

Artists Statement

NR 5: Sanchayan Ghosh (Birbhum, West Bengal)

AAKIL AARSHI is a research and workshop-based community art project, within the Santhali community, exploring the notion of home in the minds of Santhali women, and also understanding the changing pattern of domestic and social life of Santhali community. The research and activity is concentrated mainly in the Birbhum district of West Bengal.

Exposure to institutional knowledge has changed the social life of a Santhali. Moreover impact of globalization has created a rift between the older way of Santhali life and the new generation of Santhali who are exposed to digital entertainment and communication. To explore this changing lifestyle and to evolve a platform for interaction, Ghosh would like to conduct a collaborative workshop of paper-making with bamboo leaves, along with theatre, together with the young generation of Santhali men and women of different economic and education levels. Ghosh would also like to explore their notion of home through an embroidery workshop with the women on the hand-made mattress made by them.

PART-1

Bamboo is an essential tree in Santhali life. Most of their everyday objects, even homes and roofs, are made with bamboo. But the leaf is only one part which is used for burning fire and they are very soft as a material. The workshop will be specifically focussed on developing bamboo paper with text written as water-marks. Water-mark is a special technique in paper-making where a transparent impression of a text or any linear design can be imprinted on the paper only to be visible against light. So by sharing the knowledge of transforming bamboo leaves into paper I am trying to participate in their everyday life and explore their interpretation of the material as a process of knowledge-sharing.

Through the process of water-mark, the project will try to document designs, texts and images that will address issues like conflict and contradiction of contemporary Santhali life, and also archive traditional designs and patterns of Santhali cultural heritage. The paper-making workshop will also explore the different ways in which globalization has affected the culture of Santhali people by transferring popular sounds and words as water-marks on bamboo paper. Initially theatre workshops will be conducted to evolve a narrative network within the community which may be reflected in the watermark patterns.

A physical space, employing vernacular architecture of the Santhalis, can be conceived, which can later become a possible site of economic rehabilitation once the community takes over the process of paper-making as an alternative economic venture.

The water-mark workshop will be conducted in three different Santhali villages (Phooldanga, Pearson Palli and Boner Pukur Danga) around Santiniketan . After completion of each workshop, an installation with the bamboo water-marked papers and artificial light will be created inside the individual villages. The installation will be planned in collaboration with the participants and work as an interface between the different generations of Santhali community.

This project will investigate into the process of participation of an outsider into the everyday life of a community. Second, it will allow possibilities of interaction within the community by making art as a user and not just an aesthetic discourse.

PART-2

Finally all these different bamboo paper installations will be installed together in between the space of the two public sculptures on Santhali life by Ramkinkar Baiz inside Kala Bhavana. This final installation will become a temporary platform and an interface for a dialogue between the institutional framework of the University and community life of Santhali, and also provide opportunity for a dialogue between the two. The Installation will host a one-day interactive session between the Santhali community and the neighboring residents of the University. The bamboo papers with water-marks will be later transformed into a bamboo paper book.

NR 6: Surekha (Jakkur Lake near Bangalore, Karnataka)

Jakkur Lake is one of the very few lakes existing towards the North-Eastern outskirts of Bangalore/Bengaluru, about 15 kms from Bangalore city center. It is more than two hundred years old and is a lake densely connected with the history of Bangalore, for it is closer to Yelahanka, the place where the king Kempegowda, the founder of Bengaluru, was born. The lake has a village (Sampigehalli) towards its eastern side and a township (Jakkur) towards its west.

Currently the lake is being 're-structured' from being a natural one to an artificial lake, an undertaking which is part of a larger scheme of 'City Beautification' and 'Lake Development Projects'. In due process, the functional purpose and the natural existence of the lake are both jeopardized and curtailed. What remains now is a renewed appearance and what is available/offered is only the recreational aspect of the lake. The 'recreative' element replacing the 'functional' and 'domestic' aspect of the lake is also a reflection upon the man-made alternatives offered as a choice at the cost of farming, and how the latter is of the least priority to the governance.

The lake is historic, was an abode for birds, and had an intense domestic function - washing, bathing, cleaning, farming and drinking purpose. Fish cultivated in the lake seasonally by fishermen and the dependant farming around the lake came to an abrupt end owing to the government policy to detach the nomenclature 'green belt' category attuned to this area. The decision to convert the green belt into a 'developmental urban area' and the conversion of the natural lake into an artificial one, with a shift in purpose is noteworthy.

The artist will track back, documenting and making a site-specific art project about the history, myths and folk tales; lost domesticity, nostalgic preoccupation, memoirs and intimate personal anecdotes in relation to the biography of the two settlements (Jakkur and Sampigehalli) on either side of the lake.

The project involves a multiple addressal, within and without the premise of art and an obvious interaction between cultural production, site-specificity, history, geography and environmental issues, including the population around the lake as a integral part of the overall project.

