

English

Tandoor Legacy: Punjab's Village Cooking Shaped Global Cuisine



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Introduction

Imagine the aroma of freshly baked naan, the smoky essence of tandoori chicken, and the crisp, golden crust of kulchas—all of these culinary delights share one thing in common: the tandoor. This traditional clay oven, rooted deeply in the culture of Punjab, has transcended regional boundaries to become a staple in kitchens and restaurants across the world. But how did a humble village cooking technique influence global cuisine? Let's explore the incredible journey of the tandoor, its historical significance, and its lasting impact on food culture worldwide.

The Origins of the Tandoor: A Fiery Invention

The tandoor's history can be traced back thousands of years, with evidence of its use found in the Indus Valley Civilization (around 2500 BCE). Archaeologists have unearthed remains of cylindrical clay ovens in ancient settlements like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, suggesting that the people of this era baked bread similar to modern-day roti and naan.

However, the tandoor, as we know it today, became a defining feature of Punjabi cuisine during the Mughal era. The Mughals, known for their love of rich, flavorful food, adopted and refined tandoor cooking techniques, making dishes like tandoori meats and kebabs famous across the Indian subcontinent. Over time, the tandoor became an essential part of village life in Punjab, with every home or community center having one.

Tandoor: More Than Just a Cooking Tool

For centuries, the tandoor wasn't just a cooking appliance—it was a symbol of community and togetherness in Punjabi villages. Unlike modern kitchens, where food is often prepared in isolation, traditional tandoor cooking was a shared experience.

- *A Community Affair: In many villages, people would take their kneaded dough to the communal tandoor to bake rotis or kulchas. The tandoor became a place for neighbors to gather, share stories, and bond over food.*
- *A Wedding Ritual: Even today, it is common in Punjabi weddings to have a 'tandoor night,' where family members prepare food together as part of the pre-wedding celebrations.*
- *A Symbol of Hospitality: Offering freshly made tandoori roti with butter or ghee is a gesture of warmth and hospitality in Punjabi homes.*

The Magic of Tandoori Cooking

What makes tandoori food so unique? It's all in the science of the cooking process. The traditional tandoor is a cylindrical clay oven heated with charcoal or wood. When food is placed inside, it cooks at extremely high temperatures, often exceeding 400°C (750°F). The intense heat sears the food quickly, locking in juices and creating a delicious smoky flavor that is hard to replicate in a regular oven.

- *Tandoori Roti & Naan:* The dough is slapped onto the inner walls of the tandoor, where it sticks and bakes to perfection, getting crispy on the outside while remaining soft inside.
- *Tandoori Chicken:* Marinated in a blend of yogurt and spices, the chicken is skewered and cooked in the tandoor, giving it that signature charred and smoky taste.
- *Seekh Kebabs:* Spiced minced meat is molded onto skewers and roasted in the tandoor, making for a succulent and flavorful dish.
- *Amritsari Kulcha:* A crispy, stuffed flatbread baked in the tandoor, often filled with spiced potatoes and served with chole (chickpeas).

The Tandoor's Journey Beyond Punjab

The spread of Punjabi cuisine across India and the world can be largely attributed to the partition of 1947. Many Punjabi families, displaced due to the partition, took their culinary traditions with them as they migrated to different parts of India and beyond. As a result, tandoori cuisine found its way into street food stalls, dhabas (roadside eateries), and eventually fine-dining restaurants.

The global appeal of the tandoor grew rapidly in the 20th century:

● *Indian Restaurants Worldwide:* From London to New York, Indian restaurants made tandoori dishes their highlight, drawing food lovers from all backgrounds.

● *Fusion Cuisine:* The tandoor's cooking method inspired chefs globally, leading to fusion dishes like tandoori pizzas, tandoori tacos, and even tandoori-flavored grilled fish.

● *Home Tandoors:* In recent years, portable tandoors and electric versions have made their way into modern kitchens, allowing people to recreate the authentic flavors at home.

The Modern-Day Tandoor: Adapting to Change

While traditional clay tandoors still hold their charm, modern innovations have made tandoor cooking more accessible. Gas tandoors, electric tandoors, and even stainless steel versions are now available, making it easier for home cooks and restaurant chefs to use this age-old cooking technique. Additionally, with growing health consciousness, tandoori food has gained further popularity. Since tandoor cooking requires minimal oil and retains the natural flavors of ingredients, it is considered a healthier alternative to deep-fried foods.

Conclusion: A Tradition That Keeps Burning

The tandoor is not just an oven; it is a legacy that has stood the test of time. From ancient Indus Valley kitchens to modern Michelin-starred restaurants, this humble clay oven continues to be at the heart of some of the world's most beloved dishes. Whether it's a smoky naan, a juicy kebab, or a crispy kulcha, the magic of the tandoor lives on, bringing people together through the love of food. So, the next time you bite into a piece of tandoori chicken or scoop up some curry with warm naan,

remember—you are tasting a piece of Punjab's rich culinary history, a tradition that has truly shaped global cuisine.

English

The Lost Math of Kolam

#GenderEquality



Proteeti Satpati

Jul 2, 2025



The Lost Math of Kolam

#GenderEquality

Mornings in the southern states of India are much the same as anywhere else, with only a small twist—women rise before dawn, sweep the thresholds of their homes, and then sit down to create some of the most intricate geometric patterns using rice flour.



These designs, known as *kolam* in Tamil Nadu, *rangavalli* in Karnataka, and *muggulu* in Andhra Pradesh, are more than decorations—they are visual rituals, mathematical constructions, and carriers of centuries-old algorithms passed down orally from mother to daughter. *Kolams*, long dismissed as folk art or women's tradition, are now being recognized by most as ancient knowledge systems that encode geometry, logic, memory, and computations. They are representatives of an unwritten algorithmic tradition rooted in aesthetics and cultural symbolism, and interwoven with the daily lives of the women in southern India.

Decoding Kolams

A *kolam* is a symmetrical, looping pattern created by dropping tiny dots of rice flour on the ground and then drawing continuous lines around them in

closed curves. These designs range from simple grids to highly complex arrangements, all drawn freehand. Kolams are traditionally drawn outside home entrances, symbolizing auspiciousness, welcoming prosperity, and warding off evil. They also double as a form of offering to birds and ants, promoting ideas of non-violence, and sharing. Though ephemeral—gradually erased by wind, rain, or foot traffic—kolams are redrawn every day and over time, their patterns become embedded in the cognitive muscle memory of the women who create them with religious dedication.

A Women-Led Tradition

Kolams at first glance may come across as mere ornamentations; but upon a closer look, we find embedded within their loops and curves, a powerful form of mathematical reasoning.

Kolams are built on the foundations of mathematical tools of symmetry, geometry, and pattern recognition. This is a form of math that is practiced without formulae or formal instructions. Women, most of whom have never studied mathematics in schools, intuitively develop an understanding of building layered complexities from dot matrices, constructing repeating motifs using modular transformation and other such concepts, through these kolam arts.

Kolams embody algorithms, instructing where to start, where to loop, where to mirror a shape, and where to end, almost like the rules of construction in computer science. Kolams' ingenuity lies in embedding these rules in hand-drawn form, without ever writing them down.



Kolams and Computational Thinking In recent decades there has been a surge in decoding kolams through the lens of computer science. For instance, Dr. Nagalakshmi and her team at Anna University have created a software that generates kolams based on input patterns, thereby reverse-engineering traditional methods into digital codes. Mathematician Dr. Sriraman went so far as to describe kolams as a form of graph theory and lattice math practiced long before these concepts were even formally defined.

Each kolam is an example of visually coded logic and can have potential applications in fields of robotics, computer graphics, and generative design. A particularly intriguing subset of kolams is the pulli kolam, drawn using the dot grid and continuous lines.

Researchers have modelled these kolams as the famous Lindenmeyer systems—an algorithmic system used to simulate plant growth, fractals, and other natural forms.

Cultural Memory and Mapping

What makes kolams even more remarkable is that they are often retained entirely in memory. Women memorise hundreds of different patterns and reproduce them with unmatched accuracy and creative variation. They need no notebooks and no sketches. It is almost as if their brain has transformed itself into a mental library of geometric forms.



Looked at in this way, kolams are mnemonic devices, not much different from oral epics, or musical ragas, where structure and improvisation coexist in harmony. For some families, kolam styles are almost like heirlooms, passed down to the next generation as a part of their cultural heritage, to be embedded in marriage rituals, festivals, or caste-specific customs.

Kolams of Resistance and Reclamation

Beyond being mathematical wonders, kolams are also layered with social meaning and richness. Kolas, as a women-led practice, can be seen as enduring forms of intellectual labour of the women, which traditionally has a long history of being ignored by patriarchal and colonial systems of knowledge.

Women were rarely given a place to shine in formal sciences, but in the yards of their homes, they quietly practiced algorithms, encoded memory, and mapped symmetrical logic every single day. Kolams were perhaps their own unconscious efforts to exert their importance in a field which had long been reserved exclusively for males.

In recent years, feminist scholars have reinterpreted kolams as silent struggles against the continued effort to erase and undermine women's intellectual contributions, as a claim to space and knowledge, and as language for the marginalized, especially in rural and Dalit homes, where kolams have their own unique and unconventional forms.

Drawing the Line from Past to Future

In the face of the ever-looming threat of globalization, where hand-drawn kolams are increasingly being replaced by vinyl stickers or printed mats, many young artists are now looking to revive kolam traditions through digital art, workshops, and coding platforms. These efforts have taken the forms of kolam-generating apps, workshops integrating kolams with coding to raise interest among the younger generations, interactive art installations, like those by artist Ranjani Shettar, and even the use of kolams in artificial intelligence to train models in pattern recognition and design. Kolams are cultural algorithms and maps of memory, math, and meaning.



They represent an ancient knowledge system, formalized not in books, but breathing through repetition, touch, and the rhythm of everyday life. By honouring kolams we acknowledge the intellectual labour of countless unnamed women who practiced complex ideas in simple spaces—without calling it science, yet embodying it with elegance. In a world panting after complex coding and algorithms, perhaps we should first pause and look at the ground beneath our feet. It is there, in rice flour drawings glistening in the morning light, that we find a wisdom we are only beginning to fathom.

CLOTHES HAVE "NO" GENDER . ISN'T IT ???



DR. Mohammad Ali

Jun 24, 2025



#Gender-Equality

#Constitutional_Right

#Youth

CLOTHES HAVE "NO" GENDER . ISN'T IT ???

एक स\$ची कहानी से शुरूआत करत है 2

"Clothes Have No Gender" नामक Campaign का नाम सनु क्या है? आपने? WhatsApp University के बेबनु यादः; जान और कुतकः > सेथोड़ा ऊपर उठ कर सच तलाशनेका को शश कर गे तो हम ह पता चलेगा जैसे - कुछ वष = पहले 27, October 2020 को ऐपेन के एक शहर Bilbao

महंएक पुष छा_ को ऐकूल सेइसग्लए बनकाल दिया गया दिया

ँक उसनेंकट= (Skirt) (माक्यता

के आधार पर महला के कपड़ा)े पहन कर कूल मह दामखल हो गया था.

कूल से बनकाले गए उस छा_ के समथन= मह कूल के आधे से अधिक छा_ भी कट= (Skirt) पहन कर कूल आ गए. हद तो तब हो गयी जब कूल के एक पुष शक ने भी कट= (Skirt) पहन कर उस छा_ के समथन= मह उत्तर गए और कूल शासन का पवरोध करने लगे. देखते ह: देखते"Clothes Have No Gender" नामक मह

ुहम (Campaign) कर

श. आत परे एन मह होने लगी और इसका समथन= इंलेड के सड़क> पर भी देखने लगा.

लड़क> ~वारा कट= पहनने कर घटना पर वहाँ रहने वाले अक्य जक्सी समदुय के लड़क>

ने कट= पहनने का न तो समथन= जक्या और न ह: कूल शासन कर तरफदार: करते हु

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'समान नागरिक संहता' एवं बन्यम> का हवाला देने मह जटु गए।

परंतुधम=bनरपेडता / पंथबनरपेडता को अपनेसंवधान कर जावना (आईमा) महलखने

वाले देश कूल के द्वास से लेकर सड़क एवं सेमनर> तक जहजाब के पवरोध मह न के वल

नारेबंद: करते ह2बिंक इसे लड़क्य> के पपछापन से जोड़ने कर परज़ोर कोशश मह सड़क से

लेकर टःवी ज़ान तक पचेलाते रहते ह2।

नकारतमकता कर जक्खठा को पीछे छोड़ते हु

ए हमारे देश मह जहजाब के पवरोध को लेकर भगवा

गमछा लहराया तो जक्सी ने धाम=क नारे के सहारे सामने वाले को डराने और धमकाने कर

कोशश कर। हमारे देश को भगवा गमछे या धाम=क नारे से दृढ़कत नह: है मगर वो गमछे

और नारे इ\$छा से नहः बिंबक Jकसी को डराने धमकाने और Jकसी कF bनजी Zवतं_ता को समावृत्त करने के Gलए लगाए गए थे, जो दियित pवरोधी होने के साथ-साथ नैपतक और संवैधाबनक eविक्टकोण से भी इस देश के pवरोधी ह2.

जो यवु ा उkमाद मH अधं_ हो कर, भगवा लगा कर Cहजाब का pवरोध करते Jफरते ह2, उनके माता-पपता को भले हः आज अपने b\$च> पर गव= हो रहा होगा, पर उन AGभभावक> ने अपनी अगलः पीढः को धाGमक= कोटरता का Zवाद बड़ी हः खबू सरुती से iाkZफर कर Cदया है. उkहH लगता है Jक - उनके b\$चे देश बदलने का साहGसक काय= कर रहे ह2, पर वो भलू रहे ह2Jक – WhatsApp यb

्नवGसट= : के कुतक्ग से उनके b\$च> के द्रयवहार मH जो ज़हर घोला जा रहा है, उसका डकं पलटकर उkहH हः Gमलेगा और उसका दंश परे ् देश को झेलना होग । हमारा देश एक लोकतां_क देश है जो संपवधान के bनयम> से चलता है, जिसमH काननू बनाने और उसमH सधु ार करने के Gलए जनता अपने वोट के ताकत से pवधाबयका को चनु ती है. उस काननू के आधार पर दोषी को सज़ा सनु ाने या bनदर्ष को kयाय देने का फैसला kयायपAलका करती है, और उस फैसले को ज़मीनी Zतर पर लागु करने का काय= कF ज़िज़ोमेदरः काय=पाGलका के हाथ> मH होती है ।

हमारे देश मH धम= के नाम पर कुछ तथाकpथत ठेकेदार> ने धम=तं_, भीड़तं_, अराजकतं_, मनमानीतं_ के माठ्यम से लोकतं_ कF जड़ो को लगातार Cहलाने का tयास कर रहे ह2, और इस tयास के Gलए उन सफेदपोश गं

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जो ने देश के कमठ = यवु ाओं को चनु ा है. इनकF कमठता =

को नकारतमकता कर तरफ़ ले जाने के लिए कभी धम=, फ़ज़पे राष्ट्राभिन्नत, जात, संताय तो कभी सेंशनलता का ज़हर घोलते रहते हैं। कहाँ ऐसा न हो, देश के युवाओं को ऊजाव को ग़लत देश देने वाले मरेके के बल राजनीतिक जमुल> मह हः पवावगु . के सपने संजो रहा हो.

