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**International Seminar on
Entrepreneurship as a Social Movement:
Creating Cultural, Social and Economic Value**

**January 5-6, 2018
Taj Bengal, Kolkata**

Towards Entrepreneurship as a Social Movement

Introduction

Founded in 2000, *banglanatak dot com* is a social enterprise working across India to foster inclusive, pro-poor and sustainable development using culture-based approaches. Its flagship model Art for Life (AFL) uses culture as a catalyzing force for promoting grass root entrepreneurship. *banglanatak dot com* is organizing this seminar in partnership with the British Council for a discourse on how innovation, entrepreneurship and local skills, supported by a pragmatic and sensitive socio-economic eco-system can make the desired impact. The seminar is supported by the International Entrepreneurship Forum based at The Venture Academy, Essex Business School, University of Essex UK.

The common passage of entrepreneurship as an instrument for economic growth is well recognised throughout the world. This recognition manifests itself in significant public and private initiatives to boost start-ups, growth of small firms and innovation. The jury is still out on the outcomes as variable contexts reveal mixed results. Seldom, however, has entrepreneurship been seen as a vehicle for social and economic development, as a force for effective transformation of our lives through new arrangements for social welfare and exchange, or the identification of opportunities for new modes of community-based relationships that harness both the economic power of people and the strength of ties and relationships of people in society. Seldom too is a new venture in the arts or humanities seen as a platform for economic engagement in the community. The popularity of social enterprises offers certain palliatives when market or systemic failures abound, and when people come together to seek solutions for problems within their ambit for change.

Yet technology today and the necessity to address institutional myopia in societies, opens up possibilities for valorising the inherent value of the arts and people-focused cultural and social activities. While some of the possibilities center round revenue generation for and the monetization of public, cultural and social activities, others recognize the soft power of those activities in changing local neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities and regions. People improve their habitat as places to live and work satisfactorily.

Technological convergence has brought multiple resources to us in ways never dreamt of before. Technological applications and intuitive modes of use have unleashed new forms of communication especially among people who have been disenfranchised from the market place for long. The ubiquity of information as a public good and as a means for private enterprise allows for a greater sense of attachment and belonging to society and the economy. A form of distributed capitalism recognizes the wealth of networks of people and their ideas, and lays bare the cracks in traditional institutions. We have the opportunity for a new movement, an entrepreneurship movement that

does not simply seek alternative power but identifies opportunities for empowering people, communities, the markets and civic society through the better utilization of their personal and cultural assets and the direct engagement in governance structures of new institutions created by and for them.

Entrepreneurship as a movement involves the producer, the user, the consumer and the citizen often in dual or other roles as their multiple identities play out in civic society and the wider economy. It means using technologies to enable users of products and services to define, design, and sometime co-produce the products that they consume. This helps them to introduce consumer rights and obligations to the producer economics equation. The technologies can help generate and scale up crowd funding which allows users, producers and citizens to invest and engage in the market dynamics of social return on their investment (as is evident in reward and donation crowd funding). Engaged as citizens on these producer-user platforms, there are possibilities for introducing local governance measures which can complement traditional institutional structures of decision making. The social embedding in entrepreneurship as a movement can start with social and business enterprises working together with established institutions, so that the morphing of society does not exclude anyone. At the heart of it is the identification of a new opportunity based on the identification of the community itself as a skills and capability resource. This community capability structure becomes a space within which people negotiate and evaluate what is necessary for personal, social, cultural and economic value creation. We aspire to brainstorm with thought leaders and industry experts how to kick start Entrepreneurship as a Social Movement.

Objectives

- To identify the roles of key stakeholders – community, the private sector, government organisations, the education sector and others in fostering social and creative entrepreneurship
- To explore ideas for developing a sustainable network for sharing knowledge and resources and leveraging existing establishments, policies, technologies for supporting an enabling ecosystem for promoting entrepreneurship
- To establish a platform for the free flow of ideas, technologies and resources related to the development of a unique project: 'Entrepreneurship as a Social Movement'.

Seminar Schedule

Friday, January 5, 2018

Inaugural Session: 10 am - 11:30 am

Chandra Shekhar Ghosh, CMD, Bandhan Bank (Chief Guest)
Jay Mitra, Professor of Business Enterprise and Innovation, Essex Business School, University of Essex, UK
Ashok Banerjee, Professor (Finance & Control) and Director, IIM Calcutta Innovation Park (IIMCIP)
Debanjan Chakrabarti, Director, British Council, East and North East India
Amitava Bhattacharya, Founder Director, banglanatak dot com

Tea Break

Entrepreneurship and SDGs: 12 noon - 1:30 pm

Chair: **Jay Mitra**, Professor of Business Enterprise and Innovation, Essex Business School, University of Essex, UK
Rajiva Sinha, IAS, Addl Chief Secretary, Government of West Bengal
Ananya Bhattacharya, Director, banglanatak dot com
Soumyo Mukherji, Institute Chair Professor and Dean of Student Affairs, IIT Bombay

Lunch Break

Stories of Grassroot Entrepreneurs: 2:30 pm - 3:30 pm

Moderator: **Amitava Bhattacharya**, Founder Director, banglanatak dot com
Swarna Chitrakar, Tajkira Begum, Madhumita Parihari, Shankar Das, Babu Fakir, Harendranath Rana, Kuntal Hazra

Tea Break

Entrepreneurship - A journey with the stakeholders: 4 pm - 6 pm

Chair: **Chandradeep Mitra**, Mentor & Advisor IIMC Innovation Park and CEO, PipalMajik
Suresh Reddy, CEO, LYCOS
R Venkataraman, Managing Director and Co-Promoter of India Infoline (IIFL) Group
Rahul Bhalchandra, CEO & Director, YLG
Ananda Bhoumik, Managing Director and Chief Analytical Officer at India Ratings and Research, Fitch
Rahul Johri, Executive President & Head of Retail Banking, Bandhan Bank

