

**De-colonising the Aesthetic Sense:  
The story of craft revival in  
Aruvacode potters' village**

**Jinan K. B**

**Discussion Paper No. 98**

**Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development  
Centre for Development Studies  
Thiruvananthapuram**

**De-colonising the Aesthetic Sense: The story of craft revival in  
Aruvacode potters' village**

Jinan K. B

English  
Discussion Paper

Rights reserved  
First published 2004  
Editorial Board: Prof. P. R. Gopinathan Nair, H. Shaji  
Printed at:  
Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development  
Published by:  
Dr K. N. Nair, Programme Co-ordinator  
Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development  
Centre for Development Studies  
Prasanth Nagar, Ulloor  
Thiruvananthapuram  
Cover Design: Defacto Creations

**Price:           Rs 40  
                      US\$ 5**

---

KRPLLD                   2004                   0500                   ENG

## Contents

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Self Exploration                                  | 5    |
| 2. Nilambur Project with Potters                     | 8    |
| 3. Growing up to the “Doing Nothing” Training Method | 16   |
| 4. Attempting a Curriculum for the Potter’s Children | 17   |
| 5. Natural Learning Process                          | 25   |
| 6. Redefining words                                  | 27   |
| 7. Why must the traditional crafts survive?          | 30   |

# De-colonising the Aesthetic Sense: The story of craft revival in Aruvacode potters' village

Jinan K. B

## 1. Self Exploration

My journey into the world of the rural artisan communities was not with the intention of 'developing' them or educating them. I went to them to regain that which I had lost in the process of getting educated; to learn from them. Having escaped 'education' and 'development' they were still original and authentic and were holding on to the culture and world-view, which sustained them for centuries. I perceived the rural / tribal communities as being wise and evolved; and recognised that only by learning from them could we lead sustainable lives.

So the documentation of the Aruvacode project is not about how I 'developed' them, but about what I have learnt from them. In that sense, it is a critique of the modern paradigm of life. It is also about what harm us, the 'educated' are doing in the name of 'development' and 'education'.

My journey towards the 'self' began in the year 1982 after I was expelled from my college hostel. It was the third year of my engineering course at the Maulana Azad College of

---

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: *Documenting an ongoing endeavour is surely fraught with pitfalls. Encapsulating deep learning experiences within the confines of printed matter is even more risky. This report submits a simple account of my faltering attempts in trying to regain the wholeness of my frayed being by recapturing true sense of beauty, sensitivity, and creativity. Instinctual creativity, which I consider a higher form of creativity, seems to be getting fogged steadily among the city dwellers. The most apparent reason has been the offensive onslaught of 'modernity' on every single facet of our day to day life. In trying to capture the nuances of creativity, which is the thematic link that runs through this report, one cannot but begin by offering reverence to nature. The predicament that modernity has landed us in mandates that irrespective of the subject and realm of our pursuit, a fundamental sensitivity to Mother Nature dictate and inform our search. Since the time I moved away from the urban setting to live with rural and tribal communities, I have been learning all afresh. Having escaped 'education' and 'development', the rural and tribal communities are among our final refuges where genuine and uncorrupted forms of knowledge still prevail. In sequential order, after Mother Nature let me offer my salutations and gratitude to the rural and tribal communities and particularly the Potters' community of Aruvacode hamlet that extended to me the privilege of learning from them. The lasting relationship with the culturally rooted has helped not only in strengthening my own cultural roots but offered a perspective towards life as well that has enriched every facet of my world-view. Allow me to also acknowledge the following people whose co-operation and assistance brought this effort to fruition: Dr K.N. Nair, Programme co-ordinator, KRPLLD and Dr P. R. Gopinathan Nair for their guidance and more so their abundant patience with my wayward ways of reporting and documentation. Suman K.B of Anuragam organic farm whose gentle questionings continue to add value to my search. Anita Varghese and Durga from Accord, Gudalur, who have at various stages helped in documenting the Aruvacode initiative. Seepja and Tomy of Elements for rewriting most of the text written by me and many times for giving written form to my thoughts.*

Technology, Bhopal. It gave me the first chance to live alone and look deeply within. Confrontation with the self brought to the fore countless questions and self-doubts. Most important was the question of freedom. True freedom seemed unfathomable, as one could sense the impressions of conditioning on one's own self as well as on each individual one came across. It seemed distant to believe that true freedom could exist as long as conditioning that begins right from infancy remains a reality. One way to break free from the predicament, for me, was to delve into the entirety of children's upbringing and nurturing at home and at schools. The following year, I decided to take up teaching assignment in a nursery school to get a closer look at childhood itself.

During the same time, Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth* impacted considerably on my restless mind. My own non-conforming temperament held me from taking up any regular engineering related work after finishing the course. A whole year was spent doing nothing.

### **The NID days**

The next year saw me at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. Looking back it was a vibrant period. It provided the right opportunities to look deeper into the role culture, history, societal conditioning, innocence, spontaneity, etc. played in endowing creativity and a sense of aesthetics to individuals. The three years at the institute offered an intense period of self-exploration and lent some very basic insights into various dimensions of our cultural ethos. What came sharp in focus was the direct relationship that existed between colonised minds, cultural and spiritual alienation, and formal schooling/education. At NID, the process of learning design is completely and clearly West-oriented. No wonder, when year after year students are subjected to a Western design process and learn design through Western history and Western sense of aesthetics, generation after generation gets estranged from one's own history, culture, and individual sense of beauty. And undoubtedly, a conditioned sense of beauty then barely manages to gloss over a pathetic personality.

I began exploring how conditioning bears on creativity? What sparks spontaneity? Does culture indeed help in keeping one's own sense of beauty intact? And can creativity be intellectualised?

Contrary to the importance that was given to the intellect at NID, I worked with my hands. Worked with wood, clay, plaster of Paris, and stone and while NID focussed on mass production, almost all my design solutions tended towards objects that could not be mass produced. (Today I realise that the process I adopted then, were that of an artisan's approach of evolving product design).

My diploma project at NID put me with a group of deaf and mute women for a period of six months. I was to work with this group on the mechanics of working with clay. This still remains an unforgettable experience in my life. Communication had to be established through creativity. It was an opportunity that offered a complete new spectrum in the realm of experiencing creativity on an altogether different plane. The whole process of

initiating creativity with this group strengthened my own perceptions of beauty and creativity that I had held somewhere close within and which came to the fore with much greater lucidity.

### **De-colonising the self**

After completing my graduation, my initial idea was to take up sculpting. But my preoccupation with not letting beauty be insulated with intellectual or mechanical activity held me from taking on a fixed profession. At the same time I was acutely becoming conscious of the role senses and intuition played in lending creativity to an individual. I do believe that what is lost as a result of 'modern education' is a very subliminal tie up that our senses and intuition share with creativity. I left the 'art world' in search of my instincts.