नफ़रत कर राजनीत :- (Politics of hate will turn our children towards crime)

इस देश के युवाओं को इस तरह देशगत (Astray) किया जा रहा है जक - यदि किसी पंजाबी सरदार जी कर पगड़ी का अपमान किसी आक्य देश या फ़रेम मह भी होता है तो सारा देश इसे देश कर इग्नोर और अिमता से जोड़ कर एक साथ आवाज उठाते हैं। सरकार: दूसरे मह सरदारी वंदना एवं सरदारी पजूा होने मह वै ाबनक एक्टिविटी को किनारे रख कर

इसे आदर्श से जोड़ कर देखा जाता है पर मसुलमान दूसरे एवं कॉलेज जाती हु

ए लड़के के

हजाब लगा लेने से देश के तथाकथित धम=बनरपेट लोग> को दृढ़कत होने लगती है। इसी देश मह देशगतबर जनै ठेबना वै_ के रह सकते हैं, वेतांबर जनै परु: विज़ंदगी सफेद कपड़े मह रह सकते हैं, योगी आदर्शयनाथ भगवा वै_ मह राष्ट्रीय का सबसे सर्वोच्च संवर्धी ाबनक पद संभाल सकत है, बस मसुलमान लड़के हजाब नहः पहन सकती है।

अगर किसी को लगता है जक - नफ़रत कर राजनीत और युवाओं के दमाग़ मह ज़हर घोलने से किसी एक समदूय, संताय या धम= के युवा बबाद हो जाएँगे तो उक्त हक्म कर, ठहर कर पनु पवाव = ार करते हु

ए 'राहत-इंदोर: साहब' कर इस दो पंचिन्ता को बार-बार पढ़ना चाहेए

|

लगेगी आग तो आएँगे घर कई जद मD,

यहाँ पे JSF M हमारा मकाँ थोड़ी है.....

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English

Childhood Rituals



Snheal Amembal

Jun 24, 2025



Childhood Rituals

(rituals childhoodrituals belonging)

word count 1023

I grew up in nineties Bombay. A Bombay that was going to soon be called Mumbai, a Bombay that was going to see the greatest impact of India embracing globalisation, a Bombay which was at the peak of her ‘sapno ka shehar’ attitude and owning it with full Bambaiyya swag.

More importantly it was for me a secure space where I grew up within the safety of certain childhood rituals under my paternal grandma, Papama’s protective care. Here, I share with you a few of these rituals which for some reason seem to have been left behind in those growing up years.

Ubtan Bath

“Uddak bhochi taaaplyaa, zauke maa” Papama cautions the 4 yr old me about the hot bath water as I await my special “yellow” bath. I stand bare in the small bathroom , awaiting Papama to finish preparing the ubtan mixture of gram flour , turmeric and milk in the kitchen which is adjacent to where I am standing feeling a bit bored. I begin tracing my name on the white tiles of the bathroom wall which are covered with water droplets. This is a newly acquired skill, one which I am excited to master. ‘Hanngaa yaw ma” Papama beckons me towards her as she enters the bathroom. She swiftly gives the ubtan a final mix and begins applying it on my face followed by my arms, legs, torso and back. If I think about it now, the scent of the ubtan along with the steam in the bathroom makes for a sauna like environment.

The 4 yr old me however says ouch Papama as the rough texture of the ubtan cleanses and purifies my skin. “Vattantu khelnu kashi zallya pale’ Papama gently admonishes me for playing in the hot sun for far too long. “Vaggi kari nave’ I plead with her to rinse off the ubtan quickly. She dunks the copper chambu into the stainless steel bucket, checking that it is just right - neither too hot nor too cold. Once satisfied she asks me to shut my eyes and begins pouring chambu after chambu of hot water over my head. My body is thoroughly soaped and washed. My best part is about to happen. As the water in the bucket reaches the very bottom, she keeps the

chambu aside, lifts the bucket and pours the rest of the water on my head. The gush of water over me thrills me every time . Before I can even open my eyes properly, Papama wraps me in a bhairaas and leads me out of the bathtoom to get changed.

Plaits

8.05 am every school morning, Papama braids my curly frizzy hair. She invariably has just five minutes to do this because my school bus arrives promptly at 8.10am and if I am lucky at 8.12am. Papama never seems to be fazed by the time pressure. She is confident and efficient. She oils my hair generously to which I always complain ‘my friends will call me chip-chip chokhri’. “Ignore kari tanka” Papama asks me to ignore them.

I wish it was that easy I think to myself. Teenage girls can be rather nasty but how can I explain this to Papama now?

Her voice interrupts my thoughts. “Tel ghalka baa,barenchi te” she tries to reason with me by saying oiling my hair is in fact beneficial for it. I sullenly agree as I need my hair to be tied into neat plaits and time is of essence. I make a mental note to talk to her about this after school. I can see my brother ready to leave for school. I can;t help but be envious of how he doesnt have to go through this hair braiding malarkey.

I see my school bus turning around the corner. “Bus aayle papamaaaa”, I scream as she is tying the end of my second plait with a bright red ribbon. “Vhaee gottasa”, she replies calmly . “Gadbadi kornakkaaa”, she tells me not to panic. She quickly hands me my school bag and water bottle and with blessings and love waves me goodbye.

Kelai Hashale Sliced banana dunked in a bowl of cold milk and sprinkled with powdered sugar was an after school snack that I looked forward to as soon as I got off the school bus. Haath paay dhuyi anni vaggi yaw khavnchak. Papama’s voice greeted me every single day. She would be busy preparing this snack for me as I entered home after a long school day.

I was sweaty, tired and hungry and kaley hashale was the perfect pick me up snack. The cold milk, soft banana and sweetness from the sugar energised me almost immediately. One day we ran out of bananas and the 5 year old me threw a massive tantrum. I wanted kaley hashale and nothing else. Even a slice of chocolate cake would not do. Papama was in a dilemma. I was refusing to eat - a relatively new problem as I have always been one of the most non fussy eaters around according to my family at least. My incessant crying ended up waking Aju from his afternoon nap. Without saying a word, he got dressed and stepped out of the house. Papama wondered where he went but was far too distracted by my antics. She tried telling me a joke, showing me my favourite book and switching on my favourite cartoon on television. Nothing worked.

Her methods to calm me down seemed to be failing miserably. Soon after, Aju returned with a handful of bananas and handed them to Papama who was very relieved. She quickly made the hashale and as soon as she fed me a spoonful, I instantly became quiet. Kaley hashale for me was comfort food - a significant part of my daily routine. It provided me with a strange sense of belonging to my home. Without it, the afternoon was different and for the 5 year old me, dealing with change was hard. So I latched onto the kaley hashale like an anchor. Even today, when I find myself dithering and unsettled, I know what I reach out for almost subconsciously - banana, milk and sugar.

Nepali

Sadhu | साधु



Pranay Rai

Jun 24, 2025



साधु

जड्गलबीचमा साधुको एउटा कुटीर थियो। यिनी दयालु थिए। आँखामा भस्म गर्ने, सराप वा वरदान दिने शक्तिदान तपस्याद्वारा यिनले पाएका थिए। जड्गलका सारा पशुपक्षी जड्गलदेखि यिनका कुटीर वरिपरि निर्धक्क चर्दै गाउँदै घुमफिर गर्थे। चोट घाइते भएका पशुपक्षीहरूको निवारण वनौषधिद्वारा यिनले गर्थे।

एक दिन साधुले अचानक पशुहरूको बथान घट्टै गएको थाहा पाए। हिज देखिएको पशु आज छैन। आजभोलि देखिरहेका पशुहरू फेरि देखिएनन्। रोगले पशुहरू मर्दैछन्, कसैले पो मार्दैछन् वा त अर्को ठाउँमा जाँदैछन् भन्ने शङ्कामा साधुले निधो गर्नलागे। निकै दिनको खोजीमा एउटा राक्षस दिनमा गोटा दुई तीन पशु सुटुककै मारेर खाँदोरहेछ। त्यस दिन पनि राक्षसले मुडुली मृग मारेर लगेछ। ठाउँ-ठाउँमा रगतको फाल्सा पैल्याउँदै साधु बाँसघारीमा आइपुगेछन् ।

री अनि भाँची खाओस्। आकाश छुने इच्छामा बाँची बढेका लिङ्गोले नुहेर यसै धरतीमा निहरिन परोस्।"

तामाहरूलाई सराप दिएर साधु राक्षसको खोजीमा जुगा घारीमा आइपुगो। "जुगा हो! कुनै राक्षसलाई यताबाट गएको दे"बाँसका तामा हो! कतै राक्षसलाई मारेको पशुसित यताबाट गएको देख्यौ कि?"

साधुको सोधाइमा तामाहरूले भने- "हामी राक्षसको हौं र उस्तो कुरो सोध्छस्? हामीलाई चाहिँ कहिले बढ़ेर त्यो नीलो आकाश छुअौला भन्ने आनुरी छ, तेरो जस्तो गयो गएन, खायो खाएन चियो गर्न बानी छैन जा....।"

तामाहरूको फुटानी सुनेर साधुले सराप दिए- "आजदेखि उसो तँ तामाहरूले कलिलैमा दया-मायाबिना पशुहरूले चिथोख्यौ कि?"

English

Brewing beer and memories



Ahie Megha

Jun 24, 2025



Brewing Beer And Memories

Aliya and her cousins were travelling back from Delhi to their hometown in Arunachal Pradesh. Aliya had bought her naniapiya (father's elder sister) a jewellery box from Janpath

and a set of flavoured beer from a shop in Safdarjung, an area famous for

Northeastern

cuisine. As they sat on the bamboo floor exchanging pleasantries Aliya's naniapiya was

mixing rice spreaded on a tarpaulin sheet with an aluminium ladle.

Naniapiya. Ini mein nu gebane aecha gifts lowada. Aathu.

Ohh. Aecha kesha mein taando! Thank you ah. Aecha aesya? Yu hunji aathu da.

Aecha mein flavoured yu dumo. Yu ajihone nu aecha ma fruit flavour aetehone ichibu topra

mein taando baida. Aathu aecha Kiwi chi, aecha mango flavour.

Naniapiya. We have bought gifts for you. Please have a look.

Ohh. These are beautiful. Thank you dear. What is this? This looks like Yu.

Yes it is. It is a set of flavoured yu (rice beer). When the rice beer is made it is mixed with

fruit syrup and fruits flavours and then we can drink delicious flavoured fruit beer.

See this

one is made up of Kiwi, and this one is a mango flavoured drink.

As naniapiya nods at the explanation she cannot help but remember how the process of

brewing yu used to be a household chore which connected households through barter system

and merrymaking. Yu is seen as a necessary part of village and community festivities. Local

glutinous rice cultivated in the farm is half boiled along with red rice. Naniapiya says the red

rice is Mishinge jijiko. The name of this variant of red rice might have been derived from an

indigenous collection of rice of the species Oryza sativa, known as Jijiko from Tirap district.

Another possibility is another type of variant found in Lohit district which is nearer to their

district of Lower Dibang Valley. The name of the variant is Jijkong (Ahu) of the same

species. One of the ways in exchange in rice varieties and names could have been a result of weekly markets held in villages and barter system.

As the local white rice is half boiled and mixed with the red rice it produces a nutty, starchy

aroma. The rice is spreaded evenly on a carpet until it has cooled down substantially. Then

the Pa is broken down into fine powder and mixed with the rice. Pa is a rice cake consisting

of yeast that will help the rice to ferment. It is made out of uncooked rice paste which is

mixed with old rice cakes consisting of yeast or local herbs which fastens the fermentation.

These small rice cakes are shaped into small disks which can be stored for months.

Naniapiya recalls “ Nga ichikihi ho nani so paku ne inane, oko ma pehiyo, pa ajigai chi. Pa

ajite hiyo, aashunu ma brushutu aehiyo, aaya gibene aamegaichida. Aaya ho Pa khege ma

prage lagaichi, aechaho Pa amuni babuda. Hu chi hone khepetya chiyada. Nga ichiga

bihitone Bizari iih, ayahobu nga aatiko chi nani aalombro so inyime pa ajigai da. Pa aji

hone jigaiho ini yaku alombro mein jipa jeene oko chi lagaiji, aatiko chi, anapra chi lagaiji.

Baha chi taju bu lagaiji, aai aene jigachida.

Buge mein ini mein Bizari ne Pa ajite hayo Dambuk ma amewdane aagugaichida. Nga hone,

ichibu nani khe kani hone Dambuk bojaar aagugaichida. Bojare pa aakhahogaicha imu mein

taando pa lowdane ini maanu ma dega banaba. Ini chi pa wa mosa alombro mein

Iondogahiba. Baha aashunuge pa amehiyo, aaga kani kiku gine aegaichim.

"When I was young Whenever we used to return from our fields we would start making pa.

We would make enough that could be stored in our baskets and sell it in the markets, some

people used to come at home to buy it and we would also visit houses in our village.
The cost

of selling one pa was 1 Rs. Now it has increased to 10 Rs. When I got married I had to shift to

my husband's village which is Bizari. I used to make pa along with the village nani (mothers).

We used to talk about our households, childhood, food and much more. Then after we made

and filled our baskets with pa we would go to the market which was at Dambuk. One day as

we went to the market, we opened our baskets and displayed our pa for customers and

suddenly all the people in the market surrounded us. It was so crowded. Hands jutting out

money in exchange of a dozen pa. It was amusing. Most of our customers were Adi (another

tribe residing in Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, West Siang, Lower Dibang Valley and Lohit

districts). Maybe because most of them lived in Dambuk too.

In the olden days mothers would fill baskets of pa and travel to villages and markets in the

morning. By evening they would return back with two baskets of grains and pulses."

After Pa is mixed with the rice it is evenly spread again. When the rice cools down it is stored

in aluminium or steel beakers. The speed of the fermentation process usually depends on the

temperature and season. During winter season it takes more than two weeks for the

rice to be properly fermented while in summer the process may be completed in a week.

People believe drinking Yu in small quantities help in regulating low blood pressure and digestion. Although Yu is harmful when consumed heavily, it is also an integral process of traditional cooking technique. Rice beer, Apong, Zutho, Chuwak, Yu whatever the name be it has connected several people with love and appreciation for tribal cooking and culture. When resources were scarce and means of leisure almost none, drinking Yu and sharing stories, enjoying some hours before lulling into sleep was a social outlet for men and women alike to enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

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Bishnu Sendra Parv(Hunting Festival)



Purbasha Roy

Jun 30, 2025



Bishnu Sendra Parv(Hunting Festival)

#traditionalfestival#clim ate#indigenousfestival

A hunting festival called Bishnu Sendra Parv is celebrated by tribals of Chotanagpur Plateau. The indigenous communities participating in it are called Santhal, Bhumij, Munda, Ho, Birhor and Kharia. In a particular date, the men and women of these communities enter the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary situated in Jharkhand. This sanctuary is spread in an area of 192 km. In the hot month of Indian May, the Sendra Parv's date is fixed by the

king of these communities. He is called Dalma king and is christened the surname Hembrom. He observes executive monarchy within the community. Before we discuss the hunting rituals of these indigenous communities let us discuss the Dalma Sanctuary.

DALMA

Dalma is situated about 30 km from the steel city Jamshedpur. Dalma has gotten its name from the local goddess Dalma Mai. This goddess is worshiped by the adjoining village people of the sanctuary.

Dalma is a hotspot for ecotourism.

The river Swarnarekha runs along the length of the sanctuary and gives birth to several scenic waterfalls within the landscape. The forests of Dalma mainly are divided into Dry peninsular sal and Northern dry mixed with deciduous forests. The flora has a varied richness of the climbers, herbs, shrubs, orchids. Some medicinal plants too participate in the fauna list such as Anantmula, Shatavari, Sarpagandha etc. The sanctuary is an abode for Asiatic elephants. The largest number of tourists come with the intention of watching the herds of them from a close distance. Apart from the famous unofficial elephant sanctuary tag, large varieties of wild animals are also found here. Such as barking deer, sloth bear, porcupines, mouse deer, Indian giant squirrels, pangolins, mongooses, wild boar, wild buffalo too can be sighted in the sanctuary.

