An Artisan Village, Surat, India: Safeguarding the Art & Craft Heritage of India

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Abstract: This paper aims to strategise a comprehensive design, establishing a link between urban and rural sectors through preservation and revitalisation of the craft sector of India. The intent is to unite the various typologies of artisan crafts, scattered throughout the country, to build a community cherishing the Indian heritage: a place to practise, teach, demonstrate culture. With the aim of fostering this heritage community, the concept of crafts village has been selected as the cornerstone of this design. Thus, the sub-question: How to create an artist village, providing a platform for vocational training and retail, a mixed-use organic development, cherishing the Art and Craft heritage of India? Notwithstanding Industrialization, a large population of India still depend on long-established traditional methods of manufacturing using traditional techniques to earn a living based on handmade products. These craftspeople/artisans are the backbone of the non-farm rural economy of India. There is a crucial necessity for philanthropy to understand the potential to monetise the crafts sector by the financing of high impact scalable models that can sustainably strengthen livelihoods. By harnessing the potential of the craftsperson/artisan sector, the concept of artist village promotes forgotten values of art in the modern world and re-examines the role of architecture. An artisan village reinforces the upliftment of rural craftsmen/Artisans by providing them with a place to reside, practice and earn with their skills.

Keywords: Sustainable buildings, Artisan Heritage, Incremental Architecture, India

1. Introduction

This paper aims to design a development of an artist village in the city of Surat, Gujarat, India. The research involves the in-depth study of the rural art and artisan, their living environment and indigenous development and the future demands to conserve their skills and techniques by providing a platform to educate the young generation and even housing them for their better living standards. Current analysis of the variety of craftperson/artisan within the Indian sub-continent indicates the highest concentration of rural artisans resides within the state of Gujarat. The city has always provided a platform for Artistic events and traditional festivals. Taking the initiative, a step further, this research
paper aims to develop an artist village with a mixed activity of education, retail and recreation incorporating Indian architectural elements within the design.

Case studies include Belapur Artist village, Sanskriti Kendra, Delhi, Shilpgram Artist Village, Udaipur, India. Followed by an in-depth analysis of the artisan spatial needs, for each sub-group of craft split into eleven distinctive groups; Pottery Art, Knife work, Lacquer Wood, Metal Bells Art, Block Print craft, Bandhani Craft & Batik, Rogan Art, Kachchhi weaving Art, Plastic Weaving, and Embroidery, will ensure a programme which is fit for purpose for the site.

The design methodology incorporates the more in-depth comprehension of the type of activities and environment required with each art and craft, to develop typical housing model which holds the incremental possibilities and Indian architectural characteristics. The circulation and spatial organisation study are the essential elements in developing the master layout. The case-studies offer few planned and organically developed artist villages of India, providing the inferences to develop the best possible strategy to design an artist village. The design conclusion outcome safeguards cultivates and fosters the reconsideration of the role of architecture within the context of an artisan village, and the subsequent growing the economy within this region.

2. State of Knowledge in the Field

There is no preconceived regulation for such village design within India. Most of the unplanned villages are organically developed, depending on their residential requirement. The master layout design can be derived from the inferences of spatial organisation and circulation from case-studies. The understanding and functional needs of an artist village are analysed from the more profound comprehension of each Art and craft of India. There are many examples of artistic villages throughout the world, albeit few have clearly defined aims, and those organic agglomerations of artists’ studios are founded by artisan themselves. Planned Artist Villages can be initiated by the government, non-governmental organisation, education institution, philanthropist or a private enterprise. The purpose of establishing a village like this can be to provide space for art creation and developing the creative industry, even revitalising the community. The Indian craft sector is entrenched very deep into the Indian Culture. One of the paradoxes of India is, having innumerable craftsmen working with various techniques and materials than anywhere else. However, neither those craftsmen are being valued, nor they are earning a basic livelihood. Due to unemployment, these skilled professionals are leaving the sector and joining labour jobs instead. Revitalising prospects of the crafts sector can provide improvement in economic, environmental and social conditions of rural communities. In the process of making India and skilling India, many non-governmental organisations are trying hard to forefront crafts-people and provide them with better living standards.

3. Context

India may be a land of farmers, but it is equally a land of artisans. Indian art is the sheer hard work of thousands of unknown, undervalued artisans and craftsperson’s. This art has continuously evolved over thousands of years. The traditions and customs of India tend to produce so many activities and opportunities.