Saturday, January 6, 2018

Social & Creative Entrepreneurship: 10 am - 11:30 am

Chair: **Jay Mitra**, Professor of Business Enterprise and Innovation, Essex Business School, University of Essex, UK
Harish Hande, Founder Director, SELCO
Subodh Kerkar, Founder Director, Museum of Goa
Arijit Bhattacharya, Founder Director, Virtual Infocom
Bappaditya Biswas, Co-Founder of Bai Lou and Byloom

Tea Break

Presenting Best 5 Ideas from Eastern India: 12 noon - 1:30 pm

Moderator: **Suman Mukhopadhyay**, VP & Director, banglanatak dot com

Lunch Break

Final Session: 3 pm - 5 pm

Creating a White Paper on Entrepreneurship as a Social Movement in India

Co-ordinators: **Jay Mitra and Amitava Bhattacharya**.

- Key emerging points from discussion in all the sessions on:
 - Linking entrepreneurship and SDGs
 - Enabling role of technology and innovation in social entrepreneurship
 - Role and function of stakeholders in fostering transparent system of governance
 - Role of social and creative entrepreneurship in changing ways of doing business
 - Social Entrepreneurship as a convergence point for the grassroot and citizen based entrepreneurship.
- Key action points that can be developed on initiating entrepreneurship as a social movement
- Working towards a strategy – setting SMART objectives, priorities, committing key stakeholders, identifying resources and time scales

Speakers, Chairs and Panelists



Jay Mitra

Jay Mitra is a professor of Business Enterprise and Innovation. He has acted as a Scientific Advisor to OECD (Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development). He has held Visiting Professorships with many institutions like Indian Institute of Management Technology in India and School of Management, Fudan University in China.

He has written widely on the subjects of Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Economic Development. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in the UK. He also leads the International Entrepreneurship Forum (IEF) and is a member of the boards of numerous referred journals around the world. He has also worked with various national and international universities like UNCTAD, UNIDO, ASEAN and EU.



Chandra Shekhar Ghosh

Chandra Shekhar Ghosh is the Founder, Managing Director & CEO of Bandhan Bank, the first instance of a microfinance institution becoming a universal bank in India. He is an M.Sc. in Statistics and has attended the HBS-ACCION Program on Strategic Leadership at Harvard Business School. Mr. Ghosh was elected as 'Senior Ashoka Fellow' in 2007 by

Ashoka Foundation. He has won several international and national awards including Forbes India Leadership Awards in the category 'Entrepreneur with Social Impact' and has received the CNN-News 18 'Indian of the Year' award in the 'Business' category. He adorns a number of important chairs like Member of Managing Committee of Indian Banks' Association (IBA) Member, National Executive Committee, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) for the year 2016 - 17, Member, UK - India Financial Partnership (UIFP) Committee.



Ashok Banerjee

Ashok Banerjee is a Professor of Finance at Indian Institute of Management Calcutta. He holds an M.Com. degree from Calcutta University and a Phd. from Rajasthan University. At IIM Calcutta, he is a Senior Professor in the Finance and Control group,

and takes several advanced courses in Finance like Financial Accountancy, Corporate Finance, Corporate Restructuring and Behavioural Finance. He is also the faculty in-charge of the Finance Research and Trading Lab at IIM-C and his primary research interests are in areas of Financial Time Series and Operational Risk Management.



Rajiva Sinha

Rajiva Sinha is the Additional Chief Secretary, to the Government of West Bengal in charge of the Department of MSME&T. He is a Masters in Geology from Patna University and joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1986. His initial service days concentrated on social sector with specialization in primary education and

preventive health. He has worked as the Secretary in the Departments of Cooperation, Food Processing & Horticulture, Govt. of West Bengal. As Program Manager of UNICEF for two stints of 3 years each, he had made notable contributions. Under his leadership MSME and textiles sector have made tremendous growth in the State in the last 3-4 years. West Bengal has recorded highest investment in India by the Banks in MSME sector in the last few years. Around 165,000 MSME and textile units have been set up during the last 5 years. He has facilitated closer interaction with industry and focusing on ease of doing business by reforming the statutory environment in the State. Public policy and planning are his strengths.



Debanjan Chakrabarti

Debanjan is the Director of British Council, East and Northeast India covering 13 states. He has over 15 years of experience in leading education, development and cultural collaboration programmes in India, South Asia and internationally. A triple gold medalist in English literature from Jadavpur University, Calcutta, Debanjan was awarded the Felix

Scholarship for his doctoral studies in the UK where he obtained his PhD in literature and media studies from the University of Reading, UK. Debanjan is one of the trustees of the International Language and Development Conference and sits on one of the research advisory boards of the university of Reading.



Rahul Bhalchandra

Rahul, Co-Founded YLG, a Bangalore based Salon chain along with his better half Vijayanti. He quit his corporate job at Future Group and moved to Bangalore to set up YLG in 2008. He is a Post Graduate from Indian Institute of Management Calcutta and has a B.Tech from Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur. He brings 17 years of experience in diverse

industries such as retail and manufacturing. Prior to founding YLG, Rahul was Head, Wellness business for the Future Group. He built the Health & Beauty Category, set up the beauty salon chain “Star & Sitara” for the company. He was instrumental in setting up India’s first Gym Chain in Malls in a JV with Talwalkars for the Future group. He has also played a key role in bringing about the Sachin Tendulkar - Future Group initiative “Sach”.



