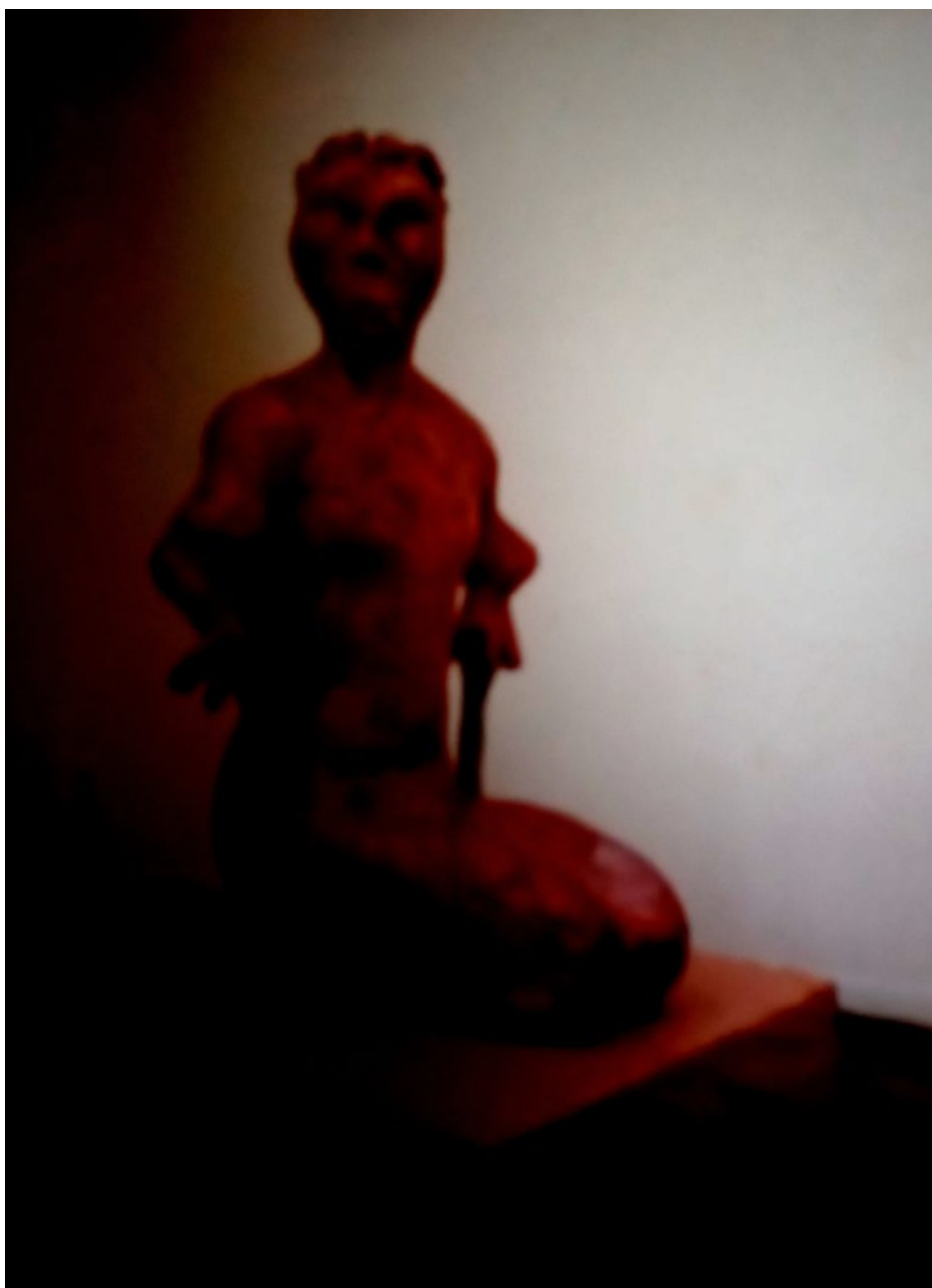


Social Distancing or Physical Distancing? / Archana Hebbar Colquhoun

a

sculptural representation



Seated Man

Covid-19 and Social Distancing

The current global coronavirus pandemic leading to COVID-19 shows no signs of dying a natural death; far from it, we are nowhere near finding a solution to arresting the spread of the virus. The virus appeared mysteriously and suddenly, infected some, multiplied rapidly, hitch-hiked by various means and entered all parts of the world – sparing no region. It underwent numerous mutations during its journey around Planet Earth and half a year later still stays firmly away from the grasp of human comprehension.

