was always considered a mode of worship. In India, craft is a community industry performed for community service, and the intention is for its wide use rather than its wide appreciation or recognition of the individual maker. And yet, each is a piece unto itself - the creation of a unique pair of hands.

Gandhi believed in the indivisibility of truth; therefore, to injure or exploit another was akin to doing violence to one’s own soul. The economic implications of this is that it is morally necessary to provide sufficient work for everyone to be able to feed and clothe oneself and the family. For everyone to be provided with work that maintains equally the dignity of the human being, it is necessary, according to Gandhi, to place intellectual labour on par with physical labour. Going a step further, he suggested that sound educational practice, namely, the combination of knowledge and handicrafts, or what Plato called ‘music and gymnastics’, is in effect, sound social practice. The sacramental nature of any work through which we identify with the poor and therefore the whole of mankind, was the philosophy of mankind itself. And the best example of its realisation was the spinning wheel. It sounds simplistic but unless philosophical and moral concepts are rooted to concrete action, they remain just so much hot air. After all, was not the simple gesture of grasping a handful of salt enough to electrify the meaning of freedom?

The steamroller effect of mechanisation and the Industrial Revolution pauperised the Indian handloom weaver in favour of Manchester and Lancashire textile mills. Now with the second onslaught in the form of multinational corporations and their high tech methods of production, it is illusory to presume that our illiterate and impoverished craftpeople will have access to skills which would help them to be absorbed in these workplaces. As for the highly skilled and artistic craftperson, it can surely be no credit to modern civilisation that he should now resort to punching a computerised machine. Machines should obviously assist people in their own skills rather than displace them. Here it is that Gandhi’s philosophy of handwork becomes relevant, where the work does not degrade or dehumanise but shows concern for the quality of life of ordinary people.

Theories of industrial production and employment have always presumed that it was the chosen few who owned the means of production and it is

As for the highly skilled and artistic craftperson, it can surely be no credit to modern civilisation that he should now resort to punching a computerised machine. Machines should obviously assist people in their own skills rather than displace them.
they who should gain the most profit with the least outlay. If machines had a larger output than man, then man could be dispensed with. Schumacher, the author of *Small Is Beautiful*, made acceptable in economic terms, the Gandhian belief that man possessed a soul as well as body. Methods and machines should be sufficiently cheap in order to be available to everyone, applicable on a small scale and constituent with the creative needs of man. These were important prerequisites for a true quality of life. He brought the crucial moral question into the understanding of the role of economics, termed it 'metanomics', and concerned himself more with the adverse social consequences of marketing mass produced goods which displaced the jobs of millions. Schumacher even harmonised his economic precepts with Buddhism and linked himself with this universal philosophy which opposed those who 'consider goods as more important than people and consumption as more important than creative activity. It means shifting the emphasis

The best example of the realisation of freedom was the spinning wheel. It sounds simplistic but unless philosophical and moral concepts are rooted to concrete action, they remain just so much hot air. After all, was not the simple gesture of grasping a handful of salt enough to electrify the meaning of freedom?

Pattern and design are the most salient features of handcrafted articles. They represent three very important aspects of the link between man and nature. The most profound philosophers, scientists and artists study symmetry and mathematics in patterns of nature. Look at water, leaves, branches or sand. There are immutable laws which govern their designs. Infinitely varied, yet neither chaotic nor individualistic, they reiterate the concept of continuity and community activity as opposed to anarchy. The creative freedom offered within the limitations of raw material and
UTILITY is limitless unlike the monotony of a pattern governed by a mould or machine. Just like the framework of a *raga* which has to be adhered to while the musician makes innumerable creative forays within it. The 'art of craft' follows this philosophy.

Soetsu Yanagi, the artist-philosopher of Japan echoes Gandhi when he says, 'crafts are of and for the great mass of people and are made in great quantity for daily life. Expensive fine crafts for the few are not of the true character of craftsmanship, which being for every man are appropriately decorated with the patterns of every man. It is natural that craft objects be associated with patterns that are also in a true sense, communal' (i.e., of the community).

Painting today is prized far more than patterns but the time will come again when this position will be reversed, and beauty that transcends the individual will come to be accorded more importance. When you look at the delicate fish patterns woven on the borders of a Sambalpur sari, or trace the criss-cross textures of a Tripura basket, the harmony of the senses transmitted between the craftsman - maker and the observer - user through designs and patterns illustrates the meaning of this 'quality of life'. The silent, almost prayer-like meditative moments during production adds to the many-faceted worth of a crafted object.

Crafting, weaving and other forms of artisanship are community activities which at the same time assert and cultural influences and the social, religious and domestic needs of the community, tribe or even race. Bamboo artefacts for hunting and thickly woven deep-hued dhotis for women who work the land, the finest muslins for feudal courts, pastel silk tones on embroidered shawls as an item of export, votive offerings to propitiate the gods of the forest... all these bear the imprint of a specific design suited to a specific purpose rooted in time.

The several nomadic herdsmen spread across Central Asia, down through Kashmir, Rajasthan, the Thar Desert in Pakistan and the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat are examples of identity establishment through handcrafted objects of daily use. Wooden cots, storage chests, spice boxes and mirror frames have a distinct style of carving, often inlaid with mirrors. Earthenware pots used for water, milk and butter-milk in hot desert areas have common geometric hand-painted designs, linking a millennium of regional tradition with influences of Greek and Nordic designs. Embroidery, encrusted with mirrors of varying sizes, each define the wearer's caste, religion and occupation. While the entire group or tribe may wear the same printed, woven or embroidered headdress, it will be an indicator of its distinction from another group.

Today, as the youth turn to the amorphous 'global' design of T-shirts and jeans manufactured in any factory, owned and controlled by bosses who
live elsewhere, dictated by fashion moghuls in Paris or New York, any individualisation or group identity based on cultural practices is effaced. Can the Rajasthani musician sing of his desert in lurex vests and polyester blouses or will he have to compete with MTV in order to be part of the great global culture? At best they will become anthropological amusements at restaurants and festivals for the urban rich, while our young researchers and photographers document them for posterity. At worst, they will degenerate into a bastardised cultural expression with no aesthetic merit. (Visualise combination of high heeled shoes with dhoti sabwars and a dupatta hanging like a towel over one shoulder). These ‘ethnic’ styles, however expensive or handcrafted have no identity or cultural expression. Will our handicrafts, which in fact, is a way of life, end up like an exquisite ship in a glass bottle on the mantelpieces of coming generations, while seminars on ‘ethnicity’ and ‘identity’ are held in air conditioned conference rooms?

Man’s mind creates concepts and his hand creates objects. Handwork, handicraft, hand skills, call it what you will, is the reflection of the cosmos in all its manifestations and so becomes one of the nodal points of man’s cultural and spiritual expression. The West overran it, and the Far East is fast losing it. We in the middle have something which we can either throw away or preserve. To preserve it means to re-establish the ‘Dignity of the Eastern Mind’.

About our Guest Editor

Jaya Jaitly is a friend of the craftsperson and has been one of the few people spearheading the crafts movement in India. Apart from activism in this sector, Jaya has been a consultant in the design and marketing of handicrafts and handlooms in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh and a consultant on Kashmir to the Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India. As a designer, she has revived traditional designs and products. As an office bearer of the Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat, a trade union federation, she organises artisans and weavers and creates links between rural and urban workers. She is the founder of the Dasikari Haat Samiti, an organisation of primary craftspeople and co-operatives engaged in the marketing and development of crafts through their own initiatives. Jaya has written extensively on the ethics, economics and philosophy of craft. She is also a civil activist and part of the socialist group in mainstream politics in India. Jaya belongs to Kerala and lives in Delhi with two children.

Beyond all question of old or new, the human hand is the ever-present tool of human feeling, whereas the machine, however new, is soon out of date. Young people nowadays judge according to whether a thing is new or old, but more important is whether it is true or false. If true, whether it is handmade or machine-made it will always preserve its newness.

SOETSU YANAGI

THE EYE NO.1 VOL.11 JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1993

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The term ‘folk art’ came to be used and was assigned an entity when the more aware, conscious and vocal section of humanity had lost touch with the peoples’ natural forms of expression. There were two worlds filled by two peoples, the large mass, the ‘folk’, and the other who regarded themselves as superior and progressive. What indeed was this folk art, except the irrepressible desire of the people when their cultural stirrings blossom forth and result in beautifying objects used in daily life and in religious cults, to give them a character of their own by experimenting with materials and skills available. This was not prompted by any conscious intention or external consideration but solely moved by the impulse of an inner creative compulsion.
expression heightens the big events in human existence, the wonder of birth, the mystery of death, the ecstacies of love and the sweetness of intimate human relationship.

The story of folk art is the story of man. It begins with man’s moving away from the base animal world, urged by a yearning for something beyond the satisfaction of creature needs and comforts. He strove to lighten the severe gloom of the cave by decorating walls, to soften his harsh vocation by ornamenting the bow and arrow, introducing pleasing designs into his baskets, giving handsome shapes to pots and pans, these being determined by the use to which they were to be put and not by the moods of the maker. Thus he began to shape, carve and paint, and cultivate his sensibilities. Here we have the beginning of art, the mere functional being made into works of beauty, transforming the person and the environment from the harsh and the bland into the gorgeous and the attractive. He embellished his own person with leaves and flowers, seeds and shells and later with metal jewellery, brass, silver and gold. He started to cover himself with textiles which he contrived to weave with skill and imagination. He covered bare walls with paintings and grim cold floors with many patterned animal skins. Soon every article of use was endowed with a new magical quality.

Out of the million coloured strands of the environment filled with song and verse, legends and myths, fables and local romances, out of the core and substance of everyday life and nature’s own storehouse, these concepts of beauty were worked out and a rich and forceful art evolved. For each man combined within himself both the conceiving and executing, bringing about the integration of creative endeavour with livelihood. Art and aesthetics became deeply rooted in function. Ornamentation was not divorced from utility. The adherence to the belief that each fulfilled himself through his vocation, no matter how humble, explains the meticulous devotion brought to each task. For it was a social duty, not just an economic compulsion. It was creation with a purpose. Therefore, highly aesthetic, one may say ‘beautifying’, became a social obligation. To ensure its observances this was blended with good omens and made a ritual like the paintings on the walls, drawings of designs in front of the house, on the steps, round where you sat down to eat.

Floral ornamentation, incense, decorated pots became part of the daily ritual. A woman had to have certain embellishments, a minimum of ornaments, beauty marks on her face, hands and feet, as a good omen. The use of special articles for certain occasions, such as clothes, ornaments, vessels, catables etc., all of which had to have a definite character and a recognised quality, ensured a high standard for these products even in daily use; moreover these usages meant a continuous outflow of creativeness, a sustained

The term ‘folk’ means people. This nomenclature was in vogue one time. Today it has become archaic and is replaced by the term ‘people’, a word pregnant with deep political and social overtones.
SPIRIT OF ANIMATION AND FRESHNESS THAT DISPelled STALENESS AND MONOTONY.

AWAY FROM EGO-CENTRICITY

The term ‘folk’ means people. This nomenclature was in vogue one time. Today it has become archaic and is replaced by the term ‘people’, a word pregnant with deep political and social overtones. The word ‘folk’ is used only in a certain context. In fact, in several countries, the term ‘folk art’ is substituted by the term ‘popular art’, ‘art populaire’. It may be appropriate to quote here, a pioneer in the discovery and revival of folk art in Japan, Dr. Soetsu Yanagi, who attempts a precise definition of the term. ‘I propose to call all creations of ordinary men by the inclusive name of ‘peoples’ art’. I am not at all sure if such a name sounds proper in English. But let it serve our purpose for convenience’s sake. ‘People’ in this context refers to the great mass of unknown creators as opposed to individual artists. It may be understood simply as a term inclusive, like special creations by geniuses. Here the consumers are also the creators.

In this context, it stands to reason that none of its chief characteristics should be anonymity, in striking contrast to the modern vogue of signatures. It is a different evaluation which may make the modern artist rather an overstressed individual. Folk art being a community and integrated expression, moves away from ego-centricity, to abandon the self only to find or realize it through the faith in tradition with the devotion, hard work and the strict discipline that it involves. It emphasizes a sense of attaining a wholeness and unified self-expression.

The profundity of this world is an end in itself. It does not pose queries. For in the ‘folk universe’ people just accepted their place in life and what was expected of them, placidly and without a sophisticated self-consciousness. They were not agitated by ambitions to produce works of art, but only to make things for everyday life, punctuated by special ceremonials and festivals with their rituals. It was all in the day’s work. When they added colour and ornamentation to simple objects, it was not as conscious artistic endeavours.

Folk art an indigenous product of ordinary people away from the storms and stresses of urban life, untouched by the rapid rise and fall of fashions and styles. It cannot be dated. One may say it is timeless.

We are an animal, man is a Superman. It is not what they merely see, it is something they feel and what fulfils their inner needs and desires.

The projection has definitely moved away from the cave and the pit-dwelling days and evolved afresh through meeting new cultural trends with new cultural impacts, forming fresh confluences. The new orientations and innovations have been continuous and inexhaustible. This is why it has still a dynamism. The forms may change, details alter. But it is the essence that speaks to us.

A COLLECTIVE CREATIVE FORCE

When art, or rather aesthetics, was made a part of one’s entire life, this naturally extended to objects such as toys, votive offerings, objects of worship, etc. But here again it was not marked by the stamps of an unusual individual, but of collective creative force, anonymous with the millennia of a rich heritage behind them.

The widest range of variety is to be found in religious objects and votive offerings. Most common and perhaps the most interesting are the clay ones which fill a whole world by themselves. They are seen largely resting under trees. They are offerings to the local protecting deities who vary from region to region, each with a distinct name and attributes. They are offered, no doubt, to obtain favour, ward off evil, fulfill a promise made, invoke blessings on the house or the land, and a thousand other purposes. The most common is the horse, then the elephant, sometimes a bull, a tiger, a lion, occasionally even a rhinoceros, and the serpent.

They are not naturalistic in form. Each is distinctive even though animals of a certain region may have some resemblance, but that is largely superficial. Each seems a new and fresh creation. The style is rooted to a large extent in ancient symbolic requirements, the exact meaning of which is difficult to categorically determine as there are so many diverse interpretations. They could fill a volume. Most of them have an archaisms. This, together with a native directness and simplicity, endows them with an indefinable
charm.

These fantastic votive offerings have passed into metal objects made in the fascinating cire perdu or lost wax technique, which succeeded in creating the unique twofold design style that characterizes them: the applique metal style and the hollow three-dimensional wire construction style. Often with a combination of both these ritual objects have sometimes been called ‘wordless metaphors of cognition’.

Wherever they have been displayed, they have elicited most enthusiastic response. They seem to evoke the same sense of awe for they betoken the primeval forces latent in nature and man. They are interpretive rather than descriptive for there is no attempt to represent forms as the optical eye sees them. They attempt to reflect a subconscious concept of natural forms and this has invested them with a profound reality of their own. It is not surprising to find that they are now being accepted as works of art.

The paintings on walls or clay applique on walls, all have the same themes and quality. The same goes also for the delightful embroidery that adorns not only their own garments but also the coverlets for their animals.

FRESHNESS AND SIMPLICITY

The interest in and the increasing search for a study of folk art all over the world is a special feature of our time. There are, no doubt, several reasons for this, but the most dominant is rapid urbanisation and other hybrid influences generated by the vast industrial complexes overrunning the globe. Man finds in these objects a sense of release from a complicated world because of the simple direct way they reach out to our heavy hearts. The interest has come at a time when our anxiety is accentuated by the fact that folk art is fast disappearing. In fact it is often alluded to as a ‘vanishing art’, with a nostalgia for this ‘lost paradise’.

Not long ago at the entrance to a folk art exhibition dangled a placard with these words: ‘A part of our heritage is being lost. Who is responsible?’ The suave answer would be that the art of a milieu should decline with the milieu. But is the heritage really lost? Certainly not in the sense of being obliterated. Maybe some of it cannot but slip under the silt of time, becoming a graceful part of our cultural history. But a great deal of it is very alive, as vital and buoyant as it ever was. It is also possible to reach back to this valuable heritage in a real sense. For the folk objects bear a close kinship to our own contemporary images, if we have the sensitivity to feel. For whatever changes may affect our thinking processes, our emotions and sensations continue the same. We are moved by the same elemental fear, elation, despair, hope as the early men and women did. We can reverse it and relate our own to these traditions and sense a fresh experience, a new aesthetic sensation. We do not need to despair of losing this experience of a total expression which is the essence of folk art and one of humanity’s greatest heritages, if we try to understand and cherish it as we do with other similar values.

In conclusion I may say that the dominant emotion which folk art creates and leaves lingering is one of wonder. One can echo Sir Herbert Read. In his Philosophy of Modern Art he has dwelt most eloquently on this: ‘Just as curiosity is the faculty which drives man to seek out the hidden structure of the external universe, so ‘wonder’ is the faculty which dares to use powers in new ways and for new effects. We have lost this sense of the word wonder. It is a better and more inclusive word than ‘beauty’; and what is full of wonder has the most compelling force over the imagination.’ ‘We cease to wonder at what we understand,’ said Dr. Johnson. Here we can put it the other way and say: understanding ceases when we cease to wonder. This is the message folk art holds out to us.


Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya’s name is synonymous with the conservation and promotion of Indian crafts and craftspersons. She has been the source of inspiration to many who have tried to explore and save Indian heritage. She was the Chairperson of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, National School of Drama, Council for Performing Arts and the Children’s Book Trust. She was also the Vice President of the World Crafts Council. Many awards and accolades have been showered on her, two of them being the Magsasay Award and the Padma Vibushan. Kamaladevi Ji has authored several books and articles, including two called, Indian Handicrafts and Awakening of the Indian Woman. She died in October 1988.
In order to understand the practice of peoples' craftsmanship in India and its evolution into a sophisticated creative mode of expression, we need to understand the implications posed by social norms.

The Hindu religion and the caste system are mutually interlinked, and into this bond is further woven the hierarchical structures containing the artisan community of India. It would not be wrong to say that the very immobility of the groups within the caste structure has both sustained the skills and traditions of the craftspeople as well as kept them away from the benefits of technological development and upward mobility.