Domestic birds such as falcons, gray hornbills, paradise fly catchers, magpie robins, egrets, mynas, Indian tree pie, Indian peafowl, different varieties of kingfishers, herons, racket tailed drongo, golden oriole etc can be spotted in the sanctuary. The migratory birds that fly over the various water bodies

surrounding Dalma hills from Siberia and other cold countries in November. These birds begin to return from mid-February. Species such as Ferruginous duck, Eurasian Wagon, Red Crested Pochard, Common Pochard, Taiga Flycatcher, and Black Bittern.

The Dalma Sanctuary has no safari but foot trails envelope this shortcoming with higher degrees of grace. The trails are carefully marked by the forest department authorities for visitors to enjoy the natural beauty. A forest guide usually accompanying the wildlife enthusiasts helps them for a thorough understanding and enjoyment.

Sendra Parv Rituals Analysis

This tradition's history is undated and has come down from generation to generation. These indigenous communities are Polytheist. The tribes not just of Jharkhand but from adjacent bordering states such as Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal too join them. This occasion is celebrated under just one leadership of the Dalma King.

This festival's relevance and ostentisity can be understood from the fact that the people beyond their community are invited to participate and it depends upon the intelligibility of the said person to either participate or skip the event.

The whole ritual begins by a meeting at their King's residence or any village's primary school ground or at the courtyard of a village's temple. A fallen palm leaf[called as gira sakam] is given to everyone whose presence is anticipated in Sendra. This is a traditional tribal invitation method followed till date. More than 10,000 people participate in this hunting festival.

On the first day the cleaning of their temple is completed. Next day, a praying ceremony is observed in the temple. The beginning is marked by gathering around a bonfire to offer prayers to their god Bonga Buru. They sing and dance to their traditional and indigenous songs. The next day, the men and women ascend the Dalma hills with the intentions of attacking and hunting in the Dalma Sanctuary. The hunters do not use modern ammunitions like nets, guns, noose etc.

The villagers take the ancient and traditional weapons like bows and arrows, farsa[battle axes], axes, bejar [dagger], lathi-danda[sticks] and enter the forest beating their traditional drums and chanting holy hymns. With these weaponaries they hunt animals like birds to wild buffaloes. After their hunting culminates, the people gather again at some clearing to settle any dispute within the tribal society of the entire region throughout the year. The decisions are pronounced in front of their local god Dehri Baba.

Since hunting is now widely considered illegal in almost every country of the world for the risk of extinction of the endangered and both species who are found abundant, the amalgamation of the motley communities is lessening year-by-year. Every year the forest department runs social and environmental awareness programmes in the local markets and the villages showcasing them the danger of ecological imbalance.

During the time of this hunting festival a tight vigil is observed at the possible locations serving as entryway for them. Use of patrol teams continuously touring the sanctuary to prohibit them from entering the forest. Still sometimes, as they are well acquainted with the area's nook and cranny, the people sneak through the rough terrain areas to continue this ritual of hunting. Albeit with time those who have understood the urgency of forest habitat equilibrium, perform the symbolic ritual of hunting i.e. after the worshipping, animal hunting is on a rapid rate of decline.

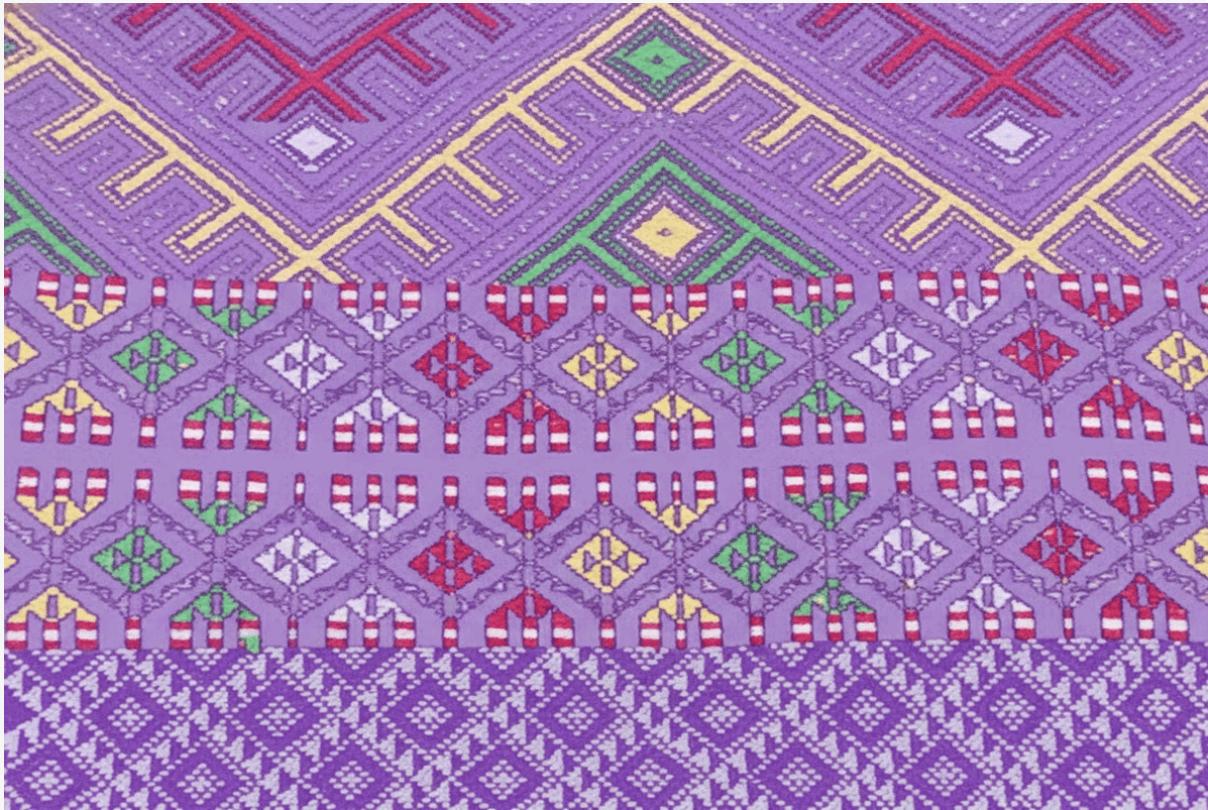
English

My ‘boring’ traditional
attire was never ‘boring’
at all



Ahie Megha

Nov 18, 2025



My ‘boring’ traditional attire was never ‘boring’ at all

Packing for college was an exciting activity for Imu considering that this was going to be her

first time leaving her hometown of seventeen years and going to a college in another state. As

her stomach filled with a heavy sense of impending doom; probably because of excitement

and jittery nerves, she did a double check on all her belongings packed in her brown trolley

which her elder sister had packed.

Eeee! Aecha aesya? Ngada. Nga aecha thuwe gimbaw gumda!

Aecha nu chi Etopolo ni Thuwe. Naniapiya mein college gimbana laada.

Eeee. Ngada. Kesha gum. Nga gimbaw gum.

Yoh! Gimbana.

Ngada. Ngada. Ngada!!

Eee. What is this? No! I am not taking this thuwe with me.

This is your Etopolo and Thuwe. Naniapiya has told you to take it with you to your college.

Eeee. No. This is not even pretty. I am not taking it.

Oh c'mon. Take this with you.

No. No. No!!

But after multiple back and forth between the two sisters which lasted for more than half an

hour the result was final. Imu would be taking her 'boring' traditional Etopolo (top) and

Thuwe (wrap around skirt) with her to college. Although Imu had kept her end of the bargain

she promised herself she would not be taking these clothes out from her bag any time soon.

College started and so did new adventures and lessons. Days turned into weeks and weeks

into months and soon it was the Indigenous Faith Day of Arunachal Pradesh. In the midst of

tribal students excited to flaunt their traditional attire Imu found herself nervous at the

thought of wearing hers.

The idu mishmi textile pattern consists of simple geometric shapes which are decorated with

smaller colourful shapes. The primary colours used in Idu Mishmi textiles are Black, dark or

bright orange, white. Different cloth pieces have different colour themes. For instance- when

weaving a traditional Thuwe which is a wrap around skirt the colours used are mostly black,

dark or bright orange, white and shimmering yarn is also used for embellishments.

The

design on a Thuwe is weaved on a black background with rows of diamond shaped

motifs

filled with smaller diamonds in shiny silver, white or brighter colours of green or bright

orange. A traditional everyday Etoma , a coat also has the same colour scheme as the Thuwe.

Another coat known as Anatubru is a more colourful version consisting of bright yellow

rectangular strips with black, red and green geometric shaped embroidery. The warrior coat

known as Etondre is made out of thicker yarn or wool. It is mostly in a symmetrical black and

white design.

In the earlier days the Idu Mishmi people would use nettle plants to make yarn and natural

plant dyes for the colours. Every loom set was different and had multiple components for

multiple attires. Since the clothes were curated out of natural raw products it was a time

taking process taking up to four to five months. Thus each clothing piece was appreciated and

cost a lot. When Imu was in high school she remembered how her naniapiya weaved different

sets of Thuwe for different occasions. The simpler ones made mostly out of one single colour

could be weaved in a week and would cost around 1000- 1500 Rs. While the ones which had

Jon (embroidery/ weaving designs) were much costlier considering the amount of time and

precision it took to complete one. The cost of the latter would start from 3000- 6000 Rs.

Imu remembered how she had to accompany her aunty during the initial phase of setting up

the wooden loom for weaving. She would pass the ball of black yarn to her aunty who would

be sitting in front of the loom; one hand waiting for the ball at point A and passing it to the

other hand through the horizontal opening at point B. As the duo repeated this process till a

black piece of desired outcome could be seen they would be sharing anecdotes from everyday

life, incidents of great curiosity, home remedies and life lessons from school and the farm.

As the D-day approached, Imu found herself contemplating if her attire would be pretty

enough or if it would be too plain and simple. A pinch of nervousness and a bucket load of

hopefulness later Imu looked at herself in the mirror. She looked pretty. Why did she think

her clothes made her ugly? Perhaps it looked boring to her because she had always seen it be

made out of simple balls of yarn and had worn it multiple times on multiple occasions that

she forgot how colourful it was and how beautiful her clothes made her feel. She was wearing

a lekopo, a traditional necklace made out of small white beads and bigger red beads, her

silver earrings or andisu and her aakuchi (purse) made her resemble her naniapiya, her

mother's elder sister.

Mimi, her Adi friend, was also wearing her traditional attire of Ulta Galuk (top) of a dark

black colour and Gale (wrap around skirt) of a bright red colour with horizontal thin black

rows. Her look was complimented with a traditional necklace Aane, made up of silver coins

and beads.

As the two friends joined their classmates all adorning their traditional attires with pride and

gusto, Imu realised how important her clothes made her feel. Every attire was different,

colourful and beautiful. Each attire had a story to tell and a tradition to be preserved and

proud of. She was part of a connection between her traditional roots and the modern world.

Her embarrassment crumbled as she paraded hand in hand with her peers, the sun shining

brightly at the ongoing procession and a smile breaking into her young heart.

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English

Empathy & Design. Design as a Means of Understanding



Payel Ghosh

Oct 2, 2025



In the realm of design, empathy is not just a crucial principle; it's the cornerstone. It enables designers to comprehend people's feelings and experiences, empowering them to craft solutions that deeply resonate with users.

This concept has deep roots in philosophy, where thinkers have long emphasized the significance of understanding others' perspectives. For designers, this understanding is indispensable, as they strive not only to create functional designs but also ones that genuinely connect with their audience.

Empathy isn't merely a theoretical notion; it's a practical imperative woven into every stage of the creative process. From initial research to prototyping, empathy guides designers, ensuring that their creations are rooted in a profound understanding of users' needs and desires. It all begins with a sincere curiosity and a readiness to immerse oneself in the lived realities of those they design for.

The Role of Empathy in Design

Empathy isn't just a theory for designers; it's a practical tool they use throughout their work. They start by listening to and observing the people who will use their designs. This means putting aside their own ideas and really trying to understand what users need and want. Once they have this understanding, they can start

coming up with ideas that fit the users' needs and situations. Empathy also helps designers improve their designs by involving users in testing and getting their feedback.

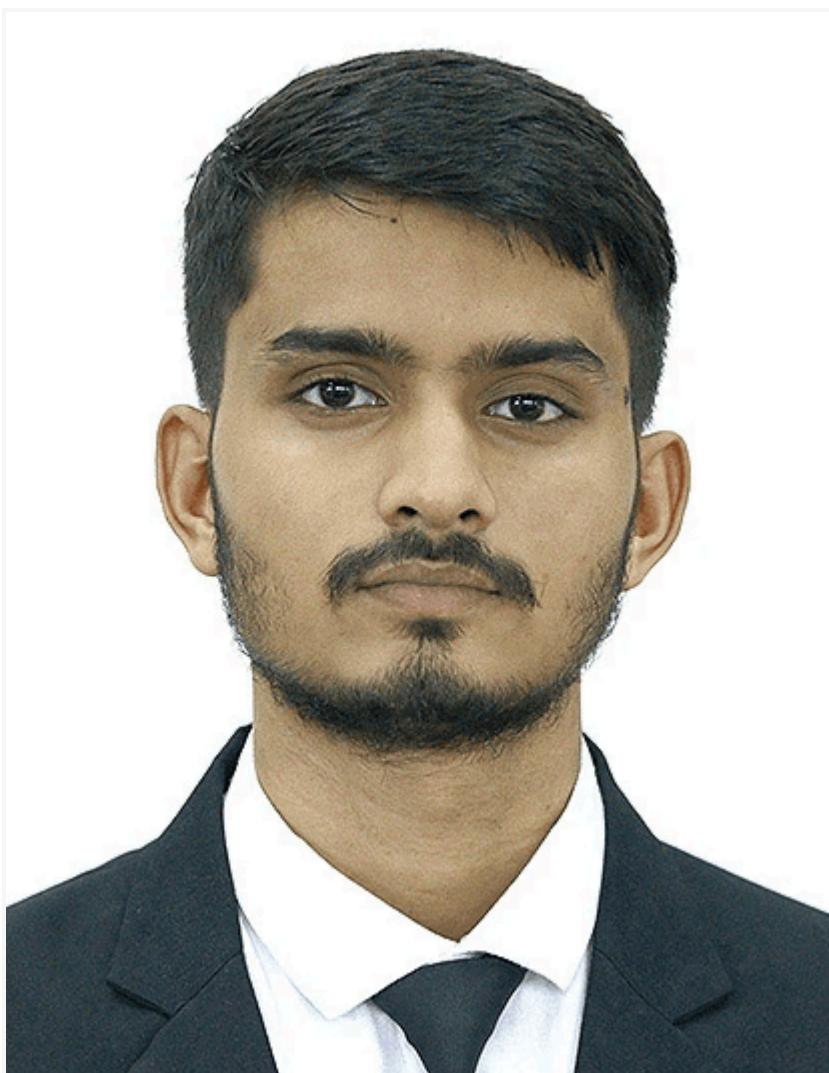
Design as a Means of Understanding

Design isn't just about making things look good; it's about understanding people and their experiences. Philosophers like John Dewey and Richard Shusterman have talked about how philosophy can help us understand the world better. For designers, this means constantly testing their ideas and making sure they work in real life.