This uncontrolled, worldwide pandemic has completely transformed our lives and we have come up with one rather simple behavioral method and the only known effective one so far to cope with this situation. The world's lingua franca has given it the name "Social Distancing." The English language is highly adaptive. But the language is also very adept at coining specious terms. These terms are then taken up unquestioningly by anyone speaking any language, anywhere in the world.

I would like to discuss, using one of my sculptural works, the connotative meanings of the term "Social Distancing." As a more suitable term to use in the COVID-19 context, I would suggest the term "Physical Distancing."

A Sculptural representation

The subject of this article is a sculpture of a seated man. It is the third in the series of five sculptures that I made in Tokyo, in the late 80s. These sculptures are based on specific people I saw on the streets of "Calcutta," in the early to mid-80s. I did not and could not strike up a conversation with any of them. Perhaps I did not have the strength of spirit to connect with them through verbal communication. I had my own problems and I felt just as helpless as they did or perhaps

they did not even feel the same sort of disempowerment I felt. They were, for all I know, stronger in spirit than most and had the mental strength to accept their condition and live a functional life with a reasonable level of happiness and fulfillment.

The reason for the absence of an interaction with any of the individuals I saw and passed by on the streets of Calcutta that year in the early to mid-80s was revealed to me gradually, over the years. This happened through certain specific experiences I had with people, belonging to different groups, in various countries. These experiences were, what I would call, mundane and of little import when taken from the point of view of a day to day existence. To me, however, they were eye openers. These experiences signified to me the true meaning of the currently much bandied about term "Social Distancing."

I posted a write-up about my second sculpture in the series, *crawling man*, titled "The World on its Hands and Knees," since the person the sculpture was modeled on represented to me the condition that all of us are in now – our lives ruthlessly controlled by a global pandemic caused by a bio-chemical entity, the coronavirus, that exists in that nebulous state between living and nonliving.

The fear of COVID-19 is real, palpable, and terrifying because we have no understanding of the workings of the coronavirus. A term with a very specific meaning has been coined to describe the physical distance each of us needs to maintain with everyone except for the few people with whom we share a living space, excluding even your blood relatives if they happen to live in separate accommodation.

This **physical distancing** is termed "**Social Distancing.**"

Social Distancing vs Physical Distancing

“Social Distancing” is entirely erroneous as a term to describe the sort of distancing we need to maintain between each other during this pandemic. The ‘distancing’ is necessary so as to not catch the virus from people with whom interaction is unavoidable, termed essential workers, and spreading the virus to other individuals.

Social Distancing as a practice is nothing new; it has always existed in all societies, in one form or another. It is implemented and controlled by a small minority of agents of power, be they the ruling elite, the strong amongst the weak etc. Using the term **“Social Distancing”** in the present situation to describe a **prescriptive behavioral form** of maintaining physical distance to avoid spreading of **COVID-19** that applies to **all**, irrespective of their social standing, performs the task of validating, insidiously, the deep social divide, wide-spread all over the world. The term gives credence to the **institutionally managed** segregation of communities that disempowers large groups of people based on their color, ethnicity, economic standing, gender, etc., and people with physical disabilities. These groups of people live a **socially distanced** life. I have not included other groups or even people with disabilities that are not to do with the visible physical body, in this discussion.

Persons with physical disabilities

Among the many disempowered groups of people, such as those listed above and others, it is the group of people with physical disabilities that are uniquely placed as the ones whose lives are more severely affected by social isolation and the resulting **social distancing**. A person with physical disabilities is a single individual, often experiencing a

sense of separation even within their own family. Although living a **socially distanced** life like many other groups of people, a person with a physical disability is **alone in their disability** as each form of disability is different from another. The extent and nature of the disability depends on individual factors and the person with a disability **does not belong to a clearly identifiable collective.**

Examples of a 'collective' would be an ethno-racial social group or a community of economically deprived families, living in ghettoized, marginalized conditions. Accordingly, a person with disabilities lacks the emotional support system that individuals belonging to other disempowered groups with shared problems and a common identity have.

The social and emotional isolation of people with a physical disability may be the result of congenital factors, of deliberate acts of cruelty, accidents, and even more shockingly and tragically due to poorly understood medical treatments. These treatments are administered hastily, not having been properly verified but widely hailed as effective, and any side-effects resulting from the treatment, which may be severe and irreversible are identified only when the damage is already done.

As mentioned earlier, physical disabilities can include a whole range of conditions, including ones that are not readily visible to others or those that entirely escape the notice of people who are strangers to the person with a disability.