NR 7: Asim Waqif & Vaibhav Dimri (Badrinath,Uttarakhand)

Ni-Shulk Piyau and Installation

Waqif and Dimri will work in Badrinath, which is one of the four most revered shrines for pilgrimage for Hindus. The shrine is open for only six months in a year as it is snow-bound for the rest of the year. Today, the revered forest of berries (badri) has now become a field of plastics and rags. Packaging itself is a huge disposal-problem, especially in a place as inhospitable as Badrinath because almost nothing is produced locally so every item has to be transported, and packaging can be an important way of keeping items in hygienic conditions. So whether you want biscuits, prasad,chai or a muffler you will get some layers of plastic with it.

The Context:

The Alaknanda river, one of the two main branches of the upper-Ganga, originates a few kilometers upstream, and a holy dip in the river is an essential part of the pilgrimage. It is believed that one's sins are washed away by bathing in the holy waters of the Ganga. Ganga-jal (ganga-water) is considered to be the purest and held to be very auspicious for a Hindu household. Pilgrims take water back home and keep it with reverence.

The pilgrimage to Badrinath has gone through an incredible transformation in the last few decades. Since Adi Shankaracharya (who is believed to have) started and popularised the chardham pilgrimages in the eighth century, till as late as the middle of the nineteenth century, it was essentially a padhyatra (a pilgrimage on foot). The journey from Hardwar to the main pilgrim sites of Garhwal took between two and four months. It was a slow trek and the hardship on the trail and the infirmities of weather forced pilgrims to deal and interact with the locals, thus exposing each group to new experiences. The physical nature of the journey was an essential part of the experience, and on reaching the destination the sense of accomplishment and also relief must have been incredible.

Today the pilgrimage has moved into the fast lane, egged on by 'development' and 'progress'. Most pilgrims stop only overnight before reaching Badrinath from Hardwar. There are buses, taxis and even helicopters available to the paying yatri. And although sometimes there are landslides and flash-floods, yet the pilgrimage is infinitely more accessible than before, and we see a situation where an exclusive experience has been transformed into mass-tourism. This mass-pilgrimage has created new situations and realities for the local people and environment. One of the most visible effects has been the exponential increase in non-biodegradable waste. Unfortunately very little has been done about the safe-disposal of waste so far in Badrinath in spite of a proposed Badrinath Master Plan.

For their project, the artists had to concentrate on a single commodity readily available in Badrinath: water. For in Badrikashrama the water is the purest and most holy. Holy is related to belief which is in abundance among the yatris; purity is its physical state. Dripping from ancient glaciers and flowing down mountain slopes, the waters of the Alaknanda are full of

minerals and herb-extracts. There are also two springs nearby that have clean and clear water. But today, the pilgrim-tourist consumes bottled water that is brought up from the plains, some of it even bottled in NOIDA. On the other hand at Badrinath, the Ganga-jal that is considered holy, the purest, this same water receives the pilgrim's shit every morning, the grey-water from washing of clothes, bodies and utensils, and some part of the garbage too.

This dichotomy is where their project begins. The pilgrims come to Badrinath because it is a holy spot and the waters of the Alaknanda are so pure that they will wash away their sins; but the act of the pilgrimage kills the purity of that water and poisons the hills.

Through their project, the artists will propose a recycled-bottle installation along with a Ni-Shulk Piyau (no-charge water-point) on the walkway leading up to the Badrinath Temple. The installation will be built almost like a temple, a homage to water, or perhaps an antihomage. It will be made using recycled waste collected from Badrinath, primarily PET bottles. Eventually all the bottles will be trucked down to a recycling plant in Srinagar. The water will be locally sourced and hygienically dispensed. A small water testing set will be available at the piyau to compare bottled water with local water. This work will be exhibited and then eventually presented to the local administration.

NR 8: Shilpa Joglekar (3 Village Schools between Khopoli and Panvel, Maharashtra)

Joglekar will work about 80 kilometers from Mumbai nestled in small hills where she has identified three of the village schools, the nearest small towns being Khopoli and Panvel.

Even though Conservation is our national right, the state focuses on the conservation of monuments at a slow pace and ignores the preservation of non- tangible heritage that has come down to us from generations and not been documented, recorded or preserved in any written form.

During the scope of this project, the effort will be focused on interacting with the local population, visiting their homes, schools and recording (audio/video) these every individual region's folk culture. It will be an endeavor to illustrate, draw and paint all this acquired material. Conserving our heritage is our constitutional right.

The children of these schools can be involved in actually painting these artists' illustrations on the school walls, and finally the data procured through research will be transferred into simple small printed books, of which some copies can be handed over to each of these three schools and can be circulated to other schools eventually and uploaded on the web.

In addition to this, the project will involve the creation of a small play area in each of these schools using natural materials, involving the children in the process. This will not only help to exercise their bodies but minds as well and help or enable the process of gathering all the above mentioned information from them. This will also help them to understand how important it is to conserve their natural surroundings and create simple structures by using materials from their everyday lives. The entire process will be video documented and can be used as material that can be shown as an example to other schools. The objective of this project is focused on the lesser know, but equally enthralling folk stories, verse and songs. These lesser know cousins are most popular in homes of our countries' small villages and

hamlets. These songs and folklore have a possibility of creating an imagery, which can be woven into the fabric of their pedagogy through visuals and colourful illustrations.