Soumyo Mukherji

Soumyo Mukherji pursued his B.Tech. in Instrumentation Engineering from Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, MS in Mechanical Engineering from Colorado State University (Fort Collins, USA) and PhD in Biomedical Engineering from University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill, USA). After his PhD, he joined IIT Bombay in

1997, where he is now a Professor in the Department of Biosciences and Bioengineering. He was the Head of the Centre for Research in Nanotechnology and Sciences at IIT Bombay from 2010-2013, and is currently the Dean of Student Affairs at IIT Bombay. He also holds an Institute Chair Professorship. His research interests are in sensors and instruments for widescale deployment in resource constrained locales for environmental and medical applications, mobile health, security, etc., and instrumentation in general. He has dabbled a bit in the entrepreneurship domain as well, having been a partner in a incubation process for a company (Nanosniff).



Suresh Reddy

Suresh Reddy is the CEO and Chairman of LYCOS. Mr Reddy is an Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur graduate and pursued his MS from Iowa State University. He has been instrumental in getting LYCOS listed in India and bringing in some of the large investors into the company. Before LYCOS he has worked in various roles across different

industries in Fortune 500 companies such as Caterpillar, Chrysler, SBC (PacBell) and Charles Schwab.



Rajamani Venkataraman

Venkataraman received an M.B.A. from Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore and a B. Tech. in Electronics and Electrical Communications Engineering from Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur. He has been Managing Director of IIFL Holdings Limited and serves as its Chief Executive Officer and also has been its Executive Director. He has been the Director at India

Infoline Finance Limited and has an experience of more than 16 years in the financial services sector. He held senior managerial positions in various divisions of ICICI Limited, including ICICI Securities Limited, BZW and Taib Capital Corporation Limited. Prior to this, he served as an Assistant Vice President at G E Capital Services India Limited in their private equity division and as a Member of Advisory Board of IIFL Holdings Limited.



Rahul Johri

Rahul is an Indian Institute of Technology graduate and has pursued MBA from X.L.R.I Jamshedpur. He started his career as a banker with ANZ Grindlays Bank. Over the last 21 months, he has been heading various businesses (Micro Finance, Bank Branches, Retail Lending, SME) at Bandhan Bank. He takes pride in sharing that Bandhan Bank today services over 1.3 crore

customers Pan-India through 886 bank branches, 2560 Micro Finance centres and 386 ATMs.



Ananda Bhoumik

Ananda Bhoumik is Managing Director and Chief Analytics Officer in India Ratings & Research, a FITCH Group Company. Ananda is an engineering graduate from the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, and received his MBA from the Indian Institute of Management Kolkata. His research on the Indian financial system is widely tracked by banks and investors in India and global markets. In

2012, Ananda was a member of Reserve Bank of India's working group that reviewed guidelines on restructuring of loans by Indian banks (the "Mahapatra committee").



Chandradeep Mitra

Chandradeep Mitra is the Co-Founder & Director of Neoleap Business Ventures, Eastern India's premier Startup accelerator. He is a Strategy Coach & Mentor for StartUps & Entrepreneurs, Professor of Marketing, Corporate Master Trainer, Branding & Innovation Consultant, and Social Enterprise Evangelist. He is the Advisor to the Centre for

Entrepreneurship and Innovation at IIM Calcutta and a Charter Member and Secretary of the Kolkata Chapter of TiE, the leading global organization for fostering entrepreneurship. He is often invited as a guest faculty at IIM Lucknow, IIM Indore, IIM Kozhikode, ISB Hyderabad & XLRI Jamshedpur. He has headed the Indian operations of Advertising, Integrated & Digital Marketing, Brand Consultancy & Media Agencies in global organisations like Lowe Lintas, O&M and DDB Mudra.



Harish Hande

Harish is a graduate from the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur and a Masters and PhD from University of Massachusetts, US. He returned to India to start SELCO, an open source, not for profit platform creating solutions linking sustainable energy to poverty eradication. He was chosen by Business Today as one of the 21 young leaders for India's 21st century and he and

his company has also received many national and international awards like

Asia's prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for 2011, Ashden award (2005 and 2007), The Tech Museum Award (2005), Khemka Social entrepreneur of the year 2007 and the Financial Times – Arcelor Mittal Boldness in Business award 2009. Also in 2013, the trustees of University of Massachusetts awarded him with a Doctorate of Humane Letters.



Subodh Kerkar

Dr. Subodh Kerkar gave up a thriving practice in medicine to spend more time and energy on art and founded Museum of Goa (MoG) in 2015. Dr Kerkar found ample material in the endless vistas of beauty that are spread across the land of Goa. His work, therefore, is an attempt to capture the essence of Goa in her various moods, right from the pristine beaches, the

majestic sea smiling under a blue sky, the waving palms and the human figures enjoying the lavish display of nature. He has also won award at Busan Biennale Sea Art Festival 2006. His art works and installations are heavily washed by the inspiration he draws from the ocean, both literally and metaphorically.



Arijit Bhattacharyya

An entrepreneur for over 19 years, Arijit Bhattacharyya is the founder of VirtualInfocom (www.virtualinfocom.com) and India's first Portal on cosplay (www.cosplayseller.com). He is an active advisor and speaker at various national and international platforms about game development, virtual reality, and scale up business, wealth management, startup

ecosystem and IP. He is the creator of India's one of the first Virtual Reality training institute and Virtual Reality lab maker in Middle East and in Mumbai with SP Jain institute. He is also a Corporate Advisory Board Member of few Universities in India. Advisor of three animation and gaming institute in Russia, UK and India. He is the creator of India's one of the first 3D games based on mythology and culture.