A physical disability of a particular kind and why it became the subject of my sculptures

The form of physical disability I chose to highlight through the set of five sculptures belong to the one category of

people (four of the sculptures referring to actual individuals I saw), who are either born with or developed later in life anomalies (*in medical terms a "deformity"*) in their bodily structure. Their limbs, extremities, and craniofacial features affect how they are viewed by others and the bodily movement and functionalities of the people in this category are restricted to various degrees. Often, the stark visual nature of their physical characteristics, entirely unique to each individual and the disabilities being specifically their own, marks them apart from others. They are denied a sense of belonging to a community. Inarguably, the social and emotional isolation that the people in this group experience compounds their day to day difficulties and increases their dependency on others. The subject was compelling and I was and still am deeply affected by the life situation of people with disabilities who have readily visible "malformations" of the body.

Before I talk about my sculpture, *seated man*, and the form and content of the work, I would like to make clear my rationale and impetus behind selecting, as subjects of my artwork, people with physical characteristics that restrict their mobility and whose body structure does not conform to expected norms. If the motivation for doing the set of sculptures is not already evident from the foregoing discussion, I would like to stress that by doing these works I want to bring to light the pain and suffering of these individuals, **which is singularly their own.**

These set of sculptures may be deemed voyeuristic, distasteful, and even lacking in basic human sensitivity and compassion on the part of the artist. This is one reading of the work, and from the point of view of the artist, that is me, the reading reflects the reader's/viewer's own point of view, which does not allow them to extend their understanding of what an art work stands for, the compelling motivations of the artist for doing works of this kind, and the complex web

of meanings the artwork holds. These meanings of the artworks constantly change and come to light depending on the context in which they are presented and the nature of the audience. There may be no specific target audience in the mind of the artist when a work is created, unless the work is commissioned by a specific patron with clear-cut requirements. My set of works are entirely self-motivated and created with no specific audience in mind.

It is my conjecture that the *seated man*, who in all probability was homeless, had a congenital condition that caused the shortening of his arms but evidently with strong musculature in the upper and forearms, both structurally relocated and joined in such a way as to provide for an elbow function. The formation of the arms had a certain degree of symmetry, in that the arms had the same proportion and structurally related to the rest of the body in a similar manner.

The Sculpture of a *seated man*



A **seated man**, homeless perhaps, his posture is almost that of a yogi. His torso is upright and handsome. He sits with his legs folded under in the yoga pose of *Vajrasana*, holding a stick in one hand for support. His arms are strong, although

shortened. They are connected securely to his shoulders in a “standard” anatomical position. His head is turned sideways to view something that he caught sight of from the corner of his eyes. He used his very own form of transport, a little trolley, which I edited out from the sculpture. This I did so as to give prominence to the figure of the man who bore himself with dignity to the extent he could, given his circumstances. The trolley would have been a distraction and would have drawn attention to his disability.

