



Leathercrafts

AT SHANTINI KETAN

SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE [126130011]

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विश्वभारती

VISVA-BHARATI

(Established by the Parliament of India under
Visva-Bharati Act XXIX of 1951
Vide Notification No. 40-5/50 G.3 Dt. 14 May, 1951)

संस्थापक
रबीन्द्रनाथ ठाकुर

FOUNDED BY
RABINDRANATH TAGORE



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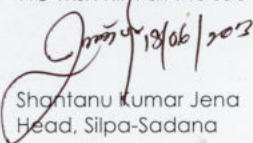
18th June 2013

दिनांक/ Date: _____

To Whomsoever It May Concern

This is to certify that **Mr. Siddhartha Mukherjee Roll No. 126130011** is working with us in our Leather section, at Silpa-Sadana, as a training student from 19th May to 20th June 2013. During the tenure of his entire training, we found him hard working, intelligent and have good aesthetic sense. His performance was good and up to the satisfactory level. Besides being a trainer, he is a self motivated person, who is able to present creative ideas and communicate in the relevant medium.

We wish him all the success in his future endeavors.


Shantanu Kumar Jena
Head, Silpa-Sadana

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Background of internship

Finding a place for a decent P1 project was seriously a daunting task for me as the time drew near. So as a preconception, I thought of working in an industry without giving much thought about it. One fine day we had a discussion with our faculties who suggested opportunities in places other than mainstream production and industry where there was enough scope to learn into newer frontiers of design I was unfamiliar with. I chose for doing my internship thus in the prestigious Visva Bharati university in Santiniketan, Bolpur in the Birbhum district of West Bengal. I had a great experience working in the heritage leather crafts indigeneous to the place. After the thought given on this the next step was to get there and meet the administrative body there, I was lucky that I was guided on this by my faculty here at IDC, IITB and I got full support from the faculty at Visva Bharati who arranged my work area and even the stay at that place.

I visited Santiniketan Once but don't remember anything vividly. A place which was highly rooted to the art of Bengal which I

feel proud to refer as ' Banglar Shilpo '. A place which turned into a cradle as a brainchild of the eminent Rabindranath Tagore, this place was a reason that people no matter who they are, whatever their knowledge or qualifications chose to be one with the art, with the nature. A tradition which continues since Tagore's time when children were taught sitting under the trees still one feels like to experience it , feel it close, when all your emotions and senses get one and there is no excuse nor any distraction which takes you away from what you chose to do or like to do, it comes out in pure form. Finding accommodation there the first day was a difficult task. I being new to the place it took time to develop familiarity in the area around. However, Ms. Maitri Barman, a faculty in the leather department took real pains since the first day after I reached there and searched together for the accommodation we needed. Summer holidays were going on at the time we reached but the management made for us the facilities we needed, from teaching and assistant faculty were made available for us. The workshops opened although holidays.

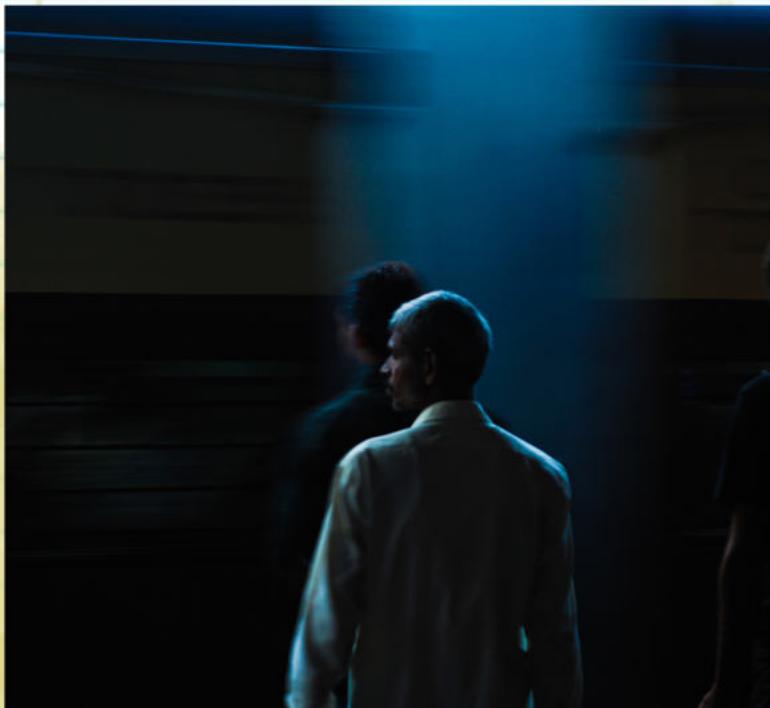
How I reached there ?

Santiniketan is a place about 100 miles from Kolkata proper but well connected by trains from Sealdah and Howrah, the main railway hubs of Kolkata. Bolpur (Santiniketan) falls in the route connecting Kolkata and Jalpaiguri. Almost all the trains travelling to North east India pass through here and it is a major halt. I used to board train from Sealdah and Bolpur arrived in 4 hrs. Shantiniketan is 3 Kms from the railway station and Sriniketan 2Kms. Cycle rickshaws are the most common mode of transport but without the presence of auto rickshaws or shared mode of transport, the rickshaw wallahs charge exorbitantly. However if one is lucky enough he may get a town service bus from the station which may drop him at Jambuni, a junction area from where the most buses leave. An official Visva Bharati bus plys often on this route and can be caught quite often from here.