Crafts and village industry have been split asunder in the urban mind, because of the division between the elite and the working force, again because of the caste system. Artisans and craftpersons were divided into professional categories with a varying degree of social status. Metal workers had the blessings and sanction of Vishvakarma. Their work, particularly in South India was carried out according to the shilpa shastras. Those who made icons of gods and goddesses and vessels for use in temples were invested with a special status. Metal was eternal and indestructible and thus its maker was superior to the potter who's earthen figures were ephemeral. Basket makers belonged initially to forest areas and were from the innumerable tribes that inhabited them (before the caste system was established). Those who came into the Hindu fold (in the plains) were consigned to the lowest rung of the ladder. They were the doms or untouchables. It is only those who retained their strong tribal identity who still continue with their modes of 'folk art' which are deeply animistic.

Art, village industry, folk art and craft all merge into one. So, a shilpachar (sculptor), though practising a 'classical art form', is very much a part of the daily life of the people. To that extent, he is no different from a distakar who makes items by hand to sustain the daily lives of people. Classical icons of Vishnu or votive offerings to the fertility goddess are both part of the religious vocabulary of Indian craftsmanship.

Temples, mosques, stupas and totems have all been embellished by the hands of the Indian craftsman. Somewhere, the folk and the classical forms of craftsmanship intertwine and intertwine. At this point we can attempt to have a brief look at the span of crafts sustained by religion.

The spiritual dimension of all creativity is nowhere better reflected than in the craftsmanship of the Indian sub-continent. To the common man, the spiritual experience restores the continuity between the forms of experience that are works of art and the common events and requirements of life.

Hinduism, the common tradition and binding force of the people of the sub-continent, has undoubtedly been a great source of inspiration. Divine deities became expressions of sophisticated craftsmanship. They are created...
out of every conceivable material - clay, stone, wood, ivory, bone, shell and painted on walls, textiles, wood, canvas and so on. Regional variations tell their own stories. Icon-making translated religion and ritual into endless possibilities of creativity. When the air of sanctity was breathed into them and when they were invested with tangible imagery of the attributes of divinity, they became objects of worship. Very often, these deity images themselves became votive offerings. In Tamil Nadu, the simple night watchman deity of the village, Ayyanar and his horse, are represented as massive, stylised, decorated figures intended to scare away evil spirits. The Durga images of Bengal and Ganeshas in Maharashtra are also awe-inspiring.

While terracotta is generally used for festive images and votive offerings, images of metal and wood may vary from the decorative to the functional, from being a carving on a wall to a votive offering or even the deity in a temple or a domestic puja. The bronze and wooden figures are often utsava muritis (festival images).

Painting played a major role in ritual art. The Kalamkari of Shri Kalaberi in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Tamilnadu, the Phad paintings and Pichwas of Rajasthan, the Chitrakathas of Maharashtra, Pattachitras of Orissa and the Madhubani paintings of Bihar are among the many examples of religious painting, usually depicting stories from ancient epics.

Religious ritual found itself expressing itself through the innumerable objects used for it. The lamp, symbol of purity, awarness and a certain mysticism, evolved from the simple clay cup to the elaborately designed and executed many-tiered metal deepamis and diyas. The lamp is one of the most distinguishing aspects of a culture. It is a homage to the supreme purifier, Agni, fire. The Santhals of Bastar made them in an intricate metal wire craft known as Dhokra, in Hyderabad, they are crowned with glass chimneys in elaborate Bidri ware, while Tamil Nadu made a whole range of them - Pavana vilaku (female holding a cup), Hansadeepam (lamp crowned with a mythical swan) Lakshadeepam (lamp with one hundred thousand cups) and many more. Neighbouring Kerala developed its own variation, a simple, ringed, solid lamp without the spout on the bowl. In Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, lamps are decorated with intricate lacquer coloured designs. In Gujarat, they hang from chains whose links consist of parrots and human figures.

Ritual and religious crafts in India include trays, bells, water receptacles, spoons and aarti lamps. Utensils that are used in temple kitchens were finely cast. Domestic common pots and pans took on artistic details and evolved into enormous andas and gangalams. Rathas or festival chariots evolved out of the need of people to have their favourite deities visit their section of the village or town. The deity is taken amidst great feasting in these temple cars which were masterpieces of craftsmanship. Associated with these cars, grew applique work textiles famous in Tamil Nadu and Orissa.

The arts and crafts of India have been greatly enriched not only by the indigenous Hindu religious tradition, but by the Islamic arts of Persia after the tenth century.

Emperor Akbar introduced pile carpets and brought Persian masters to provide the first impetus for miniature paintings. Islamic religious art is non-representational and consists of the largely arabesque style which employs, flower, foliage, fruit, animal and figural outlines and geometric patterns. Since Islam forbids iconography, calligraphy played the role of beautifying the word of God. The history of calligraphy in the Islamic world begins with the Quran written in an austere but majestic script known as ‘Kufic’ writing. As the art of calligraphy developed, particularly in the eastern part of the Islamic world, it became a major mode of decoration on mosques and prayer niches. Calligraphy is used on walnut wood boxes and engraved on the outer surfaces of vessels and utensils. We are all familiar with the prayer rugs of Kashmir.

The relationship of craft to religion is old and strong. In a sense it acquired the status of a bridge connecting the functional and the divine. It bears reiteration here that all art forms in India maintained this connection attributing artistic expression to divine inspiration. Ritual and religious artifacts became the functional answer to spiritual needs. Craft also, therefore, took on a religious hue with its own patron God, Vishwakarma.

In conclusion we must remember that religious crafts was never intended to become industry. The impetus was rarely monetary; it came from the ever dominating need of man to express himself in a world of unfathomable and often incomprehensible dimensions. Craftsmanship was his way of offering back the beauty of the world to its creator.

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Dr. Nanditha Krishna has a Ph.D in Art. She has been researching and writing on Indian art. She is the author of the Art and Iconography of Vishnunarayana. She is the Director of the C.P. Arts Centre in Madras. She is involved with product design and development, particularly with artisans in villages in South India.
Traditional toys have thrilled children for centuries with their simple imagination. They have been part of national craftsmanship. The author takes a look at the phasing out of crafts from modern education with the plea that simple toys made from consumer discards make good science apparatus and should be introduced into schools.

Sylvia A. Warner, author of the soul-stirring book, Teacher, taught for over twenty years in a Maori school in New Zealand. Faced with an alien curriculm in an alien language, unsuited to the needs of its indigenous people, she remarked, 'What a dangerous activity teaching is! All this plastering on of foreign stuff. Why plaster on at all when there is so much inside already? So much locked in? If only I could get it out and use it as working material. And not draw it out either. If I had a light enough touch it would just come out, under its own volcanic power.'

Joy of Making Indian Toys
Sudarshan Khanna

Education Without Roots
Most children when young, are bright and inquisitive, wanting to make sense of the world around them. But as they go through this gargantuan 'educracy' (education plus bureaucracy) machine, they slowly lose the gleam in their eyes. Today, text books have become synonymous with knowledge. Educationists seem in a hurry to shovel concentrated doses of sterile knowledge down the throats of children, without bothering to ascertain whether children can assimilate it. The whole emphasis is in trying to 'cover' the course, forgetting that the great task of education is to 'uncover' things.

In our hurry to catapult the nation into the twenty first century and more importantly, not to lag behind the West, we are in a frenzy to introduce computers into our rural schools. This we do without even providing the village schools with blackboards, chalk, toys and good children's books. Most of them do not even have mats for the children to sit on. Often children carry an old cement bag for squatting. More than 90% of the primary school budget goes into the teacher's salary. Hardly 1% is available for teaching aids, the bureaucratic definition of which seldom extends beyond the wall map of India and a few glossy pictures of national leaders. Almost 60% of children in rural schools drop out at the primary stage. The main reason cited for this high dropout is the poverty of the parents. No one talks about the poverty of stimulus in a normal primary school.

Can rote learning of a fossilised curriculum sustain the interest of any child? With an almost 80% drop out rate up to the middle school stage, the social base for garnering talent and public and state run schools have tried to parody production-based education by setting apart forty five minutes a week for Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW), as if the rest of education is socially useless and unproductive and has no relevance to real life.
Today, Barbie Dolls and Skullman flood the Indian toy market. The whole tradition of making toys with one’s own hands has given way to a culture of buying mass produced, factory-made toys.

Promoting creativity becomes very narrow.

INDIAN CRAFTS
The rich heritage of Indian crafts has largely remained outside the pale of modern education. Gandhi’s ‘basic education’ which sought to integrate India’s handicrafts with schooling, did not find much favour with the Indian elite. Instead, the public and state run schools have tried to parody production-based education by setting apart forty-five minutes a week for Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW), as if the rest of education is socially useless and unproductive and has no relevance to real life.

By and large, the crafts sector has been dying a slow and steady death with industrialisation. Most craftspeople have been facing a shrinking market for their goods. Some of them have been assimilated into the industrial mainstream. A few have been preserved by...
the state to be appropriately touted in this or that Festival of India. A few niche markets have been created by the Titoni bazaars and the Dastakars, by which some craftspersons can earn a living by catering to the urban elite.

On the one hand, schools have been successful in keeping crafts away from the curriculum. On the other, traditional crafts have been unable to adapt themselves to changing times. Toys based on local materials, designs and folklore have all been swept away by sexist and violent toys unleashed by multinationals. Today, Barbie Dolls and Skulldadn flood the Indian toy market. The whole tradition of making toys with one’s own hands has given way to a culture of buying mass produced factory-made toys.

**DYNAMIC FOLKTOYS**

We have a rather sanitized notion that science can be taught only in the laboratory using burettes and beakers, expensive glassware and plasticware. We have, however, not considered the possibility that a lot of good science can be taught using ordinary, daily life materials. There is tremendous potential in introducing folktoys into classrooms, infusing liveliness and fun in learning science. Two path breaking books, Dynamic Folktoys and Joy of Making Indian Toys by Sudarshan Khanna from the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad, amply bear this out. Over the last twenty years he has collected some of the most fascinating of Indian folktoys from different village fairs. These toys are environmentally sound, having been made largely from discarded materials and junk. They demonstrate simple principles of science, like motion, gravity, sound, elements of machines, stored energy and so on. In fact, an appendix at the end of the second book shows how these simple toys can demonstrate over forty principles of science and bring cheer to an otherwise drab classroom.

**INERTIA OF TRADITION**

Few traditional craftspersons have had the opportunity of a good science education and not many innovative ideas have found their way into the crafts sector. Two facts are glaring: on the one hand, there are bare classrooms bereft of toys or learning aids. On the other, there are loads of unemployed
Craftspersons. Since we are unable to take our children out to get inspired by the world of crafts, we should at least bring that world into the classrooms. A few examples will make it clear.

THREE DIMENSIONAL JIGSAW
If an earthen pot or bowl cracks we have no more use for it. The miti ka kullad (earthen cup) is thrown away after use. All the broken pieces of the clay pot/ cup can be given to a child to piece them together with clay paste. To figure out the right orientation of each piece in three dimensional space is tremendous mental exercise for a child - a three dimensional jigsaw.

INSET PUZZLES
Montessori Teaching Aids are available in several clones. However, there is only one licensed manufacturer of the original Montessori kit. The kit manufactured by Kaybee School Equipment Corporation, Hyderabad, meant for thirty children costs a whopping sixty thousand rupees. Even rich schools cannot afford this kind of money. Therefore, this company exports almost all its handcrafted, lacquer-finished Montessori teaching aids. The company earns some foreign exchange, but only at the cost of neglecting the Indian child.

The Montessori Inset Puzzles (where different shapes of blocks are to be fitted in their corresponding slots) need to show more imagination. One can quite easily cut a triangle, a square and other geometric shapes from an old throwaway rubber slipper with a shoe maker’s knife. Rubber cuts easily, leaves no sharp edges and unlike wood, the blocks fit snugly into the slots and do not fall off. Rubber is a wonderful material for inset and maths puzzles. Teaching aids made from rubber can provide employment to a large number of cobblers.

BIRD IN A CAGE
An old traditional toy which can be easily bought in a village fair is a bow-drill with a bird cut-out stuck on a reed. On moving the bow to and fro the bird rotates along with the reed. This fun toy has all the potential of becoming a good science apparatus. Fix a card on the reed. Draw a cage on one side of the card and a bird on the other. On moving the bow the card rotates so fast that the bird appears to be caged in. It is this principle of persistence of vision which enables us to see films. With this, children can make a rough reckoning of the number of frames required per second to see a continuum. A difficult principle comes alive with a simple, traditional toy.

COLOUR MIXER
Often children buy red goggles. A little modification in this could lead to making a science aid. Fold an old postcard into three parts and cut a window through all three layers. Stick yellow, blue and red cellophane paper on the windows. Children can now see all the three primary colours. But there is more in store. On shutting the yellow on the blue window they see green. By shutting the red on the blue window they see purple. This is a simple colour mixer.

TETRAPACK MODELS
Tetrapacks have revolutionised packaging. Cooking oil (Othara) and cold drinks (Frooti) are being sold in tetrapacks. They have a layer of plastic and aluminium foil which make them very energy intensive and non bio-degradable. Tetrapacks litter towns and railway tracks and are a pollution threat. The empty Frooti carton costs around one rupee. Though environmentally unsound, it can be used to serve as toys and teaching aids. Because of the aluminium foil it takes a sharp crease and can be made into good Platonic solids - cubes, tetrahedrons and icosahedrons etc.

We live in a consumerist junk society. So many plastic bottles, tetrapacks, soda - straws, plastic bags, caps, ice cream sticks, ball pen refills, torch batteries, hospital and industrial junk are being thrown out. Throwaway things have always been used by traditional toy makers for their toys. This culture has to be brought back into the crafts sector and be equipped with redistribution skills if it is to cater to the needs of schools and keep our lives junk free.

Arvind Gupta has conducted several workshops for children. He teaches at the Mirambika School, Aurobindo Ashram, New Delhi.

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JUST THOUGHTS....

K.B. JINAN

A friend was in a village near Kolhapur. He was talking to some craftspeople and this is what a woman said to him, "Earlier, we used clay utensils. This meant that we had to be very careful with them. Now we are quite careless since our utensils are made of steel and aluminium. This reflects in the way we treat our children. If you have observed, a person who deals in clay is so careful and sensitive with his children. Perhaps the frailty of the material demands that kind of sensitivity from you. A potter's child moves with so much care since there are delicate pots all around him. Right from their childhood, they imbibe a sense of care."

Craft-making is a serious activity and usually, the parent accords the child with a sense of responsibility, after he discovers that his child is seriously interested in his inherited craft legacy. Here, let me point out an essential difference between the original, spontaneous rural crafts-person and the acquired craft education of the urban child. In the latter case, education gets compartmentalised, there is a distinct 'inside and outside,' a separateness of craft from the child's daily life. In the case of the rural child, craft and handwork are integrated to his daily living.

Once I decided to explore the possibility of 'breakability' in a different way. I suggested to a psychologically nervous friend that he should wash about ten or fifteen breakable utensils every morning. I noticed that in order to do this he had to concentrate so much, that washing, in fact, became a sort of meditation and soothed his jangled nerves!

Craft making promotes alertness and an acute understanding of one's surrounding. Like the boys near Madras who made a paddy stalk straw for me when I wanted to drink coconut juice from a straw!

There is no denying the effect of handwork on the general nature of man. Just look around you and you will see what I mean.

The author is currently working to upgrade the products of a potters village in Kerala.
When I meet contemporary craftspeople and their children, I often wonder about the relationship between the two generations. I wonder to what extent and in which manner the way of creating crafts of the older generation has reached this new generation, the rightful inheritors of this legacy. In these confusing and complexly adverse times, many are the questions that beset us, with, alas, such few answers. Will there still be a dialogue between these two generations, can we make sure that ideas, processes, techniques and skills are preserved by the induction of newer methods and humane technologies?

Will this continuous craft tradition be taught formally or will the guru-shishya tradition continue?

We all know that in traditional cultures, learning often came as a result of direct experience and interaction and meant imbibing a certain way of life. This was so especially in the classical arts. Take music for instance. It could not be mastered by spending a few hours with the guru. A student had to live several years as part of the guru's family till an intensely personal relationship developed between the two. This relationship usually transcended a normal teacher - student relationship. What the student absorbed thus were many subtle and inexpressible shades of knowledge which fired the mere technicalities of the subject with a certain profundity.

While this was the case in music, where the individual creative spark was nurtured, in crafts, on the other hand, an entire family or a group of individuals come together to create a certain product. For example, let us look at textiles. Besides weaving, there are a whole host of intertwining skills-dyeing and blockmaking. In such integrated patterns of production what one sees as the end product is the result of layers of collective endeavour. Undoubtedly, the skills need to be passed down in a tradition of continuity and a child born into this environment becomes the first recipient of knowledge. This child then gathers together the
interwining skills and the craft is perpetuated.

Every year, the Delhi Crafts Council, a voluntary organisation, gives scholarships to children who are actively learning crafts. In the seven years since its inception, we have noticed that the most skilled of the awardees have been children from traditional craft backgrounds. Take the case of Umar Daraz, a highly proficient kite maker from Delhi. His daughter, Shamima, one of our awardees, has been learning the craft from her father for some time now. The fact that Umar Daraz has shown no gender bias in imparting his skills to his daughter, coupled with pride in her achievements, has proved to be fertile ground for furthering her talents. It is difficult indeed to imagine her learning the craft in any other way.

But, as in all fields, the methodology of communicating knowledge has changed and is changing rapidly due to social and economic pressures. In this changing scenario one cannot wish away the onslaughts of the present age and the guru-shishya tradition may have to mutate. India is now in a situation of uneven development, straddling two centuries at once. At one end of the spectrum is the village and its traditional milieu and at the other is the megalopolis explosion with modern technology as its base. Like most Indians, the craftsman too has to shuttle between these bewildering ends of the spectrum if he has to survive. In the process it becomes our concern to see whether crafts will cease to exist as a community activity and survive as 'art forms' available to few at exorbitant prices as has happened in technologically advanced countries. Will the machine be the sole dispenser of aesthetics?

The craftsman has the need to be literate if he has to overcome his status stigma and make trade transactions. More importantly, craft education, in the face of the dwindling guru-shishya tradition, needs to be actively facilitated. Special craft training schools under highly skilled gurus can be instituted in areas of dense craft activity. General education can be imparted too. Needless to say, the few government-run schools are in a state of gross neglect due to the usual confluence of factors - apathy, misappropriation of funds, lack of accountability and commitment.