Bappaditya Biswas

Bappaditya Biswas is one of India's foremost textile experts and has been creating masterly weaves over the last decade and more, weaves that have redefined Bengal handloom and given the textiles of the state a new look and feel. He has created the brand bai lou as well as the iconic store Byloom in Kolkata. Bappaditya has travelled the world to study the traditions of weaving and dyeing and one of his weaves has

won the UNESCO Seal of Excellence.



Amitava Bhattacharya

Amitava Bhattacharya, a social entrepreneur, an engineering graduate from Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur and Chevening Gurukul Scholar in Leadership & Excellence from London School of Economics founded banglanatak dot com. The organisation specializes in Culture and Development. Its

flagship initiative Art for Life (AFL) is a unique model for addressing development goals and social inclusion and has got global recognition and accreditation from UNESCO, UNWTO and UN ECOSOC. He has also started World Peace Music Festival in Kolkata, called Sur Jahan and in 7 years time, the festival is a destination for music lovers and musicians worldwide. Amitava's passion is innovation, social entrepreneurship and searching for ways to develop people & address developmental issues using culture and to work towards global peace using music and cultural tourism.



Ananya Bhattacharya

Ananya Bhattacharya is an electrical engineer from Jadavpur University and a Commonwealth Scholar with Masters in Sustainable Development from the Staffordshire University, UK. Ananya is Director and Vice President at banglanatak dot com - a social enterprise headquartered at Kolkata and working across India for pro poor growth using culture based

approaches. Promotion of gender rights and sustainable development are key areas of Ananya's work. Ananya participates in international advocacy for integration of culture in developmental planning and policymaking. She has extensive experience in planning, designing and implementing projects for developing cultural enterprise. Ananya leads and manages projects on public education, social and behavior change communication, research and enterprise development. She is a member of the Executive Committee of ICOMOS, India and the Steering Committee of ICH NGO Forum comprising of NGOs accredited to UNESCO 2003 ICH Convention Committee.



Suman Mukhopadhyay

Suman is a Director of banglanatak dot com, a social enterprise headquartered in Kolkata that works on culture-based development. He was involved with banglanatak dot com in its founding days in the year 2000, and has returned to the organisation in 2011 after leaving his corporate career. He has worked extensively over the last few years on business planning, fundraising, and developing grass root enterprises involving

innovative business models that uses traditional goods and skills as assets. He is an advisor to the Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises & Textiles (MSME&T), Government of West Bengal in developing an entrepreneurial Ecosystem in the state. He headed the 'Egiye Bangla' project — the first ever government sponsored business idea reality show on Zee Bangla. He worked closely with key government departments, incubators like IIM Calcutta Innovation Park, and leading Universities and Academic Institutes in Bengal to evolve a more favourable stakeholder network in the State of Startups.

Case Studies on Creative and Social Entrepreneurship

Art for Life (AFL)

The indigenous communities of India have a rich heritage of oral traditions, arts and crafts. But with rapid urbanization and accompanying changes in lifestyle, many of these traditions are dying as a result of dwindling audiences and lack of market. Also, there is little recognition of cultural skills as employable skills in the conventional development paradigm. Consequently, this disconnect has led to lack of interest and investment in safeguarding these traditions, creating a vicious cycle of social exclusion and poverty. While addressing these challenges, banglanatak dot com began experimenting with its flagship methodology, Art for Life (AFL), in 2005. Its mission is to revitalize local culture and traditions and its vision is to synergize cultural and economic development. The primary objective is to revive culturally rich folk traditions as a means of sustainable livelihood and shared resource for community-led creative enterprises.

The key components of the safeguarding process adopted by AFL are inventorying and documentation, augmenting the skill transmission process, capacity building for development of creative enterprises and supporting new innovations, awareness generation and promotion through events and programs, and using the internet and other digital media platforms to protect and preserve the folk art and craft genres.

Interventions based on AFL begin with cultural mapping and inventorying with the participation of rural artist communities. A 'Knowledge Attitude Practice' study is undertaken to assess skill levels and practices, identify the masters and leaders within the artist communities, and understanding the training and capacity building requirements. Participation of traditional exponents in designing skill development programs addresses pitfalls, like commoditisation of culture to suit market trends.

Skill transmission, documentation and awareness generation ensure sustainability of the intangible cultural heritage elements. Special care is taken to revitalize the traditional skill transmission system or the Guru-Shishya or Master-Apprentice model, and the mobilization of young people to make them learn their traditions and history from the living heritages. Documentation undertaken by living masters provides crucial tools to strengthen the skill transmission process and revive lost songs, dances and techniques. The documentation initiatives, thus, not only record history but also strengthen skills and create tools for promotion of the skills. The highlight of this entire process is: engaging the traditional bearers in learning about their own culture and heritage is critical in developing viable interventions for sustenance of heritage.

Facilitating direct market linkage is a key strategy for sustaining and augmenting the viability of folk art forms. The AFL methodology empowers the artists with skills and networks to reach out to wider audiences. Capacity building focuses on building of technical capacities for performance in contemporary contexts, like the proper use of mikes, lights, the subtle aspects of performance on stage, and studio recordings, as well as improving the production process.

AFL also facilitates multicultural exchanges, collaborations and exposures to address the challenge of creating new ways and contexts for intangible cultural heritage to flourish. Art Residencies and Workshops, in this context, clearly show how art transcends all barriers of language and culture, and how collaborations support new innovations. Creative interactions between folk artists, craft persons, contemporary musicians, theatre directors, choreographers and designers develop an understanding of the dynamics of culture, geography and society in different environments. In the process, the rural artists gain confidence and get enabled to understand their own cultural context and innovate.