“India is a power house of handicrafts. Each state in India not only has its distinctive ethnic identity - but also a varied tradition of handicrafts and art works. Some of the crafts traditions were born out of necessity, while others developed simply out of man’s
instinctive attraction towards all things beautiful. Regional history, social ambience, religion, culture, climate - natural resources and demography were largely responsible for the evolution of these diverse ethnic crafts traditions in India.” States Special: Ethnic Crafts

3.1. Harnessing the Potential of India’s Craft Sector

Despite the Industrialization, millions of Indians still depend on indigenous modes of production, traditional skills and techniques to make a living based on handmade products. These craftspeople are the backbone of the non-farm rural economy of India. Estimated around 7 million artisans are engaged in craft production to earn a livelihood. An estimated 63% of artisans are self-employed while 37% are wage earners.” In Handicrafts for 12th Five Year Plan

According to Jena (2010), many companies are supporting the craft-based business; most of craft creations remain chaotic and artisan struggles for sustenance. However, the loss of markets, fading skills and trouble managing to new markets, a considerable number of artisans have moved to urban centres in search of low, untrained employment in the industry. According to the United Nations, over the past 30 years, the number of Indian artisans has decreased by 30%, indicating the need to re-invest in artisans to safeguard history, culture and an essential source of livelihood.

3.2. Concept of An Indian Craft Village

The roots of Indian crafts are entrenched and integral part of Indian culture. These crafts continue to flourish in the remote corners of the country due to their utilitarian nature, the involvement of indigenous materials, over and above that the demand in domestic and foreign markets. In the present, most of the craft practised are the legacy of the past, and this tradition has been running for centuries. Intending to preserve the heritage, the concept of craft village came into being. This concept brought most of the crafts’ specimens and craftsmen together. A platform for forgotten values enlightens the current generation by planting a seed in their mind. A craft village is a place where one gets to know the traditions of a community, their historical interests and skills of making artefacts. The atmosphere and the infrastructure of this village are very true to their culture, and the feel of rural life is given to the visitors. The material and techniques incorporated to build the huts are unique, differing by the communities. According to Indian Handicrafts at Present, the crafts village is a mixed-use development of the residential and commercial place. Thus, it serves more than one purpose from a single platform. This concept can help improve the living standards of craftsmen by educating them with modern technology. It also offers the programmes and workshops for general masses to learn Indian Crafts from the artisan itself. This platform also felicitates a unique edification exchange of ideas, experience and crafts practice at national and international level amongst the artisans and designers from diverse backgrounds. This concept is able to establish a link between rare crafts of India with modern consumers.

4.0. Case Studies in depth

In India, there are many concentrated craft centres. From which, very few are recognized to house artisans within it. One can identify the difference in vernacular architecture and spatial organization of the village as it varies from state to state. Three artist villages of different scale and purposes are selected for the extensive research for this document.
4.1 Belapur Artist village, India

Charles Correa designed a Low-cost incremental housing typology for artisans. Located close to the city centre of New Bombay and spread across six hectares of land. Correa has conceptualised this project on his beliefs about the nature of community and housing. He has developed the idea based on his observations of the spatial hierarchy of individual privacy to the public gathering. He has created a link from the private space of every individual dwelling (doorstep), to the communal courtyard, to the more significant public space (maidan) of the community. According to Davey (2015), the design geometry of the village is a direct interpretation of this syntax. According to Correa (1999 p48) concerning the Indian climate and even keeping the territorial privacy, ‘Open-to-the-sky space’ is essential to each family.

Correa made a cluster of seven houses; wherein there is a central courtyard of 8 x 8m. Moreover, Correa amalgamated three clusters of seven houses together and made a more significant courtyard of 12m x 12m. Incrementing this model, generates the courtyard of 20 x 20m, increasing interaction and participation within the user group — the repetitive model of a cluster of houses in the heart of this project. For an artist community where the exchange of ideas and a shared working environment is required, Correa has designed the model which promotes the convention spaces.

4.2 Sanskriti Kendra, Delhi, India

The organic development of the project in the foothills of Aravalli ranges has kept natural elements throughout the site. The rainwater channel is a linear cooling pond which starts from the pond and runs down to the stage of the amphitheatre. The existing trees become the dominant structuring element of the layout plan. Individual identity is given to the courtyards and the landscape terraces.