We are used to sitting back and extolling the rich and varied fruits of older traditional crafts communities that now stand endangered. But the situation is grim and needs a great deal of examination both on the parts of ordinary citizens as well as those for whom the well being of our crafts sector is a concern and an obsession.

We need to ensure the continuation of this tradition, albeit with modern means. Documentation, communication, awareness and training become vital. We should be able to prove that crafts can provide a viable and satisfying means of livelihood. We need to understand that crafts is one of the most potent creative self and group expressions. And finally, we need to come to terms with the fact that the craftsman is becoming a threatened and endangered species soon to be extinct. Our children may well grow up without any experience of the beautiful legacies of handicrafts.

Poornima Rai is the Secretary of the Delhi Crafts Council, a voluntary organisation.
THE CRAFTSPERSON AS TEACHER

"Give me any fibre or grass and I will make the whole universe for you."
- Old basket maker of Bihar.

"...man's labour and the earth's resources must never be wasted, never be used unproductively. Each moment of life must be productive. By following this principle, we cultivate good citizenship and are also able to make basic education self-supporting."
Gandhi - Harajan, 1940.

JOLLY ROHATGI

A few years ago there was a tremendous need to bring about some useful and joyful activity in the dismal lives of mentally disabled children in three schools of Delhi. After observing the lack of communication between the children and the crafts teacher who could only teach paper cutouts and pattern drawing, we decided to invite a traditional papier mache toy maker to take over. With an uncomplicated and non-scholarly attitude towards the mentally disabled, he promptly divided the class into those children who could roll the clay, those who could bake it, those who were able to paint and finish the items and finally those who could cost these and sell them. Soon, the classes became joyful centres of creativity where production began to pile up. The items were then sold at the Diwali bazar. When faced with this kind of child developmental work, he intuitively divided the activity into rolling, bending, pinching and joining clay, developing gross motor control and fine motor control. How did an illiterate, poor craftsman know about these things? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that being deprived himself, he had a profound empathy for a similarly deprived group.

There is a special school in Orissa for 'dropout' girls. It was started by a lady with an initial capital of Rs. 400/- She enlisted the help of craftspersons to train the girls to produce items for sale. The students themselves buy the coir, cloth and other raw materials required for their afternoon session with craftspersons. In the mornings they are involved with other aspects of formal schooling. So that, when they graduate, they not only get a formal certificate of learning but also have the werewithal to earn a livelihood.

Once, a workshop of design and training was organised to train young women to make parandis (thread/bead ornamentation woven into the hair when plaing). There were three trainees involved - a diploma holder from a design institute, and two craftspersons. The 'designer' made an intricate sample using special coloured threads. Seeing him work, the craftspersons were shocked. So much thread was being wasted while the strands were being cut and the strand size itself was so uneconomical. They set about showing the 'designer' how to divide the hank, not wasting a single piece of thread, and then, how to dye it. The girls who came from a similar background of thrift understood them perfectly and communication between the craftsman - teacher and the students increased.

Learning with a folk painter can be
Whether the education system can become totally dependent on dastakari is another question, but it is naive to deny the importance of crafts and real, practising craftspersons in the system.

a multifaceted experience of understanding the origin of colours, rituals, imagery and the environment. Satyanarain, a young painter from Madhubani brought with him to the city, a host of stories, allegories and images he learnt from his old aunt. He not only assimilated modern education but went about training many school going children to draw and paint in the Madhubani style. Naturally, many other aspects of Indian life and nature got highlighted.

Whether the education system can become totally dependent on dastakari is another question, but it is naive to deny the importance of crafts and real, practising craftspersons in the system. That there is hardly any documentation of craftspeople teaching children is sure. Invariably, non craftpersons decide what should be taught as crafts, leading to poor quality in design and execution. We understand craft only through translation, missing the intrinsic and rather subtle system of values involved. As yet, we have no real yardstick to fathom the unknown depths of a craftsman’s sensitivity.

Thus we alienate the craftsperson, making him feel small and inferior, always looking amongst us for patrons and probably resenting it.

An old Zardosi worker recited the following to me:

हम किसी मंज़ी से तरफ़दारी
की उम्मीद नहीं रखते,
क्योंकि हमारा उन सुंदर रंग से,
जो सल्म से है, वह सरल सकता है।

(We do not expect favours from ministers, because we know Him who can convert a sequin into a star!)

The Zardosi worker had spent his whole life embroidering shining stars with sequins and threads and finally found the Truth of his craft. Should we not get our children close to this truth?

Jolly Roiatgi is a dedicated artist who has been working with disabled children. Her special commitment is to bring artisans into the education system and connect them with children in schools. Jolly lives in Delhi.
RAMU KATAKAM

Architecture in India has always worked with craft. It is only in modern architecture that ornamentation has been discarded in favour of utility, even given the fact that it is human instinct to decorate homes and places of prayer. From simple forms and motifs, evolution of design reached high levels of sophistication.

The craftsperson represents a life of true purpose. The traditional sculptor will rise early, spend time on meditation and prayer before he starts work, as he believes that his talent is merely an extension of a spiritual force. This belief is responsible for the intensity of his work.

The temples of Khajuraho are a good example of the use of craft with architecture. The grand architectural style and scale of the temples is infused with carving of such magnificent quality that it transcends the rather simplistic appellation of 'craft' and becomes art. The rigour of the temple design is maintained for over three hundred years after which one observes a decline in the quality of carving.

Vijayanagar is another example. The barren rocks of the Deccan (a masterpiece of natural art) are used as a backdrop to create a complex of buildings that are incomparable to any other in the country. This complex, though in

Corbusier, in his creation of Chandigarh in the early fifties, brought in an ideology that was more than two decades old.

Now, perhaps two generations after him, Indian architects can have a panoramic view of our utterly chaotic and ugly cities.
ruins now, is a perfect example of craft combined with building.

The artisan - architect relationship, though on the verge of extinction, manifests itself every once in a while. As in the Venkateshwara temple in Hyderabad, where a team of stone carvers from Rajasthan spent years trying to create a structure extensively carved in pure white marble.

Artisanship in architecture required a special skill which developed on utilitarian requirements, such as windows, pillars, ceilings, screens etc. Forms from nature appear to have provided the impetus to design. Flowers and leaf motifs brought together patterns which were later used in facades and interiors. The use of patterns is clearly visible in the jalis of earlier buildings. The effect of light and shade provided by them became an integral part of building design, as also the facilitation of privacy.

At the Deeg Palace in Rajasthan, the builder created a complex to celebrate the monsoon in a rain-starved terrain. In addition, he laid out the building with a series of fountains linked with pools and established a relationship between water and the palace. The flower motif is used extensively to accentuate the railings and columns. The patterns appear to give a different image at each scale and the balance of the solid to the void is perfectly executed. Here is where the understanding of the architect and the artisan becomes crucial. Naturally, the commissioning of a building to an architect meant that artisans were part of it.

It is therefore difficult to comprehend why craft has been totally ignored in modern Indian buildings. Corbusier, in his creation of Chandigarh in the early fifties, brought in an ideology that was more than two decades old. Now, perhaps two generations after him, Indian architects can have a panoramic view of our utterly chaotic and ugly cities.

The Indian architect is once again contemplating a return to tradition and ritual. The first signs of this is the appearance of craft (mostly rural) in contemporary urban surroundings. In contemporary world views on architecture, utility has superseded the induction of philosophy into its practice. However, though it may be difficult to go back completely to traditional decoration, craft and natural materials must return if we are to live aesthetically and in a healthy manner. The builder must come back to the craftsman since the former is the one who has strayed. The consistency of the craftsman should be exploited by architects to once again evolve an emotion that makes many Indian buildings eternal.

Wither Craftsmanship?

Ramu Katakan is a well known architect with a private practice in Delhi. After doing his Masters in Architecture from Cambridge University, Ramu has worked on conservation and restoration of the old city of Hyderabad and the Golconda Fort. His buildings include the American Studies Research Centre in Hyderabad and the Centre for the Syriac Christian Church in Delhi. He is presently teaching at the IIVB School of Habitats Studies in New Delhi.
SOCIO - ECONOMIC STATUS OF CRAFTSPERSONS IN INDIA

RAJIV SINGH IN CONVERSATION WITH L.C.JAIN

Lakshmi Chand Jain opted out of conventional politics after Independence. For the last forty five years he has been engaged in development work and the study of economic alternatives. He has a special interest in co-operatives, handlooms, Panchayati Raj and decentralisation of the polity. He has worked at planning at the state and central level and was a Member of the Planning Commission from November 1989 to Nov. '90. He was the Chairman, All India Handicrafts and Handloom Board from 1977 to '79. Lakshmi Ji is currently working on development programmes in Assam as Chairman of the Institute of Social Change and Development.

Rajiv Singh : While talking of the socio-economic status of craftspersons in India, who are the people you would include in this discussion?

L.C.Jain : When we refer to artisans and craftspersons, in a socio-economic sense they are essentially those who make aesthetically pleasing and useful goods as a measure of self-employment. They are not exactly those who have the prerequisite skills and work for creative satisfaction alone as a hobby or pastime.

R.S : What would be your estimate of such artisans in India?

L.C.J : Firstly, we must identify the broad categories and only then make conjectures and estimates. To me, the foremost categories are the village carpenter, the blacksmith, the potter, the leather worker, the basket maker and the weaver. I would like to make a brief point on the criticality of these people. These artisans provide the underpinning for an agric-rural economy. They are, what one may call, the 'industrialisation structure' of such an economy. For instance, farmers cannot work smoothly unless they have a handy blacksmith who will repair their implements. Or take the case of the leather worker. We have the largest livestock population in the world. What happens when the cattle die on their own? Someone has to immediately remove the body, flay and clean it or the health hazards would be monumental. The basket weaver provides baskets for all agricultural operations - seeds, manure etc. In the handlooms sector the significance is that it is carried on in the slack season when there is respite from agriculture. The handloom activity fills in to take care of local demand and self consumption.

If these are the broad categories that we have identified, then one can hazard a rough estimate. There are something like thirty lakh handlooms in the rural areas, even after many of them have been displaced or destroyed by industrialisation. On an average, about four people work on the various
processes like the warp, weft, weaving and spinning. We are thus talking about 120 lakh people in this sub sector alone. Roughly, all other artisans put together, we should have at least 3.5 - 4 crores of crafts people.

Four years ago, Kanika Satyanand, Executive Director of SRUTI (Society for Rural, Urban and Tribal Initiative) wrote a paper, 'Contribution of Artisans to the Indian Economy and the Contribution of the Indian Economy to the Artisans'. Hers is the only brave attempt to do a study such as this. Despite very little information available on the subject, she scanned through whatever material existed at the time. The fact is that not many people are interested in this kind of economics and unfortunately, her study has not been upgraded or improved upon.

R.S: Why has a consolidated census of this sector not been done since 1947?

L.C.J: Every census covers workers called 'the main worker' and the 'marginal worker'. Some categories which have been created are as follows: agricultural labour and those in manufacturing and industry, household and non-household labour. By and large the artisan sector falls in the category of household labour. But even this category does not cover them fully because of the part time nature of their work and the fact that they have more than one means of survival. We assume they are manual workers, illiterate and backward.

So we see how census is a broad approximation. No detailed census of artisans has been evolved. The KVIC (The Khadi and Village Industries Commission) is the only institution in the country responsible for statistics on village artisans. Unfortunately, their coverage is very marginal, consisting mainly of those who come to them for help, which in reality is not more than ten percent of artisans. In the village sector, only Karnataka and Kerala have attempted a comprehensive job, with
estimates of their output, wages, employment and all other economic parameters. But even this is ten years old.

R.S: Can you talk about the low and high points of government action or inaction?

L.C.J: First of all, let us understand that the artisan/crafts sector existed long before the government came into existence. It is not an exaggeration to say that the government is illiterate and indifferent about this sector and many of its policies are at odds with it. It is, as it were, guilty of these three 'l's.

While it talks of 'industrial development' it ignores the concept of 'industrialisation'. If it did not, it would have built upon the skills and materials that are available and then moved from a given stage of development to the next one by higher added value, better skills etc. It has never even recognised that the artisan activity is an industrial one. Therefore, anyone who calls himself an Indian economist, planner or administrator who ignores or misuses our inherent strength and endowment is deceiving himself.

The first thing taught in the social sciences or economic research is to take into consideration what is available. Whether one likes or doesn't like it, whether one wants to discard it or not is a separate matter. One arrives at a conscious decision but one doesn't pretend that nothing exists. We keep looking westwards - if they have a steel plant and they call it 'development', then we in India must have one too. This is exactly what I mean by 'industrial development' as opposed to 'industrialisation'. This is what I mean when I say the government is 'illiterate' about the issue.

Now, when I say that it is 'indifferent'. Under some amount of pressure, a few institutions have been set up, such as the KVIC, Handicrafts Board, Handloom Board. Therefore, to say that it has completely ignored this sector is not quite right. But, to say that these have been mere acts of tokenism.
would not be wrong. Look at the government attitude to, say, ONGC. It decides that oil must be explored and takes a systems approach to it. All infrastructure, whether they be helicopters, platforms, other technology, manpower, or know-how, it is acquired with urgency and the project is under way. But in so far as the artisan sector is concerned, it is peripheral to the government’s interest. For example, if an artisan requires Rs. 4000/- to buy a buffalo, government agencies will give him Rs. 2000/- assuming that he will buy half a buffalo this year and half the next!

And lastly, it is ‘inimical’. Artisans have acquired their skills, tools and local demand markets through a hereditary process without state participation. Perhaps the government is busy elsewhere and can’t really help them. But surely it can leave them alone without having to initiate investment policies of a kind that destroy the working of these people and their sources of livelihood.

High technology, modernisation and international competitiveness are today’s buzz words. In textiles, the stress is on what is the most ‘modern’ way of making cloth, not on the health of the population, their stomachs and livelihood. Who is to wear this cloth, where is the purchasing power to come from, these are not questions of paramount importance. We have gone in for a massive investment in synthetics for which the government has procured foreign exchange, imported raw materials and technology processes without bothering to assess whether it is suited to our agro-climatic conditions. Seventy percent of our labour force is in agriculture, working in the sun, and if they were to use synthetic cloth their bodies would burn! And yet, our election manifestos always claim that their commitment is towards the poor i.e. the bulk of the population. Is it right to collect majority votes in the ballot and then plan for a small section of the affluent?
R.S: What is more beneficial for the crafts sector? Local markets or exports?

L.C.J: Firstly we have to decide whether there is scope for a subsectoral space and policy of our own. We can decide on any strategy but before we launch a boat we have to find out whether it will be able to weather the storms. Well intentioned voluntary agencies who genuinely want to help the craftsman (say in the textiles sector) often make the mistake of attributing the problem to one of design. Okay, so you may buy one or two sarees from him based on design, but then, can he enter the market to survive? Will he be intruded upon by power looms that have tremendous direct or indirect government support as well as cheap credit?

It so happened that in the last ten years our economic growth, according to the modern concept of GDP, has been rising from 3.5% to 5.3%. But during these years, while the GDP has risen, the employment growth rate has fallen from 2.8% to 1.3% and the labour force is increasing at the rate of 2.6%. So you can see at once that this is a distortion in the economy. Unfortunately, the Finance Ministry does not see this as a distortion, concerning itself, as it does, with only balance of payments. In a country with a huge population of 850 million, this distortion is suicidal. Naturally, with this massive unemployment, purchasing power is very low, causing lack of demand in the artisan sector. Thus, this sector is faced with a gross uncertainty about its future and it is beyond anyone to handle this separately through a subset of policies sustained autonomously.

Having said that, the only scope that still exists is within the local haats or marketplaces, which is a very powerful instrument in clearing the goods of local artisans to meet local demand. However, in the face of poor working capital, artisans may be aware of demand but are not able to produce sufficiently. The problem is compounded by the fact that institutional credit is all controlled by the government and very often it is again guilty of tokenism. A strong lobby may be required to reform this credit system and facilitate the artisan’s entry into a bigger market, more employment and more income. We should stop worrying and keep saying, “change his tool and technology and give him new design”. I think these refer to the real life problems of not even 1% of artisans. This is a peripheral, marginal, insignificant kind of constituency one is working for. 99% is the constituency is where the artisan says, I know there is a demand. Every effort from the outside is important, but it needs to be done with an overview of the whole situation.

R.S: So the problem is more with financing rather than marketing?

L.C.J: No, the problem is with both. ‘Market’ needs re-definition. The local haat or marketplace where he goes walking, needs no shop or emporium and educates himself on consumer reaction without seeking recourse to any ‘market information system’ is vital. Since we have a traditional market outlet, I would imagine that should be given prime importance. There is no need to take him on a ride to New York which will provide him with a seasonal income and also one which is dependent on the import policy of that country. I was in Brussels recently. The textile trade union there passed a resolution that they would not allow the Asiatic and other Third World countries to occupy their market because they wanted to protect their own em-
For forty years we have done nothing to help the backward classes simply because we knew that we could suppress the aspirations of that particular class. The yardstick of any true democracy is the way it treats its disadvantaged groups without them having to agitate for it.

employment. If it is legitimate for them at their level of prosperity to think of protecting their employment, then should we, at starvation levels be also asked to protect their employment and not our own?

R.S: Since most of the artisans and craftsmen belong to the socially and economically backward classes, what is your opinion on the Mandal Commission, especially in the light of the recent Supreme Court judgement?

L.C.J: When the Constitution of India was being framed, representation was made on behalf of the backward classes. They were assured that their interests would be kept in mind through the setting up of a commission but the framing of the constitution should not be delayed at any cost. Thus, a provision was made in the constitution but no commission was set up. Finally, the Kalelkar Commission was instituted and it gave its report which was deemed to be incomplete and inconsistent and therefore got shelved. After many years, came the Mandal Commission to look into the issue. Soon after its report the Janata government collapsed. Mrs. Indira Gandhi used the issue to drum up popular support for her party, but withdrew when told that she was about to disrupt a hornet’s nest. When the Janata Dal came to power again in 1989, the Mandal issue became an important part of the election manifesto. They also decided to write off loans less than Rs.10,000/- to the artisan/farmer sector and to amend the Panchayat Act.