I had complete faith in the fact that working with the culturally rooted, rural and tribal artisans would be the best way to redeem the self. Working with and being part of the rural and tribal folks was the only way to de-colonise myself. I began working very closely with different artisan communities within the country. Started out first with the Ao-tribe of Mokokchung district of Nagaland and later interacted with many artisan communities in Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu. Experimented with diverse crafts like Pottery, Brass, Kantha Embroidery, Bamboo, Stone, and Horn.

While these interactions helped me distil myself in many ways, they also brought to light the umpteen hurdles that confront the artisans. From lack of availability of raw materials to the lack of demand for their products, there is a pattern to the problems faced by the artisans. These remain discernible problems and need direct solutions. Some problems or should I say consequences, are insidious in nature and spring from interventions that come in the guise of "helping" 'them' out. I view this as the uprooting of the rooted. 'Development' remains the mantra of the interventionist agencies and issues related to culture, lifestyle, and ethos of artisan communities are given a complete go. The primary fallout of such approaches, be it by governmental or non-governmental agencies, undermines the confidence and self-esteem of the communities concerned. Certainly therefore, when I began working with the rural/tribal artisans, I was acutely sensitive of the intricacies involved in not letting their creative inheritance be disturbed. I made sure I assisted them in regaining and maintaining their dignity, distinctiveness, and self-hood and all along hoped that they remain fastened to their culture.

## **2. Nilambur Project with Potters**

While experimenting, learning, and placing myself within different communities in different parts of the country, I had been leading a semi-nomadic life until I came to Kerala to work with the potter's community in Aruvacode, a tiny hamlet in Nilambur. My stay originally was supposed to be for six months. At the time Kerala to me was a far cry from my place of interest as it seemed relinquished of almost all traditional craft and folk culture.

### **The initial years (At the Potters' Village)**

A news report on how the destiny of Aruvacode, from being a simple potter village had changed to becoming a hub of sex-workers impelled me to proceed to Aruvacode. The reason for such a drastic transformation in the village was the rush of cheap substitutes of steel, aluminium, and plastic products to pottery in the market. The rush had pushed the demand for earthenware off the edge and the artisans were left a troubled and distressed lot. Seized of their traditional labour, women of the village were forced into sex-work. Advent of consumerism had held out its stakes and the artisans failed to keep pace with the fancy needs of the new consumer. In earlier times the artisans had always responded excellently to the local needs of the people, as a strong cultural bond held the user and the producer in unison. But every nuance of modernity brought with it newer difficulties for the potters.

Fifteen years ago with police intervention, the sex-work was brought to a halt. A number of individuals and organisations came forward with good intentions to help the village recover from its past. Most tried to help them out by introducing new skills like candle making, book-binding, etc. Some took the initiative of taking the village products to distant markets. But all the initiatives were sporadic in nature and obviously turned out to be unsustainable.

At this time, in October 1992, a grant from Oxfam helped me spend ample time with the potters of Aruvacode. Dr Zacharia, who worked with a local NGO and the police inspector Mr Radhakrishnan, who was instrumental in bringing to an end commercial sex work in the area, provided the introduction. Even though Dr Zacharia personally did not believe that my efforts to make pottery again the main source of sustenance for the Aruvacode potters would succeed, he introduced me to three very good potters of the community.

Our first effort was to convince the potters of the possibilities that lay in continuing with pottery. We had to convince them that it was most feasible to make terracotta products that would find market in the modern world. In all, three artisans did get convinced and willingly made a few new designs that were utilitarian in nature to begin with. One of the first products developed was a candle stand by Manchery Narayanan, whose expertise lay in petite objects. Large sized terracotta products were Apputy Chami's forte.

All the experimental products were purchased by *Helping Hands*. The element of risk involved in trying out new products was thus avoided. We also held exhibitions in and around Nilambur. The first exhibition was held in Chandakunnu just before Christmas, with the help of the local YMCA and the church. The exhibits included candle stands, table lamps, jugs, garden pots, etc. The response to the exhibition was mixed but on the whole it was an encouraging experience.

Meanwhile Oxfam, with whose initial support I had ventured into the village was keen that the potter's products be readied for exports. In my reckoning though, it would have been an ill-considered move given the lack of any substantial back up or external support system. Having already extended my sojourn planned for just ten days to two months, I decided to leave the village hoping to come back another time.

Coincidentally, the *Dastakari Haat Samiti*, Delhi, headed by Ms Jaya Jaitley, was in search of a coordinator for a six-month project in Aruvacode. The project was basically aimed at rehabilitation of the potters' families there. The financial support was to be extended by the Development Commissioner, Handicrafts, Ministry of Textiles. I was more than willing to take up the project. I was back again in Aruvacode and the project with the women of the community commenced in 1993.

Even this time round what was planned was a six-month interlude. As things turned out I continue to be associated with the community 10 years since it all began. Years of interaction with the rural and tribal communities, even prior to my life with the potters of Aruvacode had revealed to me that the issue of development lies deep in preserving the self-respect and creativity of the concerned community. Any community, armed with an absolute sense of self-respect and untarnished creativity, is well able to sail through all their problems. It is a dilemma of the 'educated' and the culturally uprooted sections of our society where development is perceived more on an economic plane. It is these sections more than any body that genuinely consider the distressed community as incapable of confronting and solving their own problems. Such perceptions spring from the civilising agenda pursued so ardently not just by the colonisers from afar but more stridently by their local minions converted under the efficacy of the west-oriented education system.

Treading therefore very carefully, not to step on to the much-travelled path by the interventionist agencies, I took up the work with the potters, honouring my own integrity.

### **Product evolution**

During the summer of 1993, we began the programme with about 30 women and children from within the community, with the aim of bringing out the inherent creativity that abounds in them.

We did away with the wheel needed for traditional pottery and the women were encouraged to explore the clay with their bare hands. Tools, if needed were also innovated and designed by them.



I wanted the aesthetic quality of whatever they made to be rooted in their own culture. I therefore limited my role to incorporating utilitarian aspects into their creations. It was a slow process and the products that emerged were evolved at a natural pace.

### **Training method**

*Training* (for want of a better word) for the above mentioned group was evolved on the premise that the people with whom we are initiating creativity are culturally far superior and have greater creative potential than their city counterparts as they come from traditional societies. The basic idea behind our training programmes is to help the individuals regain their wisdom and confidence which lies embedded within their own communities and culture, believing that creativity can and does solve many a problem related to self-esteem.

#### ***Creativity and Self Esteem***

During the summer of 1993, we began a programme with about thirty women and children from within the community, with the aim of bringing out the inherent creativity that abounds in them. We did away with the wheel needed for traditional pottery and the women were encouraged to explore clay with their bare hands. Tools, if needed were also innovated and designed by them. I wanted the aesthetic quality of whatever they made to be rooted in their own culture. I therefore limited my role to only incorporating their creations into utilitarian products. It was a slow process and the products that emerged were evolved at a natural pace. My belief that creativity can and does solve many a problem related to self-esteem stood vindicated.