In India, designers face unique challenges because of the country's diversity. They need to understand the different cultures, languages, and lifestyles of people across the country. This includes both urban and rural areas, as well as people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. By understanding these differences, designers can create solutions that work for everyone.

English

Litti Chokha: A Culinary Treasure Rooted in Ayurveda and Sustainability



Prince Singh

Sep 24, 2025



Litti Chokha: A Culinary Treasure Rooted in Ayurveda and Sustainability

Introduction: More Than Just a Street Food

What if I told you that one of Bihar's most beloved street foods is also a powerhouse of Ayurvedic nutrition? Litti Chokha, a dish often associated with rustic flavors and roadside eateries, is far more than just comfort food. It is an Ayurveda-approved meal that has sustained farmers, warriors, and travelers for centuries, offering a perfect balance of nutrition, energy, and sustainability.

While modern food trends emphasize organic eating, balanced diets, and sustainability, this humble dish from Bihar has been following these principles for generations. Litti Chokha isn't just food; it's a story of heritage, health, and harmony with nature.

Let's explore how this simple yet powerful dish aligns with Ayurvedic wisdom, its cultural significance, and why it deserves a global spotlight.

The Origins: A Meal of Warriors and Farmers

Litti Chokha traces its roots to the Magadha Empire (6 th century BCE), one of the most powerful kingdoms in ancient India. It is believed that Magadhi soldiers relied on Litti because:

It was lightweight and easy to carry during long journeys.

It required minimal cooking resources—just a fire to roast the Littis.

It provided long-lasting energy without refrigeration.

Over time, this simple yet effective dish became a staple among farmers and laborers due to its cost-effectiveness, high nutritional value, and ability to stay fresh for hours.

Even today, Litti Chokha remains a symbol of resilience and self-sufficiency, making it one of Bihar's most cherished dishes.

Litti Chokha and Ayurveda: A Perfectly Balanced Meal

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, emphasizes a diet that balances the three doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Surprisingly, Litti Chokha is designed in such a way that it helps in balancing these energies.

Litti: A Nutritional Powerhouse

Litti consists of wheat flour balls stuffed with sattu (roasted gram flour), herbs, and spices, then roasted over an open fire.

Let's break down its Ayurvedic significance: Sattu (Roasted Gram Flour):

High in protein and fiber, sattu aids digestion, boosts energy, and keeps the body cool. It is beneficial for Pitta dosha, helping in detoxification and preventing acidity.

Whole Wheat Flour: A great source of complex carbohydrates, ensuring a slow energy release and better digestion.

Provides warmth in winters, making it suitable for Vata dosha. Ajwain (Carom Seeds) &

Jeera (Cumin): Helps in gut health and prevents bloating, making it ideal for Kapha balance.

Mustard Oil: Used in both Littis and Chokha, it improves digestion, is antibacterial, and generates warmth—ideal for Vata and Kapha doshas.

Chokha: A Smoked Delight with Medicinal Benefits Chokha is a mashed vegetable side dish made of roasted brinjals (eggplants), tomatoes, potatoes, and green chilies. Ayurveda recognizes each of these ingredients for their healing properties:

Brinjal (Eggplant): Rich in antioxidants, great for blood circulation and detoxification. Helps in balancing Kapha and Pitta doshas.

Tomatoes: A natural source of Vitamin C, boosting immunity and aiding digestion. Helps in detoxification and skin health.

Garlic & Green Chilies: Known for their anti-inflammatory properties, aiding in digestion and boosting metabolism. The combination of smoky flavors, earthy spices, and fresh ingredients makes Litti Chokha not only delicious but also a medicinal meal that heals the body from within. A Meal for All Seasons One of the unique aspects of Litti Chokha is its seasonal adaptability. Unlike modern fast foods, which have a fixed nutritional profile, this dish naturally adjusts to different weather conditions.

Summer: Sattu cools the body and prevents heat strokes. The high fiber content ensures better digestion and hydration.

Winter: Mustard oil and wheat provide warmth, keeping the body cozy during cold months. The protein-rich sattu ensures higher energy levels in winter.

Sustainability and Simplicity: A Meal for the Future At a time when the world is looking for eco-friendly food solutions, Litti Chokha stands out

As a sustainable dish:

* *Minimal Cooking Fuel Required – Traditionally, Littis are roasted over cow dung cakes or wood fire, reducing dependency on gas or electricity.*

* *No Refrigeration Needed – Due to its simple ingredients, it remains fresh for longhours without refrigeration.*

* *Locally Sourced Ingredients – Every element of this dish is derived from local farms, reducing carbon footprint.*

* *Zero Waste Cooking – Unlike modern processed food, there is minimal food waste in making Litti Chokha.*

* This makes it not just a heritage dish, but also an eco-friendly future food option.

A Heritage Dish with a Global Future

In recent years, Litti Chokha has gained international recognition. With an increasing interest in organic and plant-based diets, this dish is now finding its place in: Fine-dining restaurants experimenting with gourmet versions. Health-conscious diets promoting sattu as a superfood. Vegan and vegetarian cuisine, as it's naturally plant-based. Despite its simplicity, Litti Chokha remains deeply cultural, nutritionally

rich, and environmentally sustainable—a rare combination that makes it worthy of global appreciation.

Final Thoughts: Bringing Back Forgotten Traditions

In our rush towards fast food and processed meals, we often overlook the wisdom of our ancestors. Litti Chokha is a testament to how traditional diets were naturally aligned with health, sustainability, and Ayurveda.

So, the next time you enjoy a plate of Litti Chokha, remember: You're not just eating a meal; you're embracing centuries-old wisdom. You're choosing a dish that nourishes your body and respects nature. You're indulging in a food tradition that deserves to be celebrated globally.

English

Timekeeping Before Clocks: Tracing Ancient Indian and Bengali

Timekeeping Traditions

#Traditional Knowledge



Proteeti Satpati

Aug 15, 2025



Timekeeping Before Clocks: Tracing Ancient Indian and Bengali Timekeeping Traditions

#Traditional Knowledge

"Time was once told by tides and twilight, sung by birds, and whispered by the wind—long before clocks dared to measure it."

Much before the mechanical clock became a reality, civilisations relied on indigenous methods to track time. From celestial observations to water clocks, the human need to organize daily life, agriculture, and rituals gave birth to unique timekeeping techniques. This was also true for India, especially Bengal, where people wove their daily lives around indigenous timekeeping methods that married science with ritual and nature with culture.

In this blog, we delve into the depths of how people in Bengal and the broader Indian subcontinent crafted their way of knowing the hour—from astronomical calculations to water clocks, and temple bells to birdcalls—and how traditional methods have still found a way to retain their presence in cultural practices and continue to persevere

even in the face of the ruthless pace of mechanization that characterizes the world of today.

Celestial Science: Astronomy and the Panchang

Astronomy played a key role in Indian, and Bengali, timekeeping traditions. The movements of celestial bodies were meticulously observed and charted to divide the days and years into meaningful units. Bengal, with its rich tradition of astronomy and mathematics, had a significant role to play in enriching these early efforts. The Panchang, which was the traditional Hindu calendar, used the lunar cycle to divide the year into months named after prominent constellations. This calendar was a prime example of how important the role of Nakshatras and celestial bodies was in determining rituals, agriculture, and governance.

Panchang was used for centuries by Bengali scholars and priests to determine auspicious days for festival dates and agricultural cycles. Bengali astronomy experts like Raghunath Purushottama refined these calculations to create more accurate almanacs to guide everyday activities. This led to the introduction of concepts such as Tithis (lunar days) and Muhurats (auspicious time periods) which were widely used for religious and social events. Bangabda: Akbar's Fusion Calendar Another landmark moment in the history of pre-clock timekeeping in Bengal was the introduction of the Bengali calendar, Bangabda, which was introduced by Akbar in 1584. This was a unique fusion of Islamic lunar and Hindu solar tenets of timekeeping.

This helped standardize timekeeping in Bengal, particularly in the case of agriculture, aligning tax collection periods with region's seasonal cycles. Ghati Yantra: Measuring Time with Water people also developed the Ghati system of timekeeping. These were water clocks known as Ghati Yantras that would measure the passage of time through the controlled flow of water from one vessel to another, through units called Ghatikas. This method was widely used in the Dakshineshwar and Kalighat temples to signal daily prayer and offering times. They were also widely used to regulate trade and administrative work in the medieval cities of Murshidabad and Gauda.

Nature as a Clock: Ecological Cues and Cultural Rhythms

During this period in the history of Bengal, we also observe a unique dependence on biological and environmental cues to measure time. The call of the cuckoo signaled dawn. The ebb and flow of tides guided the fishermen of Sundarbans in timing their ventures. The boatmen's Bhatiyali songs often had references to time and its unique nature of waiting for none. Even the auspicious Brahma Muhurta—the religiously important pre-dawn hour—was determined based on celestial movements and the spiritual and symbolic silence in the natural world. In short, Bengal's maritime culture environmental dependence ensured that natural elements, especially rivers such as the Ganges, the Hooghly, and the Brahmaputra played crucial role in guiding trade, travel, and daily life.

Bells and Criers: Sound as a Signal of Time

The account of timekeeping Bengal perhaps is not complete without the mention of an age-old device of signaling time—bells. Mangal Arati, and midday offerings at temples, big and small, were signaled using bells. In trade towns like Kolkata and Chandannagar, bells rang to indicate market opening and closing hours. Public criers often used bells to announce significant events, marking time for communal activities.

The Colonial Shift: From Cycles to Clocks

With the British, came the European clocks, almost ominously calling time on all the means and measures of timekeeping that had been prevailing in the land. Water clocks gave way to Big Ben-style clock towers and wristwatches replaced sundials. As times changed, indigenous methods slowly gave way to the more machine-driven products, and modern inventions steadily overtook traditional knowledge.

Echoes in the Present: The Persistence of Traditional Time

However, all has not been lost. Traditional lunar calendars are still considered an indispensable part of Bengali households with them being of utmost importance when it comes to determining auspicious days for sacred rituals and festivals. This goes on to show ancient timekeeping practices have themselves stood the test of time. In an increasingly mechanizing world, these methods have somehow still held on to their relevance. They are reminders of the deep connection between human societies and nature, the ingenuity of ancient science, and the cultural rhythms that continue to shape our lives.

Timekeeping is not just a scientific pursuit; it is a practice deeply woven into the Bengali social structure that has endured quietly in a race defined by the beat of quartz and atomic seconds. It survives in the ringing of the temple bells, the rhythms of the tides, and the occasional rustling of the Bengali calendars in every Bengali drawing room; and it is through preservation of these practices and knowledge systems that we honour rhythm over rush, and community over clockwork.

Nepali

निष्पक्षताको प्रयोग । "The practice of impartiality"



Pranay Rai

Jul 7, 2025



निष्पक्षताको प्रयोग ।

बेयार्ड रस्टिन एक अफ्रिकी...अमेरिकी नागरिक अगुवा थिए। उनले सुरुमा सन् १९४० र १९५० को दशकमा फेलोसिप अफ रिकन्सिलिएसन संस्था मार्फत् र पछि नागरिक अधिकार आन्दोलन मार्फत् उत्तर अमेरिकामा सबैका लागि समान अधिकार स्थापनाका निम्ति काम गरे। यो कथा लेखिएको समयमा मान्छेहरूलाई छालाको रंगअनुसार बोलाइनु सामान्य थियो।

मध्यपश्चिम क्याम्पसमा मन्तव्य दिन जानु अघि म एक गिलास दुध र एउटा पाउरोटी किन्न भनेर शहरको एउटा सानो रेष्टुरेण्टमा छिरेँ। रेष्टुरेण्टमा मलाई वेवास्ता गरिदैछ भन्ने थाहा पाउनु निकै बेर अघिदेखि म बसेको थिइँन, उभिरहेकै थिएँ। करिब दश मिनेट पर्खिसकेपछि मलाई लाग्यो... अब यहाँ द्वन्द्व, लफडा हुने नै भो। म एउटा कुनातिर गएँ, एकजना वेट्रेसका सामुन्ने उभिरैँ ता कि उनले मलाई वेवास्ता गर्न नसकुन, अनि भनेँ, “म एउटा पाउरोटी किन आएको, दिनुस्।”

“माफ गर्नुहोला,” उनले भनिन्, “हामी यहाँ तपाईं.....लाई.....अँ.... अँ..... गोरो छाला भएका बाहेक अरु रंगका मानिसलाई सेवा दिन सकदैनोँ।”

“यहाँको जिम्मेवार व्यक्ति को हो?” मैले उनलाई सोधें। उनले मलाई दुई कुराको संकेत दिइन्... पहिलो, अलि पछाडि उभिएकी एउटी महिलातिर देखाइन् र दोसो, आफ्नो चोरी औँलो ओठ अगाडि लगेर ठाडो पारिन्। दोसो संकेतको स्पष्ट आसय उनलाई यो द्वन्द्वमा कुनै हालतमा नमिसाउनु भन्ने थियो। म सरासर रेष्टुरेण्टको पछिल्तिर कफी बनाउने ठाउँ नजिकै उभिएकी महिलातिर लम्किएँ।

“यो रेष्टुरेण्टमा मलाई सेवा दिन किन सम्भव छैन म थाहा पाउन चाहन्छु” मैले उनलाई सोधें।

“ए... अँ....” उनको बोली लरबरियो। “किनभने... अँ... किनभने... हामी यो शहरमा त्यसो गर्दैनौँ। यहाँको कुनै पनि रेष्टुरेण्टले गोरा बाहेक अरु रंगका मानिसहरूलाई सेवा दिँदैनन्।”

“ठिक छ, तर किन? त्यसो गर्दा तपाईंका अरु ग्राहक बिच्किन्छन् भन्ने कुरामा तपाईंलाई विश्वास लाग्छ?” अनि मैले उनलाई प्रजातन्त्रिक अभ्यासका रूपमा एउटा प्रयोग गर्ने आग्रह गरेरे। केही असहज मान्दै उनी यसो गर्ने सहमत भइन्... दश मिनेटसम्म म रेष्टुरेण्टको अग्रभागको कुर्सीमा बस्नेछु र त्यसबेला म मेरो पाउरोटी खाने छैन। म त्यहाँ बसेका कारण कतिजना ग्राहक रेष्टुरेण्टबाट उठेर हिँडे वा भित्र छिरेनन् भनेर हामी दुवैले गन्नेछौं। यदि एकजना त्यस्तो मान्छे देखियो भने म त्यहाँबाट उठेर हिँड्नेछु। तर एकजना पनि त्यस्तो मान्छे देखेनौँ भने म मेरो पाउरोटी खान थाल्नेछु। मैले पन्ध मिनेट पर्खिएँ। त्यसपछि उनी म बसे ठाउँ आइन्, चिसो भइसकेको मेरो पाउरोटी उठाइन् र त्यसको सट्टा तताएको पाउरोटी प्लेटमा राखिदिइन्, अनि सहज भावमा सोधिन्, “योसँग पिउने कुरा के लिनुहुन्छ?” त्यो शहरमा बस्ने काला र गोरा दुवै रंगका मानिसहरूले मलाई बताएअनुसार उक्त घटना पछि श्रीमती डफी आफ्नो रेष्टुरेण्टमा कुनै द्वन्द्व नमच्चाई वा लाज नमानी काला मानिसहरूलाई सेवा दिइरहेकी छन्, जुन यस्तो भेदभावयुक्त वातावरणमा वास्तवमै एउटा शाहसको कुरा हो।