Further, greater recognition and opportunity to travel and interact with other artists at the national and international levels attract and engage youths in safeguarding their heritage. Awareness about and promotion of heritage are also facilitated through participation in fairs, cultural events and festivals, heritage education programs in schools and colleges, and through websites and other social media platforms. Partnership with print and digital media, in this context, plays a key role in spreading awareness.

AFL also stresses on formation of artists' collectives to support the development of community-based creative enterprises. Leading teams are trained in the basic and finer aspects of business, management and finance. Training, in this case, focuses on building financial and digital literacy, and language and communication skills.

Over time, Art for Life not only revitalizes folk art forms and empowers the artists with skills and networks, but also rebrands artists' villages as vibrant cultural hubs.

Folk Art Centres established in these artists' villages work as centers of practice and promotion of the arts and crafts. Village festivals, organized to celebrate the art forms, help create new contexts for performance and new audiences. And, in the process, the artist villages gradually emerge as local growth poles and destinations for heritage education and cultural tourism.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has documented this model of developing community-based cultural tourism in artist villages as a good practice for promotion of responsible tourism.

Between 2005 and 2017, Art for Life has covered over 30,000 families of folk dancers, singers, theatre groups, storytellers, mat weavers and crafts persons. The initiatives have been supported by the ministries of Culture, Rural Development and Enterprise Development at both the national and state levels, and also by the European Union and the U.S. Department of State. The state government of West Bengal has adopted the AFL methodology to work in collaboration with UNESCO and integrate culture in development planning and programming.

The AFL model of development has also been awarded as a good practice by the World Bank-supported Bihar Innovation Forum-II. banglanatak has a national partnership with UNESCO, New Delhi, for rollout of the model. Advocacy for recognizing cultural skills as an asset for development is underway at present in different states of India.

Safeguarding efforts undertaken with AFL have led to the revitalization of several art forms and an impressive increase in the number of artists and craft persons. Especially significant has been the increased participation of younger generations in pursuing their age-old traditions. The rural artists now enjoy greater recognition, respect and demand among their own communities and their neighbourhood. This has also resulted in more opportunities of performance and sale of art and craft works.

Initiatives undertaken with AFL methodology have resulted in a five to 10-fold rise in the income of most artist communities. Since the majority of the artists involved, around 60%, are women, AFL has directly resulted in women's empowerment. They now have a much greater say in matters concerning their families, community, economic empowerment and mobility.

Meanwhile, strengthened networks have resulted in multicultural collaborations with academics, festival organizers and other artists. More than 300 rural artists have travelled to countries in Europe, Africa, North America and other parts of Asia to participate in events and workshops. International cooperation and collaboration has truly empowered entire communities and proved that artists' travel to foreign countries is not an expense but an investment. Simultaneously, recognition as artists has led to social inclusion and greater interest in the development process, resulting in non-monetized outcomes like the artist families investing more for education of their children, improved health and sanitation at home and villages, and discernible improvement in environment and quality of life.

We would now like to share six stories that reflect the unique journeys of six rural artist communities of Bengal. All of them were abjectly poor, marginalized people, struggling to sustain themselves, bereft of any recognition as artists till a decade back. Today, however, they are artist villages, sustainably run by the community through performances, painting or craft-making, hosting festivals celebrating the art forms. These villages also showcase a unique model of developing cultural tourism based on intangible heritage. They are now destinations frequented by people from cities in India and beyond — artists, musicians, art lovers, graphic designers, fashion experts, photographers, students, and the discerning tourists who are not just interested in travel but also cultural and aesthetic enrichment!

- Naya is the village of a community of scroll painters-cum-storytellers. They are actually painters, lyricists and singers, all rolled into one. The art form is called Patachitra and the artists Patuas.
- Bikna and Dariyapur are villages of an artist community that flourishes in Dokra, a primitive craft of lost wax metal casting. Their products are adored and treasured for their intricate designs and color.
- Nanoor is a village of weavers who specialize in making quilts called Kantha. It is a centuries' old tradition and an exclusive women's domain. Kantha products are known for their softness and elegance.
- Kushmandi is known for its wooden masks which are traditionally used to perform Gomira folk dance. The wood, the craft and the masks' looks, designs and color have earned the art form an enviable reputation even among European greenwood experts.
- Charida is the village of an artist community that specializes in making ornate masks used in Chau — a vigorous, acrobatic dance that has its origin in traditional martial arts. It is a popular folk dance of the indigenous people of Chotanagpur plateau, which is spread across central and eastern India.
- Gorbhanga is a village of Baul-Fakirs, a community of traditional, wandering balladeers who sing simple but deeply philosophical songs that preach love, peace, tolerance and universal brotherhood of man, casting aside all barriers of caste, creed and religion.

ART FOR LIFE: APPROACH



A New Dawn at Naya: A Scroll Painters' Village

It was 2004. In the dusty, non-descript village of Naya in Pingla block of Paschim Medinipur district, there were just eight Patuas who practiced the ancient art of scroll painting called Patachitra among the village's 60 families. Even a cursory glance revealed that Patachitra was an endangered art form.

While asking for directions to the Patuas' village, the first reaction one would get was one of utter dismay and disbelief — "Why do you want to visit that beggars' village!?" However, a few steps ahead, one came across a motley group of people returning home, clutching a few objects in their hands. After some persuasion, they divulged that they visit the nearby villages with the Patachitras of the eight Patuas of Naya. There, they sing songs to narrate the stories painted on the Patachitra scrolls while unfurling them before their kind-hearted neighbors who, in return, give them small quantities of rice and pulses, barely enough to survive on. Stepping into the Patuas' village what struck first was the tell-tale signs of extreme poverty all around.