Climate

Bolpur almost falls on the Western part of Bengal. Places in Bihar such as Dumka and Massanjore being very near and accessible by

bus. The whole region of the Birbhum district has red soil hence the name also ' lal mati ' . The soils are very fertile and during the period when I was there it was summers when temperatures rose upto 44 to 46 degrees Celsius. But during the advancing monsoon season, the skies are dark and over cast with severe thundershowers. Mango grows in large numbers here. Also this is the season of ' Ilish ' fish, one of the most savoured delicacy.



Introduction

A unique & beautiful tradition of craft, commonly referred to as Santiniketan Leather Products, has over the course of more than three quarters of a century carved out a distinct identity on the world stage. Its appeal is both popular and artistic, its charm both exotic and future-embracing. Its delicate aesthetics is informed by a singular artistic tradition (the artistic heritage of Santiniketan) and its innate aesthetic affiliation to an organic world. Like the discrete charm of the place itself, Santiniketan and its surroundings, this craft of leather products too owes its origins to the many-sided meditations of the poet, artist & thinker Rabindranath Tagore, more commonly known to the world as the famous Poet Laureate of the East, and the winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913.

A process that started with the poet's father, Debendranath Tagore, and carried forward by the poet himself, Santiniketan's journey from a barren land to a thriving cultural microcosm cradled in a rich natural environment is an amazing story, and one of the more unique offshoots of this grand meditations in the

grand tradition in leather crafts.

The artistic heritage of Santiniketan has a rich and engaging history. From its inception to date, Santiniketan and its culture has been a pioneering force in the world of art & culture, and a leading aesthetic conscience of the region. Its unique aesthetic tradition is shaped by its innate affiliation to the organic environment and nature. As a result, a remarkable aspect of this tradition has been its responsive interpretation of nature and the environment, a feature that lends its nuances heavily upon the crafts of this place, and none more so ever than on the leather crafts tradition. Thus the decorative style of the traditional leather crafts of Santiniketan traces its roots back to the creative and ornamental interpretation of nature, a style which is at once inimitable and sightly.

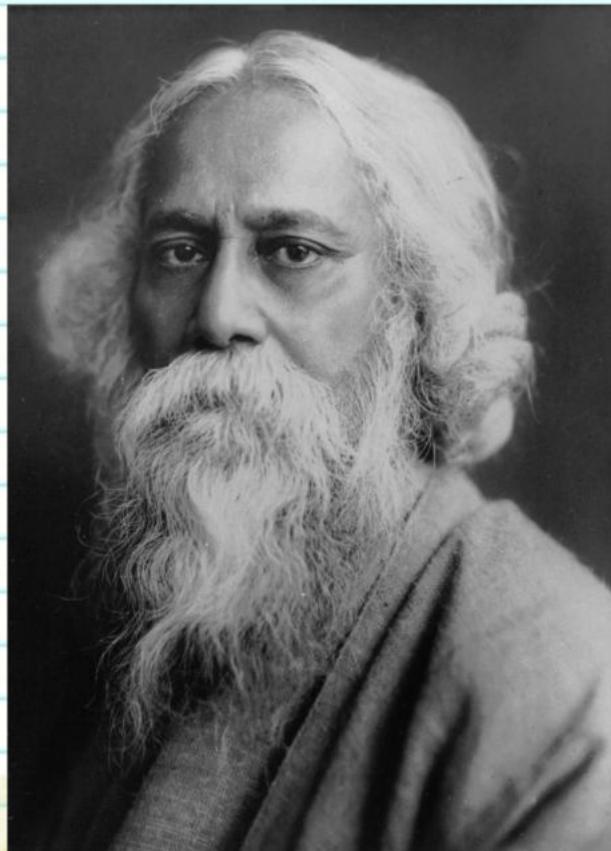
Over the years, informed by the creative inputs of the master artists of Santiniketan and ingenious solutions by the local artisans, Santiniketan leather craft has become a force in the world of crafts, appreciated by craft-lovers all over the world.

Place profile and overview

Santiniketan, a place hundred miles north to northwest to the city of Kolkata, is primarily famous for its association with Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Laureate, and for the university he established there, Visva-Bharati, where his vast heritage is still alive through its environment, its unique open-air school for children, and the many seasonal festivals the place is associated with. From its humble beginning in the form of an austere asrama, Santiniketan has over the course of a century become a thriving cultural centre, a much celebrated centre of education, and—because of its rich historical heritage and its beautiful environment—a popular tourist pilgrimage. Much of the popularity of the leather crafts of this region rides the enthusiasm it fosters in the hearts of these tourists, visiting this place in millions every year. (Heritage crafts brochure : <http://www.santiniketanleatherbds.com>: 6th Jul 13)

A place which bears the memoirs of its founder Rabindranath Tagore.