During the first training conducted in 1993, it was very difficult to convince the women about their abilities. But the entire subsequent training programme so far has done exceptionally well. Initially when training methods were introduced with a group of women, we began with drawing straight lines, circles, etc. in free hand. Once they were adept in drawing, clay was introduced. It is indeed worth noting here that although the women belonged to the potters' community, most of them had not handled clay. Gradually they made a variety of things in clay and we sat together and started improvising on the designs to make them functional.

Since our production process was unlike the factory process, the possibility for creating and introducing newer products was open all the time. Most women understood this aspect and were able to take full advantage of it. The new entrants to the craft too got easily absorbed in the process and could create their own products.

At the same time, I was also working with the traditional male potters of the community and making interventions on the design and product front. It was important while working with them not to bring in or even suggest new technologies than what they were accustomed to. I realised fairly early on, that the art and craft of making pottery had evolved over the ages in this community and any change that was unconnected to this tradition would destroy the self confidence of the craftspeople and alienate them. The interventions among

traditional male potters were thus restricted to making the clay finer by more meticulous cleaning and spending more time in burnishing to get a better finish. Simultaneously a product development exercise was initiated among them to identify the market potential of the various products that they were adept at making and to see if new products could be derived from them.

## **Marketing**

Right from the beginning I knew that the future of the craft lay heavily in the success we would achieve in marketing the products. However, at the time, when I and a colleague, C D Suneesh took up the responsibility to market the products, our exposure and understanding of the mechanisms involved in selling craft was negligible. Conducting exhibitions was the sole method of sales we took recourse to during the initial days. We were also keen that the marketing efforts be kept independent of any external funding. The initial capital required for marketing the products was taken on loan from my parents. The name KUMBHAM emerged at this point and what was primarily a marketing identity soon became synonymous with the entire Aruvacode initiative.

### ***Design Process & Product Evolution:***

One of Kumbham's most significant feat has been in the region of design and product development. Ongoing efforts and experimentation that Kumbham has so far facilitated has helped introduce a range in product design that is extremely impressive. The product designs number to about 500. They include a vast range from household items to architectural and landscaping products, table accessories, garden furniture, and in fact a prototype of a complete living space.

The precursor to the first Kumbham mural was a hemispherical shaped coiled plate, which was flattened and used as a wall hanging. This marked our first step towards developing coil tiles. The present red and black coloured murals owe its origin to the double coloured cut pottery, which I developed in 1991 while working with a potter community at Bagusala in Gajpathy District of Orissa.

Our initial experiments with colour were in simple geometrical shaped tiles which were fired differently to get the red & black effect. Gradually as the potters gained experience the designs became more complete and varied.

The tiles have come a long way and we have several new kinds both in terms of size and finish. The functional attributes too have become more encompassing so we have wall tiles, floor tiles, decorative tiles for borders, etc.

## **Exhibitions - a mixed bag**

Our very first exhibition held in Bangalore in January 1994, was a 'success'- not just in terms of expected returns but more in terms of the experience the whole process offered.

*Madhyam Communications*, an organisation based in Bangalore, extended their full support and did most of the spade-work. Involvement of organisations like ISI, Action Aid, Pipal tree, ICRA and Equations helped greatly in making the venture a success. More than 100 different product designs were displayed at the exhibition. Six craftspeople who travelled to Bangalore were able to get a first hand experience in the logistics involved in conducting exhibitions as well as a chance to interact with the city customers which was very important. The success of the Bangalore exhibition, in more ways than one, was a morale booster for the village as a whole. The euphoria continued through months after the exhibition and a whole lot of new designs and products were developed. Enough and more products were completed in record time and we were ready to conduct yet another exhibition.

The city chosen this time round was Ernakulam. Local well-wishers were contacted. Mr & Mrs Balagangadhara Menon, SIDBI, Local trade union leader Mr Dharam Singh, State Bank officers' union, etc. pooled in their expertise and offered monetary as well as logistical support for conducting the exhibition in the city. The exhibition drew more than the usual share of media coverage for an event of this nature. Despite all the positive factors the exhibition was a financial fiasco.

Looking back we realised that the primary reason for the failure of the exhibition was the location where the exhibition was held. It was fairly far away from the hub of the city. Totally broke, we returned to Aruvacode and realised that it was not just the money that we had lost but, in the process, also the faith of the people of the village. While the villagers were always paid in advance for the products and were unaffected financially, the failure of the exhibition made them sceptical of our ability to market their products and make the initiative sustainable.

Three women from the community, Lakshmi, Rema, and Shakunthala were the only ones to remain with Kumbham. All others sort of withdrew. Having seen and experienced the potential of unleashing the creativity latent in the community, it was too early for me however to wrap up and look at other options. Financially it was a tough time for us. My part-time consultancy with Gram Vikas in Orissa provided some sustenance and the women, who were still ready to put faith in me, mobilised their personal savings and kept the enterprise going. It was a time when we always carried a few assorted items in our bags wherever we went and tried to sell it to add to the kitty.

### **Initial explorations in architecture**

The failure of the exhibition in Ernakulam was in many ways an eye opener. It was not possible to rely on exhibitions as the sole mode of sales. Moreover, the type of products we were making, we soon realised had so much market potential and no more. We had to explore not just new markets but new products as well.

Our foray into the world of architecture began with a mural that we designed for an office in Thiruvananthapuram. Jaigopal, a Cochin-based architect referred us to the group in Thiruvananthapuram and got us the first order of the mural. This venture opened up a new

realm for craft in architecture. From suitability of the material to the aesthetic quality that it offers, terracotta has an undisputed charm and we had all along been sure of the consonance terracotta would find within architecture.

Meanwhile at Aruvacode, Rama and Shakunthala were doing some exceptional work in coiled tiles. Their designs in coil is what set the foundation for the murals which later led to the designing of tiles in different shapes and sizes. Around the same time, the Small Industries Development Bank of India provided assistance for a programme to train women in exploring the potential of craft in architecture, through the aegis of COSTFORD, a local organisation based in Thrissur. We began working with about 15 women from the community all over again.

### ***Professionals and Aesthetics***

All through the late nineties I had been spending ample time with architects around the country, trying to get them to apply craft in architecture. But the architects seemed unable to break free from their preconceived thought process and planning moulds. Over the years I have realised their approach to be typical - architects, designers, artists, in fact the entire range of professionals, churned out by our western oriented education system display a complete lack of appreciation of crafts as living traditions. Even when some of them liberally 'apply' craft in their works, what they seek is an ethnic feel that is mummified and museum curated. To me this whole approach towards craft brought out the clear bankruptcy of education. The inadequacy of our architects and other professionals to appreciate and value art is directly proportional to the inappropriateness of the western methodology followed in our educational institutions. The western model of design methodology is more of a 'factory process' and a factory process undoubtedly, entirely surpasses the craftspeople - their community, their knowledge systems, and their culture. Even from a very practical sense, in a country like ours, such factory approach cannot provide solutions to problems related to livelihood of millions of people. What these interactions finally taught me was that it is perfection of the craftspeople. Through the series of efforts at recovering creativity, the realisation also dawned that what is actually happening in the name of teaching and training of rural and artisan communities is the corruption of their sense of knowing.