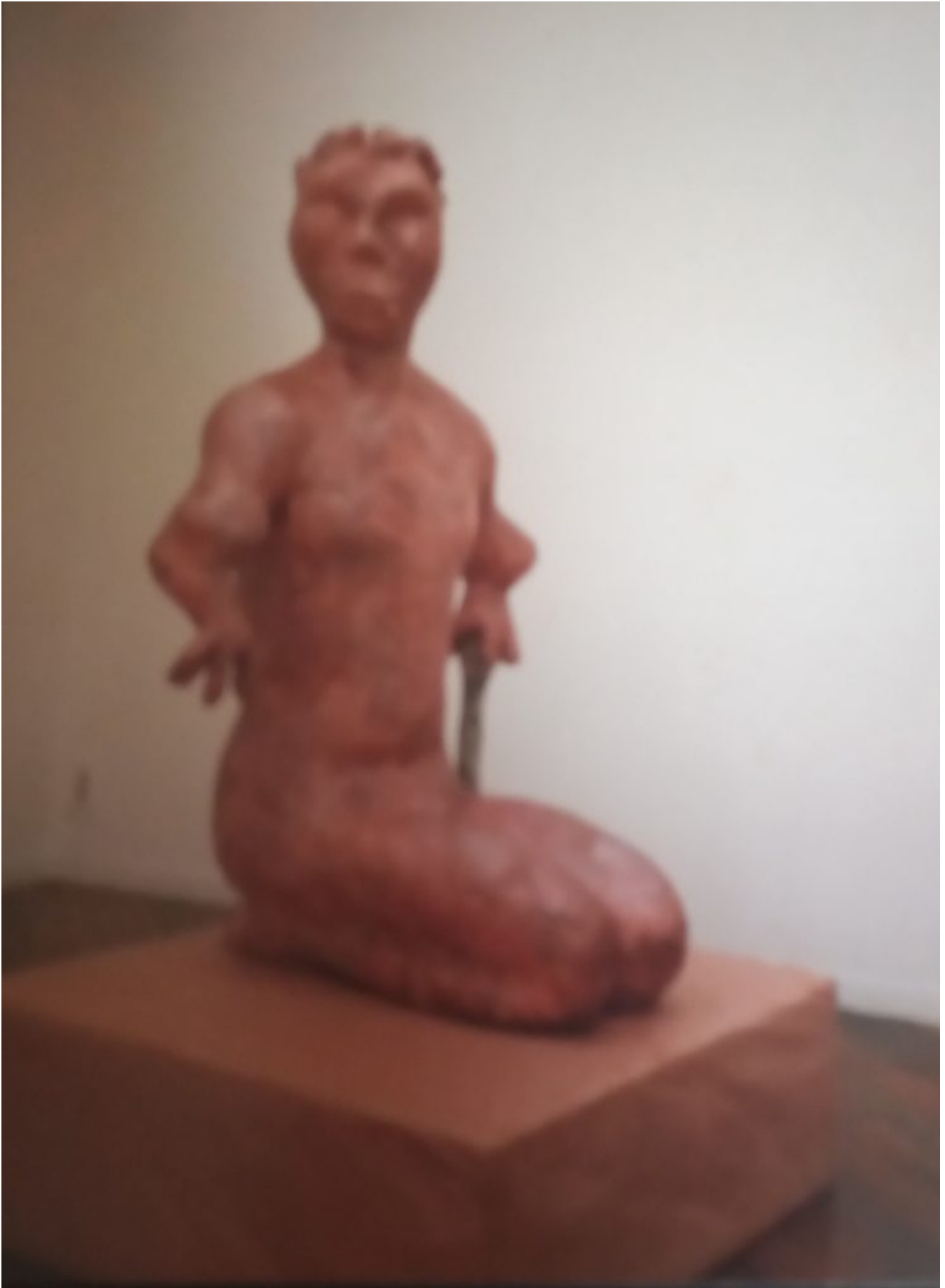
Whatever innate dignity his physical demeanor may have presented, he was still an outcast – homeless, living on the streets, and displaying those physical features that the vast majority of people could not relate to and from whom they maintained a clear social distance.

The social distancing of people such as the *seated man* has no relation to the “Social Distancing” prescribed by the governments of all countries for tackling COVID-19. What is needed in the present circumstances is “Physical Distancing.”

If the indignity of a subtle form of social distancing was not enough, the *seated man* spending most of his time on the pavement had people walking past him, occasionally tossing a few coins in his bowl, who practiced a more blatant form of “physical distancing;” whereby, when they passed him on the street, they kept a distance that was more than necessary. This they did to make certain that they avoided contact with him. They walked past him by making a wide arc of a semi-circular curve using a quick motion to go past him, in the shortest possible time.

Practicing social distancing in relation to people isolated from the mainstream of society existed way before COVID-19 gripped our lives.

Displaying the work in an art gallery



In order to express the combined qualities of dignity and social isolation of the *seated man*, the figure was placed directly on the floor of the gallery on the first day of the

show, and from the second day of the show until the closing of the show the figure was placed on a pedestal, which not only isolated him but also provided him with an elevating platform, giving him the dignity he deserves.

Dharti Arts Residency 2018 | Public Talks – Pallavi Paul | 13 June

Serendipity Arts Foundation

<http://www.serendipityartsfoundation.org/>

Dharti Arts Residency 2018

As part of its programming, Dharti Arts Residency 2018 is hosting a series of public talks by artists, performers, and cultural practitioners. Invited speakers will give an illustrated lecture about their practice, which will be followed by a conversation with the audience.

13-06-18 | 6pm – 7.30pm

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Neeraj Gupta Wins Silver in Florence Biennale

Sculptor Neeraj Gupta became the first Indian artist to get the Lorenzo il Magnifico SILVER medal in sculpture in XIth Florence Biennale, the second highest award of an important art event of Europe. The award is significant because it comes from the Birth Place and work place of the most important artist of the history Michelangelo.

Michelangelo not only established the role of an artist in the society but also took the art to a new high. He proved that the best in the art is yet to come and demolished the myth that best art was created in Roman Era.

So this important award to an Indian sculptor improves the Image of India in terms of artistic capability on the international scene but also proves that Indian are second to none intellectual and art areha also.

The award was also significant because there was a staff completion from more than 1000 participating artist from around 73 major nations. Their award will help put the contemporary Indian art in international focus.