Rabindranath Tagore was a polymath – poet,



Rabindranath Tagore Img. 1

painter; he was also a philosopher, a social reformer, a teacher and to many, a prophet. In his lifetime his renown as a poet resounded around the world, accepted and celebrated across different cultures and climes. As a reformer he fought against impeding customs and practices that hindered the progress of the people and their spirit and through his writings

Place profile and overview

criticisms and social endeavors became the active conscience of his race and nation. To the world he was welcomed both as a people's poet, and as a seer – a prophet, a voice of hope, a profound believer in man and his capacity for goodness, and a humanist whose humanism was informed with a belief in the universal essence of man. Today, Tagore's legacy can be found alive in his vast body of writings which still holds relevance, and strains of his visions are still alive in Santiniketan, where he established the institution of Visva-Bharati, a university, which still bears his ideas and his pursuits.



India map (Img 2) , Map of West Bengal with Birbhum district highlighted (Img 3)

Visva - Bharati

As an educational centre, Santiniketan boasts of a unique educational tradition, at once traditional and experimental: dissatisfied with the prevalent systems of learning, he set out to establish his own ideas on how to improve upon methods of schooling through radical interpretation of the idea of education itself; this system was as original and novel as it was based upon the traditional Indian Vedic ideals of learning. Modeled after the Vedic 'tapovana'-system (centres of learning amidst forests in ancient India), in his school he first abolished the concept of the classroom, and classes were therefore held in the open, under the trees, surrounded by nature, and students were encouraged to study and love nature in its changing moods and phases. In a practical as well as symbolic way, it was doing away with the system of pedagogy that limited itself to bookish education with no relation to one's environment, to nature and to the world at large. (Heritage crafts brochure : <http://www.santiniketanleatherbds.com: 6th Jul 13>)

Place profile and overview

In Tagore's worldview, education was not a set of skills learned by the individual and then applied to the world, but rather, it was learning the world itself through one's mind and senses for the development of one's spirit, making him, in turn, responsive to one's environment. He firmly believed that it was through freedom and joy in close proximity of nature that a mind could grow. It is with the idea of imbuing one with the full understanding of this delicate relationship between the world and the individual, and to foster a spirit of interactivity thereof, that Tagore designed Visva-Bharati. Over the last forty years of his life, Tagore developed Santiniketan with his ideas of education and the unity of man in mind. The plays and songs he composed for his students to perform, which capture different nuances of nature and the world, are still lenses through which awareness has been spread. The different seasonal festivals he designed, carefully eschewing any religious import and remaining secular at core, are still observed round the year, and still help forge a shared world view in an atmosphere of communal

binding. Some of these festivals, like the Celebration of Spring (Basantotsav) or Poush Fair, have become major events, drawing visitors in millions to Santiniketan every year. Initially the Brahmacharyasram, a school of primary education, in 1921 he founded his university, Visva-Bharati. One of the objectives of this university was: "To seek to realize in a common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and West, and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world



Visva Bharati Silpa Sadan. The showroom of the finished product, collectibles and souvenirs exhibits work on textile, pottery, leather

Place profile and overview

Art & Culture of Santiniketan :

Along with academics, Tagore laid equal stress, if not more, on art and culture, creating an atmosphere where the creative spirit of man can flourish and find means of its expression. Visva-Bharati, from its inception, was a leading centre of fine-arts and music in India, and Tagore's ideas of education based on the interaction between man and his environment was carried forward by many luminaries who came to be associated with this place and the institution. Most notably in the fields of performing and visual arts, the fruition of Tagore's ideas still enliven the atmosphere of Santiniketan in various ways.



Shantiniketan art (Img 4)

Nandalal Bose, Tagore's protégé and the person who primarily shaped the visual aesthetics of Santiniketan, taught his students at Kala Bhavan (the art faculty of Visva-Bharati) to stay alert and responsive to nature and environmental concerns. Among many of his achievements as an artist, Nandalal Bose developed the unique design tradition, partly based on many ornamental and visual traditions of India and turning them into ornamental units or motifs which could be applied in a systematic way to embellish the surrounding and its objects. This ornamental system, commonly known as alponar naksha, laid the foundation for the aesthetic aspect of the leather crafts of Santiniketan. (Heritage crafts brochure : <http://www.santiniketanleatherbds.com>: 6th Jul 13)

Alpona is a traditional decorative art form that has been traditionally been practiced by women in Bengal. This includes both the modern day state of West Bengal, a part of India and also Bangladesh. The designs are traditionally created as motif-based floor paintings using rice flour mixed with water.

Design Origins



Top : The typical 'Alpona pattern' or colloquially called alponanaksha formed the elementary basic for the designs in leather. (Img 4) www.mydrawingworld.wordpress.com Bottom (img 5) picasaweb.google.com, artwork by Prapti Paul



The alponanaksha was the initial design guideline for the Shantiniketan leather bags. (Img 6) www.craftsofindia.com

Rabindranath Tagore did not want Visva-Bharati to stay impervious to its immediate surroundings and its problems while engaging itself in esoteric practices: one of the first things he introduced in this institution was to employ his students for the betterment of the neighbouring villages, (Heritage crafts brochure : <http://www.santiniketanleatherbds.com>: 6th Jul 13)