Buoyed by the successes we were making in the development of the new product line, I began travelling all over South India and meeting architects trying to convince them of the immense possibilities that lay in incorporating terracotta in architectural designs.

One major break came with an order from Ms Suniti Sahaney of Ashok Leyland which was in many ways a watershed. We leveraged on the fact that the corporate entity like the Leyland has our mural in their guest house to the hilt to try and procure more orders.

One major work that came our way then was the total over hauling of a concrete structure using our craft in to a traditional looking 'ethnic' resort. We were allowed abundant use of

terracotta both in landscaping and interiors. Architect Abdul Hameed of Hameed Associates based at Kozhikode gave us a free hand and at the end of a five-month long effort a drab concrete structure by name Rocky Rosy got transformed into Green Gates – a work that still continues to generate enquiries for us.

Finally, was modernity coming to terms with creativity of our potters, we wondered. And this was before the floodgates of the ‘ethnic craze’ had actually opened.

### ***Kumbham murals***

From 1996 onwards orders for murals started coming in but it was becoming increasingly difficult to stick to deadlines and maintain quality. Unaccustomed to deadlines and the rigours of order execution and delivery across distant markets, the financial viability of the venture continued to be under constant strain. It was impossible for a small group of women to meet deadlines and produce tiles at an industrial pace.

We had no option but to become much more equipped to take on bigger orders than what we were managing then. This period saw the setting up of Kumbham Murals. At Aruvacode it is called the *Company*. The *company* helped streamline the mural work and began to provide regular work to a section of the villagers. Mr Sundar, a potter from Pondicherry, was of immense help in setting up the activity line of Kumbham murals and putting in place the entire set of activities related to the execution of a mural order - right from design to erection at site.

Setting up of Kumbham Murals was a major milestone as executing large orders came under control. We were able to meet deadlines and transport tiles efficiently.

The success of the mural line of products had its spill over impact. The Handmade pottery by the women got a boost as the cash flows from the mural work helped to cross subsidize the holding cost of their products. They were able to receive cash on the completion of work and not wait for it to be sold at some future date. The visibility of the murals in the major cities of South India and the fact that we were frequenting these cities to execute orders opened up other avenues. The traditional earthen ware created by the men folk of the village and the items created in bare hands by the women folk began to be viewed in a different light altogether. Exhibitions followed in many cities. Many outlets, especially the major craft retail outlets across the country began to stock our products and these were well received. The retail stores themselves conducted some of the exhibitions. The advantage here was that even after the exhibition moved out of a city, the products stayed on. In addition to the sales during the exhibition, people came looking for the products later as well.

The systems were in place by now and the activities showed signs of stabilising. By now around 80 persons, some member from every other family in the village was drawing their livelihood through the Kumbham initiative.

What was proved right is not just my belief in the inherent strength of the pottery craft to hold on its own against the onslaught of modernity. It also vindicated my conviction that if I were to inextricably link my own survival and livelihood to the fortunes of the craft, rather than opt for a patronising intervention, the Kumbham initiative would definitely survive. In effect, by around the 5th year of the Kumbham saga, I was drawing both spiritual and material sustenance from Kumbham.

Today Kumbham gets orders from all the major metros in India. Large murals adorn the office walls of the rich and the famous. The landscape products lace the gardens of the best resorts and hotels of the country. The architectural products are merged with the interiors of plush rooms. The numerous household products created by the women add a remarkable sense of aesthetics to the routine lives of ordinary homes.

That is not to suggest that the sailing has been smooth ever since. The slump in the real estate market saw many of our prospective orders vanishing and Kumbham was in the throes of another major financial crisis since the year 2000. The spiralling impact spread to every activity in the village. And as with every crisis of this nature doubts, uncertainties and suspicion began to rear its head. While the recent upswing in market conditions is bringing back orders and some cheer, the bad blood created by the economic crisis of the past three years continues to circulate and would require some concerted effort to be totally drained out.

In hindsight, not having provided the trainees direct exposure to the market and opportunities for interaction with end users stands out as another limitation of the Kumbham experience so far. This was critical in giving a sense of market realism to the designs of the trainees. While financial constraints and the limited mobility of women can be cited as constraining factors, the fact remains that the design difference it could make was substantial.

### **Kumbham Mural's major installations**

The following are the major installations of Kumbham Mural.

1. The Tree - Hotel Pankaj, Thiruvananthapuram
2. Elephant mural - Taj Residency, Calicut
3. Palm Trees - Green Gates, Wayanad Hills
4. Creeper - Hinduja's Guest House, Chennai.
5. Ganesha - Cine Star Mohanlal's Residence, Chennai.
6. Panchabhootham - M. S. Swaminathan Foundation, Chennai.
7. Tree Mural at Tata Interactive Systems - Mumbai.
8. Palm tree at ICICI Prudential Building, Mumbai.
9. Kathakali - Hotel Fortune, Kozhikode.
10. 4675 sq. ft. Tree Mural - Shilpavedika Art and Craft Auditorium, Hi-tech city Hyderabad.  
(It has the distinction of being the world's biggest single terracotta mural)
11. Ashok Leyland, Chennai
12. Bamboo at Nilambur

### **3. Growing up to the 'Doing Nothing' Training Method**

A fundamental premise of the training interventions at Aruvacode is the cultural, aesthetic and creative superiority of the trainees, compared to the 'developed' mainstream of Indian society. Thus the basic attempt at the training programmes is to help the individuals regain their wisdom and confidence which lies embedded within their own communities and culture.

During the first training conducted in 1993, it was very difficult to convince the women about their abilities. The hangover of my NID days did not help matters either. Initially when training methods were introduced with a group of women, we began with drawing straight lines, circles, etc., in free hand and moved on to exploring clay and making objects giving free vent to their imagination.

But subsequent training programmes showed marked improvements. And the latest of my interventions at initiating creativity among the village children proved beyond doubt that the trainers' interventions, if at all, in natural learning processes need to be restricted to erecting a fence against outside influences that corrupt the genuine aesthetic sensibility and sense of perfection of craftspeople. Through the series of efforts at recovering creativity, the realisation also dawned that what is actually happening in the name of teaching and training of rural and artisan communities is the corruption of their sense of knowing.

Finally all methods were rejected and the artisans are encouraged to create whatever they felt like till they reach perfection in terms of shape and finish.

We then sat together and started improvising on the designs to make them functional. In 1995 again there was a formal 'training' programme for six months. This time most of the trainees were of the younger lot - 13, 14, 15 year olds. While the method was the same - freehand drawing, colours, clay work etc. my confidence about minimalist interventions had indeed grown and I deliberately kept myself away from the scene as far as possible. Their creations were simply superb. Several new designs emerged and an entire product range - coiled tiles was the result of the exercise.

The training programmes which began during the KRLLPD project was a major turning point. It is through this exercise that I re-assessed my understanding of the indigenous/ traditional process of transmitting skills more closely. As coincidence would have it, I came across during the period a potter girl in Mana Madurai scooping out in perfect circle the opening of a smokeless choolah. I realised the futility of importing to the artisan milieu, training methods - drawing of lines, shapes, etc. - that suited urban alienated people.