Recovering the Republic

Recovering the Republic

Anisha Shekhar Mukherji



1. Plastic Salt Container, in Urban Kitchens
 2. Traditional Salt Container
 3. Traditional coconut scraper
- (Courtesy: Ira Chaudhuri)

I would like to begin with a question. A question asked by an external juror to the first year post-graduate students of Industrial Design in the Delhi School of Planning and Architecture, at the end of their research presentations comparing a traditional craft with its modern counterpart. "Which is more important, the survival of the craft or the survival of the craftsman?"

Considering the abysmal conditions that most traditional crafts-people practice their art in, and the pittance they receive for hours of strenuous creative work, this question is entirely apt. It sums up the entire dilemma in reviving the manifest arts and crafts of India. Traditional craft is today unable to give either dignity or money to support its practitioners in our Republic. To ensure their own survival they abandon it, in favour of the most feasible employment alternative available—as road or building construction labourers, factory workers, domestic help. Such literally back-breaking unskilled work earns them some money. But it gives no surety of tenure, no provision of basic human dignity, no respect for their persons or their labour. We have all seen these labourers in our cities, their children lying unattended in a corner of the dusty road, their

habitation consisting of a few plastic sheets. It appears that while soon there may be no traditional artists, having either starved or taken on other jobs marginally better than starvation, the relics of their art will survive as museum pieces in this country and in others, such as the beautiful traditional coconut scraper, from the private collection of Sankho Chaudhuri, Courtesy: Ira Chaudhuri

What then should we do? We who praise and display the skilled products of such hands and minds, in safe and comfortable environments so different from theirs? We do not have to look too far back in space or time for the answer. It was given more than seventy years before, by none other than Mahatma Gandhi. He wrote in 1934,

‘In a nutshell, of the things we use, we should restrict our purchases to the articles which villages manufacture. In other words, we should evoke the artistic talent of the villager’.¹

We have as a country disregarded this advice. The inaction or actions of our own government has resulted in the destruction of traditional habitats and the cultures that such habitats foster. Despite the manifest artistic talent of the villager, our way of life today routinely favours ‘articles produced in big cities, even if they are obviously inferior in workmanship *and* design. We have segregated things of beauty from things of utility. They reflect our own segregation of lives where we separate work and pleasure into different compartments. Thus our homes and places of work, both from the outside and the inside, use materials that degrade the environment and consume huge amounts of energy in their design, manufacture and maintenance. Most products of daily use in even the homes of the relatively well-off and well-educated are *devoid* of aesthetic form or detail. What better example to demonstrate this, than to compare the domestic container for salt, the humble but vital ingredient of food that Gandhiji chose to use as his symbol for self-reliance from the British? The photograph above depicts a salt container collected from a rural home, by Sankho Choudhuri in the course of his travels over the length and breadth of the country and beyond. Contrast this with the usual salt container in a kitchen today.

We instill the same lack of feeling for art in our children, in the choices that we make for them. Though traditional hand-made toys, such as the wooden Benaras toy shown below, are practical objects to play with and are beautiful both as examples of craft and of design, it is the mass produced plastic toys of similar price available commercially, which most of us prefer to buy for our children today.



Traditional *Banarasi* handmade parrot



Plastic mass-produced toy dog

This is a reflection of the 'colonization of our minds'. We have been conditioned into believing that the *only* way to progress is to imitate the cultures of the Western countries. This perception continues today, even when it is increasingly evident that the western mechanized model of development is neither congenial to individual creativity, nor sustainable for the earth's resources. We all know that its factories occupy substantial land, and consume *quantities* of minerals, water and electricity *only* in order to mass-produce standardized objects devoid of individual characterization, and made

of energy-intensive materials. When they are thrown after use they poison the earth and irremediably harm our habitats. Contrast this with the cycle of production, use and disposal of traditional crafts. Produced in a home environment which does not require any extra investment in separate land or buildings, the natural materials that they overwhelmingly use such as clay, wood, coconut shells, reeds, bamboos, do not degrade the environment, but add to its fertility after they are broken or have outlived their use. Thus, the input as well as the output of small-scale craft and design activity is far more humane and superior to the 'environmental and human cost' of large-scale mechanization.