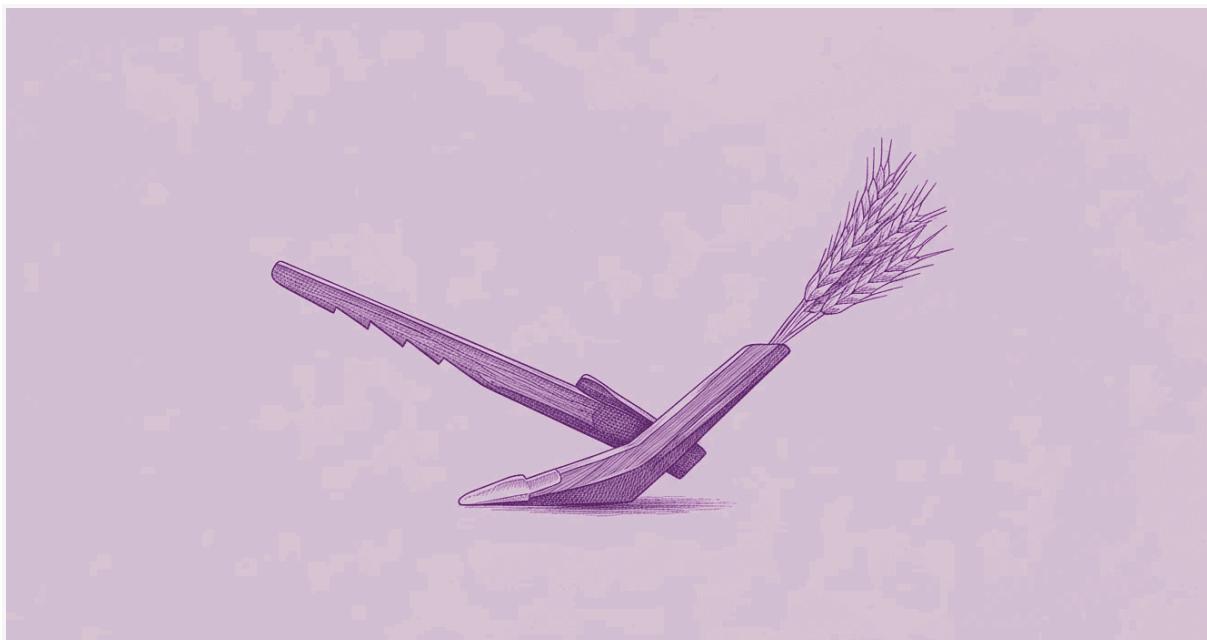
English

The Plow Story, a time tased design methodology



Payel Ghosh

May 29, 2025



The plow, in its most basic form, is a tool designed to cultivate and prepare soil for planting. Its origins can be traced back to ancient civilizations across the globe, where early farmers recognized the need to break up and loosen the earth, facilitating the growth of crops. However, the design of these primitive plows was not a product of pure ingenuity alone; it was deeply rooted in the local knowledge systems that had evolved over generations of intimate interaction with the land and its resources.

In regions where wood was abundant, plows were often crafted from sturdy tree branches or logs, their curved shapes mimicking the contours of the earth. These designs minimized the strain on farmers while maximizing the efficiency of the plowing process. In contrast, in areas where wood was scarce, animal bones or antlers were repurposed to create sharp, durable plow tips, enabling the tool to slice through even the most stubborn soils.

The materials used in plow construction were not the only aspect influenced by local knowledge; the design itself was shaped by the unique environmental conditions of each region. In arid climates, where water conservation was paramount, plows were designed with narrow blades that created shallow furrows, minimizing soil disturbance and reducing water

loss through evaporation. Conversely, in regions with fertile, well-watered soils, broader plow blades were favored, allowing for deeper cultivation and better aeration of the soil.

Beyond their functional aspects, the primitive plow designs often carried symbolic and cultural significance, reflecting the deep connection between agricultural practices and the spiritual beliefs of local communities. Intricate carvings or decorative elements adorned these tools, imbuing them with a sense of reverence and respect for the land and its bounty.

Embracing Sustainability through Design Thinking

As we struggle with the urgent need to develop sustainable agricultural practices in the face of climate change, resource depletion, and population growth, the principles embodied in the primitive plow design offer valuable insights. By embracing the concept of local knowledge systems and integrating them into contemporary design thinking, we can create solutions that are not only environmentally sound but also culturally relevant and socially acceptable.

One of the key tenets of sustainable design thinking is the recognition that solutions must be tailored to specific contexts and environments. The primitive plow exemplifies this principle, with its designs adapting to the unique conditions and resources of each region. By studying and learning from these traditional practices, modern agricultural engineers and designers can develop tools and techniques that are attuned to the local ecosystems, minimizing environmental impact while maximizing productivity.

Furthermore, the primitive plow's emphasis on utilizing locally available and renewable materials aligns with the principles of circular economy and resource efficiency — core pillars of sustainable design. By drawing inspiration from these ancient practices, contemporary designers can create agricultural tools and systems that prioritize the use of sustainable materials, reducing waste and promoting closed-loop cycles.

The cultural and symbolic significance of the primitive design of plow also highlights the importance of social sustainability in design thinking. By acknowledging and respecting the deep-rooted connections between agricultural practices and local belief systems, designers can create solutions that resonate with the values and aspirations of farming communities. This sense of ownership and cultural relevance can foster greater adoption and stewardship of sustainable agricultural practices, ultimately contributing to the long-term viability of these solutions.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Integrating Local Knowledge into Sustainable Design

The integration of local knowledge systems into sustainable design practices finds theoretical grounding in various disciplines, including anthropology, environmental studies, and agricultural sciences.

One influential framework is the concept of "indigenous technical knowledge" (ITK), which recognizes the wealth of knowledge and practices that have been developed by local communities over generations of interacting with their environments. Scholars such as Paul Richards and Gloria Anetor have extensively studied ITK in the context of agriculture, highlighting the importance of understanding and incorporating these traditional systems into modern agricultural development initiatives.

Another theoretical lens that supports the incorporation of local knowledge is the concept of "agroecology." Developed by researchers like Miguel Altieri and Stephen Gliessman, agroecology is a holistic approach to agriculture that emphasizes the integration of ecological principles and traditional knowledge systems. By recognizing the intricate relationships between crops, soil, water, and other elements of the agroecosystem, agroecology

seeks to create sustainable and resilient agricultural systems that are tailored to local contexts.

Furthermore, the field of “ethnoecology” provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the intricate relationships between human cultures and their environments. Scholars such as Eugene Hunn and Víctor Toledo have explored how traditional knowledge systems shape the way communities perceive, classify, and interact with their natural surroundings, including their agricultural practices. By understanding these cultural frameworks, designers can create solutions that are better aligned with the worldviews and values of local communities.

The primitive plow symbolizes the enduring wisdom and adaptability of local knowledge systems within agriculture. Rooted in diverse environmental, cultural, and social contexts, its design principles provide valuable insights for contemporary sustainable design thinking. By incorporating local knowledge systems into modern agricultural design processes, we can develop solutions that are environmentally sustainable, culturally relevant, and socially acceptable. Theoretical frameworks such as indigenous technical knowledge, agroecology, and ethnoecology underpin this approach, stressing the importance of understanding and respecting the intricate relationships between human communities, agricultural practices, and ecosystems.

As we endeavor to address the challenges of 21st-century agriculture, it is essential to draw guidance from the past. The primitive plow serves as a reminder that true sustainability necessitates a nuanced understanding of diverse knowledge systems shaped by millennia of human experiences with the natural world. By leveraging the timeless wisdom encapsulated in tools like the primitive plow, we can chart a course toward an agricultural future that

blends traditional knowledge with modern innovation, ensuring food security, environmental stewardship, and cultural continuity for future generations.

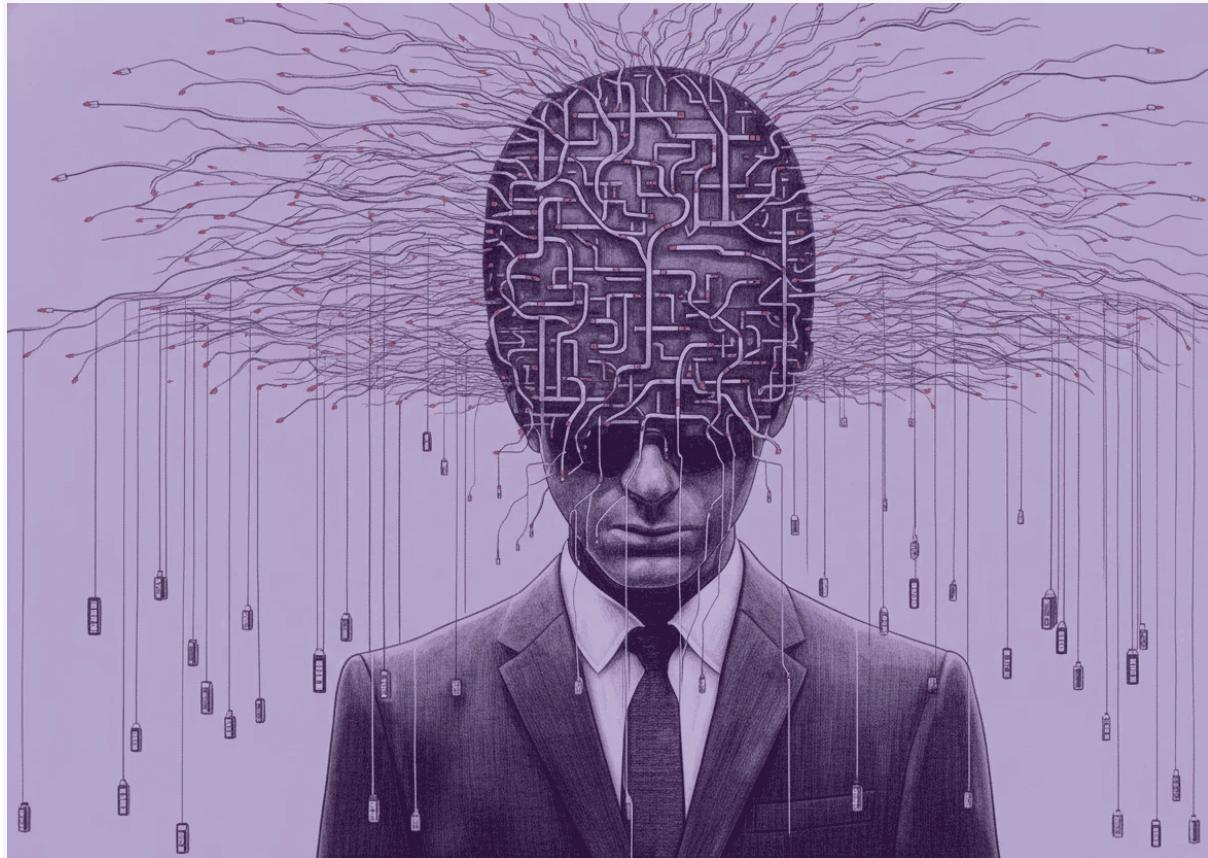
Bengali

এৱা ওৱা এবং "They, them, and"



Ranjan Bhowmick

Apr 11, 2025



এই নিয়ে ড্রয়ারটা চতুর্থ বার বন্ধ করলো সুকল্প। ওয়ান টু থ্রি ফোর। দুই আর দুইয়ে চার। দুই আর দুইয়ে চার। Lets finish it. এখানে শেষ। আপাতত। কিন্তু, শেষ কি? দুই আর চারে? দুই আর চারে কত? না, ভাবতে চায় না সে, ভাবতে চায় না। Ohh! It's irritating. ভাবতে না চেয়েও সে ভেবে ফেলছে। তার মাথার মধ্যে আসছে একের পর এক সংখ্যার প্রবাহ। দুই আর চারে আট, দুই আর আট এ ঘোলো। (আবার চার আর চারে ঘোলো)। ওহ স্টপ ইট। আর কিছুতেই ভাববে না সে। কিছুতেই ভাববে না। দুই আর আট এ ঘোলো। চার আর আট এ বত্রিশ। Oh fuck! দুই আর ঘোলো বত্রিশ। দুই আর বত্রিশ এ চৌষট্টি। (আবার আট আর আট এ চৌষট্টি)। চৌষট্টি। চৌষট্টি। যাক আপাতত ছাড়া পাওয়া গেছে। ড্রয়ারটা সে বন্ধ করতে শুরু করলো। ফাইভ সিঙ্ক সেভেন এইট লাইন টেন ইলেভেন টুয়েলভ থার্টিন ফট্টিন ... আরে দরজার আড়ালে কে? কে আড়াল থেকে দেখছে তাকে? তাকে নাকি অন্য কাউকে? আশেপাশে তো অন্য কাউকে সে দেখতে পাচ্ছে না! কিন্তু সুকল্পৰ মাঝে মাঝেই মনে হয় তাকে কি কেউ নিয়ন্ত্ৰণ কৰছে? কে? কেন? কীভাবে?

- আপনার এৱকম কৃতিন থেকে হচ্ছে?

- ডাক্তারবাবু সে ধৰন ছোটবেলা থেকে। মানে ছোট থেকে যখন বড় হতে লাগলাম তখন থেকে। আমাৰ ক্লাস ইলেভেন টুয়েলভ এৱ সময়টা...

- এছাড়া আৱ কোন সমস্যা?

- নোংরা দেখলে গা ঘিনঘিন করে, বারবার হাত ধুই, মুখে জল ভরে ফেলে দিই। সিনেমার যৌনতার দৃশ্য গুলো হলট করতে থাকে, পর্নোগ্রাফি আমি দেখি না, কিন্তু উপন্যাসে সিনেমায় যৌনতা ভালো লাগে। আসলে আমার যেটা মনে হয় জানেন তো, পর্নোগ্রাফি তত্থানি ইরোটিক নয়, যতটা হতে পারে উপন্যাস বা সিনেমা।

- মানে?

- আমি বলতে চাইছি শিল্প সাহিত্যের মধ্যে একটা ক্ষমতা আছে উপস্থাপনের মাধ্যমে যৌনতাকে সুন্দর করে তুলবার। পর্নোগ্রাফি অনেক সরাসরি সেটা উপস্থাপন করে...

- আপনার দেখবেন সফট পর্ন ভালো লাগবে। এটা রিক্রিয়েশন এর জন্য মিস্টার লাহিড়ী, এখানে শিল্প সাহিত্য কোন ফ্যাক্টর নয়। আর কোন সমস্যা?

- কিন্তু...

