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Translating bidri craft to interiors

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ABSTRACT

The national design policy of India encourages the active involvement of designers from various fields in the development of traditional and local crafts and designs. The strategy is to create a platform for creative design development. This research constitutes the same as an interior designer or an architect can engage and create a craft-based design environment that can strengthen and generate opportunities for both the domains by recognizing Indian crafts and craftsmen in multi-dimensions. Through this paper, the intent is to emphasize the implementation of craft culture in interior architecture to enhance the culturally sustainable environment. It concludes with the possibilities of the impact of such models.

Keywords: Metal, Interior, Craft, Built Environment, Culture, Techniques, Social Sustainability, Structure, Surface, Community

1. INTRODUCTION

The perception of craft in Indian culture is as diverse as the practice itself. Crafts manufacture and its purpose can be identified by the culture which produced them. Crafts originated with necessity as an integral part of the lives of the people who created and used them. Later, they became an expression of their lifestyle and culture at a given time. India being home to many civilizations has a history of rich craft practices. Many of which are reflected in traditional buildings showing the in India reflect the close association of craft practices and architecture in India. This link between the two slowly started fading with the industrial reforms introduced by colonization. The traditional view of artisanal production was considered limited and in contrast to the efficient new technological industrial products. The formal distinction of craft, art and design emerged. Craft was now considered sector which was dying many, initiatives were taken to bring back craft.

Colonization, then industrialization and finally globalization shifted the paradigm for craftsmen and their products in terms of market, sustenance and livelihood.

The paradigm shift is evident with initiatives taken to sustain the craft from celebrating them.

“Architecture is an art when one consciously or unconsciously creates aesthetic emotion in the atmosphere and when this environment produces well being.”¹

Luis Barragan

“To provide meaningful architecture is not to parody history, but to articulate it.”²

Daniel Libeskind

Interior architecture is a multi faceted approach towards creating a built environment and the process involves different design layers which can be strategically used to create a space which creates an experience and builds a relationship between people and the built environment. It creates a sensory experience. Interior space making is an expression of self and therefore synonymous to the craft practices. Using interior design as medium to sustain age old crafts will generate opportunities for these crafts communities. The design development can accommodate craft as a part of the process rather than making it look superimposed. The process not only accommodates the product but also acknowledges the craftsman, generates opportunities for them and strengthens the concept of social sustainability.

An attempt has been made to further implement the concept of social sustainability and collaborative design process by integrating Bidri craft in interiors with respect to individual elements, space making and by creating a narrative. Primarily such models will celebrate the craft while sustaining them and redefining their lost place in the 21st century.

2. WHY IMPLEMENT CRAFT

2.1 Social Innovation

“Social innovation aims to co-create services in the context of local communities aiming to improve the quality of life of the people in the said communities. This marks a trend towards collaboration, adopting a craft approach in the context of social innovation self-organizing and collectivism. These communities challenge the dominant narrative or metanarrative (Lyotard 1984)”³

2.2 Social Sustainability

Development (and/or growth) that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population.” Polese M, Stren R, 2000 the Social Sustainability of Cities: Diversity and Management of Change. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, pages 15-16.⁴

3. APPROACH

3.1 Implementation of craft in built environment

Researchers at DICRC, CEPT University have termed coins for space making techniques through craft -

3.1.1 Space Making Craft (SMC): Those building crafts that are directly or indirectly related to the making and embellishing of buildings, elements, furniture and their details. The Applications of the craft in interior can be

- Structure Based
- Structure Integrated
- Structure Clad
- Structure Finish

The craft is the integral part of the product and can range from structural components of interior design like walls, ceilings, doors , windows, interior elements, furniture, ornamentation, hardware, accessories, claddings, highlighters etc.

3.1.2 Surface Narrative Craft (SNC): Those building crafts that deal with the 2-dimensional plane and have surface ornamentation or narrative as its core content. Applications are

- Surface Integrated
- Surface Clad
- Surface Finish

Such implementation can be for aesthetic, protection or decorative purposes. Design statements are more apparent in surface integration.

3.2 Adaptation Of Craft

Designs, products, objects are inspirations from the practices and designs unique to the craft. These new designs can contribute to the peripheral preservation of the tradition. Adaptations can be structural and surface designs; they allow the craft to exit in hybrid form.