Despite this evident fact, and despite a famed artistic tradition that still continues in some measure today, our institutions give credence only to book-knowledge or machine-skills. Most designers and artists graduating from reputed national universities cannot craft anything with their own hands to equal the skill of traditional designers. This is why perhaps they produce banal work that is merely a copy of repackaged and repetitive Western ideas. Those that are in positions to do so, refuse to heed the economic potential of the vast human resource of traditional craftsmakers, which can not only support itself with practically no government investment, but can also earn the country much money through its craft and design skills. Some of our policy documents such as the revised Draft National Design Policy, do state that they would 'promote value added designs focusing on India's unique position as a country with a rich cultural heritage...'.² But in real terms many rare crafts-skills, far from being promoted, actually face extinction because they are even refused recognition as an economic industry. Student research shows that possibly the only remaining family in Paharganj in Delhi which practices the craft of hand-woven *chiks*, have been refused PAN numbers, since only pit-loom woven *chiks* are recognized by the government as a craft industry!³

Historically, such craftsmen and artists of India have been famed over the world since centuries. So much so, that the eighteenth-century Persian invader Nadir Shah took care to carry hundreds of craftsmen

along with all the wealth that he looted from India. The crafts have often reached their pinnacle in cities, and in or around the courts of kings and noblemen. How was it that we earlier managed to develop the potential talents of our people, while we are unable to do so today despite our democracy? In earlier times, as Dharampal, the noted Gandhian historian has recorded ‘...the sciences and technologies...in countries like India...[were] in tune with their more **decentralist** politics and there was no seeking to make their tools or work places **unnecessarily** gigantic and grandiose. Smallness and simplicity of construction, as of the iron and steel furnaces or of the drill ploughs, was in fact due to social and political maturity as well as arising from understanding the principles and processes involved’. ⁴

There was also no active discouragement to village organizations. And an important component of the economy of villages was local talent. The presence of such talent was nurtured, and the best amongst these were given patronage in the cities. Thus in the mid-seventeenth century, the imperial urban palace of the great Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, in his new capital of Shahjahanabad, had areas reserved within it for artists and craftsmen from the city. These *karkhanas*, surrounded by gardens and courtyards, had some of the best such artists working within them. Imagine such a situation today. That some of the many rooms within the *Rastrapati Bhawan*, are given over for master-craftsmen to practice their craft, secure in the knowledge that they are under the patronage of the President! That they will not have to beg or run from pillar to post for raw-materials for their craft, or for buyers for their finished products. It would be a wholly suitable use for the hundreds of empty rooms in the Rashtrapati Bhawan maintained at public cost, but most of us would find it unacceptable, if not downright unthinkable.



The city of **Shahjahanabad**, a mid-19th century map of which you can see above, held to be an ideal example of town-planning in its design and functioning, followed the example set by the Emperor. **Despite being the capital of one of the largest and richest empires in the medieval world, areas of governance within the city were decentralized.** Houses of noblemen and princes were surrounded by that of their dependents, artists and craftsmen. **Workplaces and homes were integrated.** Our cities today forcibly separate places of work from residential areas, even in the case of professions which do not pollute the environment in any way. Our law-enforcers separate poorer people into the fringes of the cities. The only end of work appears to be to make money, lots of it; that work can afford creative pleasure is a luxury most of us are afraid to even imagine.

The downfall of a local level of crafts and technology, that in turn fed a corpus at an urban level, began, really speaking with the advent of the European trading companies, three hundred years before Mahatma Gandhi campaigned for the revival of village industries. The sole purpose of these companies was to amass wealth for themselves in the name of fair trade, by deliberately undermining local craft and technical skills 'by hook or by crook'. The personal and state correspondence between British traders and British rulers and administrators, shows their active connivance to ruin this economic base while at the same time extracting economic and other benefits for

themselves from indigenous Indian knowledge. They also show that the fountain head of this knowledge has been the villages. That it still remained in sufficient amount even a hundred odd years after the start of the British operations, shows the spread and tenacity of this knowledge base.⁵ Thus in the mid-eighteenth century, in the time of the renowned ruler of Jaipur and Amber, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, the architect and town planner *Vidyadhar*, despite hailing originally from Bengal—a land many miles east of Amber—could practice his talent with dignity and freedom in Jai Singh's court. His remarkable design of the city of Jaipur, with its feel for local needs that most of our modern architects and town planners are bereft of, continues to function well till today. The city's unique identity, unlike its faceless or facile modern counterparts, stems from an integration of local building skills as well as a response to local climate and culture. Vidyadhar could visualize and construct the city in this way because though he came from a culture, whose details and landscape were different from that of Rajasthan, the process of thinking itself was not different. It depended on an elaboration of the local building theme, which was known as much to the local users as to the local builders. The formal basis for this theme was in the Sanskrit texts and building manuals.