As the dialogue with the Patuas and their fellow villagers progressed, it came to light that the Patuas had little income from their art. There were only a few retailers who visited Naya, and that also infrequently, to buy their paintings at prices ranging from Rs 100 to Rs 400, virtually a pittance!

Cut to 2010. As Naya hosted its first village festival, 400 people from Kolkata and 2,000 people from nearby villages and towns were in attendance. The village had undergone total transformation in terms of look and environment. Many guests stayed overnight at the village.

Asked about his main realization at that juncture, Patua Yakub Chitrakar said, "For the first time in our lives, we are seeing that even our fellow villagers are interested in watching our Patachitra!"

In 2011 there was political turmoil and fewer visitors from Kolkata. But what surprised all was the huge local turnout during the festival days, and they ensured that the sales figure crossed Rs 4 lakhs, an unthinkable achievement at the time! It also showed that villagers had started buying Patachitra!

In recent years, Naya's Patuas have carved out a niche for themselves in both national and international art markets. Two Patuas, Bahadur Chitrakar and Anwar Chitrakar, have painted a mural on the life of Vaishnava social reformer Chaitanyadeb for the Indian Museum in Kolkata. In 2009, a Polish artist visited Naya and taught the Patuas the art of installation and usage of space. In late-September 2017, Patachitra was chosen as the theme of a

community Durga Puja pavilion in Kolkata and it was brought to life by a team of seven Patuas from Naya led by Swarna Chitrakar.

Today, the average monthly income of a Patua family in Naya hovers between Rs 10,000 and Rs 60,000. Naya has its own association of Patuas also. It is called Chitrataru. Formed in 2013, it had Rs 3 lakhs in its coffers when it embarked on organizing the 2017 edition of the village festival in November.

Post-demonetization, demand for digital currency and transactions has seen a steep upswing. Realizing the changing trend, Rupsona Chitrakar, a 24-year-old woman Patua from Naya, promptly bought a card swiping machine that put her in good stead in fairs and festivals.

Naya's success has inspired Chandipur, another Patachitra cluster, 40 km away in Purba Medinipur district. A group of Cultural Studies students and professors from Italy visited Chandipur in September 2017.

A specialty of Naya's Patuas is that they use natural colors made from vegetables and flowers. They are now imparting these skills to the Patuas of Chandipur.

By the end of 2017, Naya also acquired the distinction of sending 26 Patuas abroad to participate in events and workshops! Some had made four to five foreign trips by then!

Looking back, one realizes that the initiative that started at the grassroots and individual capacity building combined to lift Naya from the status of beggars' village to one of a vibrant cultural entrepreneurship hub. Significantly, women are the vanguard of this change and, incidentally, they are all Muslims! Religion per se has failed to suppress the passion of Patuas though orthodox Islam has inhibitions about figurative paintings, public singing by women and women's mobility. And here lies Patachitra's success! The young Rupsona visited Denmark in 2017, while the veteran Swarna made her 12th foreign visit, and her fifth one to the United States, in the same year!!

From Drudgery to Fame: Evolution of Dokra Hubs Bikna & Dariyapur

In 2012, the villages of Bikna in Bankura district and Dariyapur in Bardhaman district had three challenges in common: grinding poverty, all-encompassing filth, and an abysmally low level of literacy among villagers!

Few outsiders visited Dariyapur. The living condition in Bikna was worse. It was a very congested slum. Also, both villages lacked proper sanitation. The government had constructed a few toilets but there was no water supply! Dilapidated walls and smoke all around marked the life of Bikna.

However, both Bikna and Dariyapur had one more thing in common, something that would steer them out of that round-the-clock nightmare in the years to come. It was Dokra, an ancient craft of metal casting done through the lost wax method. There were quite a few families in both these villages who were continuing this ancient art tradition, something they inherited from their forefathers.

The pitiable plight of the two villages and the villagers' skills in Dokra attracted the government's attention and, in 2013, the Department of MSME&T decided to develop rural craft hubs at both places, as a part of a joint initiative with UNESCO and Art for Life methodology was adopted.

Cut to 2017. Every child in Bikna and Dariyapur are now going to school. There is no sign of that haunting black smoke anywhere around. There are proper toilets and they are functional! Dokra artist Haren Karmakar visited France in 2015 to showcase his creations. Dokra artist of Dariyapur Subhash Mondal had been to the United States and Muscat to exhibit his art works and skills. The young Dokra entrepreneur, Subho Karmakar, of Dariyapur visited Denmark during the year and was proud to declare that his yearly business volume had crossed Rs 13 lakhs! And Dariyapur & Bikna hosted their third annual village fair in October.

People from several places now visit the Community Museum at Bikna. Veteran Dokra artist Haren Karmakar's leadership has played a significant role in the socio-economic transformation of Bikna. The rural artists' efforts, coupled with the government's timely support, did the trick and ushered in the metamorphosis of the two traditional Dokra hubs.

Chau & Purulia: Celebrating the Dance of Life as Livelihood

banglanatak dot com is familiar with Purulia since 2002. It was a time of political upheaval in the district. The town of Purulia was strewn with garbage. But on the way to Ranchi from Purulia, there is the village of Joypur and the Knashai River, and Jhumur songs on its bank and Chau performances under an open sky on a full moon night at the place is still as romantic as ever!

The entire district of Purulia has been suffering from acute poverty and neglect. Most villagers were into bidi-binding, their main source of income because agricultural work lasted for barely two months a year and that too depended on a good monsoon. The average income of a bidi-binder at the time was Rs 19 for one and a half days' work. Tuberculosis was a collateral damage inflicted by the bidi industry and it was part of every household.