SWOT ANALYSIS

A.STRENGTHS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing models of the practice • Design flexibility • Worldwide recognition of craft • Skilled artisan community • Rich collection for inspiration • E-network 	B.WEAKNESSES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not cost effective • Time consuming • Lack of technology
C.OPPURTUNITIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness • Skill transfer • Growth for craft community • Increase in demand for craft • Craft based design model 	D.THREATS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality decrease • High cost of production

4. BIDRI AND BIDRI WARE

4.1 Origin

The origin of the bidri craft is traced to the Deccani province of Bidr a city in the state of Karnataka. The city is well known for its many sites of architectural, historical and religious importance. Bidri craft flourished in Bahamani dynasty when a lot of artists and architects were brought to the kingdom. Abdullah-bi-Kaiser known as the father of Bidriware was one among them. Oral traditions narrate that metal ware was first brought to India by Sufi Saint Khaja Moinuddin Hasan Chishti (1192A.D) from Iran. Another source suggest the craft traveled when a group of craftsmen moved from Syria to India. Mohammad gawan was was the chief minister under the prince Aladin Bahamnai under whose reign bidri flourished greatly, madarsas were set up for artist and craftsmen. These

pieces were in great demand in various parts of the world. Trade was established between south East Asia, Africa and Europe. Even After its annexation to Bijapur sultanate, Bidar still remained the main centre of this craft, but from about 1770 A.D. it spread to other places like Lucknow of Awadh. Bidri-craft was exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851 at London and Paris Universal Exposition in 1855. It got highly appreciated in Europe.

This is an old image of the Great Exhibition in 1851, at Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park where Bidri ware was displayed.

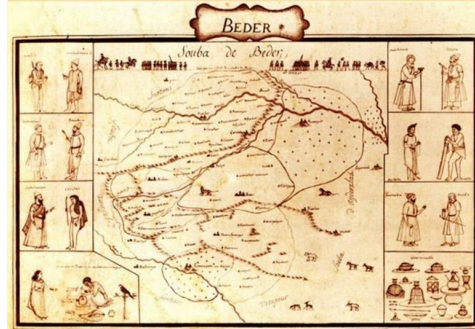


Fig. 1: A section of the map showing Bidri articles produced

4.2 Pattern Designs

“Shapes were determined by their function in Deccani Muslim aristocratic households. A variety of bidri objects were produced which included dishes, abkhora or katora (bowls), aftaba (ewer), surahi (water bottles), pandan and khasdan (boxes for betel leaves), spice boxes, dibiya (small boxes), ugaldan (spittoon), jewel boxes, palang-pae (cot legs), mir-e-farsh (weights for floor covering), shamadan (candelabras), uddan (incense burner), gulabpash (rosewater sprinkler), alam (Shi’a standards), cups with Qur’anic or Shi’a inscriptions in Arabic script, rihal (bookstand), pushtkhar (back-scratchers) and of course, huqqa bases (Mittal 2011:20). “5

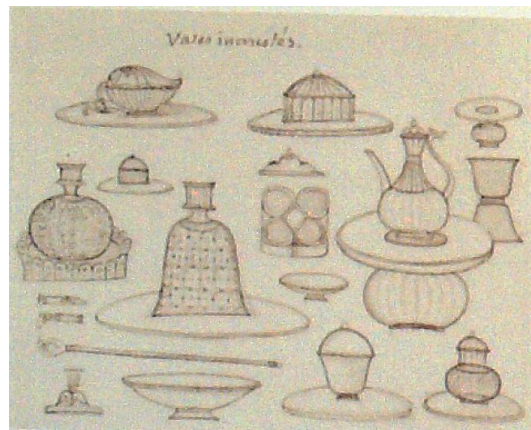


Fig. 2: Different forms of vases and basins from 'souba de bedar map'



Fig. 3: A bidri Surahi with Turkashi work



Fig. 4: A bidri pandan



Fig. 5: Bidri exhibits

Depending on the functionality shapes were changed and production altered with new age needs. Cigar-boxes, ashtrays, vases, cufflinks, fruit bowls and other items made their entry. Some pieces showed a blend of Persian and European design. The metalwork can be broadly classified into:

Teh Nashin: The designs are on the surface of the metal without any relief. The pattern is engraved on the surface of the metal ware and then inlaid with silver.



Fig. 6: Tehnasin Work

Aftabi: Bidri or Mehtabi is sheet metal overlay design and uses metal sheets instead of metal wires to cover large spaces. Only the background of the objects is engraved leaving the design pattern.