For most of us bred to the superiority of city learning, it would be no doubt amazing to realize that we owe the existence of the world-renowned Jantar Mantars as much to a village priest of humble origins as to the famous Maharaja of Jaipur. Jai Singh II met Pandit Jagannath, a Brahmin village priest in the Deccan, whose knowledge of astronomy and religion was so manifest that it catalysed the Maharaja to take the priest back with him to Amber. This also demonstrates that learning was not limited to cities or courts. Pandit Jagannath went on to become Jai Singh's chief aide in his astronomy researches and in the theory and practical construction of his unique masonry instruments of astronomy. It should also give us some food for thought that this is described as one of the darkest periods of Indian history, by many Western historians.

In what seems to be a perverse joke of history, the very nation that once led the race to wipe out indigenous Indian methods of living and

crafts production, has now adopted a direction of economic growth that depends to a large extent on crafts and creative industries. The merely 32,000 crafts makers of Britain surpass the earnings of its organized industries of motorcycle or sports good manufactures.⁶ Ironically, despite our estimated population of 'over a crore of handloom weavers, and an equal, if not larger, number of crafts people engaged in diverse crafts from pottery, to basket-making, stone-ware, glass-ware, hand made paper products and multifarious other utility items made out of local, available materials',⁷ our policy makers assiduously continue to court a centralized large-scale, high-investment, and polluting model of western development.

The fact that there is a global market for Indian crafts is quite evident from the quantities that are bought by visiting foreign tourists, and by the fact that China is now mass-producing objects in factories that *imitate* Indian crafts, to tap into this demand. However, the export of crafts does not always imply the preservation of the artists. Thus, despite earning huge amounts of foreign exchange, the woodcraft of Saharanpur no longer succors the traditional craftsmen. Even local demand is by itself not enough. Despite a continuing demand for gold jewellery, traditional goldsmiths in Tamil Nadu from the *Vishwakarma* community, are starving. Customers now go to showrooms owned by jewel magnates which stock machine-made jewelry instead of the custom-made designs of traditional goldsmiths. One imported jewel-making machine does a year's work of *ahundred* goldsmiths in about ten hours. From the late 1990s, this increasing mechanization in jewelry-making has led to the suicide of several goldsmiths, many with their entire families, by consuming cyanide, which every goldsmith uses to polish gold. Most of the remaining two lakh goldsmiths in the state, are in debt. About two thousand of them are now reduced to selling liquor in government run shops.⁸

Not content with wiping out indigenous craft and technology by patronizing large scale industrial investments, even the land of rural communities is being taken away. The recent Bill devised by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development, appears to be

even more exploitative than the archaic Land Acquisition Act of 1894 that it seeks to replace. The new Bill according to Medha Patkar, the veteran activist who leads the National Alliance for People's Movements, (NAPM), removes the more public-spirited provisions in the colonial government's Act. It instead, includes a clause that may be invoked to assist private companies in acquiring public land for 'any project relating to the generation, transmission and supply of electricity' and even 'mining activities'.⁹

This is why, despite protests by village groups, Gautam Adani, ranked 91 on the Forbes' World Billionaires list, has been able to buy land at rates between Rs 1 and Rs 8 per square metre^{10, 11} from the Gujarat government for the SEZ coming up on the northern shore of the Gulf of Kutch in and around the Mundra port. This land, including government revenue and forest land, and more than 1400 acres of *gauchar* or grazing land under panchayats, has been leased to other companies by the Adani Group at Rs 1000 per square meter.¹² The Adani group, the new 'company bahadur' has killed fragile ecosystems including more than a crore of mangrove trees, appropriated common property resources, and displaced 'local people who since centuries earned their livelihoods based on access to the land and the sea'. 570 hectares of mangrove forests have been cleared through industrial activity, the fish-species they spawned have been destroyed, the local *Wagher* fishing community's and the traditional cattle/buffalo rearing *Rabar* community's livelihood has been permanently lost. Country-craft builders at the Old Mundra port which generates an annual income of a crore to the Maritime Board are also at risk. The smooth roads and infrastructure that the SEZ boasts as justification for all this destruction and displacement, are a stark contrast to the *kuchha* roads outside its boundaries without basic water and sanitation where its more than 10,000 migrant labourers are made to live. Despite such obvious exploitation, our obsession with foreign investments and stock markets have made us as a country blind to such usurpation of the lives and rights of village communities.¹³

How then, to return to the original question, do we ensure

the survival of crafts people and their art, against the new colonists?

First, we must understand that it is only in the village, that these craftspeople can survive with dignity, in a familiar environment that promises them the security of some level of relationship with their land and with its society. **Second**, we need to ensure that their craft brings them and their families enough to live in the villages, without fear of starvation or eviction. Third, we must place the invaluable knowledge embodied in craftsmen, on an equal footing with that of the degreed faculty who teach in our institutions at enviable salaries.