Design Origins

solving their problems by local means. Among the initiatives as part of curricula of Visva-Bharati, he introduced his ideas about rural reconstruction. Few people are fully aware of the value of Rabindranath's contribution in the field of rural development. It could be that his achievements in literature, music and arts eclipsed his activities in this sphere. Yet it has to be acknowledged that Rabindranath was a pioneer in the movement for rural resuscitation in this country. He advocated a thorough reconstruction of village life at least a generation before the Indian National Congress turned its attention in this direction. (Heritage crafts brochure : <http://www.santiniketanleatherbds.com>: 6th Jul 13)

Silpa Sadana:

Central to Tagore's idea of Santiniketan was how a society can become self-sufficient & self-sustaining through devising local and innovative solutions to fulfill its daily needs, and craft played a crucial role in this system. It is through craft, production of tools and

artisans in the nuances of crafts, as well as develop simple yet aesthetic solutions to encourage & facilitate home-grown craft production through the cottage-industry model, so that the local people can become self-sustainable. Another aspect of this endeavour was to, not only preserve or revive, but also take forward the native crafts of the villages.

Among various crafts developed in Silpa Sadana, which included woodwork, textile, embroidery, lacquer-work & pottery, leather craft was a major success, both for its artistic merit & for its role in boosting the local economy in terms of commerce. The leather craft of Silpa Sadana (indeed the basic model behind the Santiniketan leather craft in general) originally imported and assembled from various foreign traditions, soon took a very original shape & colour in the hands of local artists & artisans, and became a major export of this place. (Heritage crafts brochure : <http://www.santiniketanleatherbds.com>: 6th Jul 13)

Design Origins

The importance of cottage industries for eking out uncertain and inadequate agricultural income in rural economics, especially in mono-crop areas like Birbhum, has always been acknowledged by experts in the field. The role of revival and encouragement of the industries in any scheme of national reconstruction cannot be over-stressed. It is also known that the introduction of cheap machine-made articles on a mass scale and various other general and local factors led to the decline of many cottage industries which threw out of employment numerous artisans supported by them and in many cases led to their migration to towns in search of livelihood. According to the West Bengal District Gazetteers: Birbhum, the district of Birbhum never had a demographically significant cottage or handicraft industry. There used to be a community of charmakars, who made shoes and who could tan some of their leather according to local methods for the making of chappals required by cultivators and people of other trades. (Heritage crafts brochure : <http://www.santiniketanleatherbds.com>: 6th Jul 13)

Early Experiments:

A year after Visva-Bharati was established, a separate unit for rural crafts came into existence in 1922 as part of Rabindranath Tagore's vision for rural reconstruction. The development of cottage industries had always been one of the chief aims of the comprehensive scheme of education envisaged by the Poet. He had two objectives:

- 1) To revive the many moribund crafts and industries which were once the pride of the villages, and by doing so
- 2) To ensure the well-being and happiness of the masses. There was a third objective—the desire to open diverse channels for self-expression peace through the establishment of free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres."before the village folk, whereby they would not only gain wealth, but find means to realize themselves. He said, "In our organization we have not ignored the problem of livelihood, but also

Design Origins

recognized the great value of aesthetic joy." Beauty, he felt, should be everywhere—even in everyday objects of utility. One of the industries that were taken up by Sriniketan was leather work. A tannery was set up, and between 1924 and 1930 a number of Muchis (cobblers) were trained in their own trade. They were definitely better off after their training. Rathindranath Tagore, the Poet's son tried out various experiments in tanning. But the purely educational side of the tannery did not seem to be justified and so it closed down in 1931. In 1928, on a trip to Europe, Rathindranath and his wife, Pratima Devi realized the potential of leather craft on seeing beautiful leather products which were very popular in European markets. Keeping these ideas in mind, Rathindranath came back with tools for developing leather craft here. With the help of a few students from the school, he began an experiment in producing various articles of utility by adapting rural designs from Birbhum. Within a couple of years this craft became very popular and started attracting several

art students from Kala-Bhavana.

Rathindranath had made some initial experimentation for a year at a leather laboratory to decide on the specifications and quality of raw materials to be used. He engaged a team for further experimentation and research in this area. Appropriate hand tools,

machinery, and facilities for the purpose were developed in consultation with craftsmen and manufacturers of machinery for small-scale industry. Later, in 1930, on a visit to London, Rathindranath and Pratima Devi got trained in a vocational institute in leather craft and acquired the necessary expertise to work professionally. It was re-introduced into Silpa-Bhavana as it was found that it would be profitable for the Institute, as well as for the muchisor charmakars, to manufacture fancy articles of leather, such as handbags, leather-covered stools, portfolios etc.

(Heritage crafts brochure :
<http://www.santiniketanleatherbds.com>: 6th Jul 13)

Design Origins

Kala Bhavana

Kala Bhavana was founded in 1919. It grew from Rabindranath Tagore's earlier and more informal efforts at quickening the Indian art scene and later as his efforts took the shape of Visva Bharati 1921, Kala Bhavana became one of its core faculties and the first department of fine arts in an Indian university. In the next two decades, it became the nucleus of the new art movement in pre-independence India and acquired great national importance.

Having come on the crest of the wave of Indian artistic renaissance initiated by Rabindranath Tagore and nephew Abanindranath Tagore, right from the outset Kala Bhavana was planned to be different from a conventional art school. There art education was visualised not as a programme for imparting technical skills but as an exploration of visual communication; visual arts were not seen in isolation but as part of a larger cultural spectrum, and culture was perceived as a factor enhancing the quality of life, the renewal of which depends on the renewal of creativity.