The design focuses on the unique relationship between the closed-box and open to sky spaces, the whole continuum of zones with varying degrees of privacy. The unique hierarchy starts from stepping into the veranda – courtyard space – then under a tree - and beyond onto the semi-covered terrace with bamboo pergola – onto a balcony and so on. There are no formal boundaries in the site.

The primary design focus is on the distribution of function and connection through circulation. Public spaces such as galleries and the governing body are situated near the entrance. Studios and dormitories are distant from the public spaces to avoid any distraction. The site only has 10 per cent of built mass as the rest 90 per cent is a judicious mix of formality and informality of hard and soft landscaping.

4.3 Shilpgram Artist Village, Udaipur, India

Shilpgram is the workplace of craftsmen and a potential pilgrimage place for artists. The village is an effort to present and preserve the tribal culture from four western states of India, which are Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa.

The village also houses the rural market, performing art centre, vocational training centre and other aspects of tribal life. Along with it, there is a park of sculptures of Indian Gods at the hilltop, exhibiting the statues which have been carved by Indian and foreign artists who have visited the village. The village has spread across 33 hectares of land, accommodating seven huts of Rajasthan, twelve of Gujarat, seven of Maharashtra and five from Goa and depicting their cultural activity and living styles. These huts have been made by the workers themselves with their rural architectural style using the vernacular materials from native place.
In circulation, a central axis run throughout the site, connecting continuous pedestrian movement pattern at several intervals. All different type of hutments (see glossary) can be seen in order, as their retail area is adjacent to the pedestrian path forming a street market culture in the village. The spatial organization of the village is designed based on communal hierarchy.

Ishan Jain (2017) discusses that the huts depicting the culture of Rajasthan state, are called Ramaroa. Specially designed for extended family, these huts have a boundary wall which serves the purpose of safeguarding the house from the deserted dust of Rajasthan and even deliver the sense of privacy to the family. It has a kitchen, grain storehouse and weaver’s workshop area. The roof of the hut is made from the wood of Kade tree and covered with grass.

The other hut from Rajasthan, designed for a middle-class family has stone pillars and roof made of wood. The well-crushed clay has been laid on walls in many layers.

Figure 1. Left hand two images showing the huts from Rajasthan state and right-hand images showing hut from Gujarat state and mud-mirror work on the walls.

Shilpgram is the best example of the self-sustained artist community. The art and craft of India, cherishing in the lap of rural craftsmen and exploring the possible linkages with the modern world today. Shilpgram is well stocked with all the functions which an artist village demands. These organically developed functions, lead an idea of such programme to its accomplishment. An informal settlement entices even an unknown visitor to be a part of it. Daily performances, workshops with artist, even the retail places provide a direct interaction to common masses with the dying heritage.

4.4. Kala Vaarso – Art Event, Surat, India

The event brings together rural artisans and craftsmen from 24 states of India at one stage and highlights their art to create a demand for their products. The weeklong event attracts tens of thousands of visitors each day. More than 250 artisans participate in this exhibition, with a variety of 120 art at one platform. Kala Vaarso has been spreading its identity, and through the spectacular public response, it has been growing over the years. The event is handled and designed by the volunteers, who are students of universities. All the creative student body put their best efforts to please the soul of a visitor. The whole environment is designed to depict the authentic Indian culture. This event covers all the crafts such as pottery, metal bells making, block printing, lacquered wood merchandizes, bandhani art, leather art, batik printing, knife work, rogan painting, recycled plastic weaving, embroidery art, Kachchhi weaving. These artisans are keen to teach their skills to the young generation. The workshops run every day long, providing a chance to learn the rare crafts.
5.0 Study of Arts and Crafts – Artisan needs

The event Kala Vaarso offered an opportunity to study the work pattern of each artisan. Analysing the eleven typologies of crafts created a conclusion to provide combine area for some crafts as some art and crafts are more or less the same in functions. This study intends to derive at a conclusion for further designing different model based on the functional requirement of each craft. The three major divisions of eleven crafts are based on the shared or separate workshop and retail area requirement.