During one of the visits during those days there was this eye-opening anecdote of an interaction with an old woman and during a conversation, she revealed that the last time when she had her last full meal on her wedding day! They survived on grounded maize kernel.

But then, there were about 20 Chau dance groups in Purulia who practiced the art form regularly at the time. The martial and acrobatic dance is an integral part of the cultural heritage of the people of Chhotanagpur plateau, including Purulia. The groups used to do 20 to 50 performances a year. It was during this time that banglanatak dot com came to know Jagannath Chowdhury, a resident of Maldi, a small village in Balarampur. Jagannath was a member of Padmashree recipient Chau dancer Nepal Mahato's group. After extensive discussions with Chau artists like Jagannath, Dhana Mahato and Binadhar Kumar, banglanatak finally started its work in Purulia in 2004.

Cut to year 2017. Purulia's Chau is in the UNESCO's Representative List of Heritage of Humanity. There are 320 Chau troupes in Purulia now and every troupe has around 25 members. As Chau performance requires masks and they need to be changed every 3-9 months (the artists call it 'season'), many had made Chau mask-making a livelihood. The village of Charida has become a throbbing hub of Chau mask-making and business is on the upswing. Charida has also evolved as quite a vibrant tourism destination. Different villages of Purulia now organize fairs during the Holi festival, the first one took place around 2004 at Deulghata, Jaypur. Significantly, despite being just a six-hour journey from Kolkata, most of the city-dwellers were oblivious to the beauty and cultural richness of Purulia for years. The annual

Chau-Jhumur Utsav in Bamnia now sees a daily footfall of 10,000 plus.

By 2017, Jagannath Chowdhury travelled abroad nine times to showcase Chau. A German journal sent him some Euros as a Christmas gift and he started an all-girls Chau troupe with the money. Moushumi Chowdhury leads a girls' Chau team. A Folk Art Centre is also being developed. Veteran Chau artist Binadhar lives in Bamnia. A small resource centre was developed at the place by banglanatak in 2010. Binadhar's troupe now performs around 280 shows a year and Binadhar is a doyen of Chau in Purulia.

The average monthly income of the artists is now around Rs 10,000. Some of the senior artists earn up to Rs 35,000 a month. For the Chau artists, the scourge of tuberculosis is today a distant memory and so are bidi-binding and Maoist activities. Within a span of 13 years, the entire district has transformed into a throbbing cultural hub and Chau has been the game-changer. If Jagannath Chowdhury is the leader of today's Chau in Purulia, the future waits for budding talents like Moushumi. After Birsa Munda University introduced Chau courses, Moushumi had bagged their first prize!

Nanoor: Where Women Weave Their Way to Freedom

It was the beginning of 2006 when an interaction with Kantha weaver Tajkira Begum prompted banglanatak dot com to visit Nanoor in Birbhum, an hour's drive from Santiniketan. Incidentally, Nanoor was the birthplace of legendary Vaishnav poet-philosopher Chandidas but, in modern times, it is better known as a politically volatile area.

In 2009, political violence led to many deaths in Nanoor. Women faced much abuse and violence. But even in the middle of such a scenario, there was hope in the fact that around 3,000 women were into the art of weaving Kantha. The ground reality, though, was harsh and a Kantha saree that fetched Rs 10,000 in the city would give the weaver barely Rs 300, with the rest of the money making its way to the pockets of middlemen!

Those were the times when Lovely Bibi, a successful Kantha weaver-entrepreneur of today, was thrashed by her husband after she asked him for a small bottle of hair oil and a comb; and the husband of Amina, another successful Kantha weaver of today, had acid thrown on her face after a petty argument. It is another story that Tajkira showed these women a way out of that nightmare with their weaving skills, while another Kantha weaver, Afrunnisa, taught them to stand up against domestic abuse!

Cut to 2017. Tajkira visited Lithuania in July and France in September, Lovely visited Denmark, and Lovely's daughter Rini travelled to Muscat to showcase their creations. Rini now has 50 women working for her enterprise. The average income of Nanoor's Kantha artists has risen from Rs 300 to Rs 10,000. Tajkira's monthly income has almost touched six digits. Amina is a regular supplier to several boutiques in the cities. Her creations were part of a fashion show in Goa in November. Above all, Nanoor's women weavers hosted their third annual village festival with great aplomb!

It is indeed heart-warming to look back and recollect how Kantha, a traditional skill, helped these women evolve and overcome the myriad problems they faced both within and outside their homes. Today, they are not only self-sufficient and meeting their own as well as their families' needs, but are also travelling all over the world with the pride of a successful artist!

Gorbhanga: Hub of Baul-Fakiri Soul Music

In 2004, not a single rickshaw-puller would take anyone to the "village of the Fakirs" after sundown and if anybody asked anyone for directions to the village, the answer would be stoic silence, followed by, sometimes, a single line of exclamation — "Why do you want to go to that robbers' village!?"

But a visit to Gorbhanga would validate such behavior! It was a dirty village with a dimly lit small Akhra from where the smoke and smell of marijuana billowed and engulfed the entire place... the sources of income for the men in the village ranged from cheap daily wage labor to adulterating country liquor and mugging... but there was live music too!

Akkash had deadlocks and a broken voice, and Armaan, who also had deadlocks, was the "Knowledgeable Fakir". But even Armaan's day would start at 4 in the morning with a bout of smoking pot! Growing marijuana was quite a thing in the area at the time. There were just 12 Fakirs who practiced music irregularly but marijuana was a part and parcel of each of their lives!

Cut to the year 2012. Simon Broughton, a renowned journalist and filmmaker, visited Gorbhanga. Later, in his TedTalk (2015), he mentioned his observations — a clean village, beautiful music, annual festival, the pride of neighbors... that was Gorbhanga! He was meticulous in detailing the socio-economic transformation that music brought to the once hopelessly marginalised village.