Well after eight months of conducting the program to develop a methodology for training artisans' children I had to re-look at many of the assumptions I had made regarding the craft, traditional learning process, etc. Suffice it to say that the Do Nothing natural farming philosophy of Fukuoka would find ready application here.

#### **4. Attempting a Curriculum for the Potters' Children**

The need to evolve a curriculum for the children of the potter community had an element of urgency as the children were getting affected trying to conform to two paradoxical ways of life – one at home and the other at their schools. (The efforts at curriculum building stood on its head as practice and understanding progressed, which is dealt with in subsequent sections. This is hence a mere record of what transpired.) I have been closely studying the learning processes that take place within an artisan community. The ideal conditions of learning certainly no longer exist.

The highly misplaced notion of admitting children to schools in order that *they learn and become something in life* is rendering them misfits within their own environment. Invariably they drop out at some point or the other, unable to cope with the elusive 'competitive' world outside. In the process, their instinctual skills in pottery are neglected at a crucial age and it becomes difficult to get them within the fold of their traditional work. The best way to overcome the situation is to create an enabling learning environment that will help them deal with modernity.

To preserve craft, it is important that the progeny is initiated into the craft as early as possible. There are three fundamental components in learning pottery as a craft – the physical *skills* involved, a keen *sense of beauty* and *creativity*. While the skills could be picked up from the experienced community hands, it is the latter two that need to be awakened gradually and naturally.

##### **Skill**

The intermediary processes involved in pottery are many. From identifying clay suited for earthenware, mixing it to get the right texture, using the wheel, making the kiln, arranging raw pottery in the kiln, etc. to ultimately firing the pieces.

While for all these, the traditional methods are most appropriate and could be learnt from the master potter, the expertise in design development, packing, costing, marketing, etc. is where outside inputs from people who are experienced in the various fields becomes crucial.

##### **Initiating creativity**

In the true sense, initiating or inculcating creativity among any traditional artisan community is a misnomer. These communities were adept at product innovation and attunement of products to the needs of the user community. It is the uprootment of their customer populations from their cultural and aesthetic moorings and the consequent shift in their preferences that left the artisan communities bewildered. Suddenly they found themselves unable to respond to the fancy needs of the new and unknown customer with a pronounced proclivity to the artificial and the synthetic. A proud and creatively alive community became



unsure of the usefulness of their craft and their creative abilities. Today therefore when we talk of initiating creativity among the artisan communities what we imply is rekindling of confidence in their own creative abilities. Similarly, making their craft contemporary does not and should not involve a break from their traditional creative moorings. On the contrary it should re-assert the strength and adeptness of their design and innovation capabilities to stand on its own against the glitter of modern kitsch. It is this resolute re-assertion of the inherent beauty of their creations even against the torrent of assembly line, mass produced, synthetic beauty that would lead to even the customers reassessing their choices and hopefully, rediscovering their sense of beauty.

### **Sense of beauty**

In a profound sense, it is a community 'sense of beauty that delineates its culture. When a society or community loses its authentic sense of beauty or subjugates its sense of beauty to the corruption of alien influences, it loses its authentic culture. The most challenging aspect of 'craft education' (if such a term can be used) would be to reassert a community's authentic sense of beauty. In the Indian context it is all too evident that our sense of beauty and aesthetics has been distorted completely by colonial aesthetics and concepts of beauty. While this distortion is most pronounced among the educated, its reflection in the products churned out by craft assembly lines is all too evident. Thus it is imperative that the uncorrupted sense of beauty, which the rural artisan communities and tribesfolk are still privy to, is resurrected and reasserted.

### **The Training Programme**

We started out the training programme for the students without any fixed guidelines, charting our course as we progressed. Our key guiding principle for the training programme was to preserve each child's individuality and independence – which we strongly believed were prerequisites to creativity.

Since the training programme commenced, the interest among the youngsters showed a definite increase. Many from the community wanted to be part of the programme and weekends especially saw a flurry of activity with children and grandchildren of the craftsmen engaged in learning clay work. The visible revival of interest in the craft sent out a healthy signal as far as the future of the craft is concerned.

The craftsmen who volunteered to be part of the training programme were some of the best in the community. Much time was spent in getting a final nod from the craftsmen to take on apprentices. Six master craftsmen, who genuinely believed that a secure future for the craft was possible if the children of the community were infused with faith and pride in the traditional work, came forward to take on the apprentices. The training programme started off with seven boys. No girls came forward. The boys were in their early teens and all were school drop-outs.

The students met every morning for an hour for a joint session and soon after went to their respective teachers. The morning sessions included regular subjects like mathematics and language together with inputs in communication skills, creativity, and observation.

The accent here was more in making the children sharpen their senses. Academics was sought to be introduced in small doses as these children had opted out of school and we had to be careful in not letting them down by recreating another 'school'.

The students learned some basic math like addition, subtraction, and multiplication that helped them deal with costs and trading. Paper craft like Origami and Tangrams seemed to hold their interest for longer duration. All the learning took place through informal methods and the impact was perceptible as all the children were regular in their attendance and in due course they could be seen reaching ahead of time for the days' engagements.

### **Sharpening the senses**

Initially, we followed some specific exercises that are directly related to the senses. For example, each day for about 15 minutes the children drew parallel lines and circles without any tools. This they did in total silence. But as we progressed, we found that with time the quality of the lines was declining. The boys were rather fast and were drawing the lines with much less concentration. At this point we got them to break the lines into smaller bits and draw every alternate line with either the left or the right hand. They were also asked to alternate the direction of the lines. These exercises helped progressively in breaking habits, in increasing concentration and helped children to assess quality and dimensions without any tools.

It was envisaged that as the senses get sharpened they would begin to grasp and use their intuitive powers.

Drawing by observing and converting three-dimensional objects to two-dimensional plane posed some difficulty for the children in the beginning. To unknot their perceptions, we first placed a brick in the middle of the room and asked the children to draw it from different angles. To complicate matters further one more brick was placed on top at an angle to the first. Children were unable to draw the bricks. We gave them clay and asked them to make bricks so that idea of dimensions attains some clarity. Children easily did this. We then coloured each side of the brick in different shades and asked them to draw. This time children were able to reproduce this on paper. Next we asked the children to make a brick by folding a sheet of paper over the brick. Many among them were unable to do this. We continued with similar exercises with various objects that were found around and the children continued to draw from observation.

### **Learning the craft**

By the end of four months children displayed increased confidence and pride in their craft. Positive spin-offs could be seen in the interest they began taking in their community and

the sense of partaking that came through while they mingled with their close-knit community for various cultural functions, rites, and rituals.

The new found respect for their *Gurus* could also be attributed to a deeper regard they now had for the skills that were imparted to them. It is important to note here, that none of the craftsmen, even as they stand unquestioned in their mastery of the craft, had ever *formally* taught anyone. This was the first experience for the senior craftsmen and their distinct temperaments enriched the teaching and learning process.