The V.P. Singh government announced its verdict on the Mandal report in parliament, which was received with magnanimity by every party, especially the Congress. During the next few days when the rather unfavourable student reaction broke out, some political parties began to back out.

For forty years we have done nothing to help the backward classes simply because we knew that we could suppress the aspirations of that particular class. The yardstick of any true democracy is the way it treats its disadvantaged groups without them having to agitate for it.

You demolish a masjid by saying that Hinduism is being suppressed, but if Hinduism can be built by demolishing a mosque it is very easy. Do you think Lord Rama is going to be in
information while it should have played a role in presenting alternatives.

So, I do have a jaundiced view of the whole Mandal question. And that is it is not ‘merit’ which should be in question. What the Supreme Court has done is merely give a verdict on ‘merit’. But has this verdict made any dent on the problem? The Supreme Court can merely aid the process but can it lead any kind of social reform? For that you need ten thousand Ram Mohun Roys!

When it comes to restructuring the economy the Finance Minister does not tire of saying that “somebody has to pay the price.” When we come to social restructuring, the poor pay the price not the Tatas, Dupont or RBI. In short, the rickshaw puller must be the one polluting the country.

In a disparity ridden, poor country like ours, can we have governance without ideology? We must have the construct of an ideal to be pursued over a period of time even if we fall short of it. A genuine effort has to be made outside the realm of power politics.

Rajiv Singh has recently graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi. He was actively involved with the Nature Club of the Institute. Rajiv is now involved in design and implementation of projects related to pollution control and macro-power project.

‘My new fear is that when this war ends we will be flooded by high mechanism, all that has insidiously gone into perfecting the deadly weapons. So what was let loose to destroy only bodies will now be turned on to destroy our inner selves. A body is after all only a tool of the mind. The carnage that has gone on unabated over the centuries, is conceived and directed by the mind. I wish I could hope that the Orient would try to be a bulwark against the modern master of destructive technology. My greatest sorrow is the threat of the individual being wiped out as human force. To me the man, not as an artist or professional, but the mere man is special, each in his own way.’

Ananda Coomaraswamy to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya after the Second World War.
Jaya Jaitly: Satyanarainji, would you explain what your work means for you? But before that, will you clarify what in your view is the difference in perception between art and craftsmanship?

Satyanarain: In my understanding there is no difference. We draw a fine line where there needs to be none. A craftsman works as hard and as carefully as an artist. Some people believe that the craftsman blindly follows a tradition without applying his own mind but I do not agree with this.

JJ: Some people believe that crafts are part of old cultural traditions which are no longer valid - that times have changed - but I believe that you are one person who is both practising and evolving your traditional craftsmanship and yet making it relevant in today's world. How would you advise your fellow craftspeople to bring about dynamic change while still continuing with their traditional skills?

S: Today, the craftsman makes what the market wants. In earlier times the market liked what we made. Training programmes funded by the Handicrafts Board teach the same things without any change. Earlier, craftspeople were able to think out themes and ideas themselves. We consulted old works of art, we looked at books. We should look inward and create and be able to guide the market to accept what is best according to us. The problem is no one wants to take time and trouble anymore. When my mother (Jagadamsha Devi) was alive she used to ensure that we knew that we were involved in serious work. Today craftspeople, because of economic problems do shoddy work - a painting in two days or even twenty to thirty paintings a month!

JJ: But people do have economic problems and they have to feed themselves. You have the advantage of a job at the Bal Bhavan where you are able to teach your skills to children. What about those who cannot find use for their skills?

S: When I first began I too used to have to sell my paintings before I could eat. But earlier we were satisfied with simple needs. Now everyone wants big houses and cars and compromise their art for its sake. My Madhubani village is full of paintings now that do not sell. The loss is the craftsman's isn't it? If the quality is bad the art will die in two years time.

JJ: What has been the relationship between your traditional method of painting and the preservation of the environment which is a popular subject these days?

S: All our methods are environment friendly. For instance, when we make our own colours, we only use fallen flowers, we do not pluck them from others' gardens. We do not make colours out of plants that can be eaten, like spinach. We use only those plants and natural resources that have no other use. Traditional artists have always depended on nature like the Kalamkari artists or painters of Orissa.

JJ: Different people have claimed credit for bringing Madhubani painting out into the marketplace. Earlier you would make them locally for special needs and occasions. What are the
facts according to your knowledge? Why did quality degenerate?

S: Yes, earlier, paintings were made on walls during weddings and other such events. Now they are not. People do not have the time. It all started in the 1964 drought. Bhaskar Kulkarni came to our village and was distributing money for relief work. He ordered some paintings because he liked them. He brought them to Delhi and exhibited them. When many people liked them, export began. With export, quality suffered and the government officers in emporia did not have the capacity to recognize and maintain quality. Officers would not pay craftsmen adequately and always felt that they were being cheated by the craftsmen. But this is not so. If you reduce the price of a painting the craftsman will accordingly lower the quality. People who sell paintings should know the details of the skill and the themes of the paintings. They should know the story behind the painting and be able to explain it to the public. Craftsmen's children should be called to sell these paintings in shops.

An artist should concentrate only on the quality of his work and not whether the customer is rich or poor. I work at my home and teach children who want to learn, according to this philosophy.

J.J: If a craftsman spends a lot of time and care over what he is making it will be more expensive. Does this mean that only the rich can have the benefit of good quality crafts? If we wish that a student or someone with just one room should also have the benefit of good craftsmanship how do we overcome their problem?

S: An artist should concentrate only on the quality of his work and not whether the customer is rich or poor. I work at my home and teach children who want to learn, according to this philosophy.

J.J: How do we ensure that you, as a true craftsperson of Bihar, earn enough for your effort just as Hussain or Manu Parekh does? Your paintings are made available to all, irrespective of their class, not just rich people.

S: I would make smaller paintings which would cost less. If you give us an environment within which we can think creatively we can contribute a lot. A scientist is given money for research - why not an artist? I constantly keep thinking - what more can I create? What more is possible? What can I do with my art? Many facets and dimensions related to the improvement of crafts have to be started. Every state has its own folk stories. Books could be produced using its folk painting styles to illustrate these stories. What I mean is, why do we only think of selling paintings to live? Why not put our skills to other use?

J.J: What are the many ways that an appreciation of crafts can be developed beyond exhibitions?

S: There should be many more workshops but not of the usual kind. When I conduct a workshop I invite three groups of people - children, their teachers and parents. I do not merely give a lecture but practically demonstrate how colours are made and how to paint with a little stick, so that they can develop their understanding of the art form in its totality.

J.J: How have children reacted?

S: Once in Bombay I taught children to paint with a fine stick. It was the first time they had come across such a method of painting and they were delighted. One child was overjoyed that he was being allowed to tear up newspapers in order to make a craft toy. At home he was not allowed to tear paper! Non-formal teaching is the best method of teaching craft. I have, in my twenty two years of experience at Bal Bhavan, seen that children respond very well to it. For myself, I feel craftsmen's children should know how to read and write and make an effort to write about their work from their point of view. If we had money we could help them do
this. What is happening today is that persons come from abroad, absolutely ignorant of facts and write books on crafts which are factually wrong. Words have to be translated from French to English, English to Hindi, Hindi to Maithili and back again to French. This distorts facts and language. And most unfortunately, our children don’t care to carry on this tradition these days.

JJ: Do your children paint in the Madhubani style?
S: Yes, my younger son is doing well.

JJ: What are your suggestions to make folk art and crafts a popular part of peoples’ lives today?
S: I would suggest that design centres and craft centres employ craftspeople. Today they are full of degree holders, not artists. Until you see the problems of craftsmen though their own eyes you will not be able to do anything for them. We conduct workshops on how our crafts should sell in Europe. This is not necessary. We need markets here. People involved in crafts promotion should pay attention to the quality of products sold at melas and bazars. Craftsmen are becoming middlemen themselves. Earlier, our problem was that others were middlemen. Now if you call a craftsman to an exhibition he will buy things from others in the village to sell there. People who have got national awards have stopped work altogether to become middlemen. So you see, the fault is on both sides.

JJ: Would it not be better if people like yourself told craftsmen this?
S: Things sometimes get difficult for us too. For instance I was once asked to go to my village Jitwarup to conduct a workshop. I just could not do it because I believed that those practising this art in my village are in fact, my gurus. How can I tell them what to do? Very often one does not have enough courage to criticise another craftsman’s work. Take the national awards for Master Craftsmen. Those who judge the products are mostly bureaucrats, who probably are unaware of genuine artistry. Are not doctors judges of medical students? Aren’t artists judges of art? Then why are craftsmen not made judges of craftsmen? How do they judge the technical fitness and traditionalism of Madhubani painting? My point is, by whom should we be honoured and judged? By a bureaucrat or a fellow artist who has been recognised and honoured?

I have knocked on many doors in the past to save my Madhubani art. For 22 years I have been asking for answers to questions but have found no response. I am now quiet because I do not see any hope. Do you know, there is a Mithila Art Museum in Japan? Foreigners take away all our paintings. A Japanese gentlemen told me that a day will come when my children will have to go to Japan to see our national art and they will have to buy a ticket to enter the Museum!

Satyanarain teaches at the Bal Bhavan, New Delhi and heads the department of arts and crafts. He has travelled for workshops and exhibitions abroad, and conducts one man shows whenever he finds a private sponsor in India. He is a perfect example of how an artisan with sensitivity, skill and potential to contribute to the development of traditional skills is neglected by both patrons of culture and the establishment.
WOMEN IN CRAFTS

It is an ironic but established fact of life that women have always been at the forefront in contributing towards creativity but as humankind advances towards newer technological heights on its road to progress it is women who fall by the wayside first.

JAYA JAITLY

But for those who believe in the indomitable will of the human spirit the creative woman will forever be a symbol to rejoice over.

Women in India have always worked alongside men in all activities related to its agrarian economy whether in the fields, along the mountains, by the seashore or while making the many implements and artifacts related to their daily needs. No hands are left idle when the day's work is directly related to survival, but for a woman, very often, leisure hours and labour hours overlap so that what she does as a piece of productive economic work and what reflects her skill and her special sensitivity is often blurred. The last to recognise this fact is the woman herself.

And so it was, that when the potter's wheel was invented and the moulded earthen utensils for domestic use could be made by the hundreds for barter and trade, the man took over their production. It became inauspicious for women to activate the wheel; the man collected the earnings from the sale of the pots, and the women was left to decorate them in her leisure hours. The pot would become more decorative, more beautiful perhaps, but she did not earn anything separately for her labour of painting, and neither for the hours spent gathering and moistening the fine earth to help her menfolk turn it on the wheel.

In a patriarchal society with the added factor of a caste hierarchy, craft production was compartmentalized into different levels of professional activity. A goldsmith was superior to a weaver, a potter came from the backward castes and the basket weaver was the lowliest of them, all. Except among equitable tribal societies the others kept their women, typically, in the position of a helper, sometimes decorative, most often necessary, but always supplementary. Skills were divided, and labour shared, but the man was and is the one in control of the work.

The contrast between an egalitarian society and a hierarchical one
emerges in the observation of these tribal communities and the main weaving groups. In Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura Meghalaya and Mizoram in North Eastern India almost every home possess a loom, and behind each sits a woman. Weaving is part of everyday life, and the handwoven sarongs, shawls, scarves and belts are worn by their own communities and often sold in the weekly market as well. Not only do the women weave cloth, but work alongside men in creating most of the bamboo basketry used in their everyday lives. Wherever weaving is done for community needs, designs and motifs are specific to each tribe or sub group. Regional location and status is often conveyed through the language of the dress and the manner of the weave. In Assam, the women of the Rabha tribe weave the finest and most laborious shawls, and these precious pieces are part of the treasures that women display to prove their exquisite natural skill. The highest number of operational looms in the country are in Assam although it is from Central and South India that mass produced handlooms reach wider markets. Here women have a clearly defined secondary role. In a family of weavers the man will inevitably sit behind the loom. The woman, assisted by younger members of the family, will stretch the yarn and prepare the warp. She will dye the yarn, will stretch and fold the fabric, but she does not weave.

In textiles, while the woman may have no role in the designing of woven patterns she comes into her own as an embellisher of woven cloth. Post loom decorations take three different forms - prints, tie-dyed designs and embroideries. In the first, the woman is excluded from the process, however in the others it is the dexterity of the woman’s fingers that gives life to the cloth. Kutch, the semi-desert region of northern Gujarat state is a fascinating example of women who while being completely bound to their traditional way of life, have been the focal point of rapid changes both within their homes and communities as well as in the larger canvas of economic activity in their drought prone, arid land.

While the men of the family divide amongst themselves the work of grazing cattle, selling their produce and carrying on the purchase or sale of wool or blankets and maintaining business and social relationships with neighbouring villages and towns, the women attend to the domestic chores. They spend their days amidst children and animals, feeding, cooking, churning buttermilk, constantly tending, gathering and storing something or the other in a brisk yet silent rhythm.

Amidst these constant and routine chores the little-women, the adolescent-women, the bride-women and the mother-women decorate their textiles and their homes in a manner that is perhaps unmatched in brilliance, richness and variety anywhere in the world.

The tradition of home and textile decoration stems from both religious and social practice. In a society still functioning according to the defines and dictates of the caste system, dress is one way of conveying the identity of a particular group. The style of skirt or body wrap, the decoration on a head veil, the drapes of a turban, the colour, patterns, all make a statement. The statement not only conveys the nature of the caste group but also the marital status of the woman. Whether she is unmarried or widowed can be discerned.
by the cut and decoration of the upper garment, or the colours tie-dyed on her veil.

Again apart from performing the social function of identification, the art of decoration and embroidery serves many other important functions in their lives, for the women have a fixed role defined for them. They pass their childhood in the knowledge that they must one day go to another home to care for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of their new families. The observance of religious rituals, the cooking of meals, the care of children and leisure time activity of needlework is the unchanging pattern of their lives. It is in their leisure though, that their personality and their skills and creativity find full expression. Young girls of five and six first look and then take the needle and thread into their own hands, creating tiny bead necklaces and later purses and blouses embedded with small circular mirrors while their mothers sit in small groups, eyes and heads lowered in quiet concentration.

The 'secondary' nature of their existence within their homes, and the harsh, dusty barren aspect of the land that surrounds them is resisted through the artistic flourishing of this simple activity. Whether the cloth is purchased from the local village shop with meagre resources or saved through the parsimonious collection of discarded remnants, it is pieced together to make a wide variety of textile crafts in their homes.

As times change, and technology, communication, values and motivations alter, centuries old patterns of existence are swept away. Who would deny that superstitions, meaningless rituals, the caste system, male domination in society and the illiteracy of women should not be removed forever? It must be recognised, however, that as a consequence, the outward manifestations of old and perhaps outworn beliefs such as artifacts, symbols and tokens will also disappear. However, in Kutch today the preservation of a heritage has taken on a most unusual and vital form, making the continuance of artistic activities not just assured but imperative for survival. An earlier drought first brought to light the vast collection of embroideries which emerged as part of a distress sale and as a result, the focus changed. Art for art's sake, the recognition of beauty, the discipline of regular production to satisfy the growing needs of people and the understanding of the values of an income not dependent on the vagaries of nature, all these became the new priorities and the new motivations.

The most remarkable example of the transformation of ideas came among the Girasia Jat women. They believed that their dress belonged to the Goddess Jeejamah and that destruction or defilement of it would bring misfortune upon the entire community. The front portion of the dress is embroidered in a grid-like pattern with mirrors embedded between the threads. This piece is attached to a widely flared loose tunic. When enquirers came from France about the quantum of production of this particular embroidery, the women first refused to make any pieces for commercial use. However, in neighbouring villages, the Rabaris, Dhanetuh Jats, Ahirs, Muttuwals and Sodhas were all busy preparing pieces for sale. Their industriousness enhanced their income and they were proud of their beautiful workmanship.

Two elderly Girasia ladies looked about
them and weighed the situation carefully. Since they were old, they could afford to take a risk. If they earned more they could certainly have their roofs tiled and buy another buffalo. So they made their silent peace with Jeejammah and began embroiderying yoke pieces for sale. Jeejammah in turn must have decided to look the other way, for today scores of women spread over five Giriasasia villages are busy embroiderying for sale, and fortune instead of misfortune has visited them. While embroideries though have made women equal participants in productive activity, their role as craftswomen have not as yet led to a holistic understanding of their environment and its future.

The resistance and creativity of women in facing the challenges posed by changed technology in the international arena is illustrated by the women mat weavers of Kerala, who belong to the community of fisherfolk. With an 8000 kilometre coastline and 50,000 fishing villages dotted along it, the traditional Indian occupation of fishing with its allied artisanal activity of net making, basket weaving, and rope making, apart from the building of small fishing boats themselves, all these created a full and vigorous means of livelihood for the entire community, apart from a balanced protein filled diet for the local population.

The progress of technology meant air-conditioned fully equipped “mother” ships operating along the coastline which laid claim to the treasures of the sea. Their fine meshed nylon nets entrapped the smallest of fish. These would be cleaned, processed, canned and exported from the high seas itself. A very neat, efficient and convenient process, but it marginalized the traditional fisherman. The women who wove mats from the screwpine leaf not only had to face the challenge of the modern ocean vessels but of the replacement of traditional packing materials by synthetic ones. Petro-chemical based fibres replaced the screwpine mats woven at home by hand. These floor-mats used by common folk to sleep on were now being made by machines in Dubai out of nylon thread. With the menfolk rendered jobless the woman weaver was left with the task of earning enough from this activity to feed her family. The screwpine mat industry involves two hundred thousand women in Kerala alone and the quality of the skill ranges from the single weaving of screwpine leaves, to the finer work of paring them down and creating value-added products for up-market use, such as folders, table mats and handbags. At every level there were problems to face, whether it was purchase of raw material, obtaining credit from the bank to do so or getting a reasonable living wage for their work and extricating themselves from the grip of money lenders.