Tagore invited painter Nandalal Bose disciple

of Abanindranath Tagore, the founder of Bengal school of art movement, to become the first principal of the institution. In the coming years, stalwarts like Benode Behari Mukherjee and Ramkinkar Baij became associated with college, and in time gave a new direction not just to the institution but also to the modern Indian painting. K.G. Subramanyan, Somnath Hore, and Dinkar Kowshik were among their successors. (

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kala_Bhavana: 15th Jul, 13)

Through the last ten decades, Kala Bhavana has grown into an educational center of marked creativity and liveliness, where traditional and modern, eastern and western cultural trends get into a meaningful relationship.

Today it is known as a distinguished center for visual art training and research in South Asia. Its academic programme is broad and thus successfully introduces the students to all the necessary traditional and modern skills through studio courses and to a knowledge of

Design Origins

art history and aesthetics through lectures, discussions, through various group activities and a work atmosphere that combines informality with personal commitment. It seeks to develop in a student the spirit of personal initiative, creativity, inner discipline and awareness of his cultural environment. Besides this the inter-disciplinary character of Visva Bharati, its personalized campus and heavy calendar of cultural activities tend to give a receptive student an educational exposure of remarkable breath and depth. In keeping with its early ideals, Kala Bhavana is still trying to look beyond academics and produce young artists with a broad perspective and understanding, and imparting to them a broad range of skills to help them in various fields of creativity.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kala_Bhavana : 15th Jul, 13)



Kala Bhavana Santiniketan, (Img 8)



"The Santhal Family" , Sculpture by Ramkinkar Baij
(Img 9)



Society building

An important point to be noticed is that Silpa-Bhavana did not necessarily sever all connections with the trainees on completion of their courses. It maintained a separate establishment to provide work to those who sought it. There was a central workshop at Sriniketan where trainees, on completion of the courses, might come and work for their livelihood. But more usually they were encouraged to go back to their villages and work there under the supervision of Silpa-Bhavana. In this latter case, Silpa-Bhavana took upon itself the entire responsibility of supplying them with raw materials and marketing the finished products. A significant outcome of the employment of labour in Sriniketan is the disintegration of caste barriers. Of the 451 workers employed in 1943-44 in different trades, only 113 were members of their hereditary professions, and the rest were all of different castes. In leather works, 40 were charmakars while 181 were from other castes. In 1944-45, there were 36 charmakars while 233 were from other castes.

Leather works yielded the highest rate of income and explained its great popularity for new entrants. Besides, leather work is physically less strenuous and mentally more recreational. A large percentage of the total number of workers worked part-time, that is, they adopted village-crafts as a source of income, subsidiary to their main occupation. Silpa-Sadana, as it is now known, has always offered a variety of courses in leather works. At present there are four courses on offer: 1) Certificate course in Artistic Leather Work. This is a two-year training course for artisans below Secondary level education. After training there is a one-year Production period. 2) Vocational training for second-year class of pre-degree students. 3) Subsidiary Craft classes for First-year Diploma students of Silpa-Sadana. 4) Craft classes in Artistic Leather works for First-year B.S.W. (Hons.) students. Besides these courses, two artisans are given production opportunities.

(Heritage crafts brochure :

<http://www.santiniketanleatherbds.com: 6th Jul 13>)

Setup and Management hierarchy

Silpa Sadana, a department under Palli Samgathana Vibhaga (PSV) is a pioneering institute in India in developing cottage and small scale industries. It has two units : Training and Extension wing.

Silpa Sadana is headed by **Mr Shantanu Kumar Jena** (MFA and BFA in Ceramic and Pottery), as the Head of the department along with **Mr Rajkumar Konar** (B.Arch , M.Des IDC IITB) as the senior professor. It offers 3-year Diploma Courses in Textile Technology (Handloom), in Furniture Technology & Interior Design and in Pottery & Ceramic Technology, 2-year Certificate Courses in Hand Made Paper Making, Book Binding, Batik and Leather Work as well as 3-year Certificate Courses in Handloom Weaving, Wood Work and Pottery.

In the leather department I was guided by Mr Mrityunjay Chandra and Ms. Maitri Barman having years of experience in this discipline

Design Brief and Objective

The main idea of pursuing internship in Silpa Sadana in the premise of **Visva Bharati university** was to get a closer introspection on the traditional crafts of Bengal. In my case the craft work in leather. Leather embossing , tooling and batik in leather is a craft indegeneous to this place and was patronized by Rabindranath Tagore when he founded this institution. The design brief may be summarized as an opportunity to have an hands on experience in this field and develop accordingly leather products and accessories using the techniques widely practised here.

Instead of being goal driven the whole internship programme was process driven and more of a live training which emphasized more on developing sensitivity towards the material usage, the art form practiced and involved the understandings of the design process and cumulative assimilation of styles and techniques over time. An objective was set so that all the styles in leather crafts practiced over there are tried out, which includes Batik, block printing and embossing.