Today Gorbhanga has concrete houses. The entire village has undergone a makeover which Broughton had observed in its initial phase in 2012. An initiative undertaken by the Fakirs of Gorbhanga is underway since 2016 for skill development of Baul-Fakiri singers and musicians in the nearby villages of Hariharpara and Jalangi located in neighbouring district of Murshidabad. Babu Fakir is playing a significant role in this. In November 2017, for the first time, the Gorbhanga Mela was extended to these 2 villages, along with the workshops.

Among the younger generation singers, Babu Fakir participated in the Copenhagen Music Festival in Denmark in 2017. He has already been invited to perform at the Urkult Festival in Sweden in 2018. Efforts are also being made to start an internet radio station in Gorbhanga to directly upload the music of the Fakirs! However, it is Golam Ali who is one the best-known Fakirs and an internationally respected musician. He is the poster boy of the West Bengal Government's artists' schemes.

For the world musicians who visit India, Gorbhanga is now the Mecca of Music. Marijuana is hardly there at the ashram in Gorbhanga and the initiative was taken by the Fakirs themselves because smoking had started taking a heavy toll on their voices. Akkash is now in charge of the ashram. He visits many European countries for at least 15 days every year to perform with Pandit Tanmoy Bose and other reputed musicians. Almost 80 musicians practice every evening at the ashram in Gorbhanga today. There are accommodation facilities for visitors as well. Weekend training for next generations have started. Internet Radio is linked to the Akhra and songs are broadcast daily.

From a robbers' village in 2004 to the Mecca of Music in eastern India, from being irregular music practitioners to professional musicians — it has been a remarkable journey for Gorbhanga, nothing short of a man-made miracle!

With fame and prosperity, sanitation has also made its way into the village. There are 3-4 toilets in every household, keeping in mind the number of visitors they cater to round-the-year! The change has also attracted the youth and they are now taking up music in the right earnest.

In 2015, the Superintendent of Police of Nadia district had noted that because of it being close to the Bangladesh border, the crime rate was also very high at Gorbhanga and around. But today, it is quite a safe place. And here lies the real success of Gorbhanga!!



Kushmandi: Where Wooden Masks Tell Tales of Success

It takes 25 minutes by car from Kaliaganj to reach Kushmandi's Ushahoron Crossing and then Mahishbathan village in Dakshin Dinajpur district in north Bengal. Kushmandi and its nearby places are full of traditional artist communities who are into making Wooden Masks, Dhokra, Terracota, Khon music and Mukha dance. The handicraft artists of Kushmandi have long been a regular feature at the Kolkata Hastashilpa Mela (Kolkata Handicrafts Fair), alongside the Bamboo Mask makers of Baisyapara.

In 2013, the Wooden Mask makers were included in the Rural Craft Hubs (RCH) project of the West Bengal Government. Altogether 60 people started making Wooden Masks after a round of skill development training. Tulu Sarkar, son of Late Sankar Sarkar, was one of those who underwent the training. Sankar was the undisputed Guru of the Wooden Mask makers of Kushmandi till he died in 2015.

In 2016, UNESCO representatives from Norway, Malaysia and England visited Mahisbathan. In 2017, woodcraft experts from Norway and Britain visited Kushmandi for an exchange-collaboration.

A senior artist Shankar Das travelled to London and Paris in 2016 to showcase his masks. In 2016, Dhokra, Terracotta, various bamboo products and Khon was added the ambit of the newly conceived Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs (RCCH) project, and Dakshin Dinajpur district was included in the project because of Kushmandi. Almost 500 artists underwent training at the newly set up Folk Art Centre in Mahisbathan.

Paresh Sarkar's leadership and the technical skills of Tulu Sarkar, Sankar Das and Jaga Baishya catapulted Kushmandi to the cultural map of West Bengal. An artist's average annual income till a few years back is now their monthly or 10 days' income! Surprisingly, this change happened over just four years!!

The demand for Wooden Masks is so high now that often the artists refuse to take orders because of time constraint. Their masks today have carved out a niche for themselves in the high-end craft exhibitions across the country also!! Kushmandi's Mukha Mela is now a destination for culture lovers.

Conclusion

With an enviable treasure trove of multi-lateral experience in working with rural traditional artists and craft persons' communities, governments and international organizations and agencies over 17 years, banglanatak dot com believes that it is high time to build an institutional model to continue the good work and provide a long-term foundation for culture-based development and cultural enterprises at the grassroots level.

It is a challenge that the notion of community empowerment — in which the solidarity of a group based on its identity can be the path for individual empowerment — is yet to be accepted. But, above all, marginalisation itself remains the biggest challenge in the entire discourse because the mainstream is not actively interested in the arts, crafts and culture of the indigenous people. We sincerely hope that this seminar would kick-start a movement towards achieving this.

Some of the possible initiatives for the future are as follows:

- An overarching Folk Entrepreneurship Institute where culture is seen as the primary catalyst for identifying, implementing new, innovative social and economic opportunities by facilitating participation of traditional Gurus as faculty
- Introduce culture as a belief system and a capabilities development agenda in the study, research and action learning programmes of the Institute
- Involve village communities and artists as key stakeholders together with education, research, technology and enterprise support providers
- Its high time to look for impact, rather than just doing activities. Enough evidences do exist to include Culture as an effective Development tool
- Work towards the development of an Arts and Entrepreneurship Council to help boost creative economy and create a space for new policy development
- Use CSR, crowd funding and technology platforms to establish the Institute's resource base



Naya



Bikna & Dariyapur



Nanoor



Kushmandi



Purulia



Gorbhanga



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