There was only one wayorganisation. And that is what they have done. Eleven thousand women formed themselves into a trade union and of these five thousand created a screwpine mat weaver’s co-operative society. After painstaking effort and some outside support, the local bank accepted their proposal for loans at a special rate of interest. Instead of each woman carrying the mats she has woven to the village marketplace every afternoon, the co-operative society now collects the mats, pays cash to the weaver, repays a portion of the loan to the bank and sells the mats to wholesalers from the society’s office. The meagre wages have doubled and today they have plans to buy their own collection van, purchase stocks in bulk to hold till the monsoon season is over, and establish an on-going design and product adaptation training programme so that the better skilled amongst them can earn higher wages through the production of more decorative utility items. Craftswomen have been carrying their mats to exhibitions outside the state and demonstrating, apart from their skill, their resilience in the face of technological change. A quiet battle through dexterous craftsmanship and the strength of organisation is being valiantly fought under the lush green coconut palms of Kerala while the men search for other occupations.

It is perhaps through such experiences that women will see themselves playing an important part in deciding the options of development and recognising their creative and sustaining role in society.
In earlier times, when production exceeded the quantity required for personal consumption and the need arose for products that could not be produced by oneself, the excess was exchanged with the excess production of others. And perhaps this compulsion made way for the convenient place in one cluster of habitation where barter or exchange of goods could take place. Each cluster of habitation must have had such a place, in an unfixed time cycle, which later took shape and occurred at regular intervals. This was probably how the first concept of marketing and markets took shape.

Called the haat, chandai, athwada bazar, shanty market and a variety of other names, these haats provide little to the industrial few of the country, but are an important marketing infrastructure for the innumerable ones since provisions of daily basic consumption are available here. The produce of the common man for the common man, namely, products of local weavers, potters, woodcutters and other craft persons, as well as grain and vegetables from the farmer, rope from the rope maker and nails from the ironsmith find their outlet here. Deals are made not with the participation of the barterer, but with local customers for whom this is a meeting point.

A woman with a bucket made by hand from palm leaf, can happily draw water from a well for two to three weeks and then replace it with a new one. It costs fifty paise, maybe a rupee, but fifteen rupees a year is not considered heavy expenditure. The benefits are that these handmade buckets are light as compared to metal or plastic buckets and are non-toxic and biodegradable.

The haat or mobile marketplace is not unique to India. They are well known in the Middle East, the African continent, South Asia and vestiges still survive in some market towns of England and America. Wherever the economy is still largely based on agriculture, the haat is the most suitable marketing infrastructure for the small, decentralised, unorganised producer. All that is fixed are the time and day. The rest is flexible, allowing for the convenience of the producer seller who may bring whatever goods one needs to sell, in whatever quantity one wishes. Then, bargains, barter or bazaar are conducted according to the dictates of the market.

Haats are held either daily, weekly or festival oriented. Some are purely related to farm needs while others spring around a temple, dargah, church or gurdwara, selling religious artifacts, flowers or offerings. The famous Mangal Haat at Howrah in Calcutta every Tuesday, claims to be the largest textile haat in Asia. Thousands of little stalls are set up by 7 am and packed away again at noon. In those few hours, wholesale and retail business are conducted at a brisk pace. The Mangal Haat is also well known for its three thousand stalls selling Bengal Left: At the Mangal Haat, Calcutta Below: Haatwards
Handloom cotton saris from Shantipur, Dhaniakali, Rajbhalcha, Phulia, Begumpur and other areas. The love of traditional cottons among all classes of people in Bengal still supports their production and sale at haats such as these. Here a crore of rupees worth of transactions is conducted every month. These are places where both a culture and the weaver are kept alive.

A Sunday market comes alive on the banks of the Sabarmati in Ahmedabad, selling everything from mirrorwork embroidery to secondhand furniture and used cycle tyres. A few kilometers from Bhagalpur, a handloom haat comes to life two days a week when weavers bring bolts of cloth from as far as ten kilometers away, carrying them on their heads and walking the entire distance. Terracotta pots are in abundance at athwada or weekly bazaars all over Rajasthan. In a chanda in Kerala, twenty thousand hand woven screwpine mats are sold within a space of two hours. In Mapusa, across the river from Panaji in Goa, a weekly market provides a sale outlet for fisherfolk. Whether in Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur or Bihar, Tamil Nadu or Karnataka, the scene is the same. Local produce and local consumption, eliminating the middleman as far as possible. Perhaps this is what Gandhi saw and we are unable to see in the dazzle of information flow, supermarkets and global markets.

Besides, has anyone thought about how boring it is to walk into a sterile supermarket, read labels (which means not having to talk to anyone), buy every item sealed and packed in non-biodegradable packaging (usually they are produced far away and have travelled many miles) and stand in a queue and pay to an unsmiling girl who mechanically operates the cash machine! Has ‘buying’ come to mean ‘possession’ at any cost or can we buy ethically, not looking only at the product but at the person behind it?

Kamal Sahai, in his mid-thirties, is a journalist and photographer who’s special interests include wild life, ecology and the conservation of India’s heritage. He has travelled widely in India, documenting its architecture, handicrafts and cultural traditions. Kamal lives in New Delhi.
THE VANISHING EARTHEN CUP

THE ECOLOGY OF CRAFTS

RANMAL SINGH JHALA

To be humanely successful in this age of rapidly advancing technology, we man and range from making simple survival aids to ornaments of purely decorative value. The processes involved in their creation seldom gener-made in complete consonance with nature. In addition, they are perfectly hygienic.

The humble earthen cup is fast giving way to plastics and styrofoam cups. The Indian railways which ferries over a crore of people every day, could be a wonderful example of the country’s efforts to reduce toxic waste by introducing the kulladhs in its meal services. Besides, the programme would employ 100,000 potters all over the country. In the textile sector, a very benign exercise would be for government departments to divert their orders for fabric to the handloom sector especially for uniforms. This, if provided to the defence services, hotel staff, hospitals, schools, railwaymen, bus drivers and others, would divert lakhs worth of orders to the weavers in the cottage sector. This would substantially reduce the effects of artificial preservatives and chemical colours and dyes which are often used to produce goods of uniform marketability.

Local resources and craft skills have always gone together. The marketplace is usually within the vicinity of production, thus minimising transport costs and reducing fossil fuel consumption. These craft skills usually encompass daily use items. The best example is the coconut tree, which lends itself to a variety of uses and is exploited by local dwellers to generate employment.

Recycling has already established itself as a vital component in our modern throwaway culture. In India, we still fortunately practice it, though on a diminishing scale. Women who work at home are forever improvising and reusing different materials. In Ladakh, where the army consumes a lot of tinned food in winter, the empty cans are transformed into tree guards. Placed one on top of the other, they protect young saplings from goats and cows. Aesthetics in recycling also has endless possibility. Rejected paper and cards from printers is converted into flowers, animals and a range of simple toys. Rags are utilised in patchwork spreads,
Farmer's dwelling located near a factory that makes large ceramic electrical insulators. The farmer has ingeniously built the walls of his house out of salvaged broken insulators packed with mud. Now he has a sturdy structure and a cool interior!

Plates and cups made of leaves
durries and pile rugs. In Kutch, in Gujarat, a remarkable response to modern technology is seen in the creative use of expired torch and transistor cells. The women of this region, who traditionally decorate their walls with paint and mud-mirror work have made interesting patterns from assorted coloured batteries.

Traditionally, each settlement or a cluster was essentially a self-sufficient one. Members took from each other and gave back in a regenerative cycle that maintained the balance for survival. Today, though we have bridged the world, even explored planets beyond, we have distanced ourselves from our own environment. Our vision remains 'micro' while our world has become 'macro'.

A re-introduction to crafts makes the most ecological sense. The process of creation itself reveals how fragile creation is. Interacting with craftspeople would reveal the intrinsic value of things and processes and reiterate the interdependence of all life. Perhaps the emphasis would shift from consumption to creating where people collaborate more and compete less, where there would be a spirit of sharing resources, more giving than taking.

Rannal Singh Khala, 40, is a professional freelance graphic designer. He is an 'art ecologist' who aims at promoting ecology through creative expression. He conducts workshops in the British and French schools in New Delhi and takes children camping. Rannal has graduated in Visual Communication from The National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. He is the branch organizer of the North Gujarat wing of WWF.
LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE!

GENETIC ENGINEERING AND THE WEavers OF KASHMIR

PADMINI BALARAM & S.BALARAM

The political side of the agony of Kashmir, the terrorism and the consequent disruption is well known. It is also well known how this turmoil has been destroying the economy of the state. What this article attempts to show is a relatively unknown aspect of the economy which is related to wool weaving, the major occupation of the rural people of Jammu & Kashmir.

More than 80% of wool weavers here operate at the cottage industry level and belong to the unorganised sector. They are farmers as well as sheep breeders. They weave for their own family or for others, either on a piece rate system or for barter. Wool in Kashmir is not a luxury but a daily necessity, given the climate of the place.

As in all other sectors, developmental efforts of the government stepped in. The department of Sheep Husbandry took up a vigorous cross breeding programme. It aims to convert the local sheep to Kashmir Merino (a cross breed with 75% Merino blood) within the next twenty years. In the Kashmir Valley, local sheep are crossbred with Australian or Russian Merino and in Jammu with Rambouillet. Efforts of this department have increased 100% wool production per sheep as well as increased the sheep population. Ironically, after all these efforts, J & K is still not producing enough wool even for its own consumption.

Wool used by the majority of Kashmir weavers (66%) is mainly that of local sheep belonging to themselves. All the processes starting from shearing to weaving are done by the local people, without depending on anyone for their raw materials.

Now, in the last few years, the genetically engineered cross breeds have flooded the state. They, no doubt, produce fine to medium fine wool. But the crux of the problem lies in the fact that this wool is greasy. Removing grease from wool is an important procedure before spinning and suddenly the weavers find that they are unable to degrease this particular wool at home. As a result, weavers and sheep breeders are forced to sell this ‘better’ quality of wool either to the private sector or to the Wool Board, which eventually is sent to the industrial sector for degreasing and cleaning. The wool is then spun in spinning mills and is ultimately absorbed by the industry for weaving. The local weavers have no buying power to re-purchase the ready spun yarn from the industrial sector. Cross bred Merinos would compel them to sell all their wool to industries and purchase ready goods at a higher price. So we see how a local occupation and craft has gone completely out of sight to be swallowed by the industrial sector.

It is not difficult to see how, in course of time, weavers would lose their weaving skills and many crafts associated with wool weaving and spinning would be sounded the death knell. In this context, India is bordering on an internal situation very reminiscent of the colonial period where we were forced to sell cotton at a low price and import the finished cloth from England at a very high price.

Besides, these cross breeds having been bred with foreign strains have a shorter life span and breeding capacity. Being rather delicate, these sheep are more prone to diseases. Kashmir Merino yields white wool which is good for dyeing, but the local valley people prefer the natural coloured wool of their local sheep.

It is a real tragedy that the J & K Handloom Development Corporation has little contact with the original sheep breeders and weavers to listen to their problems and will perform continue with their unsustainable plan of converting all local sheep to Merino within the next twenty years. It goes without saying that the monetary benefits would all go to the wool industries of Punjab and Haryana. The fact that they would wipe out the entire cottage industry of J & K in one fell swoop and bring about starvation deaths like those in Andhra Pradesh is one that both industry and science would rather not dwell on.

It is not too late to contemplate alternatives which are there and need only to be explored. But first, let ‘development’ not be retrograde. Let it take into account that its policy makers should be educated by the original settlers of the land and not implement half-baked and high-handed processes without their advice and consent. •

The Balarams are at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.
THE ETERNAL THREAD

KHADI

TARABHATTACHARYA

The Khadi Movement that Mahatma Gandhi launched in 1918 is one of the most unique in the history of humanity, for in it is the prescription for the revival of the entire economic, social and cultural life of rural India.

By propagating the cause of Indian village and home industry, he was demonstrating the need to keep away from exploitation that came from a dependent relationship with an employer. Self-help and self-effort generated self-reliance and self-confidence. Unless these were created in every individual, the people of India as a social and political entity would not be able to satisfy their craving for dignity, freedom and democracy.

It was also the only binding activity which, for the sake of Swaraj would be practised by all castes and classes, thereby breaking the stranglehold of feudal traditions fostered by both British imperialism and the caste system.

Mahatma Gandhi has written at length about all aspects of the Khadi Movement from its economic validity to its strength as a weapon of non-violence, right down to the finer details of how a khadi worker who is trying to teach the poor villager self-reliance should learn to generate funds for his own living expenses.

The unstitched, untailored length of cloth is our eternal fashion. A length is a cover, a shawl, a sari, a lungi, a turban, an aanchal. A length is also our most practical companion as it can be rolled into a pillow for the tired mind and body. It becomes the cloth which makes a cradle for the child.

The definition of ‘khadi’ or ‘khaddar’ is cloth which has not only been woven by hand, but one is in which the yarn is also spun by hand. The word ‘khadi’ may be a derivative of the world ‘khad’ - the pit or the hollow in the ground under the loom.

Khadi does not belong to India alone, it belongs to humanity. Before machines and industrialisation, people all over the world were spinning and weaving by hand. The charkha or the spinning wheel, the priceless heritage of humanity with its eternal message found its renaissance in India when Mahatma Gandhi realised its immense potential. "The charkha" Gandhi said, is "the atom bomb of non-violence" and motivated by its fine practical significance for India he used the charkha as the most potent tool in his non-violent revolution. The music of the charkha along with the music of the Ramdhun unfolded the meaning and essence of a satyagraha to the people of this land. The revival of khadi brought occupation to millions. Khadi suited India.

More than four decades saw a continuous increase in the production of cotton, wool and silk. Khadi created consumers all over the country. In a very small but significant way khadi also reached people outside the country.

But without conscience and con-
stent vigilance, khadi, like democracy is becoming an elusive concept.

Gaining popularity and giving employment to millions resulting in a huge annual turnover did not come without their challenges to the khadi organization. Challenges get ignored and they became problems and problems eventually became crises. Today there is a crisis facing the khadi organisation.

With more production and a huge turnover, khadi is facing the increasing danger of getting mechanical. The eternal thread that reached millions of people in the form of bread (and beauty) is getting entangled in balance sheets, turnovers and rebates. Complete dependence on government for subsidies and grants is resulting in a vicious circle of uncertainty and fear. The khadi organisation is in danger of losing its eternal thread. It is now time for introspection.

How do we conserve and continue with khadi? I have been talking so far about the khadi organisation, but the cloth is not limited to a structure. Outside the structure too there is a free and fascinating world of the spinning wheel. Once I took a journey to Murshidabad in Bengal to see the spinning and weaving of the legendary find khadi, six yards of which pass through an ordinary ring. As we were slowly driving through rural Bengal we stopped whenever we heard soft sounds of rhythmic dance and music. The rhythm came from the charkha and the handloom. As I entered a simple mud cottage to talk to the woman who was spinning yarn on the charkha, my attention was drawn to a bunch of fluffed cotton on the neatly swept doorstep of the tiny courtyard. I looked around the cluster of mud huts. There were bunches of fluffed cotton outside every tiny house. It was a tradition. I was told that it is considered auspicious and decorative like alpana. Through centuries they have continued their tradition of silent homage to cotton.

How do we save khadi? The British had been exporting Indian cotton to English mills for manufacturing cloth which was then brought to India and sold to the people. Gandhi discovered the charkha and hand spinning in the interior villages of Gujarat. He saw the use of the charkha again in the villages of Punjab after the Jallianwala slaughter. We will make our cloth from our cotton with our hands, Gandhi decided. Indian cloth did not have to be manufactured in English mills, it did not have to be manufactured in Indian mills either. The cotton mill would leave millions unoccupied in the country. Only hand spinning and hand weaving could bring bread and cloth to millions. As a weapon of non-violence the charkha became the central theme, the focal point of the Gandhian philosophy of swadeshi, swanvalamban, swadhinata and satyagraha.

As an infallible solution to individual and collective exploitation in the socio-economic structure, the renewal of khadi was also the most concrete implementation of Gandhi's satyagraha.

While handspinning gave economic self-reliance to millions all over the country, it also gave a sense of creative involvement with the cause of satyagraha to others who were spinning cotton from a takli or a charkha in prayer meetings and public gatherings, in palaces and in prisons.

During the freedom movement, the design of the charkha went through some change. The traditional rural Indian charkha was usually made of heavy wood. It is still very common and known as the kisan charkha, (farmers' charkha). For more practical purposes, Gandhi suggested a portable foldable light-wood box charkha. This charkha, known as the ‘Yerwada Charkha’ and the one spindle raki were the hall mark of every satyagrahi and Gandhian follower. With independence came the invention of the ‘Ambar Charkha’, the six or eight spindle charkha for greater production.

The greatness of Gandhi was his ability to span the cosmos, touching upon both the philosophical as well as the truly practical and concrete content of each issue so as to draw parallel threads through his life, meeting finally in his work and his truths. The khadi movement is demonstrative of that greatness.

There is today a moral dilemma for those who are a part of the genuine khadi movement. Do the wearers of khadi, as in our politicians, propagate a set of values even remotely connected to Gandhi?

Tara Bhattacharya is one of the well known names in the Khadi Movement, and has been responsible for its promotion in Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Latin American countries. She is one of the Trustees of the Kasturba Trust. Tara Ji specialises in making rag dolls. She lives in Delhi.
“THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE”

“Nothing is now done directly by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance.... On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster.”

Thomas Carlyle

MALCOLM BALDWIN

I was recently in conversation with a friend who described her bitter disappointment as a child on discovering a holiday souvenir bought in Europe had been manufactured in Hong Kong. Nowadays, real craft items are to be found in antique shops and expensive craft galleries. Craftsmen and women no longer form part of the everyday fabric of life, but are curiously set aside in a shrinking marketplace where few people can afford to buy.

The modern European if he perversely pleases can readily buy mass produced goods from every corner of the globe. The rare and expensive commodities are fashioned by an increasingly small band of craftspeople who are forced to compete against the mass manufacturing processes. They can produce one item whilst the production line makes fifty. So in order to earn a modest living their products are highly priced in comparison to mass produced goods.

At first glance the development of modern industry coupled with the free market economy seems to offer enormous possibilities. In an ever expanding market, goods and services will flow round the world, opening new doors of perception, increasing choice, and contributing to world harmony. Closer examination reveals a very different picture where the real human values of intimate contact, bartering and trade become centralised and monetised; everyday laughter and conversation are drowned in an ocean of bruitish noise and smoke, where the individual is consumed by the very process of consumption.