Working in this specific area required a familiarity with some of the basic tools at our disposal needed for pursuing the leather craft namely the modeller tool for tooling process and embossing, the block printing press and tools such as chisels and hammer. I worked on leather accessories such as wallets and purses, small bags a strap for a DSLR camera in the way practised there without using machinery for making the products. All the products made are more of handicrafts using the minimum tools in a more exploratory manner.



Batik on leather, the Shantiniketan bags. (Img 10)image courtesy www.delightindia.com on 6th June 2013

Material use

Leather generally used for making these products may range from sheepskin, goat skin or calf skin. The main idea is to use a leather which is of less thickness but is more elastic and stretchable so that all the components of the product can be done with a same skin. The skin at the animals back and sides is generally thicker and stiffer compared to the skin at the belly, so the leather is used up in the manner so that the desired thickness of leather is achieved everywhere also ensuring proper workability. The stiffer leather is generally used for the main body of the product while the thinner belly leather finds use in making details such as bellows or laces for the accessories.

I worked on goatskin both finished and coarse. Locally the coarse leather is termed as bind leather as it is generally used for binding journals and the finished one is called TC leather.

Getting familiar with both the types of leather showed us the pros and cons of using them

Leather is procured from Kolkata (coarse Shantiniketan leather @ Rs. 1100 / Kg; finished leather @ Rs. 60-65/sq ft; Vegetable colours @ Rs 800-900/kg; Spirit based colours @ Rs. 650-700/kg; spirit @ Rs. 65-70/litre; Gum arabic @ Rs. 100/ Kg; Tuli or brush ; Lining cloth @ Rs. 35/ metre; Rubber solution and rubber based adhesive for sticking.

Gum arabic mixed in water in a pasty mixture is one of the most essential components the batik process.

The Batik process

Batik is a resist dyeing process on cloth, leather, ceramic etc which has its roots to the Javan or Indonesian origin. Batik in leather is very different from how it is done on cloth using wax. The resin used for the process in leather is a pasty mixture of Gum arabic and water to the desired consistency which is applied on the leather using a brush (tuli).

Styles

Although the articles produced were for contemporary needs, the designs applied on them were chosen from motifs used in religious and ritualistic features of Bengal, like alpana or from those used in traditional embroidery work in rural Bengal. Help was sought from the masters of art and design in Kala-Bhavana like Nandalal Bose, Surendranath Kar, Binodebihari Mukhopadhyay and Ramkinkar Baij. They often suggested innovative ideas or designs. Primarily, the designs developed by Nandalal Bose and others were ornamental interpretation of nature – floral and vegetal motifs, vines and leafs, ordered and styled in a distinct fashion, a style which soon became very popular. It was a collective effort and resulted in a distinctive characteristic that was known as the Santiniketan - style. In 1927, Surendranath Kar, on his return from Java and Bali, introduced the art of Batik. Batik was used on leather work very successfully and this gave the leather products of this place a distinctive identity. Other techniques used in leather craft of this school included appliqué work, stencilling, modelling, poker work.

The Santiniketan Leather Goods Cluster is currently a thriving industry with an increasingly growing appeal in the international scene. Through micro & small scale units of production scattered around the vicinities of Santiniketan, it produces a number of items which are appreciated both for their utilitarian and their aesthetic value. These products have a unique and distinct look, because of their noble aesthetic heritage, and that, along with continuous striving to enhance the technical nuances of production and systematic marketing, has broadened the demand for these products worldwide. The main items coming out of this industry are artistic leather products which include: Bags: These units produce a number of different types of bags of various dimensional & utilitarian definitions, including shopper's bags, tote bags, umbrella bags, pouches, hand-bags etc. Small Leather Goods: Among the more popular products of this place are small products appreciated for their handy size and the contemporary appeal, and they include wallets, purses, coin pouches, folders etc.

Material use

Preparation of the resin

The preparation of the resin determines the quality of design desired. The solid granules of gum arabic is soaked in water overnight till a desired pasty mixtue is achieved along with a little bit of glycerine to increase the cohesion in the gum mixture. For designs involving cracking and crazing glycerine is not added.

Principle

The leather is lined with the gum mixture using a brush and allowed to dry after which it is coloured and washed. When the leather is coloured the colour can't seep through the areas lined with gum and they thus retain the original colour of the leather. When the leather is washed, the gum dissolves in water and the design becomes prominent as some parts are coloured while some parts are natural. For obtaining two or more shades the process is repeated again by applying gum over the natural areas and dyeing them with a different colour .

Apart from batik block printing and embossing by tooling forms the prominent art works done in Santiniketan.

The embossing involves the use of the modeller tool for embossing and poking the leather.

Block printing is done by taking the impressions from a Zinc block onto the leather by pressing it under a ball press couple of times.



Ball press machine employed for block printing

Design process and explorations

A ladies clutch purse

The ladies clutch purse is made by using the batik method of dyeing.



The raw leather is cut into the geometry of the purse and the design is drawn onto it after being tried on a paper. The design outlines are carefully drawn with a brush dipped in gum arabic.

After the design dries on the surface, leather is coloured with spirit based colours. Colours cannot penetrate the area where the gum has been applied.

The leather is then washed in water to remove the gum and dried for a day by laying it flat on a table. After drying it is polished using a glass paperweight

Finished product

Holes are punched on the leather using a hammer and a punch and the leather is laced with leather strips skived with a chisel to make them thin. Inner cloth lining is pasted onto the leather to make provisions for the pocket and a magnet button is fitted to the flap



Design process and explorations

A small bag

The small bag is made by using the batik method of dyeing.