Two events which were part of the training programme which the children enjoyed and cherished the most were the children building their own shed; and their visit to Kanavu – an alternate school for tribal children in Wayanad. The students spent a week in the month of February to build the shed that is used as their classroom. They saw it as opportunity to flaunt their skills to the village folks.

Each day the students have been filling out a chart that outlines their activities for the day. We would have liked them to maintain a diary but none of them are as yet adept in writing. Therefore, they fill out the activity sheet and the chart which gave us an idea of the work they were involved each day with their Gurus.

### ***The future of the craft***

While in traditional communities, the craft and all wisdom concerning the craft would get passed on to the next generation as a natural process, today a potter child learns his very own craft against several odds. The pressures of formal schooling thrust upon him aspirations that are in least consonance with his very own roots. In the bargain the child garners disregard towards his traditional profession as well as the associated wisdom.

And the irony is that even while senior craftsmen voice their concerns regarding the uncertain future of their craft and also welcome attempts to prevent its alienation, they want their children to attain formal education and only then settle down to learn this craft. This is despite examples that abound of the children who pursued schooling to be fitting neither in their own milieu nor in the world outside. Surprisingly, many of the senior craftsmen learnt the craft at an early age; they did not choose it as a livelihood option. They spent a good number of their years in the unskilled labour market and tried earning their keep. Soon enough they realised the unsuitability of their pursuits and only then shifted their attention towards their traditional craft and it did offer them an independent and sustainable livelihood.

The activity charts have been summarised and presented below:

The training with the Gurus was not restricted, as was initially perceived by even the students, to learning to work on the wheel. In fact, even before they were formally

introduced to the wheel, they had to help the Gurus pack products for transport, get sand from the river, and mud for the clay. The idea was that the entire range of activities related to all aspects of the pottery craft were introduced to the children.

As the months progressed, the children began to gain control and adeptness at handling the wheel. They started turning out products, at first of uneven shape and slowly perfecting size and shape. By the end of the year all the children could independently handle the wheel and were conversant with the related aspects of pottery as well, like preparation of mud, sifting, beating to shape, polishing and burnishing. While their learning was by no means complete, they had reached a stage where they could now independently learn and innovate. They could effectively be on their own.

It was only in the fitness of things that they were all given a potter's wheel and sufficient clay to kick-start their operations independently.

### **Profile of students**

1. Name: Sunil Babu Age: 13 years Schooling: 6th grade

Sunil wants to read and write. His mother goes for coolie work. His father knows how to make pots but can't do the work because of his rheumatism. His parents sent him for the training programme. He believes that learning this craft will give him an opportunity to work independently which would otherwise be impossible in coolie work. He has worked on the wheel for sometime at his mother's house but would like to learn the craft thoroughly. Sunil is training under Guru Maancherry Narayanan.

2. Name: Subramani M.K. Age: 16years. Schooling: 7th grade

Subramani likes Math, Malayalam, and Science. His father is a potter and is employed at Kumbham. He joined the training programme with full family support. He likes the big jars and pots that are made at Kumbham. He says, "I know people in big houses buy huge pots and jars and I can make a living by making these." Subramani is being trained by Guru Appukuttysamy.

3. Name: Rajesh Age: 15 years Schooling: 7th grade

Rajesh enjoys Malayalam, Science, and English. His parents own a tea shop. Rajesh opted out of school and was helping his parents at the shop. He too joined the programme with his parents' consent. He says he would like to join the Kumbham team after completion of the training programme. Rajesh is being trained by Guru Kumbhasamy.

4. Name: Anil Age: 14 years Schooling: 6th grade

Anil enjoys Malayalam and Math. His parents and siblings go for coolie work. He likes pottery and has been actively supported by his mother in his wish to join this training program. Anil has distinct memories about how his father used to make pots long ago

and how his mother would help out with large pots. Circumstances forced them to give up pottery and opt for coolie work as it offered some subsistence whereas pottery offered none. Anil says they still have some old pots at home and he likes them. He has an uncle who does pottery in his village. Anil is being trained by Guru Kanharan.

5. Name: Vineesh Age: 14 years Schooling: 3rd grade

Vineesh too enjoys Math and Malayalam. His mother works as a coolie while his father works in a small hotel. Vineesh's grandfather was a potter and his mother therefore is keen that Vineesh learns this craft. Vineesh wants to have his own wheel and start working independently. Vineesh is being trained by Guru Kuttan.

6. Name: Sasi Kumar Age: 13years Schooling: 7th grade

Sasi enjoys Math and Malayalam. He has a younger sister. Like many others, his mother too works as a coolie and supports the family with her income. Sasi's father has deserted them. Sasi heard of this training program from friends and his mother encouraged him to join the training programme. Sasi is sceptical and does not believe that school education can guarantee him a job. He feels he rather learn a trade. He likes the idea of being able to work from home. He has seen his mother's sister making pots. When he grows up he would like to make dolls, toys, pots, and flower vases. Sasi is being trained by Guru Kumbhaswamy.

7. Name: Hari kuttan. Age: 14 years Schooling: 6th grade

Hari enjoys Math. Both his parents work as coolies. He has never seen anyone from his family do pottery. His parents are happy that Hari wishes to do pottery. He would like to make pots and take them to the market himself. Hari is being trained by Guru Kuppan.

### **Profile of the Gurus**

#### *Guru Appukutty Swamy*

A master craftsman, in his late fifties, Appukutty has been a potter for the past twenty years. He came forward to be one of the teachers on this programme. He has never trained anyone, in the formal sense of the word. He learnt the craft from his father. He says that one has to start young if one intends to be an expert. Appukutty's family lived far off from any school and therefore was never sent to a school. By the age of 12 he had learnt the craft and was capable of working independently. His lack of *literacy* has not made him any less confident. He has travelled to many parts of the State and the country and feels travelling offers experiences that are highly educating.

Appukutty is held in great esteem by the community. He is one of the highly skilled potters and is helped by his wife in his work. They sell directly to many outlets in Kerala. In his early years, Appukutty swamy too worked as a coolie. He also worked in the forest coups, cutting bamboo for the department. He did the odd jobs for about 20 years and only then returned to take up pottery as a full time profession. He owns a house with about 40 cents of land.

Besides training Subramani as part of the program, he loves to involve his grandson in the work when he comes to learn on weekends.

### ***Guru Maancherry Narayanan***

A highly skilled craftsman in his early fifties, Maancherry, as he is fondly addressed by members of his community, stands unparalleled in his expertise. He learned pottery as a young boy. And like many of his contemporaries, had to earn a living as a coolie. Later, when coolie work itself did not fetch enough, he took up pottery. He continues to be a potter since over two decades now. His wife, who played a crucial role in his work passed away recently. She met with a tragic accident while excavating clay and the incident has left Maancherry shattered. He continues with his work but finds it difficult to manage the house affairs.

Maancherry enjoys a special relationship with his student, Sunil. Maancherry is teaching for the first time and has not taken on the role of a teacher in the conventional sense of the term. Being an easy going person, he is a favourite with the local children. Since the time Sunil started his apprenticeship, a few other boys also hang around *Maancherry mama* on their holidays and wait patiently to work for a while on the wheel.