The transition between an artisan culture and a machine dominated monoculture first happened in Britain. It was an extremely painful process which entailed incalculable loss of meaning for millions of people. As the means of production became more and more centralised, so everyday work became increasingly fragmented, monotonous and boring. The craftsman who made

The real human values of intimate contact, bartering and trade become centralised and monetised; everyday laughter and conversation are drowned in an ocean of bruitish noise and smoke, where the individual is consumed by the very process of consumption.
whole working lives toiling at processes they cannot understand, making goods for people they will never see, and taking wages from bosses with whom they have nothing in common. In the multinational corporate world manufacturing has become so fragmented that only highly sophisticated computers can properly analyse the intricacies of the production process. People no longer create useful artifacts for the family next door or the neighbouring village, but perform meaningless mind numbing tasks on a production line whose sole aim is to increase profitability in some unnamed bank account in Switzerland or San Francisco.

It is strange that this essentially Western model of progress is so appealing to the so-called developing countries. Certainly it must appeal to outsiders that we have learned the secrets of creating inexhaustible wealth, that the production line is infinitely superior to the skills of the craftsman. However there has been an enormous price to pay for our short lived luxury. Most people are aware that out mindless exploitation of the natural environment cannot continue without unthinkable consequences, but few people ever count the social and spiritual loss which has accompanied the change from craft production to mass production.

We try to compensate for this lack of meaning in our lives by constantly consuming more and more. We make up for the drudgery of everyday life with extravagant holidays to exotic locations. We fill the emptiness of our lives with video games and television. The fulfillment of a job completed from start to finish is denied us, we can only sense in the most provisional way the thrill of creativity, the personal contact, and the satisfaction of a bargain negotiated.

In the West, the role of craftsman has now become falsely elevated and we pay high prices for artifacts which have no other use than to decorate the walls of our houses. At this late stage of the twentieth century it seems we have much to learn from the living traditions which still manage to persist in many
Malcolm Baldwin is a gifted teacher, writer and a dedicated environmentalist. Born in the U.K., he has a B. Ed degree from the university of Sussex. He has worked in Theatre and as film editor mainly for the BBC TV. He has been cameraman and director for several BBC productions. He is deeply committed to organisations such as Green Peace, Friends of the Earth, Environmental Investigation Agency and has produced Environmental educational material.

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MYMENSINGH

My mother was born in Mymensingh
She speaks of it
with the desolateness of a pauper
sagacity of a saint

primeval wisdom Mymensingh
Festering pot of cultures Mymensingh
Hindus and Muslims Mymensingh
Hindus versus Muslims Mymensingh

Navigates in my blood Mymensingh
Mother says: the smell of the good earth is the same everywhere

ugly squalid Mymensingh
where on the eve of partition
hindus and muslims gouged each others’ eyes

My dirty, straggling roots Mymensingh
I’ll never dig them out
but let them remain growing like cacti
in the opal shores of history

That long unwritten poem.  

Ananya Shanker Guha
Shillong

AN ACCIDENT

Death is more abrupt
Than it was when Hopkins exalted
A shipwreck. The other day
A plane gliding in
Crashed, without sublimity.

He divined a purpose
Which I, admiring his verse
Can’t. The ‘Deutschland’ took time
To go down, time
For terror and a vision. Now

Explosions engulf. Careers arrested,
Many die,
Trapped in their seats, charred
Alike in acute communion.
Later we wonder why.

Perhaps a computer failed,
Perhaps the ....perhaps...strange.
Time pauses for an instant’s hush
Smoking, masking
A vibrant city’s dread.

It clears but the stern purpose
Hardly reveals itself.
Are we abashed? Perhaps
Not.

Siddharta Menon,
Rishi Valley School,
Andhra Pradesh

THE APE MAN

I breathe deep of the earth smell
Moments after the rain,
Overwhelmed by its richness,
And its fleeting, clinging aroma.

Dizzying heights of primordial feeling
Images of wild cries and guttural tongues;
Fresh meat and scented winds,
Expectant faces dancing in the fireslight.

Knotted throat, heavy heart,
Latent heat built up to a frenzy,
Quivering up from my toe to my hair,
I am the ape man.

Dancing round the fireslight,
The flames dance;
Shouting, screaming, clapping,
In a circle of flickering bronze.

Grim faces around me,
Masks in their passion;
Alternating as I see,
From shadow to flame.
I breathe deep of the earth smell after rain,
Man in a civilised world,
Tinned meat and smelly winds,
Monotonous faces and neon signs.

Smart regularity of a glamorous lifestyle
Surface talk and smooth tongues
Fashion and cologne and repartee;
Am I the ape man?

Manu Ananth,
National Institute of Design,
Ahmedabad
NEAR NORTH EAST FRONTIER AGENCY

All I have left is
A chiselled vision of a lonely crag
Clear blue skies
Over sharp hewn ridges and white cut ledges
On this desolate frontier post
A wishful toast, and this evening could go on
forever.

All I have is a painted scene
Juniper twigs on a charcoal brazier
A small banquet of her pheasant roast
Corn on the cob and melting butter
No being around for heights and miles
But for me and her winsome smiles
This should be forever.

And always a dream
As I yearn for my proverbial Shangri La
But forever scared to sculpt a dream
Nothing is forever but these wishful dreams.

Michael Lynrah
New York

HUMILITY

When I bow my head before you,
When I let you pierce my heart with your
wounding words
and in silence bleed
Think not I do so in weakness or in shame.
That single gesture of humility
takes more strength,
more wisdom and courage
than you with all your victory can claim.
Strength to bend the back that pride has made
so strong;
Wisdom to know I bow to the spirit within
to the potter and not the clay;
And courage to face the transient might
of those that strut in this life’s play.

Ruba Majumdar,
New Delhi

TOAD ON THE FANGS

Arrested readily in the mortar’s castle
The corn can never escape the falling pestle
Crushes and brays’ though it has to suffer
Delicious dishes to man, the flour can offer.
Midway the twig with both the ends burnt,
The ant that once has fallen can not revert.

In the Spider’s web, the insect once entangled
Can’t get freed itself, must die in it mingled.
Placed between the elephant’s tusks, so stout
The morsel is sure to find its way, no doubt.
Likewise is the state of toad, still worse
Between the cobra’s wretched fangs, alas!

Swaying and waving, between life and death
Its heart is quivering and hurried is its breath
Terrified it is, none heeds to its prayers
It has to face oh Gracious! the pointed spears
Ethics have designed, if at all this end,
Instant abasement inapt why do they find?

Lingering indefinite, the torture is too grave
Awaiting the dome to close in a cave.
Joy forthcoming is sweet, to wait and anticipate
The interval enduring, nobody will hate.
The doom approaching one comes though quite near
The wester of duration, man can never bear.

Rukmini Rajagopalan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
U.S.A.

Illustration Orloon

Send in your poems, with your name, age, occupation and address to:
39, Anand Lok, New Delhi-110049
One Vishnusharam shrewdly gleaning
All wordly wisdom's inner meaning,
In these five books the
charm compresses
Of all such books the world possesses.

Panchatantra

It is a said that an ounce of sense contained in the Panchatantra
is better than a ton of scholarship. Most of us are familiar with it from
our childhood as ‘once-upon-a-time’ stories and have read them in
abridged forms or in comics. Rarely have we encountered a literal
translation in verse form. Indeed, these wise verses, often epigram-
matic in style, go to make the real character of the Panchatantra. The
stories are charming when regarded as pure narrative, but it is the
beauty, wisdom and wit of the verses which lift the Panchatantra
above the best story books.

The Panchatantra is a ‘niti shastra’ or textbook of ‘niti’. The word
‘niti’ roughly means the ‘wise conduct of life’. It is witty, mischievous
and profoundly sane. The word, ‘Panchatantra’ means, the ‘Five
Books’, the ‘Pentateuch’. Each of the five books are independent,
consisting of a framing story with numerous, inserted stories, told by
one or another of the characters of the main narrative. The device of
the framing story is familiar in oriental works, as in the Arabian
Nights. The large majority of the actors are animals, who have, of
course, a fairly constant character. Thus, the lion is strong, but dull
of wit, the jackal, crafty, the heron stupid, the cat, a hypocrite. The
animal actors present far more vividly and shrewdly, undeceived and
free of all sentimentality, a view, that piercing the humbug of every
false ideal, reveals with incomparable wit, the sources of lasting joy.
An this is how it happened....

In the southern country is a city
called Maiden’s Delight. There lived a
king named, Immortal Power. He was
familiar with all the works dealing
with the wise conduct of life. His feet
were made dazzling by the tangle of
rays of light from jewels in the diadems
of mighty kings who knelt before him.
He had reached the far shore of all the
arts that embellish life. This king had
three sons. Their names were Rich-
Power, Fierce-Power and Endless-
Power and they were supreme block-
heads.

Now when the king perceived that
they were hostile to education, he sum-
mommed his counsellors and said, “Gent-
tlemen, it is known to you that these
sons of mine, being hostile to educa-
tion, are lacking in discernment. So
when I behold them, my kingdom
brings me no happiness, though all
external thorns are drawn. For there is
wisdom in the proverb:

Of sons unform, or dead, or fools,
Unborn or dead will do:
They cause a little grief, no doubt;
But fools, a long life through.

and again:

To what good purpose can a cow
That brings no calf nor milk be
bent?
Or why beget a son who proves
A dunce and disobedient?

Some means must therefore be de-
vised to awaken their intelligence.”

And they, one after another, re-
piled; “O King, first one learns gram-
mar, in twelve years. If this subject has
somehow been mastered, then one
masters the books on religion and prac-
tical life. Then the intelligence awak-
ens.”

But one of their number, a counselor
named Keen, said: “O King, the dura-
tion of life is limited, and the verbal
sciences require much time for mas-
tery. Therefore let some kind of epitome
be devised to wake their intelligence.
There is a proverb that says:

Since verbal sciences have
no final end,
Since life is short, and
obstacles impend,
Let central facts be picked and
firmly fixed,
As swans extract the milk
with water mixed

“Now, there is a Brahmin here
named Vishnusharaman, with a repu-
tation for competence in numerous
THE STORY OF THE LAST EPISODE...

As Godly (the holy man) was walking along, he spied a weaver who with his wife, was on his way to a neighbouring city to buy liquor for him to drink. Dusk having fallen and Godly being badly in need of shelter, he requested the weaver to keep him for the night. The weaver sent his wife back home to provide hospitality to Godly. But the wife was in a hurry to meet her lover and having provided Godly with a rickety cot, put on her best clothes and sallied forth. Unfortunately, just as she was leaving, she bumped into her husband who was reeling drunk. He was wild with her and tied her to a post and then fell into a drunken slumber. What followed was a series of tricks by which the wife met her lover, helped by her friend, the barber’s wife. Godly watched the entire scene being enacted in front of him, and finally helped in serving justice to all the protagonists in the drama. He then returned to his monastery.

Meanwhile, the two jackals, Cheek and Victor, were still deeply concerned about their master Rusty’s inseparable friendship with Lively, the bull, and were plotting as to how to separate them. Rusty, they claimed, had fallen into serious vice, chief of which was that of ‘deficiency’. For he was so captivated by Lively that he paid not the slightest heed to his counselor or the other important ministers. “But how will you detach him?” asked Cheek. And Victor replied, “There is a verse to fit the situation, namely:

In cases where brute force would fail
A shrewd device may skill prevail:
The crow-hen used a golden chain
And so the dreadful snake was slain.

“How was that?” asked Cheek.
And Victor told two stories, How the Crow-Hen Killed the Black Snake and the Heron that liked Crab-Meat.

How The Crow-Hen Killed The Black Snake

In a certain region grew a great banyan tree. In it lived a crow and his wife, occupying the nest which they had built. But a black snake crawled through the hollow trunk and ate their chicks as fast as they were born, even before baptism. Yet for all his sorrow over this violence, the poor crow could not desert the old familiar banyan and seek another tree. For

Three cannot be induced to go
The deer, the cowardly man, the crow;
Three go when insult makes them pant

The lion, hero, elephant.

At last the crow-hen fell at her husband’s feet and said: “My dear lord, a great many children of mine have been eaten by that awful snake. And grief for my loved and lost haunts me until I think of moving. Let us make our home in some other tree. For

No friend like health abounding;
And like disease, no foe;
No love like love of children;
Like hunger-pangs, no woe.

And again:

sciences. Entrust the prices to him. He will certainly make them intelligent in a twinkling.

When the king had listened to this, he summoned Visnusharma and said, “Holy sir, as a favour to me you must make these princes incomparable masters of the art of practical life. In return, I will bestow upon you a hundred landgrants.”

And Visnusharma made this answer to the king, “O king, listen. Here is the plain truth. I am not the man to sell good learning for a hundred landgrants. But if I do not, in six month’s time, make the boys acquainted with the art of intelligent living, I will give up my own name. Let us cut the matter short. Listen to my lion roar. My boasting arises from no greed for cash. Besides, I have no use for money; I am eighty years old, and all the objects of sensual desire have lost their charm. But in order that your request may be granted, I will show a sporting spirit with reference to artistic matters. Make a note of the date. If I fail to render your sons, in six month’s time, incomparable masters of the art of intelligent living, then His Majesty is at liberty to show me His majestic bare bottom.”

When the king, surrounded by his counsellors, had listened to the Brahmin’s highly unconventional promise, he was dumstruck. He entrusted the princes to him, and experienced supreme content.

Meanwhile, Visnusharma took the boys, went home, and made them learn by heart, five books which he composed and called
(i) The Loss of Friends
(ii) The Winning of Friends
(iii) Crows and Owls
(iv) Loss of Gains
(v) Ill-considered Action.

These the princes learned, and in six month’s time they answered the prescription. Since that day this work on the art of intelligent living, called Panchatantra, or the Five Books, has travelled the world, aiming at awakening the intelligence in the young.
With fields o’erhanging rivers,
with wife on flirting bent,
Or in a house with serpents,
No man can be content.
We are living in deadly peril."

At this the crow was dreadfully depressed, and he said: "We have lived in this tree a long time, my dear. We cannot desert it. For

Where water may be sipped, and
grass
Be cropped, a deer might live
content;
Yet insult will not drive him from
The wood where all his life was spent.

Moreover, by some shrewd device
I will bring death upon this villainous
and mighty foe."

"But," said his wife, "this is a terri-
ibly venomous snake. How will you
hurt him?" And he replied: "My dear,
even if I have not the power to hurt him,
still I have friends who possess learn-
ing, who have mastered the works on
ethics. I will go and get from them
some shrewd device of such nature that
the villain—curse him! -- will soon
meet his doom."

The Heron That Liked Crab-Meat

There was once a heron in a certain
place on the edge of a pond. Being old,
sought an easy way of catching fish
on which to live. He began by lingering
at the edge of his pond, pretending to
be quite irresolute, not eating even the
fish within his reach.

Now, among the fish lived a crab.
He drew near and said: "Uncle, why do
you neglect today your usual meals
and amusements?" And the heron re-
plied: "So long as I kept fat and flour-
ishing by eating fish, I spent my time
pleasantly, enjoying the taste of you.
But a great disaster will soon befall
you. And as I am old, this will cut short
the pleasant course of my life. For this
reason I feel depressed."

"Uncle," said the crab, "of what
nature is the disaster?" And the heron
continued: "Today I overheard the talk
of a number of fishermen as they passed
near the pond. 'This is a big pond,' they
were saying, 'full of fish. We will try a
cast of the net tomorrow or the day
after. But today we will go to the lake
near the city.' This being so, you are
lost, my food supply is cut off, I too am
lost, and in grief at the thought, I am
indifferent to food today."

Now when the water-dwellers heard
the trickster's report, they all feared for
their lives and implored the heron,
saying: "Uncle! Father! Brother!
Friend! Thinker! Since you are in-
formed of the calamity, you also know
the remedy. Pray save us from the jaws
of this death."

Then the heron said: "I am a bird,
not competent to contend with men.
This, however I can do. I can transfer
you from this pond to another, a bot-
ttomless one." By this artful speech
they were so led astray that they said:
"Uncle! Friend! Unselfish kinsman!
Take me first! Me First! Did you never
hear this?

Stout hearts delight to pay the price
Of merciful self-sacrifice,
Man is hidden to chastise
Even elders who devise
Devious course, arrogant,
Of their duty, ignorant.

Again:
Fear fearful things, while yet
No fearful thing appears;
When danger must be met,
Strike, and forget your fears.

So, before he drops me there, I will
catch his neck with all four claws.
When he did so, the heron tried
to escape, but being a fool, he found no
parry to the grip of the crab’s nippers,
and had his head cut off.

Then the crab painfully made his way
back to the pond, dragging the heron’s
neck as if it had been a lotus-stalk. And
when he came among the fish, they
said: “Brother why come back?”
Thereupon he showed the head as his
credentials and said: “He enticed
the water-dwellers from every quarter,
deceived them with his prevarications,
dropped them on a slab of rock not far
away, and ate them. But I perceived
that he destroyed the trustful, and I
have brought back his neck. Forget
your worries. All the water-dwellers
shall live in peace.”

“And that is why I say:
A heron ate what fish he could....
and the rest of it.”

“My friend,” said the crow, “tell
me how this villainous snake is to meet
his doom.” And the jackal answered:
“Go to some spot frequented by a
great monarch. There seize a golden
chain or a necklace from some wealthy
man who guards it carelessly. Deposit
this in such a place that when it is
recovered, the snake may be killed.”

So the crow and his wife straight-
away flew off, and the wife came upon
a certain pond. As she looked about,
she saw the women of the king’s court
playing in the water, and on the bank
they had laid golden chains, pearl
necklaces, garments, and gems. One
chain of gold the crow-hen seized and started
for the tree where she lived.

But when the chamberlains and the
eunuchs saw the theft, they picked up
clubs and ran in pursuit. Meanwhile,
the crow-hen dropped the golden chain
in the snake’s hole and waited at a safe
distance. Now when the king’s men
climbed the tree, they found a hole and
in it a black snake with a swelling
hood. So they killed him with their
clubs, recovered the golden chain, and
went their way. Thereafter the crow
and his wife lived in peace.

“And that is why I say:
In cases where brute force would fail....
and the rest of it. Furthermore,
Some men permit a petty foe
Through pure blind heedlessness to
grow,
Till he who played a petty role
Grows, like disease, beyond
control.

Indeed, there is nothing in the world
that the intelligent cannot control. As
the saying goes:
Intelligence is power. But where
Could power and folly make a
pair?
The rabbit played upon his pride
To fool him: and the lion died.

