

Artists Statements

NR 9: Akshay Rathore and Flora Boillot (Aulinjaa Village, Madhya Pradesh)

Abstract Reality: a visual perspective on the organic movement in Madhya Pradesh.

by Akshay Rathore and Flora Boillot.

'I began to believe it was something that couldn't be explained or conceived by the human mind therefore something absurd. The way in which the global grain production was being allocated was simply incomprehensible! A situation unbearable to everyone, save a bunch of profiteers.'

Bertolt Brecht, On philosophy and Marxism, on the Chicago stock market.

India is the second largest rice producer in the world, following China and third largest in terms of wheat production. From those figures, one would expect to find low hunger and malnourishment indicators in the country. Yet, there are more people starving in India than anywhere else. There are more people hungry today than 15 years ago while India's growth rate is near 9%. Over 200 million suffer malnutrition, and to complete the paradox, most of them are farmers. The state of Madhya Pradesh, in Central India, is the second largest state by area. It is a beautiful land, which inspired Rudyard Kipling the famous 'Jungle Book'. Remote, its roads are very bad, which explains partly why, so far, the state has undergone little development.

In the frame of a research that we personally initiated in January 2011, we made three trips to Madhya Pradesh. The landscape was each time incredibly different. In February, it was lush green; lands were getting ready to be harvested. By end April, it had all turned very dramatic, with half of the land still dazzling of golden wheat and the other half, jet black, a colour resulting from the old traditional burning of the crop residue. Mid-September, following a particularly heavy monsoon, it was covered with water that we saw it last. All this beauty would easily hide the ground reality of this state often referred to as the 'Heart of India'. Indeed, it sadly boasts of the highest level of child malnutrition and as a consequence, the country's highest infant death rate. With figures such as 60% of children malnourished in the state, the situation is as critical as in Chad or Ethiopia. Madhya Pradesh happens to be the state where I (Akshay Rathore) come from. I belong to a farming family originally from Aulinjaa, a tiny remote village in the Vindhya Chal hills. Since I left, at the age of 18, I witnessed great changes in the way farming was being conducted in the area. Far from improving the standard of living of farmers, the new industrial methods appeared often non-adapted, expensive and harmful to the environment. From cash crops promotion to industrial harvest storage methods, what is being promoted is a non sustainable system of dependence that uses farmers' ignorance to sell harmful 'new ways'.

The AULINJAA project has a double objective: firstly, raise awareness among the local farmer community on the richness of their traditional resources and strength as opposed to harmful 'new ways'. Secondly, raise awareness within urban cycles on the agricultural issue because what we eat isn't an abstract reality! We chose to locate our research in Madhya Pradesh, in the village of Aulinjaa, primarily because we have strong ties with the area and

this could facilitate our intervention and certainly help it have a much greater and durable impact. We also think that Madhya Pradesh's lands are still rather pristine and thus, a preventive action can be effectively led there and have an immediate positive impact. We are aware that the organic movement and the question of a sustainable agriculture are vast subjects and this project will be led closely with Navdanya's expertise in the field.

BLOG : Aulinjaamp.blogspot.in

NR 10: Priya Ravish Mehra (Najibabad, District Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh)

Making the invisible visible

To see the 'invisible' work of the darners, one needs to hold the cloth towards the light.

The project aims to put darning on the spotlight and make the 'invisible' visible

The story is about 'Rafoogari' practiced by the Rafoogars in India. The project is based on my documentation about the 'Rafoogars' and their 'Rafoogari'.

'Rafoogari' is the traditional skill of darning in the maintenance and preservation of textiles by the Rafoogar community in India. It is still practiced all over the country by traditional darners, who repair and restore old and new damaged textiles, keeping the darning tradition alive.

The research journey started in 2003 with documenting the work of the Rafoogars from my hometown Najibabad, the most important but unheard shawl repair centre in the country. Najibabad, a small market town in district Bijnor was established by a Rohilla Chief Najibuddaula 250 year ago. It has the distinction of having a large population of Rafoogar community and is also the hub for Kani Shawl trade.

I would like to place the project back home in Najibabad in the context of the 'Town'. The project will involve the local Rafoogar community of Najibabad to create a collection of contemporary works using traditional darning skills to highlight the practice of their invisible darning.

BLOG : Rafoogari.wordpress.com

NR 11: Uma Ray (Domahani, District Jamshedpur, Jharkhand)

Where the River Meets its People

The project will be a site specific endeavor conceived and developed on the social structure of the place. My project aims at understanding the intricately woven interrelationship between the river and its people. It will take into consideration how the life of these people and its quality has been affected: from marriage to social customs, as also means of economic development for many people, and education for the children.

Since the beginning of civilization, water has nurtured the growth of human settlements and driven the prosperity of the people living on the riverbanks. Through this project, I will highlight how the rivers Subarnarekha and Kharkai sustain the local population and how they have wrought changes in the social, cultural and economic conditions of the people residing in Domahani.

This project will be based on the concept of tracing a life that is at the crossroads of change between industrialization and traditionalism. I grew up in Steel City Jamshedpur, where a large part of the industrial workforce is comprised of the tribal people mainly from the districts of Singhbhum and Seraikela. Over the years I have personally seen how their lives have changed with the onset of rapid expansion of city limits.

While bringing the benefits of civilization within their reach, the proximity to an urban milieu has also been responsible for the younger generation moving out in search of better prospects. However, in spite of a dwindling population, it is remarkable to see how the locals in this particular region have remained largely unaffected by city life. They are able to transition easily from a demanding work atmosphere in the city to a personal space defined by their customary beliefs and practices, behavioral habits and traits.

Empathizing with the locals would also help to reveal the complex dual lives that they lead. My project is not just an interrogation into the complex relationships and transformed personalities, but also a means of documenting a changing reality while it lasts. My aim is to provide an understanding of the lives and practices of these people - their social customs, the ability to retain their identity while enjoying the benefits of a neighboring industrial city, the capacity to balance work and home and with that a change in roles as breadwinners by day and community members living by tradition by night.

Blog : Wheretherivermeetsitspeople.blogspot.in