The raw leather is cut into the geometry of the purse and the design is drawn onto it after being tried on a paper. The design outlines are carefully drawn with a brush dipped in gum arabic.

After the design dries on the surface, leather is coloured with spirit based colours. Colours cannot penetrate the area where the gum has been applied.

The leather is then washed in water to remove the gum and dried for a day by laying it flat on a table. After drying it is polished using a glass paperweight

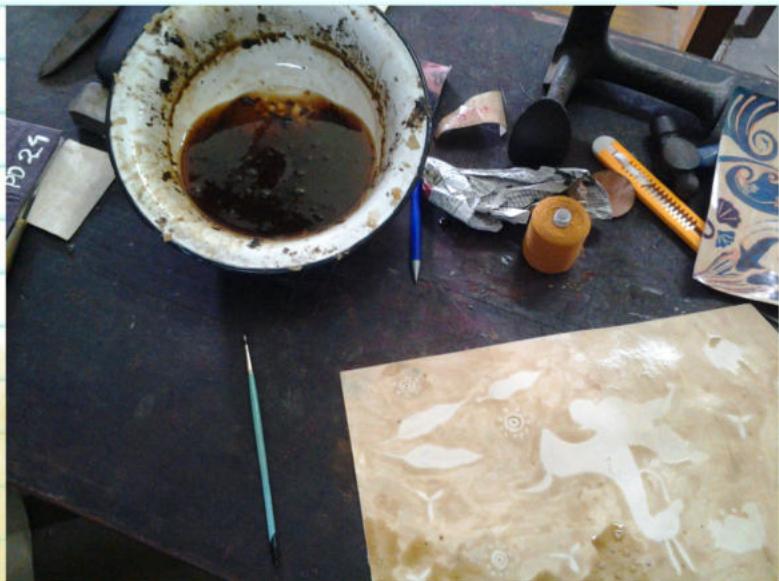
Finished product



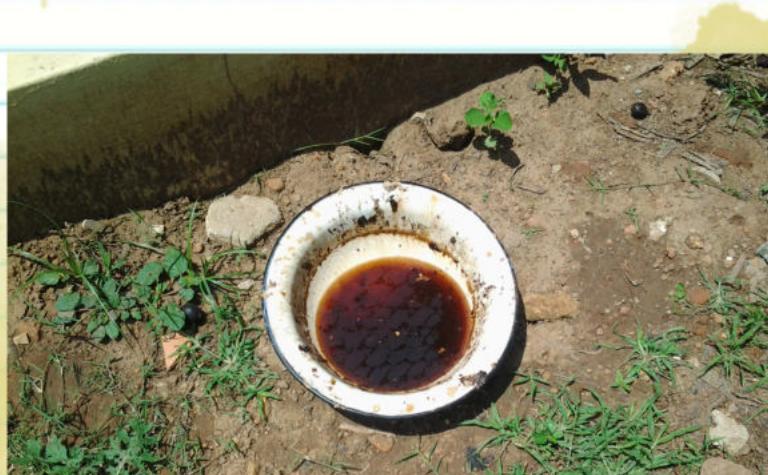
Design process and explorations

Roll up stationery holder

It involves the process of crack batik, the design is drawn and gum is applied to the areas where the cracking is needed with a brush.



A thicker paste of gum is applied so that it forms an even layer on top of the leather. The more consistent and thick the gum layer is applied more variety can be achieved in the cracks. The colour can penetrate the leather without the gum and also seep in through the cracks in the gum



The gum used for this process is only a mixture of water and gum arabic, glycerine is not added in this case

Design process and explorations



The leather after application of gum is sun dried till the gum becomes stiff and starts to crack.

The gum on the leather is cracked using a fine tool or pencil by poking the leather hard. Fine and wispy cracks known as crazing starts to happen. The leather is then coloured and the cracks allow the colour to seep through them.







Design process and explorations

A small purse

The small bag is made by block printing method



The raw leather is cut into the geometry of the purse and soaked well in water to make it moist and damp.

The leather and the zinc block having impressions are put in the ball press and the press is tightened so that the block casts the impressions on the leather.

The leather is then dried and coloured with spirit based colour with a brush.