- ওটা পরে শুনছি। যেটা জানতে চাইছি সেটার উত্তর দিন।

- দরজায় তালা লাগিয়ে মনে হয় ঠিকভাবে লাগলো কি? ঠিক satisfaction আসে না। মনে হয় প্রয়োজনের চেয়ে বেশি খুঁতখুঁতে হয়ে পড়ছি।

- ঠিক আছে। বিশেষ ভাবার কিছু নেই। ওষুধ দিছি, ঠিক হয়ে যাবে। আর আগের ওষুধ যেমন চলছিল চলবে।

- কিন্তু ডাক্তারবাবু আমার আরও কিছু কথা বলার ছিল।

- আপনাকে অভ্যেস করতে হবে ব্রিফলি কথা বলার, টু দা পয়েন্ট বলার, আপনি বড় ইলাবরেট করেন।

- সরি।

- আমার যা বোঝার আমি বুঝে নিয়েছি। ভাববেন না। ভালো হয়ে যাবেন। নেক্সট।

এই নিয়ে ঠিক কত বছর থেকে ও সি ডি তে ভুগছে সুকল্প মনে করতে পারে না। বড়ো হওয়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই সে দেখেছে কোন কাজ মনোমত না হওয়া পর্যন্ত সে সুস্থির হতে পারে না। ঘরের জিনিসপত্র বিশেষত বই গুচ্ছিয়ে রেখে মনে স্বষ্টি পায় না। সব গোছালো হয়ে গেলে মনে হয় বইয়ের কোনগুলো নির্খুঁত ভাবে মেলেনি। যতক্ষণ না সে নির্খুঁতভাবে মেলাতে পারছে ততক্ষণ সে গুচ্ছিয়ে চলে। কিন্তু এর সঙ্গেই তাকে আরেকটা বিষয় মাথায় রাখতে হয়। তাকে কেউ পাগল ভাবছে না তো?! সে দেখেছে সবকিছু পরিষ্কার করার বাতিক তার ঠাকুমা ও মেজকাকার বেশ আছে। সে শিওর নয় তবু যেন মনে হয় বাবা ও সবকিছু প্রয়োজনের থেকে বেশি গুচ্ছিয়ে

গুছিয়ে রাখে, অপ্রয়োজনীয় জিনিস বাতিল করতে পারে না সহজে। ছোট কাকারও অপ্রয়োজনীয় জিনিস বাতিল করতে না পারার সমস্যাটা আছে। ইন্টারনেট ঘেঁটে সে দেখেছে ও সি ডি কতকটা জেনেটিক কতকটা এনভায়রমেন্টাল। তাহলে কি তাদের পরিবারে সেই জিন রয়েছে যা এই রোগ বহন করছে, নাকি তার পরিবারের স্টেস্ফুল ফ্যাক্টর গুলোই দায়ী এসবের জন্য। অতশ্চ সে বোঝে না সে শুধু বোঝে যৌনতা তাকে হণ্ট করে চলেছে প্রতি মুহূর্তে। ঠাকুর প্রণাম করতে গিয়ে মনের মধ্যে ভয় কাজ করে ঈশ্বরের সঙ্গে সে যৌন সঙ্গমে লিপ্ত হয়ে পড়বে না তো। এসব কী ভাবছে সে। এসব ভাবতে যাওয়া ও পাপ। থবরের কাগজে ধর্ষণের খবর দেখে ভয় লাগে সে ধর্ষণ করে ফেলবে না তো। রাত্রে স্বপ্নের মধ্যে সে দেখতে পায় খুনের আসামী হিসেবে তাকে ধরে নিয়ে যাওয়া হচ্ছে। সবসময় এক বিষণ্ণতার বোধ তাকে তাড়া করে ফিরছে, তাকে নিঃশেষ করে দিচ্ছে ভেতর থেকে, তার কাছে এলোমেলো হয়ে যাচ্ছে সমস্ত সম্পর্ক, আজ এত বছর বাদেও কোন বাঞ্ছবীর সঙ্গে ভালোবাসার সম্পর্ক তৈরি হয়নি তার। জানা হয়নি নারীর মন কিংবা শরীরকে। তার বৌদি তো তাকে বলে সে নাকি উদ্বৃট প্রকৃতির। কিন্তু সত্যিই কি সে উদ্বৃট নয়? নাহলে বয়সন্ধি পেরিয়ে আসার এতগুলো বছর পরেও নারীর ছোঁয়াচ বাচিয়ে চলেছে কেন, কোথাও কি তার মনে ভয় কাজ করে যে যৌনতা তার ভাবনা চিন্তার নারীদের পবিত্র ইমেজকে অপবিত্র করে দেবে? অদ্বৃতভাবে যৌনতা তার শরীর মনকে বেধে রেখেছে আদ্যন্ত। স্নানের সময় শিশু নিয়ে খেলা করতে গিয়ে সে টের পায় তার ফ্যান্টাসি তে পর্ণোগাফির নায়ক নায়িকারা ভিড় করে না। বরং ভিড় করে আসে এক অস্বস্তি যা তার যৌনতাকে তীব্র থেকে তীব্রতর করে তোলে এক অনাস্বাদিত তৃক্ষার মধ্যে দিয়ে যে তৃক্ষাকে পূরণ করার মতো বীর্যপাত তার কোনদিনই করা হয়ে ওঠে না। তবে আর কোন চিন্তা নেই তার। সে এখন ডাক্তারের চিকিৎসাধীন। যে স্বাভাবিকতা অস্বাভাবিকতার ধারণা এলোমেলো হয়ে গেছে এই রোগের সূত্রে সব ঠিক হয়ে যাবে এইবার। ডাক্তারবাবু সব ঠিক করে দেবেন।

সমস্ত অস্বস্তি ভুলে সে মন দেয় আবার পড়াশোনায়। অনেক পড়াশোনা তাকে করতে হবে। ছোট থেকে বাবা মায়ের সঙ্গে সেও এই স্বপ্ন দেখেই বড়ো হয়েছে। অনেক বই সে পড়েছে অনেক বই সে পড়বে। আরও আরও পড়তে পড়তে একদিন বহিয়ের স্থুপের মতো বড়ো হয়ে যাবে ভাবনায় ও জ্ঞানে। তাকে নিয়ে স্বপ্ন দেখেছে তার পরিবার, তাকে নিয়ে স্বপ্ন দেখেছে তার শিক্ষকেরা, নিজেকে নিয়ে স্বপ্ন সেও কি দেখেনি কথনও? বোধহয় দেখেনি। ছোটবেলা থেকে আজও পর্যন্ত কোন স্বপ্ন বা উচ্চাকাঙ্ক্ষা কেই তার মনে হয়নি আপন ঔরসজাত। চেথের সামনে অজস্র স্বপ্ন ভেঙ্গে যেতে দেখেছে সে। সেই সব স্বপ্ন যা তার পরিবারের সদস্যরা লালন করেছে, সেইসব স্বপ্ন যাকে কথনো কথনো নিজের বলে ভুল হত তার। আসলে স্বপ্ন ভেঙ্গে যাওয়া তাকে কোন কষ্ট দেয়নি। তাকে কষ্ট দিয়েছিল ডাক্তারকে, বলতে চেয়েছিল এই সব সংকট। যেন ডাক্তার এক লহমায় বদলে দিতে পারবেন এইসব কাল্পনিক বাস্তবতার অকল্পনীয় যাপনকে। তবু এই সব কিছু ব্যতিরেকে সে সফল হতে চেয়েছিল। কেননা তার সফল হওয়া তার বাবা মাকে আনন্দ দেবে। আনন্দ আসলে কিসে? বেচে থাকায়? মৃত্যুতে? নাকি জীবন্ত হয়ে দৌড় এ যা আসলে ভুলিয়ে দেয় আমরা বাঁচতে চেয়েছিলাম, যা আসলে ভুলিয়ে দেয় মৃত্যু বলে কোন চরম গন্তব্য ছিল কোনদিন। সে দৌড়ে না তবু তাকে নিয়ে কে যেন লোফালুফি খেলছে, দুমড়ে মুচড়ে দিচ্ছে তার ভাবনা চিন্তা গুলোকে, তার চাওয়া পাওয়া, তার সম্পর্কের বিন্যাসকে। আসলে সে একটা

thought disorder এ ভুগছে। অন্তত ডাক্তার তাই বলেছেন। অর্থাৎ কিছু ওষুধ কন্টিনিউ করলেই সে হয়ে যেতে পারে আর পাঁচটা মানুষের মতো। ছোটবেলায় একবার গাছের তলায় দাঁড়িয়ে পেঁপে পড়ে গেছিল তার মাথায়। সবকিছু কেমন টালমাটাল মনে হয়েছিল। তীব্র যন্ত্রণার মধ্যে সে অনুভব করেছিল সন্তুষ্ট অসন্তুষ্টের উত্থাল পাতাল। আবার বাথরুমে ব্ল্যাক আউট হয়ে পড়ে গিয়ে সে অনুভব করেছিল শূন্যতা, এমন শূন্যতা যা অনুভব করতে দেয় না কোনকিছু। কিন্তু এবার সে সুস্থ হয়ে যাবে। কেননা ডাক্তারবাবু ওষুধ দিয়েছেন তাকে আর সবার মতো হয়ে যাবার। আর সবার মতো হতে হবে কেন? সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা ই কি নির্ধারণ করে ঠিক ভুলের মাপকার্ট? নাকি অসংখ্য মানুষ যাতে উৎপাদনশীল হতে পারে তাই নির্ধারণ করে স্বাভাবিকতার স্থানাঙ্ক? সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা বা ক্ষমতা গরিষ্ঠতা তার মতে বড়ো সাংঘাতিক দুটো শব্দ। আসলে তার মনে সবসময় চলতে থাকে ঠিক আর ভুলের এক দোলাচল। সে পূর্ব অভিজ্ঞতায় দেখেছে সংখ্যা গরিষ্ঠ বা ক্ষমতা গরিষ্ঠ যা নির্ধারণ করে তা অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই ঠিক ভুলের সঙ্গে মেলে না। বরং নিজেকে ঠকতে হয় অনেক ক্ষেত্রে এ দিয়ে ঠিক ভুল বিচার করতে গেলে। আসলে তার মতে জনতার কোন চারিত্ব থাকে না, থাকে শুধু সিনেমায় অনুকরণ করে যাওয়া একস্ট্রা এর মতো কিছু ছক বাঁধা অভিব্যক্তি। ও সি ডি তার এই ছক গুলোকে ভেঙে দিচ্ছে যেন প্রতিটা মুহূর্তে, নির্মাণ করতে চাইছে কোন এক বিকল্প ছক এর। ও সি ডি না থাকলেই সমাজ ও রাষ্ট্রের ছক কি তাকেও নিয়ন্ত্রণ করতো না? বানিয়ে ফেলত না আর পাঁচজনের মতো স্বাভাবিক? এই ছক গুলোকে বানচাল করার মতো বুদ্ধি বৃত্তি আদৌ কি মানুষের আছে? তার তো বরং মনে হয় যে বুদ্ধি দিয়ে সে বুঝে নেওয়ার চেষ্টা করে জগৎ সত্যকে তাও আসলে চালিত হয়ে চলেছে কোন না কোন ছক এ? এর থেকে মুক্তির কোন উপায় আদৌ কি আছে?

এই নিয়ে গেমটা আজ সকাল থেকে চতুর্থ বার খেলছে নীলান্দ্রি। এই গেমটা সে বার বার খেলে। খেলে এক অদ্ভুত আনন্দ পায়। আজকাল আর জেতার আগে গেম ওভার হয় না সেভাবে। ভালো প্রাকটিস হয়ে গেছে তার। সে দেখেছে গেমের বন্দুকধারী লোকটা অদ্ভুত ভাবে তার দাসত্ব করে। বন্দুক বদলাতে বললেই বদলায়, সুইচ টিপলেই আর্মার পরে নেয়, মেডিক্যাল কিট কালেষ্ট করে, আবার সতেজ করে ফেলে নিজেকে। আবার বন্দুক, আবার গুলি, আবার রক্ত আর অবশ্যই মেডিক্যাল কিট টা অন্য কেউ পাওয়ার আগে নিজে কালেষ্ট করে নেওয়া। মাঝে মাঝে ওইসব গেমও খেলে সে। সে এক আশ্চর্য জগৎ। যৌনতার সমস্ত ফ্যান্টাসি তার পূরণ হয়ে যায় এই গেমগুলো খেলে। অর্গাজম অর্গাজম এন্ড অর্গাজম। ওই কয়েকটাই তো পোজ আছে ঘূরিয়ে ফিরিয়ে। ওই কয়েকটা অঙ্গভঙ্গির কেবল Permutations & Combinations. সে কখনো নায়ক হয়, কখনো নায়িকা। কখনো সে দাসত্ব করে পুরুষ লিঙ্গের, কখনো দাসত্ব করে নারীর যোনির। কিন্তু এর মধ্যে কোন অপরাধ খুঁজে পায় না সে। তার বাবাও তো খেলে চলেছেন একই ভাবে। তার বাবা, ডক্টর কে কে মিত্র, ফেমাস সাইকিয়াট্রিস্ট এন্ড সেক্স থেরাপিস্ট। মাঝে মাঝে সে বুঝতে পারে না বাবা কোন পক্ষে খেলছেন, রাষ্ট্রের পক্ষে নাকি অর্থের? কে আসলে তার মা রাষ্ট্র নাকি অর্থ? অনেক সময় আবার হ্যাঁ করে যায় সফটওয়্যার। মানে গুলি চালাচ্ছে তো চালাচ্ছে, খেলা আর এগোচ্ছে না। অর্গাজম চলছে তো চলছেই, তৃষ্ণি আসছে না কিছুতেই। এইসব সময়ে মেশিনটা শাট ডাউন করে আবার খুলতে হয়। বেশিরভাগ সময়েই ঠিক হয়ে যায়, কখনো কখনো হয় না। তখন আবার শাট ডাউন। আসলে সফটওয়্যার গুলোও ভুলে যায় মানুষেরই মতো ছক এর বাইরে চলা তার নিষেধ। কিন্তু এ কী নীলান্দ্রি তো সুকল্পন মতো ভেবে ফেলছে! তার

তো সুকল্পকে চেনার কথা নয়! সে তো তার বাবার পেসেন্ট। সে সুকল্প কে চিনবে কিভাবে। আসলে এতক্ষণ
যে গল্পটা পড়লেন এটা মোটেই ও সি ডি নিয়ে কোন গল্প নয়। এই সব কটা চরিত্রই আসলে আমরা। প্রত্যেকে
যে যার স্থান বদল করছি কোন এক ছক এর অঙ্গুলিহেলনে। আপনি আমি পাল্টে পাল্টে হচ্ছি সুকল্প লাহিড়ী,
নীলাদ্রি আর ডক্টর কে কে মিত্র। কখনো গল্পটা লিখছি আমি, পড়ছেন আপনি, আর খেলছে আরেকজন।
আর কখনও... ওয়ান টু থ্রি ফোর... আমরা আমাদের অবস্থান পরিবর্তন করতে যাচ্ছি। আর সফটওয়ার
গুলোও নিজস্ব ছক তৈরি করে ফেলছে মানুষের মতো। হ্যাং করে যাচ্ছে গোটা সিস্টেমটা।

English

The Desert's Alchemy

#LocalSolution



Proteeti Satpati

Feb 22, 2025



The Desert's Alchemy

#LocalSolution

Long before industrial salt refineries cropped up to dominate supply chains globally, the indigenous communities across their arid landscapes had already mastered the art of extracting salt, not from seawater, but from the soil beneath their feet. In the Kutch region of Gujarat, the Agariyas—a marginalized community—are master practitioners of a soil-based salt harvesting technique that represents a conscious mix of environmental understanding, indigenous engineering, and economic resilience. Here we explore how these people, armed with a traditional knowledge system, turned salinity into a lifeline, and did so through methods that were frugal, sustainable, and deeply rooted in the workings of nature.

The Rann of Kutch: A Landscape of Extremes

The Rann of Kutch is a salt marsh in western India characterized by one of the most unique ecosystems in the subcontinent. For the greater portion of the year, it is a barren, blinding-white desert, continuously exposed to the sun's scorching rays, but the monsoons here are a different story. The rains transform this place into a shallow lake, fed by seasonal rivers and underground saline aquifers. This annual ritual of flooding and evaporation leaves behind a salt-rich crust ripe for harvesting. It is this mineral-laden earth, not the sea, that has provided the Agariyas with livelihood for centuries.

The Agariyas

The Agariyas, as their name suggests, are traditional salt farmers of the Rann. Their name derives from the word "agar," meaning "field" where salt is crystallized. For generations, these families have migrated to the salt plains after the rains retreat and lived there for eight continuous months, isolated from villages, amenities, and formal infrastructure. Despite their seasonal isolation, they possess remarkable knowledge of geology, crystallography, and hydrology. They have an intuitive grasp over complex salt-harvesting stages such as the depth at which brine can be found, the ideal temperature and wind conditions for crystallization, evaporation pan designs that minimize contamination and maximise yield, and so on. Their unconventional method of salt extraction, therefore, deserves some explaining.