To do all of these, craft has to come out of the ambit of merely 'decorative objects' After all, how many carved elephants or statues can one display in ones homes? They must regain their status as objects of utility that are also beautiful. If all objects of daily use are designed and crafted using the manifest skills of our traditional artists—plates, glasses, spoons, knives, lamp-holders, furniture pieces, photo frames, hair-grips, there will be a real demand for such objects and they will be part of a living tradition of use. This in turn, will ensure that there is a continuous demand for such objects, which will afford craftspeople sustained employment in producing them. As Sankho Chaudhuri has said, 'The time has come to ask ourselves what we want to [do] with the potential talent of the artisans. We have to consider whether the village and tribal crafts should be used only as a means of earning foreign exchange and keeping alive otherwise meaningless, moribund forms and crafts (like gold sequins and brocade work on velvet or rose water jars) or whether we could apply their skills to evolve designs of utility, and develop simple cheap objects of daily use which every villager can afford, like clay toys, deities, oil lamps and so on, and try to create an economic base for these artisans to survive in the villages.'

It so happens that most of us are now used to certain conveniences, and if crafts objects are to replace mass-produced objects of daily use, they must have a certain convenience of use and ease of maintenance. Their appearance and detailing also needs to be in tune

with more contemporary aesthetic sensibilities. Craftspeople additionally need help with access to raw-materials as well as packaging and marketing-skills. Therefore, we must decentralize the *practice* of craft and technology as well as the *decisions* that govern them; and foster interaction between those taught in the present design and technology schools and those trained in traditional arts and technologies, so that there is mutual transmission of learning. This is not in the realm of the impossible. It can be done. The collaboration between traditional Bidri artists whose fine metalware craft with inlays of silver, brass or copper is now almost exclusively centred in Bidar near Hyderabad, and Vikram Sardesai-a Bangalore based designer- has produced new designs which are distinctive, beautiful and useful, like Serving Plates designed with new motifs, manufactured and embellished according to the traditional techniques of *Bidri* ware & Keychains manufactured and embellished according to traditional techniques of *Bidri*ware.¹¹

The range, quality and packaging of these products has, as Vikram Sardesai says, made the corporate world look ‘...at indigenous solutions, rather than constantly buying from the West and China...’¹⁵. However, well-detailed crafts-objects suitable for daily needs of modern living, need to be stocked at neighbourhood shops within the ambit of *ordinary consumers* as well. For this, we have to generate a local demand for such products, within our own cities, towns and villages, so that there is a steady market that does not depend on huge production numbers. This will foster the necessity for local artistic talent. From this talent, those who do come to cities in the lure of fame and wealth, will like their historical counterparts be among the best practitioners, ensuring that they are not led to do downgraded jobs as today, but instead are elevated to positions of respect. And since most villagers and small-town dwellers aspire to be like the city-dwellers, this demand for village-crafts must come *from city-dwellers*. It is surely a small thing to ask, that we use objects that fill our daily life with beauty, which additionally help to keep alive in dignity those of us who have the talent to create such objects?

As Mahatma Gandhi said so many years ago:

'Each person can examine all the articles of food, clothing and other things that he uses from day to day and replace foreign makes or city makes, by those produced by the villagers in their homes or fields with the simple inexpensive tools they can easily handle and mend. This replacement will be itself an education of great value and a solid beginning.' ¹⁴

Everyone present in this conference, can resolve to move beyond discussions, to use as much as possible articles produced by indigenous crafts-people in our offices, and in our homes. We need to convince as many people as we interact with daily, our families, our friends to do the same. Whichever of us are teaching in institutions, must initiate the inclusion of traditional knowledge-bearers on the staff- as visiting lecturers, as faculty, as part of special training measures. Those of us in the government can set an example to use indigenous alternatives for office décor and office stationary, such as bamboo chiks instead of plastic blinds. We also need to facilitate the making and transformation of the houses which often double as workplaces for craftspeople, into well-lit, ventilated and healthy spaces, whether through trained advice or through the promulgation of rules which legalize such multi-use dwellings. At a policy level, the Government of India needs to ban the setting up of large mechanized efforts that compete with indigenous craft and technology, and enforce laws that forbid large-scale machine production of traditional skills such as of gold-jewelry and instead propagate and practice decentralized methods of production.

. Only then can we recover the basic tenets on which our Republic was founded. Otherwise, our very existence will be a mindless copy, like the idols we worship—now being produced by machines in factories in China. I would like to end with one such Chinese machine-made idol, displaying facial features reminiscent of the land that it was manufactured in, with the hope that true to the spirit of our tradition, our gods and goddesses shall prove an auspicious omen for the revival of Indian arts and crafts and their practitioners.

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