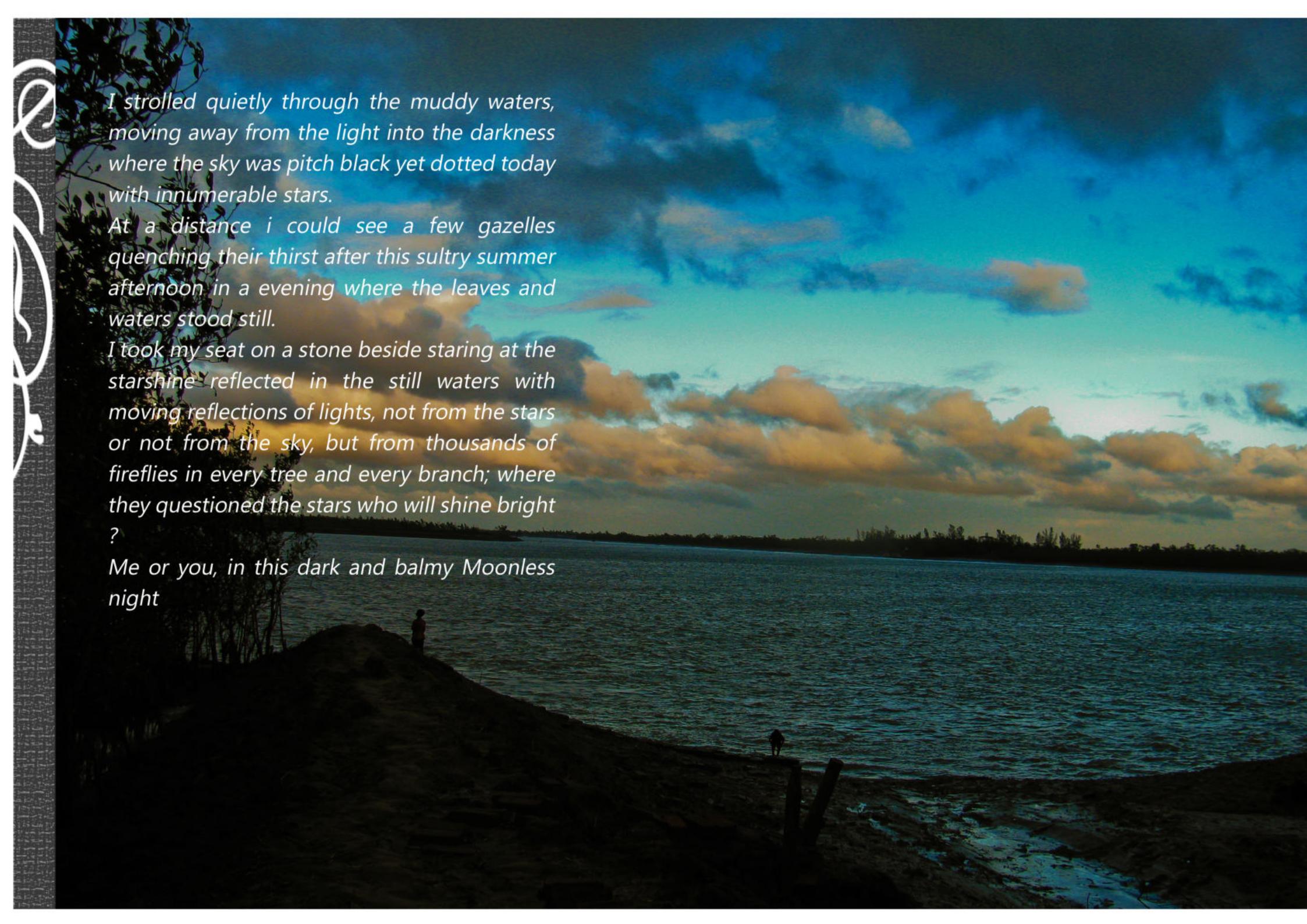
It is later punched and laced along with the inner lining to make the whole purse.

Design process and explorations



The camera strap involves the technique of crack batik with animal prints. It has two leather pieces back to back for more added strength and laced with leather. The end pieces which connect to the strap attaching with the camera are riveted to easily hold the weight.

The accessory is not an official advertisement by Canon inc. but a part of a student project without any intention of manufacturing of these under the name of Canon inc.



*I strolled quietly through the muddy waters,
moving away from the light into the darkness
where the sky was pitch black yet dotted today
with innumerable stars.*

*At a distance i could see a few gazelles
quenching their thirst after this sultry summer
afternoon in a evening where the leaves and
waters stood still.*

*I took my seat on a stone beside staring at the
starshine reflected in the still waters with
moving reflections of lights, not from the stars
or not from the sky, but from thousands of
fireflies in every tree and every branch; where
they questioned the stars who will shine bright
?*

*Me or you, in this dark and balmy Moonless
night*

Reflections and learnings

Getting in a place already charged with culture and art all around in whole is a very different experience to me. The general setback or location or maybe the overall mindset of the people are such that the environment in itself has become conducive to art and design. One of the major learnings apart from the craft is to become sensitized to design with passage of time so that the communication and responsiveness between us and what we create increases. One of the major things design can never be achieved when distractions are around. In Santiniketan wherever we went whatever we did all in a whole someway or other was related to art and design. So within a few days our mind and soul acclimatized there and tried to adapt what constitutes the ideology of the place and put us not just in a testing ground but more of a performing ground.



My poster on the leather crafts of Santiniketan, an internship project

References

Img 1. Rabindranath Tagore (The Hindu : <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/rabindranath-tagores-vision-of-india-and-china/article1095523.ece>)

Img 2. India map (India : <http://www.iloveindia.com/maps/>)

Img 3. West Bengal map (West Bengal : <http://www.mapsofindia.com>)

Img 4. Shantiniketan life (Heritage craft : www.santiniketanbds.com : 5th Jul 2013)

Img 4a. Alpona pattern (www.mydrawingworld.wordpress.com)

Img 5 Alpona noksha (picasa.web.google.com : Prapti Paul)

Img 10 Santiniketan bags (www.delightindia.com : 6th jun 2013)