“How was that?”, asked Check.
And Victor told the story of...

To be continued
NARMADA PROJECT UPDATE

MANIBELI SATYAGRAHA

"This is a peoples' movement and not something which has been imposed on the people from the top"  
Baba Amte.

The peoples' struggle against the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) on the river Narmada has now entered a crucial phase. The questions raised by the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) regarding the financial viability, environmental destruction, social disruption and questionable profits of the SSP have remained unanswered by both the Government of India and the World Bank. Despite the severe indignation and indictment of the SSP by the Independent Committee Review (now the famous Morse Report), the World Bank (WB) instead of withdrawing from the project as recommended, preferred yet another set of benchmark studies to be fulfilled by March 31st, 1993. Unfulfillment of even these minimum standards would have led to stoppage of WB aid. The government of India, which had no intentions to fulfill these conditions, preferred to withdraw from the SSP agreement with the WB.

These conditions to maintain minimum human dignity and environmental protection were agreed upon by all the parties - the World Bank, the Government of India and the Government of Gujarat, as is evident from the agreement documents available.

The dam height is at present 55 mts and by June 1993 it is likely to reach 61 mts. The lowest huts upstream of SSP are situated between 51 - 55 mts. Thus hundreds of families are facing the threat of submergence in the coming monsoon. Notices have been served to 18 villages of Maharashtra and Gujarat to vacate their homes. Most of the families have refused to move out and are opposing the project, but even those who have opted for resettlement have not yet been provided alternative land, as promised. This forced submergence is illegal as the High Courts of Gujarat and Maharashtra have issued notices that no submergence should occur till the affected people are rehabilitated.

"I was beaten with rifle butts and dragged by the police even though I was four months pregnant, merely because my village is not cooperating with government agencies in completing the benchmark surveys demanded by the World Bank as a condition for giving final clearance to the Sardar Sarovar Project."

Ranga Bai, 
Anjanwarra village woman.

The people of the Narmada Valley have resolved to drown themselves but not leave their homes. As in the last two years, this year too, the people of the valley and activists have formed the 'Samarpat Dal'. On June 10th, 1993, the people of the Narmada Valley will launch a satyagraha at Manibeli, the first village facing submergence. Hundreds of supporters from all over the country will join the satyagrahis at Manibeli. We appeal to all organisations working on social, environmental and human rights issues, trade unions, students and concerned citizens to come forward in thousands to strengthen the satyagraha. Narmada Bachao Andolan requests you to arrive at Manibeli on any day from June 10th onwards with a resolve to stay at least four days. For further information contact:

Narmada Bachao Andolan, 
C/O Parivartan, Nimbalkar Chambers, 
Dandia Bazar, Baroda. Tel: 554979 OR

NBA, 
H 24, Green Park Extension, 
New Delhi - 110016 
Tel: 6856640.

THE EYE NO.1 VOL. II JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1993
A VILLAGE COUNCIL OF ALL BEINGS
Ecology, Spirituality, and Place

Oecology, as it used to be spelled, is a scientific study of relationships, energy-transfers, mutualities, connections, cause-and-effect networks within natural systems.

GARY SNYDER

By virtue of the findings of Oecology, it has become a discipline that informs the world about the danger of the breakdown of the biological world. In a way it is to Euro-American global economic development as anthropology used to be to colonialism. That is to say, a kind of counter-science generated by the abuses of the development culture (and capable of being misused by unscrupulous science mercenaries in the service of the development culture.) The word ‘ecological’ has also come to be used to mean something like ‘environmentally conscious’. The term does have a more austere context as it works at establishing data and determining environmental health.

The scientist, we are told, seeks to be objective. Objectivity is a semi-subjective affair, and although one would aspire to see with the distant and detached eye of a pure observer, when looking at natural systems the observer is not only affecting the system, he or she is inevitably part of it. The biological world and its ecological interactions is this world, our very own world. Thus, ecology (with its root meaning of ‘household science’) is very close to economics, with its root meaning of ‘household management’. Human beings, biology and ecology tell us, are located completely within the sphere of nature. Social organisation, language, cultural practices, and other features that we take to be distinguishing characteristics of the human species are also within the larger sphere of nature.

To thus locate human beings as so completely within nature is a radical and subversive step in terms of Euro-American thought. Darwin proposed evolutionary and genetic kinship with other species. Social Darwinism emerged as a popular ideology justifying nineteenth-century imperialism and capitalism, with its emphasis on competition. Ecology will be seen, I venture to say, as the twentieth century
science par excellence, acknowledging the competitive side of nature but also bringing forward the co-evolutionary, cooperative, interactive side of natural processes. Ecology refines the view of species interaction. Ecological science shows us that nature is not just an assembly of separate species all competing with each other for survival (an urban interpretation of the world?), but the organic world is made up of communities of highly diverse beings in which different species all play different roles. It could be seen as a village model of the world.

An ecosystem is a kind of mandala, or a Buddha-field, in which there are multiple relations that are all powerful and instructive. Each figure in the mandala, a little mouse or bird (or little god or demon figure) has an important position and a role to play. Although ecosystems can be described as hierarchical in terms of energy-flow, from the standpoint of the whole, all of its members are equal.

But we must not sentimentalize this. A key transaction in natural systems is energy-exchange, which means the food-chains and the food-webs, which means that many living beings live by eating other beings. Our bodies, or the energy they represent, are thus continually being passed around. We are all guests at the feast, and we are also the meal! All of biological nature can be seen as an enormous puja.

This recognition of interconnection, fragility, inevitable impermanence and pain, the continuity of grand process, and its ultimate emptiness, is one of the insights that awakens the heart of compassion. It is the insight of bodhicitta that Shantideva speaks so eloquently of. It is a brief vision of samsara and nirvana as one.

Ecological science clearly throws considerable light on the fundamental questions of who we are, how we do exist, and where we come from. It suggests a leap into a larger selfhood. It goes without saying that the appreciation of our human interdependence calls for a social ethic of mutual respect, with a commitment to solving conflict as peacefully as possible. This ideal has rarely been put in practice in history. Nonetheless, we must forge on to ask the question, how do we encourage and develop an ethic that goes beyond inter-human obligations and includes non-human nature? This question shakes the very roots of Judeo-Christian belief, and indeed the whole Occidental world-view. The last 200 years of scientific and social materialism, with some exceptions, has declared our universe to be without soul and without value except as given value by human activities. The ideology of development is solidly founded on this assumption. Although there is a tentative effort among Christians and Jews of good will to enlarge their sense of ethics to include nature (and there have been a few conferences on 'eco-Christianity') the mainstream of Euro-American spirituality is decidedly human-centered.

Asian thought-systems fare better. Chinese Daoism, the Sanatana Dharma of India, and the Buddhadhharma of India and East Asia, all see humanity as intimately involved with all of nature. Thus they see all living creatures as full participants in the divine drama of Awakening. As Tashi Rapges our Buddhist scholar says, the personal moment of the spontaneous awakening of bodhicitta-the Mind of Concern for All Beings-instantly starts a person on the path of ecological ethics. In our contemporary world, this ethic arrives not a moment too soon. The biological health of the planet is truly in trouble. Larger species are becoming extinct, and whole ecosystems with their lakhs of little living creatures are being eliminated. Scientific ecology, in witness to this, has in a sense brought forth the crisis-discipline of Conservation Biology, with its focus on preserving biodiversity. Biodiversity issues now bring local people, industries, and governments into direct dialogue and conflict over issues involving fisheries, marine mammals, large rare vertebrates, obscure species of owls, the building of huge dams or roads systems as never before.

The awakening of the Mind of Concern, happily, is a universal human experience, and is not created by 'Bud-

We must forge on to ask the question, how do we encourage and develop an ethic that goes beyond inter-human obligations and includes non-human nature? This question shakes the very roots of Judeo-Christian belief, and indeed the whole Occidental world-view.
dhism' or any Asian thought system as such. It is a personal experience of great depth, and Christians, Jews, Muslims, Communists, and Capitalists will often arrive at it directly in spite of the silence of their own religions or ideologies on such matters.

The most workable ethical stance to my mind is in the way that the first precept of Buddhism is presented in Mahayana traditions. Ahimsa, non-violence, harmlessness, is described as meaning 'cause the least possible harm' in every situation. Even as we acknowledge the basic truth that every one of us lives by causing some harm, we can consciously amend our behaviour to practically reduce the amount of damage we might do, without being drawn into needless feelings of guilt.

And more: the condition of the world now calls us to a kind of political and social activism. We must find ways to definitively influence public policy. I will say a little in regard to my own experience with environmental politics in the western hemisphere. We have some large and well-organised national and international environmental organizations based in the US or in Europe. They do the needed work, but they are inevitably living very close to the centres of power where they lobby politicians, negotiate with corporations, and walk the corridors of power. In consequence they do not always understand and sympathize with the situations of local people, village economics, tribal territories, or impoverished wage-workers. Many scientists and environmental workers lose track of that heart of compassion, and their memory of wild nature.

The actualization, I would argue, of the spiritual and political implications of ecology—that it be more than rhetoric or ideas—must take place in real places. Nature happens, culture happens, somewhere. This grounding is the source of bioregional community politics. Such a visionary idea as an ecological Village Council comes forth from that. A council, that is, that includes the trees and birds, the sheep, goats, cows, and yaks and also the wild animals of high pastures as part of the village's local community. The village, as understood
in bioregional community-making, can be defined as the distant communal pastures and the total linkage of the larger area that is usually called a watershed, as well as the cultivated fields and households. When a village is dealing with government or corporation forces it should insist that the locally used territory is the whole local watershed. That is to say, it is the cultivated village lands plus the larger territory being used and travelled as in the 'commons' of earlier English customs. Otherwise, as we have too often seen, government agencies or business forces manage to co-opt the local hinterland as private or 'national' property, and relentlessly develop it according to an industrial model.

All of us can be as placed and grounded as a willow tree along the streams and also as free and fluid in the life of the whole planet as the water in the water cycle that passes through all forms and positions roughly every two million years. That is to say, our finite bodies and inevitable membership in cultures and regions must be taken as a valuable and positive condition on existence. And that 'furthermore' mind is fluid, nature is porous, and both biologically and culturally we are always fully part of the whole.

Our path will be the path of the compassionate heart and community (sangha) spirit that is tireless, warm, and politically well informed about the workings of governments, banking, and economics. We need an education for our young people that gives them pride in their people and their place, while introducing them to the complicated dynamics of world markets. We need an education that places them firmly within nature, and also gives them a picture of human affairs and accomplishments over the millennia. No village culture is without some sort of music, drama, and story that it can be proud of when measured against the rest of the world.

Finally, we must further a spiritual education that helps children appreciate the full inter-connectedness of nature, and encourages a biologically informed ethic of non-harming. It must help them understand that we are all simultaneously free and rooted, and that in fulfilling our roles as people of a given culture, time, and place, we can also find our true freedom.

_Sarvamangalam_  
May all beings flourish

(Extract from a talk given at a conference, _Rethinking Progress_ held in Ladakh.)

Gary Snyder is the author of several volumes of essays and several collections of poetry, including the Pulitzer Prize winning _Turtle Island, Axe Handles and Left Out in the Rain_. He teaches literature and wilderness thought at the University of California. He lives with his family on the San Junan Ridge in the Sierra foothills.

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‘SAPPED’!
STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT POLICIES VS ENVIRONMENT

MILOON KOTHARI & ASHISH KOTHARI

More than a year and a half after the adoption of the new economic policies and the structural adjustment programme, there has been almost no serious analysis of their implications on the living environment of our citizens. While it is no doubt difficult to predict their impact with accuracy because of the complex interplay of various economic, social, political and ecological factors it is possible to make some assessment based on past developmental trends in India and the experiences of other third world countries under similar programmes.

The last couple of years have seen drastic changes in India’s economic policies. The thrust towards socialism and egalitarianism which has characterised planning in the last four and a half decades (though not very successfully), has been all but given up, and moves made to usher in full-scale capitalism, domestic and global. Also gone is the emphasis towards self-sufficiency (somewhat more successful), displaced by an increasing dependence on agencies like the IMF and the World Bank, and international capital of other kinds.

Under the New Economic Policies (NEP), drastic ‘stabilisation’ and ‘structural adjustment’ programmes are being put into effect in an effort to meet India’s severe balance of payments crisis, and to propel its economy into quicker growth and global integration. Apart from direct fiscal policies, the major components of the new package include boosting exports to earn foreign exchange, liberalising industrial production, dropping barriers to the entry of foreign companies and goods, expanding privatisation and cutting government spending. Some of these are a part of the IMF-World Bank-led structural adjustment programme (SAP), a set prescription which these multilateral agencies have forced onto dozens of third world countries.

The drastic nature of the NEP package has understandably set off considerable debate of issues of economic management and national sovereignty. But the debate has only marginally, and in a very general way, touched the vital question of how the new economic policies will affect the environmental and living conditions of our citizens. It is surprising that a year and a half after the adoption of the new policies, there has been almost no serious analysis of their implications on the living environment of our citizens.

The natural environment has so far been looked at by conventional economists and development advocates, whose vision is the driving force behind the NEP, as either or both of two things: an exploitable resource, and a sink into which the effluents of affluence can be thrown. This view ignores the fact that for the vast majority of Indians, the natural environment forms the very basis of their subsistence economy. Forests, land, and waterbodies directly meet their food, water, housing, energy, medical, and cultural needs. When these resources are targeted by development planners for commercial use, or for appropriation by a small elite in the name of some unspecified ‘natural interest’, it is the lives and livelihoods of these people which are threatened. In adopting the NEP, has our government been
mindful of this?

It seems not. It is, of course, difficult to predict the impact with accuracy, for the interplay of various economic, social, political and ecological factors is complex, and there are pulls and counter-pulls of all kinds within Indian society, including among its decision-makers. But important lessons can be drawn from the experiences of other third world countries which have come under similar SAP regimes, and some analysis can be attempted by juxtaposing past developmental trends in India with the new policies. The over-wheming impression we are left with is that the NEP could lead to an acceleration in the already deteriorating environmental situation, and consequently further marginalisation and ecologically vulnerable conditions. This includes the landless and the marginal farmers, the tribals and the so-called OBCs, and amongst these groups particularly women and children.

FOREX, THE NEW GOD
Take, for instance, export-orientation. With foreign exchange (Forex) as the new god, the government will be keen on earning it any which way. This of course is not a new phenomenon; export of iron ore from Goa has devastated its once-lush forests, granite mining for export to Japan has laid bare hills in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, processing units for India's fourth largest export earner, leather, have polluted water over vast stretches in Tamil Nadu, and along the Ganga. Yet these are only precursors of what could come if the SAP aim of converting India into an export-led growth economy is fulfilled. What this could entail is a further and rapid transformation of staple food and subsistence crop lands into cash cropping, intensification of commercial fisheries in marine and fresh water areas, increase in mining for raw mineral exports and so on. The acceleration of this trend is already evident.

In a bid to 'tap the country's vast marine resources on a priority basis', the government recently cleared eleven hundred per cent export-oriented deep sea fishing ventures in the private sector, with foreign collaboration (Economic Times, Delhi, May 30, 1992). Indian companies are also quickly cashing in: the powerful house of Tatas has moved the Orissa state government to clear a large-scale shrimp farming project adjoining one of India's most valuable brackish wetlands, the Chilika Lake. The proposed project is aimed at exports primarily to Japan.

It has been argued that export-oriented development in itself is not destructive. The export value of a project/resource could theoretically be an argument for its conservation. Experience from India and other countries, however, strongly suggests otherwise. When the predominant motive for change in an economy becomes short-run profit-seeking and foreign exchange earning, the neglect of long-term environmental and social responsibility grows. Cash cropping in many parts of India has already led to severe problems of water overuse and pollution, fertiliser and pesticide-based contamination and land degradation. Large-scale commercialised fishing has led to destruction of aquatic and coastal ecosystems, and the marginalisation of traditional fisherfolk. If export-orientation could indeed be made more environment-and people-friendly, there is nothing in the current SAP package which could make it so.

Recently, an agri-business consortium has been proposed by the government, ostensibly to help small and marginal farmers, which is to give a boost to commercialising Indian agriculture to cater to expanding consumerist markets, both locally and abroad. MS Swaminathan, chief architect of the Green Revolution in India, praised this proposal, stating that this 'second Green Revolution' would shift the present emphasis on meeting minimum needs to tapping the full commercial potential of agriculture. Suddenly it seems that meeting minimum needs (like food and water) is no longer important, so long as money (especially forex) can be generated.

The experience of Latin American countries is indicative. Under SAP policies, the Costa Rican government has since 1985 encouraged beef exports, clearing thousands of hectares of forests for conversion into ranches. The burgeoning cattle population has overgrazed the land, increasing topsoil erosion and killing the country's only coral reef due to silt deposition. Under IMF recommendations, the government reduced credit to subsistence farmers, replaced indigenous grown basic grains with imports from the United States, and subsidised cash crops (strawberries, melons and ornamental flowers) for export to the US market. The resultant ecological damage has
been accompanied by a rapid growth of poverty, and increasing income disparity.

In Guatemala, export-orientation has led to the replacement of the staple crop, maize by cash crops such as cardamom, produced to meet the demands of the international market. Ironically, maize has now to be imported! SAP-led policies have also led to excessive commercial timber logging at a time when the Mayan people have been forbidden to cut even a single tree for their daily subsistence.

Similarly, over a large part of the African continent, SAP policies of export-orientation have aggravated ecological degradation through excessive cropping, overgrazing, soil erosion and deforestation. For example, Zimbabwe was still recently hailed as one of the few ‘successes’ in Africa, with an efficient public distribution system and self-sufficient in foodgrains. Not any more. In the current drought year, the country is facing critical famine conditions. Part of this is a direct consequence of the IMF-influenced forex chase, which forced the government to sell off one year’s stock of foodgrains, depress the price of the staple crop maize, and encourage farmers to switch to cash cropping. ‘A country needs financial reserves, not large grain reserves’, one Bank official comments.

Exports are one way of earning forex, tourism is another. The last few months have witnessed an aggressive new thrust to tourism promotion. Many areas previously restricted to foreigners—Ladakh and Lahaul-Spiti, the Andaman Islands and others which had so far been saved from hordes of insensitive and uncaring tourists, have been thrown open. And it is not only India’s image which is being sold. Recently the government announced its intentions to lease out entire islands in Lakshadweep, India’s famous coral island union territory, to international hoteliers for development as tourist resorts.