A Different Model of Salt Extraction

India does have a long coastline that produces sea salt in abundance, but Kutch's salt a welcome exception. Here the saline water does not come from oceans but from ancient geological formations beneath the Rann which formed millions of years ago when geological activity led to the recession of the Arabian Sea. This soil-based harvesting technique involves identifying brine-rich zones through observation and ancestral mapping, digging and maintaining bores manually, constructing salt pans,

regulating flow and evaporation through sluice gates and daily adjustments, and finally, manual harvesting using long wooden rakes and drying platforms.

As can be gauged, this process is physically taxing and requires a sharp eye for timing. Moreover, it is entirely weather-dependent—something like a sudden storm can upend months of hard work. Yet, the salt produced is one of the finest and purest, capable of commanding good markets and prices if it can reach buyers. However, most Agariyas are ignorant of the vast possibilities and still earn minimal returns due to lack of consumer knowledge and profit-capturing by middlemen.

What makes their knowledge system so extraordinary is how it seamlessly adapts natural forces into productive tools to aid in production of salt. The Agariyas use various environmental cues to ensure proper harvesting. They use wind patterns to guide evaporation, consider the colour of brine to determine purity—deep green means rich mineral content, reddish indicates iron presence—use solar intensity and moon cycles to guide production, and use cow-dung and clay as natural filters and soil binders in pan construction. Their work may appear rustic and untrained, but naturally mirror the scientific principles of passive solar distillation, hydraulic engineering, and environmental engineering.

Lives in Limbo

The Agariyas are responsible for producing over 75% of Gujarat's salt. However, despite their deep knowledge and indispensable contribution, they live rather precarious lives. For decades, they have been treated as encroachers on government land and denied basic services like electricity, schooling, and basic healthcare. Their children often must drop out of school owing to their migratory lifestyle, with little initiative from the authorities to bring them back to school. They are also susceptible to health risks—continued exposure to salt and sun leads to skin, eye, and respiratory diseases. They are also forced to work under exploitative systems with little bargaining powers because most of them work on lands they do not own, and produce salt over which they have no claim. To make matters worse, their methods are not “formally recognized” by modern industries, meaning that their

indigenous expertise remains undocumented, undervalued, and runs the risk of extinction.

Revival and Recognition

In recent years, however, NGOs like the Agariya Heet Rakshak Manch and scholars from institutions like the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, have started documenting and preserving their knowledge. These institutions have also started advocating for the basic rights that the Agariyas have long been denied.

The Agariya community has from within itself birthed new innovations such as replacing diesel generators with solar pumps, cutting down on costs and emissions, the establishment of collective marketing platforms to bypass middlemen, and training programmes to integrate traditional methods with scientific validation. Some Agariyas are even registering their salt as a GI (Geographical Indication) product, reclaiming pride and ownership over their ancestral craft.

From Margins to Models

Under an unforgiving sun, an invisible workforce toils away in the cracked terrain of Kutch, extracting white gold using nothing but generational wisdom, muscle, and hope. They are more than salt harvesters—they are scientists equipped with environmental knowledge and unparalleled intuition. To bring their knowledge into the light is to redefine the meanings of expertise, sustainability, and development—topics increasingly relevant in today's climate-stressed world with increasing issues of water scarcity and soil salinity. Their craft provides alternative models for resource management, decentralized livelihoods, and equitable economies. Perhaps it is time we tasted their salt, not just on our tongues, but in our policies, textbooks, and imagination.

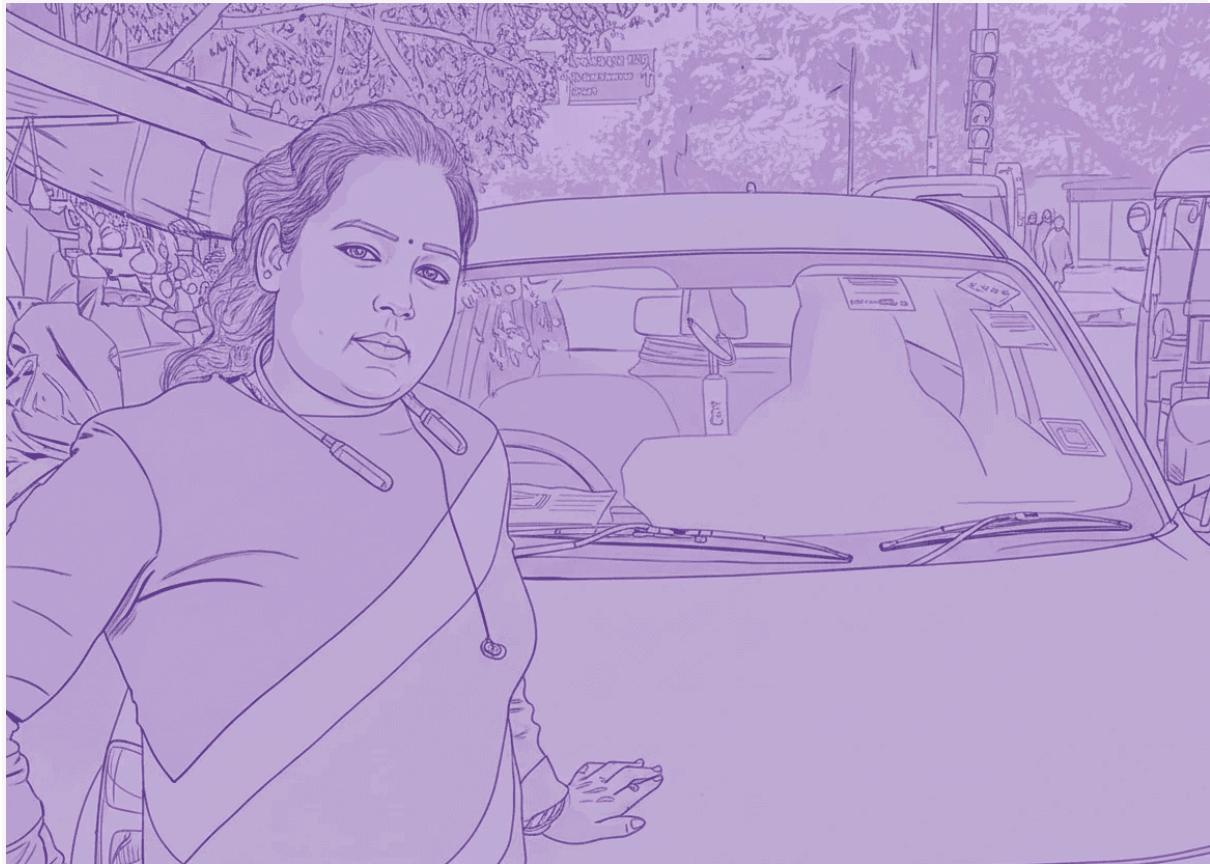
English

Saraswati on the Steering Wheel



salman Saleem

Dec 14, 2024



"Just a slap, but he can't hit me." This dialogue from the movie *Thappad*, directed by Anubhav Sinha, is not just a dialogue, it's an inspiration for many women in the country. I realised this when I met Saraswati Singh, a woman cab driver from Delhi. "If he beats me once, he will beat me again," she said with conviction, emphasising that women must first shed the fear that holds them back.

As I booked a cab, I saw the driver's name as Saraswati on my phone screen. My internal stereotype, as a man, did not make me question the gender of the driver, and I assumed it to be the surname of a male driver. But as soon as the cab arrived, I was surprised to see a woman behind the wheel. I got in, told her the pin, and as we started moving, curiosity took over. The first question I asked—one she had likely heard many times before—was, "Chala toh lengi na aap?" (Will you be able to drive?). I asked humorously, but let's not forget stereotypes are often masked as jokes. She smiled and replied, "Aap jab destination pe pahunch jaaye toh is sawaal ka jawab aap hi dena" (Once we reach your destination, you can answer that yourself).

Six years ago, Saraswati worked as a domestic help, washing dishes and cleaning homes to make ends meet. Financial struggles pushed her to look for something better. That's when she found out about the Azad Foundation, an organisation that trains women to become professional drivers. In 2017, she began working as a driver at the airport. She also drove rental cars for years until she bought her own car in 2023. Originally from Prayagraj, Saraswati is now a single mother. Her day begins with preparing her children for school before heading to work. From 2 PM until late at night, she drives across Delhi, picking up and dropping off passengers, all while ensuring she earns enough to sustain her family. On how male passengers react to seeing a woman drive, she says, "Who decides which job is for men and which one is for women?"

In a world where gender roles continue to dictate professional choices, the Azad Foundation is challenging stereotypes by training women to become drivers. "We are a feminist organisation," says Madhubala, who currently heads Azad Foundation Delhi. "We believe in gender equality and aim to break the patriarchal myth that women can only engage in traditional professions like making papads, pickles, or stitching." Since its inception in 2008, the Azad Foundation has been working to create livelihood opportunities for women by training them as professional drivers. "Driving has always been perceived as a male-dominated profession," she explains. "We want to change that by enabling women to take up driving not just as a skill but as a career." The foundation operates in four cities: Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, and Jaipur. "Currently, there are around 5,000 women drivers across these cities, with over 100 women employed as drivers with Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC)," Madhubala shares. The initiative not only challenges traditional gender roles but also enables financial independence for women from low-income backgrounds. Beyond public transport, women trained by the foundation are now employed with ride-hailing services like BlueSmart and delivery platforms such as Zomato, Swiggy, and Amazon. "There are several gender-based myths about driving, night shifts, and navigation," she points out. "We are working to dismantle these biases and make the profession accessible to all genders."

The Azad Foundation does more than just teach women how to drive. It conducts empowerment sessions that cover topics such as gender discrimination, workplace

readiness, and addressing domestic violence. "Many of the women we work with have experienced domestic violence," Madhubala says. "We equip them with the knowledge to identify violence, improve their communication skills, and plan their way forward." For women who seek legal support, the foundation collaborates with organisations like JAGORI, and the Delhi Legal Services Authority (DALSA). "While we don't directly provide legal aid, we connect women with networks that can support them through legal and emotional challenges," she explains. Saraswati, who was also subjected to domestic violence, decided one day to leave her abusive marriage. "Every girl should first remove the fear inside her, the fear of 'what will people say?'"

She acknowledges that the job is not easy. "Earlier, we could hit our daily target in ten rides. Now, it's tougher. So I look for shorter rides with better pay." One of the biggest challenges for not only women passengers but drivers too, is safety, especially at night. Saraswati doesn't carry any weapons for protection but takes precautions. "I avoid going to places like Gurgaon late at night and prefer staying within city limits," she admits. Despite these challenges, her presence on the road has inspired many female passengers. Many women passengers tell me that they feel safer with me, told Saraswati. "Whenever I travel after 9 pm in Delhi, I feel like my heart is on the brink. Today, I felt so safe with Saraswati, the only female driver in East Delhi, #Kudos to Saraswati." wrote a woman passenger on X.

Saraswati Singh's journey is not just about driving, it's about survival, strength, and self-reliance. A survivor of domestic violence, she refused to stay in an abusive marriage. Instead, she chose the road as her path to independence and dignity. "Women should step out. It doesn't matter how much they've studied. You learn by meeting new people," she says. From being a victim of domestic violence to becoming financially independent, Saraswati is a symbol of resilience. She proves that when women take control of the steering wheel both in life and on the road, they carve their path to empowerment. Her advice to other women? "Don't listen to anyone. Stay in your lane. Drive slow, drive safe, but drive."

Bengali

পাথির বাসায় ডিজাইন থিংকিং



Zahid Ansari

Nov 30, 2024



আমাৰ বাড়িৰ বারান্দা বেশ নিৱিলি, দিনেৰ বেশিৰভাগ সময় ঘৰেৱ ভেতৱে থাকায় বারান্দায় খুব কম যাতায়াত। বিগত কয়েকবছৰ ধৰে নানা পাথিৰ আসা-যাওয়া, একটা জিনিস লক্ষ্য কৱেছি—কাঁচ জিনিসটা পাথিৰেৰ বেশ পছন্দেৱ। দিনে কতবাৰ যে জানালাৰ কাঁচে ঠোকৰ দেয় তাৰ ঠিক নেই! ওদেৱ কৌতুহলেৱ যেন শেষ নেই। এই নিয়মিত আসা-যাওয়ায় ওৱাও লক্ষ্য কৱেছে আমাৰ বাড়িৰ বারান্দা নিৱিলি ও নিৱাপদ।

প্ৰথমে একটা সুন্দৰ ছোট সানবাৰ্ড। সে বিগত ৩-৪ বছৰ ধৰে নিয়মিত আসে, বাসা বানায় বারান্দায়। কী সুনিপুণ তাদেৱ বাসা! ওৱা একদম ছোট ছোট কুঁটি সংগ্ৰহ কৱে, ঘন বুনলে মজবুত বাসা বানায়। দেখে মনে হয়, বেশ শ্ৰমসাধ্য কাজ, মনে হয় যেন আৰ্কিটেকচাৰ বা ডিজাইনেৱ এক নিখুঁত উদাহৱণ—যেখানে স্থায়িৰ্বল, নিৱাপতা আৱ সূৰ্যৰ কাৰিগৰি মিলেমিশে আছে। এ যেন সেই high-fidelity design, যেখানে প্ৰতিটি উপাদান তাৰ নিৰ্দিষ্ট প্ৰয়োজনে নিখুঁতভাৱে বসানো হয়।

ইদানিং ঘূঘূ পাথিৰ আনাগোনা বেড়েছে। প্ৰথমে একজোড়া ঘূঘূ এমে বাসা কৱল, ডিম ফুটিয়ে বাষ্পা দিয়ে কোথায় হাৱিয়ে গেলো। বেশ কিছুদিন পৱ আবাৱ দেখি আৱেকজোড়া হাজিৱ! এবাৱ ওদেৱ বাসাটা ভালো কৱে লক্ষ্য কৱলাম—খুবই সাধাৱণ, মিনিমাল দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিতে তৈৱি। অল্প কিছু থড় কুঁটি জোগাড় কৱে, বেশ ফাঁকা ফাঁকা একটা বাসা বানিয়েছে। প্ৰথমে দেখে মনে হয়েছিল, যাচ্ছেতাই কৱে বানানো, কিন্তু পৱে

বুরুলাম, ওদের উদ্দেশ্যই আলাদা। ওরা সানবার্ডের মতো দীর্ঘমেয়াদি পরিকল্পনায় যায় না—শুধু একটা নিরাপদ জায়গা খুঁজে নেয়, ডিম পাড়ে, বাষ্প একটু বড় হওয়া পর্যন্ত অপেক্ষা করে, ব্যস! আসলে এটা “Minimalist Design” বা Lean Thinking-এর মতো—যেখানে কম উপাদানে কার্যকর সমাধান খুঁজে নেওয়া হয়। ওদের জন্য “অতিরিক্ত” কিছু দরকার নেই, যা প্রয়োজন তাই যথেষ্ট।

এবার ভাবলাম, ডিজাইন তো পার্থিদের জীবনেও কতভাবে মিশে আছে! সানবার্ডের বাসা যদি হয় intricate craftsmanship, তবে ঘূরুর বাসা একদম essential design। আসলে, problem-solving mindset-এর দুটি দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি এখানে স্পষ্ট—

১. High-Detail Design (সানবার্ড) – যেখানে সূক্ষ্মতা ও স্থায়িত্ব প্রধান

২. Minimal & Sustainable Design (ঘূরু) – যেখানে শুধু প্রয়োজনীয় জিনিস ব্যবহার করে সহজ সমাধান খোঁজা হয়

আরেকটা বিষয় লক্ষ্য করলাম—ঘূরুদের কোনো জটিল পরিকল্পনা নেই, তাদের মূল এজেন্ডা সহজ: সুরক্ষিত জায়গা খুঁজে ডিম পাড়া, আর বাষ্প বড় হলেই উড়ে যাওয়া। এটা অনেকটা modular design thinking-এর মতো, যেখানে শুধুমাত্র প্রয়োজনীয় অংশ রাখা হয়। আজকের sustainable architecture ধারণার সাথেও মিলে যায়!