- **Pottery Art (1)**
  The art of Pottery is well known culture around the globe since ancient age. Similarly, in Gujrat, potters acquire resources such as leaves of ‘Jaru’ plant, soft stems of Prosopis Julifera, water, clay, black stones etc. from surrounding nature and utilize them to produce unique piece of art. Beautiful traditional carvings make it unique and easily identifiable from other states of India.

- **Knife Work (2)**
  Knife is one of those utilities which is used daily from household work up to commercial usage. Craftsmen in Kachchh add a little more imagination into it by making this piece of art completely by hand and by carving cultural designs on it. Only one artist can usually carry out the entire process which improves the quality and efficiency of production. For this, raw materials like aluminium, copper, brass, iron, zinc, steel etc are bought from local scrap dealers. While fresh metal is bought from dealers from Ahmadabad and Rajkot.

- **Lacquer Wood (3)**
  Lac is a material extracted from insect resin. Whilst turning the wood with a hand lathe, coloured lacquer is applied to it by manoeuvring around the arrangement to create kaleidoscopic designs. This tradition is unique to Kachchh and has been carried on from centuries.

- **Metal Bells Art (4)**
  Evolved to accomplish a need of community, an art of coated copper bells is a main occupation in Kachchh. Recycled metal is majorly used to shape a bell, then coated with powered brass and copper, and then baked in a kiln and polished.

- **Block Printing Craft (5)**
  As the name suggests, block printing is form of art in which fabric is dyed and coloured using wooden blocks. Artists extract these colours from natural resources such as black from rusty iron solution, red from madder root, blue from indigo etc. India is one of the biggest makers and exporters of block printed texture. The prevalent outlines of block imprinting in Indian village are geometric.

- **Bandhani Craft (6) and Batik Printing (7)**
  In Sanskrit literature, the word “Bandh’ in Bandhani means to bind or to tie. All colours required for this art are naturally extracted. Bandhani involves tugging the cloth using fingernails into tiny weavings that constructs a figurative art. It is a tie-dye fabrication process done completely by hands. Because of this, a wide and combined space is ideal to accomplish synchronised tasks.

- **Rogan Art (8)**
  This is a type of fabric painting technique where castor oil is used to make bright coloured paint. Castor is harvested locally in Kachchh and is exported all around the globe therefore artisans directly obtain it from farmers.

- **Kachchhi Weaving Art (9)**
  Kachchh weaving was originally done through Panja loom entirely by hand. Today’s artisans use shuttle looms instead. First the wrap is prepared on the loom, then stretched and rolled onto a bobbin. In the
ends, the fabric is created on the loom. The designs in kachchh weaving is mainly inspired by the shape of musical instruments, animals and even the equipment of daily routine.

- Plastic Weaving Art (10)
Massive amount of plastic is dumped as industrial and domestic waste in metro cities every day in India. Local waste collectors are employed to collect this plastic which are then bought by these artisans. They sort and clean this material based on its quality & colour. This is then cleaned & cut into long stripes to spin them onto industrial bobbin which is later used in standing looms to produce substantial plastic textiles. A thick, dense weft patterned material is created out of it which is tied and wrapped with Nylon. Separate and long area is required to perform individual process. The final product is used to produce mats, backpacks, cushions etc. This form of art supports environment by transforming waste plastic into inexpensive everyday use goods.

- Embroidery (11)
The state of Gujrat is well known for its traditional embroidery. It is one of those rare crafts which is performed by women. Distinct communities have their own fashion of stitching and motifs to represent their own expression. This art has been passed on since ancient times from generation to generation.

### 6.0 Programme

As the whole concept of this research paper is to accommodate the artist community and provide a platform to educate others, the primary arrangement of the programme depends on the workspace area required by each artisan. The detailed art and craft study suggest housing artisan from 11 different crafts. According to the scale and nature of their art, the major three categories have been decided.

The first notion which must be considered in designing the programme is about residing the artisan into the village. The connection of the rural artisan to the urban consumer can be established by designing the retail outlet, where the need for both can be satisfied. Even though, to balance the living standards of these rural craftsmen in front of the rapidly growing modern society, the craft sector demands the residential infrastructure development for this artisan, as to provide all the essential amenities to this community. The second argument is about the retail outlet space requirement. The programme requires a mixed-use development of the residential and commercial activity, creating an informal atmosphere to the project. The study of Shilpgram artist village suggests the most feasible functional arrangement through the hierarchy of privacy.