### ***Guru Kanharan***

Guru Kanharan has his house and work shed atop a small hill. He is one of the younger craftsmen, in his early forties. He remembers being sent to work as a domestic help to a relative's house. A child himself, he had to look after the children of the house where he went as a domestic help. When alone, they would make some pots on the wheel and hide them under a basket. Since those days he was aware he had the skill for pottery. At his parents' place he spent ample time watching others work on the wheel. When every other person in the community was taking up work as a coolie, he too joined the brigade. At a certain point of time, his health problems forced him to give up work as a coolie. He began working from home as a potter. He feels he made the right choice as pottery offered him not just sustenance but also a life with dignity. Kanharan has built his own house, has his children studying in the local school and surely believes he is better off than many of his contemporaries who are still working as coolies.

Anil is under the guidance of Guru Kanharan.

Kanharan's son, who attends a regular school, has started learning pottery from his father since Anil's arrival. This has made Kanharan especially proud.

### ***Guru Kumbhaswamy***

In his late fifties, Kumbhaswamy is again one of the best craftsmen the community has. Learned pottery at an early age, did masonry and various odd jobs concerning the forest and travelled around the State. Only since past three years he has settled down to being a full time potter. He has built a fairly large house by himself. His wife too works with him. They have no children of their own. Both husband and wife work as a team. The wife is the last 'door-to-door seller' of pots. Once a month she still takes the products to different houses and receives grain and other essentials in return. Kumbaswamy feels pottery is not remunerative enough but likes the independence that the work offers. He has a nephew who works full time with him. Their lives revolve around the wheel.

Kumbhaswamy also trains the youth of the community in their traditional dance and music. Every evening a few children gather at their home and one can see a jovial Kumbhaswamy love his role as a music and dance teacher.

Rajesh and Sasi who are being trained under Guru Kumbhaswamy, are treated as sons of the house and enjoy a lot of freedom with their teacher. Kumbhaswamy has a comparatively large shed and could therefore take on two students at the same time.

### ***Guru Kuttan***

Guru Kuttan, in his late fifties seems the most tranquil of all. Forever bent over his wheel, he has always been a potter. His wife, a lively woman works with him and compensates for his silence. They work independently and focus only on flower pots and seem to have enough work doing just that. They supply the pots to various shops in town and at the *Arya vaidyashala* on a regular basis. They have their own house by the road. When the training programme began, Kuttan guru felt it was a waste of time trying to pamper and persuade children to learn pottery. But his initial reaction withered soon. His student Vineesh - quiet like his guru won him over with his aptitude for pottery and now Guru Kuttan proudly shows the pots that Vineesh has made.

### ***Guru Natarajan***

From his house by the road, Guru Natarajan, in his late fifties, works on large jars and pots. His wife sits close by rubbing and polishing the pots. Initially, they worked with Kumbham but are now more or less independent. Guru Natrajan was the foremost supporter of the training programme when it was conceived. He has been practising the craft for the past 20 years. His daughters work with Kumbham.

Guru Natarajan has Subramani as his trainee. Subramani, a shy youngster needed extra attention and patience from the Guru to get started.

## 5. Natural Learning Process

While I was in the process of developing exercises and activities to help children learn pottery, I was intrigued by the way with which the master potters arrive at a form. I wondered how the things they make could be so beautiful. I was keen to know what guides them to arrive at a particular form. Mulling over it for several days I realised that there is a biological assistance that guides our sense of beauty. People undefiled by modern ways are far more open and receptive to this biological guidance.

This internal capacity and the external natural systems collaborate in some manner to produce a distinct aesthetic quality to their lives. The rural, tribal or non-literate communities seem to act holistically endowing an aesthetic quality to their every act. What we understand as culture is a result of this collaboration. It is clear that in modernity this cultural distinction is totally absent. Therefore the modern artist, architect or a designer anywhere appears to be creating with a uniform and almost regimented aesthetic sense.

This insight opened up a complete new dimension in my search to understand the traditional and indigenous knowledge systems.

In fact, delving a little further into the biological aspect of knowledge, I soon realised that all the games children play in the villages is a kind of a response to their biological needs. The idea of developing a curriculum for the children itself stood challenged. That is when I stumbled upon the *do nothing training method*. This method accepts the fact each child is creative and intelligent and therefore the need is only to initiate a process by which the trainees get inspired to use their subdued potential in creating and unfolding what nature has in store for them. Children in natural learning cultures are similar to any newborn living being and nature has its own precious pace to make them grow.

Senses therefore play a very important role in the process of learning and are a sort of a reciprocal device that helps establish communion with the inner self. All the games children play in these communities has to do with sensitising the senses, planning, balancing, guessing, developing the mathematical sense, etc. This is the process of knowing the world.

In the traditional societies every situation is a learning situation. Here to live means to learn. It was a rhythm followed from birth to death.

If we consider knowledge to be a biological response to sustain life, then the present level of estrangement between man and nature is unimaginable. How could knowledge and destruction go hand in hand to the extent that the very survival of the earth now edges on the brink of cessation? Knowledge, devoid of the biological content fostered the grounds for depredation. As I closely observe the primal ways of the indigenous people I find every connective tissue an extension of nature. Their dwellings, their artefacts all seem sprouted from the earth. Inspiringly concordant like the bird - the branch – nest- the twigs. It is



imperative that we re-institute the traditional knowledge systems and restore the earth its pristinity.

The more I reflect upon, the more I see the diametrically opposite direction in which education has led us from nature. 'Western' no longer confines to the west. The ripples of western knowledge have far reaching consequences. Their world view or the lack of it has proved catastrophic to the entire humankind.

In a particular region with specific climatic, geographic, and ecological conditions a particular life form emerges and survives. Similarly knowledge must evolve naturally without any external thrust of shammed theories and counter theories. The fundamental difference, in the evolution of knowledge systems in the modern and traditional cultures is about revering nature in its totality. Indigenous cultures have for generations honoured nature's sanctity and their quest for knowledge was armoured with tools of intuition, sensitivity and creativity which bestowed a sense of un-intrusive and peaceful existence to every pulsating entity.

## 6. Redefining Words

The need to redefine or look for meanings beyond the obvious becomes more and more necessary as we get jostled around with modernity pushing its way through all lanes and by-lanes. A notion that has firmly gained ground is that 'tradition' is *static* where as 'modernity' is dynamic and vibrant – in fact creative. What is true is actually the opposite. Further, it is modernity that has brought us to a dismal standstill.

Creativity within a modern setting just about manages to sell ideas or products. It barely can extend itself even to the fringes of true creativity. True creativity enfolds within itself the whole art of existence. Modernity on its part has dissolved creativity and transformed living beings into mere spectators. To see and experience life in its purest form means shedding every alien theory and rationale from one's psyche that obscures individual vision of life.