বহুল প্রচলিত একটা কথা “ঘূরু দেখেছো, ফাঁদ দেখোনি”—এর আসল ব্যাখ্যা কী সেটা না জানলেও আমার মতো করে ভাবতে পারি যেমন, ঘূরুরা মানুষকে তেমন একটা ভয় পায় না, ওদের খুব নিকটে না পৌঁছালে ওরা ডানা মেলে না। তাই হয়তো এ কথাটার প্রচলন। এই যে ওরা আমাদের কম ভঁয় পায়, এর অর্থ দূরকম হতে পারে, হয় ওরা চতুর নয়, নতুবা ওরা আমাদের বিহেভিয়ার প্যাটার্ন বোঝে মানে আমরা কখন আক্রমণ করবো না করবো সেটা নিয়ে ওরা যথেষ্ট আল্লবিশ্বাসী, এখন কি মনে হয় ওরা বোকা না চতুর? অনেকসময় নিজের সূজনশীল দক্ষতা নিয়ে এমনই আল্লবিশ্বাস প্রয়োজন।

প্রকৃতি আসলে সবসময় শেখায়। আমাদের ডিজাইন থিংকিং-এর অনেক মূলনীতিই তো এখান থেকেই আসে—Adaptability, Resource Efficiency, Sustainable Living। হয়তো, আমরা যদি ডিজাইনে সত্যিকারের কার্যকারিতা খুঁজি, তাহলে এই ঘূরু আর সানবার্ডের মতোই প্রকৃতি থেকে অনুপ্রেরণা নিতে পারি!

When Birth Belonged to Women: Stories of Dais and Displacement

#GenderEquality



Proteeti Satpati

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When Birth Belonged to Women: Stories of Dais and Displacement

#GenderEquality

“We did not have machines, but we had hands that knew. We watched the mother, not the monitor. We sang to her, held her, stayed with her—not for money, but

“because birth is not a job, it is a responsibility.” — Rokeya Bibi, retired dai from Murshidabad district

Before hospitals, ultrasounds, and epidurals, childbirth across the Indian subcontinent was a home affair, surrounded by women, rituals, and the indigenous knowledge of the traditional midwives. These midwives, known as ‘dais,’ often lacked formal education, yet it was their practiced hands that birthed generations of young Indians. In regions like West Bengal, their role extended far beyond assisting in births, they were integral to the cultural and moral upbringing of the child. Unfortunately, as biomedical science grew by leaps and bounds, the local knowledge systems were slowly marginalized, as is the case with most indigenous practices.

However, today, when there is a reawakening to the importance of well-rounded, culturally-embedded care, these stories of midwives and their efficiency offer profound lessons—not only about childbirth, but also about community, care, and the underappreciated genius of women’s intuition. Across India, births were handled by experienced midwives who had learnt their craft through apprenticeship rather than training. These dais assisted in all stages of childbirth—from recognizing early signs of labour, positioning the mother for comfort and ease, cutting and tying the umbilical cord with a sterilized sickle—to guiding postpartum care for mother and the babies. The skilled midwives were mostly from marginalized caste backgrounds, especially in rural areas. Their position in the social fabric provided an interesting duality: they were subjects of social stigma, yet essential—no baby could enter the world without them to guide the process.

West Bengal: The Dai as Ritual Healer and Skilled Professional

In West Bengal, the traditional midwifery had its unique flavour. Here, the dais operated not just as birth attendants but also as ritual guardians, particularly in the districts of Birbhum, Nadia, and the 24 Parganas. They would often invoke deities, especially Shashthi Maa, through songs and mantras to aid in and ensure seamless childbirth. They would also instruct the use of ‘shital pati,’ cow dung-coated birthing rooms, dietary restrictions, and body-wrapping both as a means of ensuring hygiene and as signs of symbolic purity. In Bengal, childbirth was more than a medical

event—it was a passage drenched in social, cosmic, and emotional meaning. The women viewed motherhood and its various steps as rites of transformation—a shared experience savoured only by the women.

Dismantling a System Through ‘Modernisation’

As colonial and post-colonial views gained traction, midwifery was increasingly viewed with suspicion. The British authorities advocated “clean” and “scientific” methods of childbirth in institutional settings.

The newly independent India saw programmes like Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) and Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) further institutionalise childbirth. Midwives were pushed aside by auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs), and modernization trampled all over ancient knowledge. This shift brought with it social distortions, involving aspects such as control, class, caste, and gender.

Once a woman-led affair, childbirth increasingly became a domain of male doctors, hospital beds, and vertical hierarchies. However, there have been studies that show institutional setups do not automatically ensure trouble-free births. Further, most rural women are still apprehensive of the institutional set-up and miss out on the postpartum care that dais provided for weeks, but is simply not an option with formal systems.

A Future Where Both Worlds Can Meet

In recent years, however, there has been a renewed interest in traditional midwifery knowledge and attempts to integrate it with modern maternal care. NGOs like Chetna Manch and Sakhi Trust have spearheaded this movement. In West Bengal, too, there are ongoing attempts by universities like Jadavpur University and Viswa-Bharati to document and preserve the memories and skills of retired dais before they are lost forever. In rediscovering the ancient genius of dais, we have also learnt a few more things about the technique of midwifery—such as how dais were often emotional anchors for first-time mothers, how ancient birthing process was a

community event surrounded by women, songs, and comfort, and most importantly, how healing did not end with the birth of the baby—postpartum care was just as important.

On a brighter note, India's maternal mortality has indeed been steadily declining, thanks to access to formal healthcare, but numbers do not tell the entire story. The lack of culturally sensitive care, especially among marginalized communities, means that there is still a substantial trust and compliance gap that needs to be bridged. This can be done by integrating traditional knowledge into modern systems: where midwives can be trained in obstetrics and traditional care, where safe home-births are valid and supported options, and where postpartum care is again given the importance it rightly deserves. Dais can become carriers and preachers of their dying craft, thereby ensuring that maternal care is not only safe but also deeply rooted in cultural understanding.

The Wisdom We Left Behind

Traditional midwifery in India has different stories to tell. In West Bengal, for example, these stories go far beyond childbirth, they are remnants of knowledge that we overlook in our technology-centric approach to measuring care; they are documentations of women's wisdom, caste knowledge, and rural knowledge—of little importance on paper, of great relevance in the workings of life. As India forges ahead in healthcare innovation, revisiting these indigenous knowledge systems does not mean we are moving backward. It means we are accepting all that was wise, human, and healing, improving them with all the modern knowledge we possess now, and letting this improved knowledge system guide us on our path ahead.

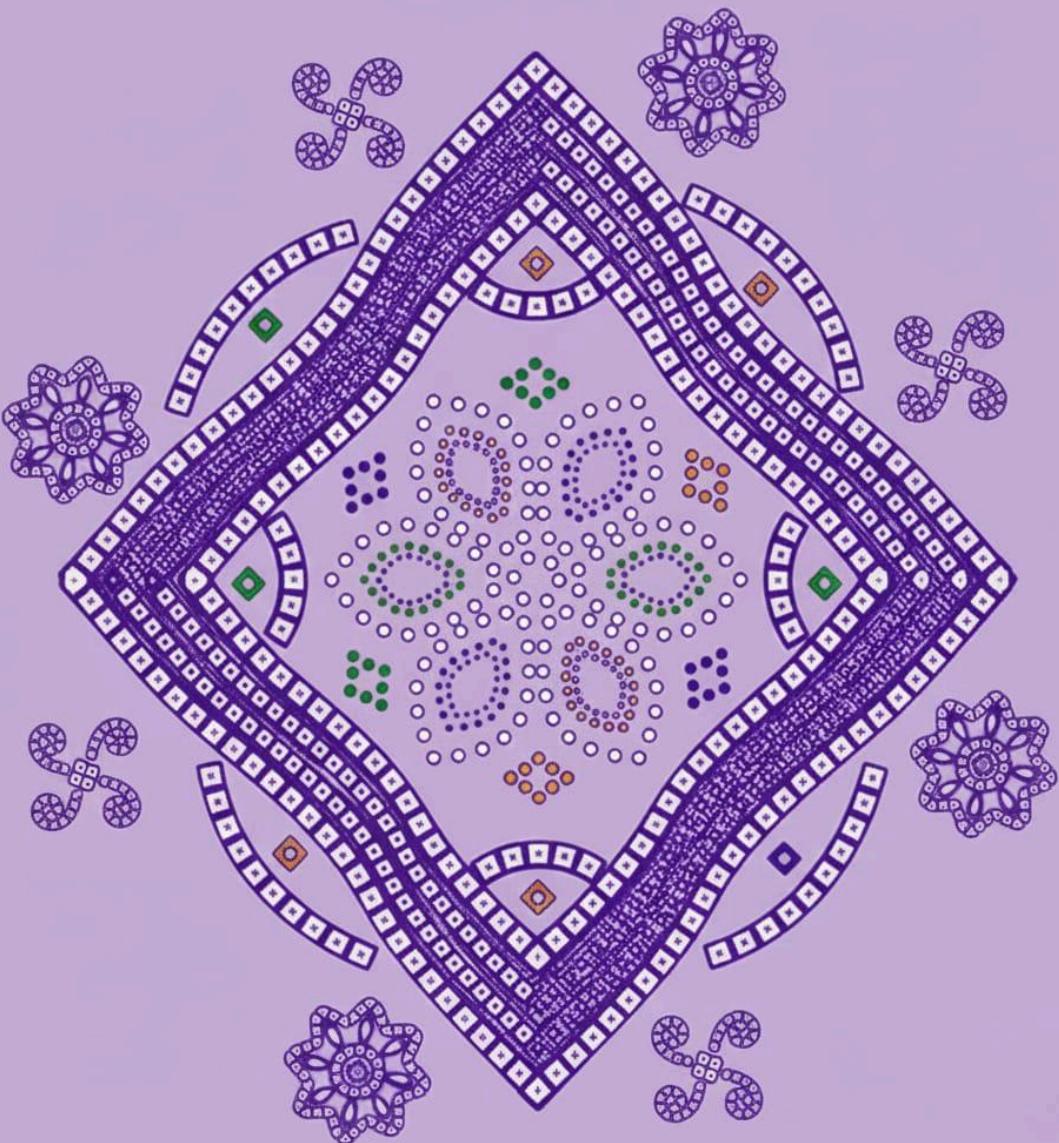
English

The Lost Art of Bengal's Nakshi Kantha Embroidery: Stories Sewn into Fabric



Priyanka Biswas

Sep 5, 2024



The Lost Art of Bengal's Nakshi Kantha Embroidery

Stories Sewn into Fabric

When you hear about Nakshi Kantha, you might think it's just an old quilt. But for many of us from Bengal, it means something deeper. These are not just stitched blankets—they hold stories. Real ones. About family, life, hopes, and memories. Nakshi Kantha is part of our cultural heritage, especially in Bangladesh and West Bengal. Women would take old clothes, usually worn-out saris, layer them, and sew them together using a running stitch. That simple technique became something special. Over time, this method turned into a style of embroidered storytelling that has been passed down for generations.

What Makes Nakshi Kantha Special?

The name in itself says a lot. "Nakshi" means design. "Kantha" means quilt. It's not about using fancy materials. It's about making something really meaningful from what you have. People would reuse old clothes from their homes, and even the threads that came from those clothes, to make something beautiful. The thread was often pulled from old saris too. Every piece told a story - some about daily village life, others about dreams, memories, or even big events from history.

The quilts often show scenes like women working in fields, fish in ponds, peacocks, trees, birds, or religious icons. These floral and fauna motifs aren't random or just for show. They often carry meaning, like good luck, fertility, blessings, spiritual beliefs, love, or memories. Some even show political changes, struggles from the past or personal loss.

Why Was It So Important?

For many women, Nakshi Kantha was a way to express what they couldn't say out loud. Most of them didn't write in diaries. They stitched their thoughts instead. Making these traditional quilts was also a way to support and bond with other women in the community.

They made them for weddings, new babies, or to keep a loved one warm. Often, they would pass down these pieces to children and grandchildren. They weren't just items. They were memories - a piece of someone's life. In some families, a kantha

was the only thing a woman could call her own. It was something she made by hand, and every stitch showed her care, time, and patience.

How It's Made

Let's keep it simple: You take a few old saris, stack them together on top of each other, and sew them all around with tiny running stitches. The designs are usually drawn by hand first using chalk or pencil. Then comes the stitching - slow, careful, and full of meaning.

The process takes time. Weeks, sometimes months, depending on the size and detail. That's why each piece feels so personal. It reflects patience, love, and a quiet sense of storytelling. It's the kind of handcrafted textile work that doesn't rush. The stitches may look simple, but the patterns and the stories behind them are not. The work often starts at the center and moves outward, like a ripple. This helps balance the cloth and the design too.



What Happened to It?

So, why do people call Nakshi Kantha embroidery a "lost" art? A few things changed. First, machine-made quilts and printed textiles took over the market. They're faster and cheaper. That made many people forget the value of slow, handmade pieces. Then there's the shift in lifestyle. Fewer women artisans in villages are sitting down to sew these. Many young people are moving to cities, chasing new careers, and

they no longer have the time or space to learn this craft. Even those who do make Nakshi Kantha today may struggle to earn enough from it.

Some artisans worry that their work is being copied or used in ways that don't give credit to the original makers. Others feel that mass production takes away the meaning, love, and care behind each piece. These concerns are real. Women who once made kantha for joy or love now make it for money, often due to their situations. And that changes things.

Is There Hope?

Yes. There are signs of hope. People are starting to notice again. Some women are trying new ideas, using symbolic designs that speak to today's problems - like climate change, migration, or personal stories of loss. They are still using recycled fabrics, but the themes are modern. In some places, women are teaching each other again. They're forming groups where they can stitch together, share stories, and sell their work. During a recent Durga Puja in Kolkata, a massive 100-foot kantha panel showed off their skills and reminded people how valuable this art still is. There's also growing interest in using these quilts in other ways - as home decor, fashion, or even framed wall art. That helps keep the craft alive and gives more women artisans the chance to earn a living.

What do these quilts really show us?

Each piece of Bengal embroidery shows us more than skills or talent. It shows us care. It tells us how someone lived, what they felt, and what they wanted to hold on to. Whether it's a spiral for the cycle of life or a fish to represent good luck, these are symbolic designs that speak without using words.

Some quilts show a quiet day in the village - trees, ponds, animals, and family. Others share deep emotions. A mother's love. A daughter's loss. A woman's wish for a better future. These aren't just decorations. They're messages from real lives. If you pick up a real Nakshi Kantha, you're not just holding a quilt. You're holding someone's voice.

Final Thoughts

We don't need to look far to see the value of old crafts. In the rush to get things faster and cheaper, we often forget the beauty in slow, thoughtful work. Nakshi Kantha reminds us of that. It reminds us to stop and listen to stories stitched into fabric. To respect the hands that made them. And to pass those stories forward. Let's not let this art fade away. Let's help keep these stitches - and the stories inside them - alive.