**LIBERALISATION VS ENVIRONMENT**

The other major component of SAP is the liberalisation of the economy. Unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles definitely need to be removed, but the tendency seems to be to throw the baby out with the bathwater. In no country in the world has industry on its own shown social and environmental responsibility; there has always been a need for appropriate regulations. Such regulations are in grave danger now. The first hint of this has come in the strong opposition to a proposed central government notification of January 1992, which would make environmental clearances for major industries and development projects mandatory.

Such a notification is long overdue to control the haphazard and often politically motivated siting and planning of development projects in India, with severe social and environmental impacts. Not surprisingly, the strongest objections to this move came from chief ministers of several states, industrial houses, and export conglomerations, all of whom argued that such a notification would create barriers to the new-found industrial ‘freedom’. To his credit, the prime minister defended the notification in a meeting of India’s National Development Council, but has not yet, over 11 months after it was proposed, okayed its final gazetting.

Indeed, in the new ‘liberalised’ (read: free-for-all) atmosphere, the environment departments in all states and at the centre are going to become everyone’s punching bag, and will find it harder and harder to enforce their regulations. In Gujarat, several private sector industries have been cleared adjacent to a Marine National Park, despite objection from wildlife officials.

Yet another example of the destructive potential of the new ‘liberal’ era is the strong revival of the proposal for a ‘Free Port’ in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Scientists and ecologists have justifiably declared these tropical islands, with their incredible wealth of rainforests, coral reefs, and marine waters, as one of the world’s most important genetic storehouses. By their very nature, these islands are also extremely fragile, their ecosystems easily disrupted and leading to a chain of consequences which have repeatedly rebound on human settlers themselves. In addition, the islands are home to some of India’s most ancient tribes, two of whom have already been reduced to near extinction by the activities of outsiders. It is sheer common sense that a Free Port here would be folly of the highest order, especially when the greed for foreign exchange is threatening a tourist boom in the islands. The proposal had been dropped for the last couple of years, following strong protest from various quarters. Yet, in a recent meeting of the Island Development Authority, chaired by the prime minister, the proposal has been revived, and a group reportedly asked to look into its feasibility.

**PRIVATISATION AND FOREIGN INVESTMENT: HOW WISE?**

Accompanying liberalisation is an emphasis on privatisation. Resources which are considered for the common good and are under public control may increasingly come under private corporate control. Particularly severe will be the adoption of ‘user charges’ on essential services such as drinking water, sanitation and medical care, regardless of whether people can afford to pay. Such a measure has been recommended by the World Bank for years, ostensibly to increase the economic viability of social services by adopting the principle of ‘cost recovery’. For families that are burdened with these charges, it becomes increasingly difficult to meet other basic needs.

Yet another thrust of the SAP is the opening up of the country to foreign investment and goods. A limited amount of competition from abroad in specific sectors may do our own industrial sectors some good. However, the environmental consequences of what is
proposed may offset the gains. An extreme, but not uncommon, form of this mindset is evident in the by now infamous internal memo circulated by World Bank’s chief economist Lawrence Summers. He suggested that the Bank should be ‘encouraging more migration of dirty industries to the less developed countries.’

The transfer of hazardous industries and commodities, as has already happened in Africa, becomes much more possible with the new open-door policies. So does, on the other hand, the transfer and growth of pollution control and ‘clean’ technologies. But if trends in other countries are an indicator, this positive prospect may be far outweighed by negative ones. Our government is currently wooing Japan’s giant corporations, many of whom have a horrendous environmental record. These multinationalations have caused the decimation of rainforests in south-east Asia, and the consequent dispossession and displacement of entire tribal and poor peasant communities. Prime minister Rao’s recent visit to Japan with a begging bowl, and the talk of a ‘mini-Japan’ being established to provide special privileges to Japanese investors residing in India are chilling indicators of things to come.

At the current juncture in our country, the government will have to continue to play an important role in harmonising developmental and environmental interests. This was recently reiterated by the prime minister. But will the NEP allow this? It is here that the IMF–World Bank insistence on increasing government efficiency by cutting spending is of particular concern. Though these agencies do not necessarily specify which sectors to make budgetary cuts in, countries under SAP conditionalities invariably end up chopping allocations for those social or ‘soft’ sectors which cannot show immediate tangible returns. The last three budgets (since 1989) have been mild to severe cuts, or no appreciable rise in allocations, in a number of social sectors: education, health, developmental and employment-generating expenditure and environment.

Indian finance minister, Manmohan Singh’s 1992–93 budget is particularly harsh in this respect. While some of the cuts may be justified on account of under-utilisation in the previous year, the severity of the cuts indicates another logic at work. Allocations for the prevention and control of pollution have been cut (in real terms) by 35.5 per cent at a time when the policies outlined above are likely to increase the pollution problem. Rural sanitation programmes have suffered a cut of 46.8 per cent, and the rural water supply project of the Water Mission has been sheared of 39.3 per cent of its budget. In a situation in which lakhs of children and adults die or are afflicted every year by water-related disease, this cut is extraordinarily callous. Other programmes which have suffered are wastelands development (down by 23.5 per cent) and promotion of non-conventional energy sources (cut by 26.3 per cent). But the heaviest reduction (61 per cent) is in the biomass development programme. This cut, coupled with increasing privatisation of common property resources, displays total insensitivity towards the 30 crore people whose very existence is tied to the health and availability of biomass fuels and fodder.

These spending cuts are already having their impacts on the rural poor. Several voluntary organisations working in the drought-hit areas of Rajasthan have reported intensified distress as allocation of foodgrains under the public distribution system (PDS) has been severely curtailed. Cuts in the water supply and biomass development programmes may undermine long-term anti-drought measures. Further desertification could result where the government reduces investments in conserving or regreening, while the rural poor have no option but to overuse the meagre natural resources left to them. Experiences from several sub-Saharan African countries under SAP indicate the clear co-relation between SAP policies and intensified desertification.

The health impacts of the NEP are particularly worrying. Reductions in investment towards improving civic infrastructure, particularly water supply and sanitation, have resulted in sudden outbreaks of cholera in several Latin American countries. The IMF, in the case of Peru, was directly held responsible. In mid-1991, Hiroshi Nakajima, director-general of the World Health Organisation stated that: ‘The economic adjustment programme dictated by the IMF is responsible for the increasing cholera epidemic in Peru... without doubt, in order to comply with payment claimed by the IMF, Peru now finds itself in a position that it cannot allocate more
resources to fight the cholera epidemic'.

Many communities in India live in perilous conditions where epidemics of water-borne diseases (cholera, diarrhoea, typhoid and hepatitis) already occur without warning. The government is reducing allocations, which will result in even more severely debilitating and life-threatening conditions.

In its eagerness to maintain an 'honourable' record of repayments so that even more money can be borrowed from the IMF, the Philippines government has diverted money from primary health care, drinking water schemes, employment generation, housing and nutrition. The results are horrific on women and children, as has been repeatedly pointed out by UNICEF and the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) and other Filipino NGOs. One child is reported to die every hour from the diversion of resources for debt servicing. This particularly telling example exposes the hollowness of the claims that SAPs are only short-term measures and do not involve any severe hardships in the long run. As Richard Jolly of UNICEF says, 'If you miss the opportunity when a child is one, five or even ten years old, to provide the basic nutrition, early education, and a secure loving home, the consequences will show when that child is an adult. I fear that we will see these consequences and have to deal with them 20, 30, 40 years from now'. It is, of course, another matter that today's planners will not be around then.

Finance minister, Manmohan Singh in a recent lecture on Environment and the New Economic Policies correctly stated that environment is 'here and now' for the majority of India's people. Unfortunately, his severe budget cuts do not reflect any concern for this 'here and now'. According to the minister, such cuts are only temporary, and greater allocations will be possible once the economy stabilises. Such logic is not only small compensation to a drought-hit Rajasthan struggling for survival, but also exposes the insensitivity of a minister sold to the neo-classical world-view of economics.

Spending cuts and other measures also entail a massive laying off of workers, about which much has been said. An estimate by the ILO and UNDP states that 1992-93 between 4 and 8 million people will become unemployed. Many of these people, who are currently employed in rural development programmes, are likely to either migrate to cities, adding to the environment and social stress already faced there. Those who are already in the cities are unlikely to leave, but will probably be forced to live in environmentally degraded slum settlements. If they do go back to rural areas, they will probably end up further degrading the environment by being forced to cash in on common lands or moving into marginal, ecologically sensitive zones. Certainly SAP appears not to provide any alternative employment for them.

Indeed, an often overlooked consequence of SAP is the large-scale displacement resulting from the dispossession of people and communities. The rise in unemployment, changes in modes of agricultural production particularly affecting small farmers, intensification of natural resources to fuel foreign trade, favouritism to the urban or commercialised sector to the detriment of rural development, the acceleration of five star tourism and so forth could all lead to displacement. In the Philippines, policies resulting from debt servicing (to the tune of 56 million a day!) have displaced hundreds of thousands of people from their productive lives and driven them into huge squatter settlements that surround the cities. In Brazil, the conversion of agricultural lands into export-oriented cash cropping (soybean, etc.) has displaced thousands of small peasants, who have been forced to clear the Amazon rainforests to eke out a perilous living.

The irrefutable evidence of environmental damage from a majority of SAP affected countries should have cautioned our government to proceed only after a thorough understanding of the likely consequences in India. Yet, there was no environmental or social impact assessment of these policies by either the government or the funding agencies. Indeed, it is unlikely that the ministry of environment and forests and other relevant ministries were even consulted.

Keeping in mind the adverse impact the SAPs have had on living conditions all over the world, it is shocking that the IMF has not even bothered to conduct social and environmental impact studies of the SAP that it recommends. As has been pointed out, the IMF has taken no effective measures to protect the poorest sectors of society or the environment... Since poverty and vulnerability are an integral part of the crisis, any adjustment programme that does not seek to reverse this from worsening is wholly inadequate... Currently, unlike the World Bank, the IMF does not conduct studies of environmental and social consequences of its action. This is partly the result of the absence of qualified personnel on the IMF staff in the areas of natural resource, development, poverty and related subjects, as well as the lack of contact with the affected populations'.

SAP VS DEMOCRATIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS

One of the worst aspects of the NPE is the thoroughly undemocratic process in which it has been adapted. There was no public debate, no attempt by the government to explain its consequences. In his June 17 lecture Manmohan Singh said that a debate should take place now. This is like throwing open the stable door to let the horse out (or rather, to let the multinationals in!), then asking everyone to debate whether the doors should have been opened or not!

For those who question these policies, democratic space is being further squeezed. Thousands of workers were arrested in pre-emptive moves all over the country, before their June 16 strike protesting the new economic policies.
So keen is the government to appease its donors that peaceful demonstrations organised by grass-roots movements against the NEP have been often brutally dealt with.

In the face of such opposition, the IMF’s stand remains tragically irresponsible and bereft of the lessons of history. In September 1991, the IMF told the United Nations that ‘programmes supported by the Fund are the programmes of the countries themselves. Indeed, they cannot succeed unless they have the full support of the population, including those whose full economic, social and cultural rights may be infringed upon.” If full support is the criteria for success, then SAP is bound to fail in India, since our government has neither sought nor received the support of the majority of its citizens on this issue.

The immense loss of social and human capabilities that accompany the adverse environmental impacts of the NEP is a violation not only of constitutional rights of India’s citizens, but also of numerous rights recognised in international legal instruments which India has ratified. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The latter in its Article 11(1) places the obligation upon States Parties to recognise ‘the right of every one to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions’. The ICESCR in Article 12(b) also recognises that “the steps to be taken by the State Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realisation of this right shall include those necessary for... The improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene”.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recently noted in a legal interpretation of Article 11(1) that ‘external factors can affect the right to a continuous improvement of living conditions, and that in many State Parties overall living conditions declined in the 1980s... It would thus appear to the committee that a general decline in living and housing conditions, directly attributable to policy and legislative decisions by State Parties, and in the absence of accompanying compensatory measures, would be inconsistent with the obligations found in the Covenant (the ICESCR)’.

All this is not to say that the pre-NEP days were ideal from an environmental and social justice viewpoint. There is no denying that structural transformation of our society and economy is required but such a transformation must tackle the patently unequal control over natural resources (especially land and water) which allows the minority elite to race towards a luxurious 21st century, at the cost of further dispossessing the poor of whatever little they have. This transformation must also redirect the present model of development, which is socially iniquitous and ecologically unsustainable. The NEP shows no potential for this, but rather reinforces the status quo.

In India, the true alternative to the economic crisis lies in getting away from both an over-centralised system, which has been the case since independence, and an excessively privatised one, which is looming on the horizon. Community management of resources needs to be revived, with a clear set of rights and obligations for local communities, governmental agencies, and voluntary organisations. Nor is this an empty slogan; if sustainable development is the goal of economic policies, then there is much to learn from the many genuine people’s and governmental developmental efforts that are scattered throughout India. The watershed and land management experiments of Railegan Siddhi (Maharashtra) and Sukhomajri (Uttar Pradesh), involving villagers with the help of some enlightened individuals who had their feet firmly on the ground, have turned food- and cash-deficit villages into surplus economies. Railegan Siddhi is, in fact, quite an eye opener, for it is in one of India’s most drought-prone areas (an average rainfall of 400 mm), and has achieved adequate water supplies for drinking and agriculture through rainwater harvesting, without the help of a costly debt-incurring big dam. These experiments have also ensured a greater degree of equity in the distribution of the resultant benefits than has been possible in most government programmes. Such equity has been the hallmark of another unique effort, the water management and distribution system of Pani Panchayat in villages of Pune district of Maharashtra. Then there are the dozens of efforts at switching to organic farming, either through traditional methods on new ones, reducing or eliminating completely the need for expensive, ecologically disastrous, and fossil fuel guzzling chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Gloria Land in Pondicherry, Narayan Reddy's farm in Karnataka, Bhaskar Save and P D Baphna’s orchards at Bordi (Maharashtra), and myriad others come to mind, yet remain neglected by the dominant agricultural establishment. As for governance, there is lot to learn from the tribal village of Seed (Rajasthan), which is managed by a gram sabha (village council) having the legal and executive power to decide all matters relating to local land and natural resource use, under the Rajasthan Grandan Act of 1971. Stringent rules regarding the use of common lands ensure their conservation and sustainable use. But in many places, local community structures have broken down; they will need to be revived, and collaborative management strategies between them and the government thought of to complement each other's strengths. There are, for instance, the joint forest management systems evolving in many parts of India, between villages and forest departments, which are proving to be successful not only in afforesting degraded lands but also in providing employment and economic security to impoverished village communities.

The ideas and models are there, the solutions staring at us in the face, if only we are to look. The danger is that the new policies may wipe out these genuinely sustainable alternatives even before we have learnt from them.

_Courtesy: _Economic and Political Weekly_

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Illustrations by Smita
BOOK REVIEW

DYNAMIC FOLK TOYS
SUDARSHAN KHANNA
PUBLISHED BY: THE OFFICE OF
THE DEVELOPMENT
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HANDICRAFTS, NEW DELHI.

JOY OF MAKING
INDIAN TOYS
SUDARSHAN KHANNA
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DESIGN AND NATIONAL
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AND TECHNOLOGY.
PRICE - RS.90/-

PARIKSHIT SINGH

The other day, in one of Delhi’s several villages, Masjid Moth, I saw a handful of children playing with a sort of boomerang-cum-frisbee. They had made this rather intriguing toy by joining three ice cream bar sticks into a triangle. They then used a bit of waste bycycle pneumatic tube to make a rough sling.

This little creation was a testimony to the inventiveness of a child. Despite their poverty, they did not deprive themselves of fun and toys.

Two days later, I came across two books, Dynamic Folk Toys and The Joy of Making Indian Toys, both by Sudarshan Khanna, a teacher at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, keenly involved in the design and development of Indian toys. These books have been born out of his extensive field studies and travels all over India.

As the author states in his introduction to Dynamic Folk Toys, ‘India is one of the few countries in the world today with a living tradition of folk toys...’

innovativeness is practised.

This monograph then proceeds to highlight the application of principles of science in the making of these folk toys which ‘are basically the product of ideas.’ The book is amply illustrated with examples of toys using the principles of lever (dacoit from Orissa made with cardboard, wooden stick and string), sound through impact and friction (Jhumhuna rattle from Agra made of reedgrass and pebbles), spring and gravity (monkey from Calcutta of pith and bamboo) screw motion and elasticity (paper snake). Many more principles of science are illustrated with many more examples.

Khanna takes the life of four toymakers into account. Their problems are manifold - the onslaught of industrialisation wiping away the individual toy maker in favour of mass produced toys, the relatively low remuneration that the toys give in these inflation ridden times, and lack of good working conditions.

The questions that crop up are, how can a better deal be given to the thousands of artisans who earn their living through this activity, how can this important sector, which is losing its force, be revitalised? How can this unorganised and decentralised sector of craft culture be linked to the organised industrial sector and to education?

‘The best thing a child can do with a toy is to break it. The next best thing is to make it.’ By the author’s own confession, the book, Joy of Making Indian Toys, is about toys which children can make and break freely. These toys are made with the simplest of materials (e.g. whistle made by rolling a leaf), and introduces the child to basic principles of technology. While the earlier monograph looks at some of the toys and their makers already in existence this one is more like a manual of how to make them. It is partially true that children from poorer communities make these toys more often and the reasons are obvious. These toys are part and parcel of the existing culture of making things with the hands and using recycled and discarded materials.

Making toys is fun and aids discovery, intimately and personally. In conclusion, Khanna says, ‘The book is really a tribute to the genius of many ordinary people... These anonymous self-trained scientific minds must have developed these toys out of love and service.’

Both these books demand urgent inclusion in school libraries and curricula if our inquiry is to go beyond guides and passbooks.
FOR THOSE WITH PLENTY OF ZEAL AND DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT HERE IS

GREAT BOOK WITH PLENTY OF INFORMATION

Such as
A) Directory of Environmental opportunities in Delhi
   a) Government Agencies
   b) Citizens groups
   c) Libraries
   d) Nature & Environment Clubs
B) Directory of Environmental Academic Programmes in India.

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