### Waste

*Waste* is a term that has come tagged along with modernity. If one is sensitive enough to observe, there is nothing that is treated as 'waste' in tribal and traditional cultures. Everything is used, re-used, consumed, and absorbed until it merges with the organic. *Kantha Embroidery*, similar to Applique work, originated as a creative practice to use the old torn bits of fabric. True waste came into existence with inventions of materials that are non-degradable and harmful to the simplest forms of life. .

Following is an illustrative case where one can see the clash between modernity and creativity. The potters at Aruvacode are quite unaware of the hazards of plastic, (unlike the 90 percent of our global population who, despite the awareness have no qualms trading off safety and purity with the conveniences plastic usage offers). Their approach to the material is extremely utilitarian. They believe they can make the best use of any 'waste' material.

An instance is the burnishing of pottery that has got evolved over generations. Initially potters would use a very smooth stone to rub and give sheen to the pots. At times sea-shells or some seeds from the forest were used. Then came in steel spoons and crushed cement bags. Now finally they use plastic carry bags. After polishing four to five pots the carry bags get completely disintegrated. It is their way of curbing and utilising waste.

There is also the innovative way in which they process their clay. To powder dry clay pieces, the potters spread them on the road and let enough vehicles pass over them so that by dusk they can collect finely powdered clay.

Initially, the pieces of clay were just spread out on the road. Then they were placed over a plastic sheet. Next, between two plastic sheets so that the powdered clay did not get blown off and it was easy to collect and carry the powder to the sheds. Technology appropriation of sorts! This raises the issue of how modernity makes processes in to

static, institutionalised products. The notion of Appropriate technology is an example of this. In non-literate communities appropriation of technologies is very common.

Observing children make toys with all the discarded metal wires, rubber, plastic, etc. one tends to wonder if all that indeed is a waste!

The ideas are innovative and the toys seem to offer adequate lessons in applied physics and chemistry than what the textbooks offer!

The concept of change that is propagated by the Western society is an illusion. It is a change for change's sake, a form of non-conscientised alternatives created by the consumerist society. The change thrives on such non-creative and destructive pursuits as fashion and advertising etc. to manipulate the mind of the people. Various artificial feelings are created. Boredom is a state of mind atypical of the cities. I see in village's people doing same thing from childhood to their death without holidays, Sunday etc. without getting or even knowing about boredom.

### **Entertainment/Boredom**

A two-hour slot for entertainment after spending tedious hours at work place is another lifestyle creation of modernity. In traditional communities work could be hard and challenging but not boring. People work with a sense of complete participation.

**Boredom**, a definitely alien mindset to ancient cultures, came about as a consequence of industrialisation and mechanisation. It led to mechanical and uncreative minds whilst compartmentalising basic functions of life in a manner that a wholesome being became obsolete. The existence of creative and uncreative elements within an individual disturbed the harmony between man and nature.

**Planning** is yet another of those things in which we claim expertise. The urban all-devouring elite has arrogated to itself the power and ability to 'plan' for these communities. These diminishing tribes of traditional people are believed to be far from being able to plan. I have come to realise that we have planned our doom through a century of short-sighted, self-centric planning. Those communities planned for eternity.

**Deadline** is an extension of planning. In modernity humans decide the deadline where in traditional communities the nature decides the deadline.

Another very important aspect is the patience that the traditional people have. I think probably patience is a concept developed by the impatient and 'busy' modernity.

The most dangerous and the most insidious of their invention is the word help which is a term masked and have taken different forms. It probably began with the project of civilising the uncivilised and also has a connection with converting the pagans. Both assume a

hierarchy. We have inherited this idea of changing 'others' from this. Today it has taken the form of development. This comes in various forms and the most dangerous is the help offered in terms of 'education' literacy being another part of it.

**'Wholistic'** is yet another invention of modern lexicon in trying to overcome this anomaly. The departure of man from the essence of being what it means to be human is a painful reality. The solutions that modernity offers ends up spawning greater harmful eventualities. The reason-logic framework works as bait that modernity throws at every crossroad and traps humanity in a tighter clench.

The fundamental difference with traditional cultures has been that the traditional cultures **follow** a natural learning process where 'nature' is the centre of knowledge. It is evolutionary in character and knowledge is a biological response to sustain life. Modernity brought in its wake a level of alienation between human beings and nature that all that was innate and intimate was either doubted or completely forgotten. It is a fallacy to believe that knowledge is attained through ceaseless questioning, where questioning borders more on doubts and disbelief.

All interpretations in a traditional rural setting give credence to the fact that while modernity evokes a general sense of incompetence and inadequacy among people, where experts are needed at every other step to help overcome problems, tradition on the other hand regards every being to be intelligent and competent enough to face life on their own terms, at their own pace.

## **7. Why must the traditional crafts survive?**

The traditional crafts people act as a mirror to see our own predicament. But we do not look, we do not see. Because our colonised mindsets are still looking at the West mesmerised and dazed. We do not see the writing on the wall. We cannot continue this lifestyle by looking and plundering the other earth. The past 50 years we have systematically destroyed whatever was left under by the British rulers.

### **De-textualising knowledge**

Today in the computer age 'softwarability' is becoming the criterion for what constitute knowledge. There was a period in history when textualisation of knowledge dictated and altered the notion of what constitutes knowledge. So in order to understand the experiential or intuitive cultures one needs to de-textualise and move out of the categories made by the text and subsequent Westernisation.

Only the indigenous knowledge or the knowledge of non-literate communities can be called experiential knowledge as the introduction of text and schooling has robbed us of the possibility of authentic and experiential knowledge. Unfortunately again the western intellectuals are reframing indigenous knowledge to suit their purposes and categories. It is difficult for the reason-oriented knowledge to understand intuitive knowledge system.

Indigenous knowledge the result of collaboration between people and their surroundings guided by the natures need to preserve all life. The biological element in knowledge is what has made the indigenous communities to create 'life sustaining' knowledge.

Children in natural learning cultures are like any other newborn animal. The nature has its ways to make them grow and all the skills of an adult world are introduced in the games, toys children make. The way they explore the world of senses by the interaction with the nature and the world of nature through senses.

This process of knowing the world.

Only by reclaiming the experiential knowledge process can the non-Western intellectual begin to see what is the true knowledge of these cultures.

My rejection of reading was part of this attempt. It gave me time to see, to hear, and to experience what the traditional communities do. To understand this type of knowledge there is no method but to leave the isms of the textual knowledge.

Institution as a method of creating knowledge is to be re-looked at again. Not intuition in service of reason knowledge which is what is happening in the West today by reason in service of intuitive knowledge.

The experiential knowledge is what indigenous knowledge is all about. Unfortunately again the Western intellectuals are reframing indigenous knowledge to suit their purposes. The third world intellectuals are also at their service. Living with indigenous communities has revealed to me that their knowledge is holistic and intuitive unlike the compartmentalized and fragmented and reason-dominated knowledge of modernity.

What comes across is the integration of beauty, ethics etc in whatever people do in the indigenous cultures.

It is time to re-look at the whole knowledge process- schools, experts, research, certification etc as the sole authority.