The literature studies of artisan villages suggest housing 20 artisans from each type of art, that in total- a community of 220 artisans at the initial stage of development. The programme of this artist village is divided into two stages. The first stage of development houses ten artists from each art and stage two do the same. After stage two development, the project can expand by repeating the housing model, which is required. The nature of this project is scalable, and the major design elements are spatial organization and circulation.

The first housing model accommodates the art, which requires all separate space for their work area varying in scale from 30 to 50 square metres area. This model incorporates the potters, metal bell makers and the artist making knives and lacquered wood products. The second housing model accommodates the cloth printing crafts, which requires over 50 square metres private area. These crafts are block printing, bandhani printing, batik printing and rogan art. The third housing model even accommodates the crafts, which require over 50 square metres of area but the nature of this art suggests a shared work environment, including sizeable open-to-sky space. This model houses the kachchhi weaving, plastic weaving and embroidery crafts.
6.1 Conceptual Design of Typical Housing Model

The programme demands the formulation of a typical housing model, which can be repeated with ease following the master plan. The housing model should complement the continuous circulation by activating the street-face of the model. The core idea is to bring a street character to the village, by following the hierarchy of public gathering to individual privacy. As retail is an essential function, which gives life to the pedestrian circulation, the idea is to have retail space in both street front areas of the model.

Another design element, courtyard provide an open working environment, even brings in enough natural sunlight and enables the air-ventilation, is the central part of the housing model. From ancient times, the courtyard has been the central space of a dwelling, increasing interaction and participation within the user group. This Indian architectural element is the heart of a housing model. Following the hierarchy, the most private workspace area for each resident is placed away from the pedestrian traffic. To bring the shared working environment to the housing model, these workspaces have a connection to the central courtyard.

6.2 Spatial organisation

Housing model #1 and #3 have retail shops on two opposite sides, whereas the model #2 have the shop on only one side. The spatial organization of each housing model decides the pedestrian movement pattern. To break the monotonous circulation pattern, nodes have been introduced after several number of housing model repetitions. These nodes are gathering places of the village, predominantly
catering live performances by the residing musicians or classical dancers. The nodes and angular pathways give directionality to the pedestrians.

Figure 4. Left hand side – Conceptual model of housing model #1, middle #3 and right hand side housing model #2

The Programme demands to follow a method of designing. The study of artist villages from around India, encourage to trace the common design. The most feasible element of an artist design is its incrementality. Charles Correa designed the Belapur artist village with typical single housing model and its repetition.

7.0 Conclusions

This research paper intended to strategise a comprehensive design for an artist village and on the other hand, drive focus on improving social aspects of the ones sustaining the heritage of India in this modern world. The research created in this document and the architectural implementation aspire to provide a stencil for designers, an awareness for philanthropy towards the crafts sector of India. A movement towards the conservation and revitalisation of art and craft of India is achieved on a smaller level through the initiation of planning to revitalise a city with the value of heritage.

The first hurdle in understanding the scope of this research document was resolved by the existing reports made by the organisations working under the crafts sector. Existing research established a strong foundation in developing the idea for an architectural initiative. The other methods obtained in
arbitrary data collection such as one-to-one interviews and attending the events and seminars on the subject, enclosed the current situation and provided a vision to derive a programme based on an actual scenario.

A deep appreciation for art and crafts led the research to analyse each craft through their functional and operational needs, work pattern of artisan and environmental requirements to perform art or craft. This intensive research helped to form a programme to develop a potential operational housing model complimenting each requirement of the user. The idea was to divide the crafts into three categories according to their desired workspace environment and develop three unique housing models which can be repeated in forming a master layout.

Literature study and live case-studies of artist villages around India helped to analyse the formation, functions, vernacular architecture and spatial organisation of an artist village. Inferences from these case-studies such as circulation in an organically developed artist village and spatial organisation of a planned artist village, poured an understanding to develop the most feasible design to foster such heritage community. The studies also encouraged the involvement of Indian architectural elements such as courtyard, street retail culture and a shared working environment to develop an authentic yet unique and rational design.

The site selected for this research document is the ideal place to develop such kind of project, as Gujarat currently has the highest concentration of struggling rural artists and on the other hand, the metropolitan city Surat holds the potential to cherish a development in the crafts sector. Geographically the location of the site offers the opportunity to imitate an environment of an actual village developing along the riverside.

References