Fig. 7: Aftabi or Mehtabi design

Tarkashi: Grooves are made on the object surfaces and then laid with silver wire made according to the respective thickness.



Fig. 8, 9: Tarkashi design on daily use objects

Zarbuland or Zarnishan: In Bidri works is inlay that creates a raised effect. This design was popular in Lucknow, along with double fish pattern.

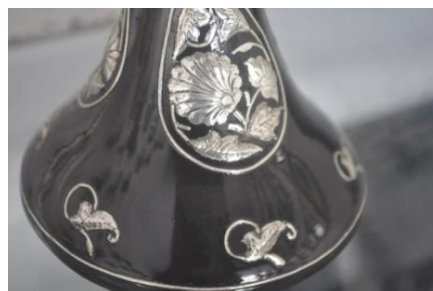


Fig. 10: Zarbuland relief work

The now extinct '**GANGA JAMUNA' BIDRI PATTERN** was done with silver and gold inlays but the process had to be done with utmost care with gold inlay in grooves at the last.



Fig. 11: Gold and silver inlay/ Ganga Jamuna

The design inlay patterns include poppy flowers, *asharfi-ki-booti*, vine creepers, coriander leaf pattern (kothimiri design), Quranic inscriptions, geometric designs animal motifs, human figures etc.



Fig. 12: A bidri bowl



Fig. 13: A Bidri bowl with Lucknowi fish design

“As the taste in Bidri changed, the objects demanded were large flower vases, basins, jugs, mirror frames, picture frames, tables, chairs, buttons, walking sticks, cigar boxes, ink stands and visitors’ card cases”(Mittal 2011:34).⁶

4.3 Making

An alloy of copper and zinc in the ratio 1:16 is used in the manufacturing of bidriware. The deep black colour is a result of the zinc content.

Molding: soil is used to create moulds and this is made malleable using castor oil and resin. The cast piece is formed after the molten metal is poured in this mould and after the casting filing is done for smoothening the piece. A temporary black coating is achieved using copper Sulphate on which freehand designs are etched using kalam (stylus) these are different in sizes and have varied sharpness. Some designs may require correct positioning and compass is used for intricate arrangements. Fine wire, flattened strips of pure silver, gold, bronze (depending upon the design and pattern) are carefully hammered into these grooves. The temporary black coating is removed by filing and buffing.

The bidriware is now ready for the final blackening process. Here, a special variety of soil which is available only in the unlit portions of the Bidar fort is used. It is mixed with ammonium chloride and water to produce a paste which is then rubbed onto a heated bidri surface. The paste selectively darkens the body while it has no effect on the silver inlay. The paste is then rinsed off to reveal a shiny silver design resplendent against the black surface. As a finishing touch, oil is applied to the finished product to deepen the matt coating. The finished product appears black with brilliant silver inlay. artisans tell that identifying good quality of soil from the fort or graveyards is done by tasting it with the tip of the tongue and this knack is passed on from generation to generation. It is supposed to be slightly pungent.



Fig. 14: Crafts making detail from the map of Bidr



Fig. 15: Bidri Crafts men at work

5. BIDRI IN CURRENT CONTEXT

5.1 Availability and demand

“While engraving the envisioned design on an alloy of 94 per cent zinc and 6 per cent copper, Khaleel, a second generation bidri worker, said, “There’s rarely any walk-in business. Foreigners have stopped coming to our shop and thus, we are increasingly looking towards the Internet for attracting prospective customers.”⁷

The demand for the craft has been majorly reduced to government orders and souvenirs for big businesses and events. Launch of e- business models have made the product more accessible to international community. Small jewelry items, home décor products and gift items are easily purchased.

Popular Bidri art gift articles that are very famous include cuff links, paper knives, key chains, and paperweights. Originating from Hyderabad in the state of Telangana, this craft commands popularity all over the world.

Websites like Amazon, Craftsvilla, Ebay, Bidrihandicraft and some government websites has helped increased the income of the artisans and decreased the interference of middleman.

With introduction of craft practices in interiors increases the demand for the products as well as on the craftsmanship and and paves new approaches to the style and attracts others to master the skill. It builds a a relationship between the artisan and the designer.

5.2 Awareness

Art Exhibitions are a good way to promote craft. some exhibitions are sponsored by the Govt of India yet heavy on cost for craftsmen as they don’t cover all expenses. Few exhibitions where Bidri craftsmen constantly go are Delhi haat, Datskar.

Artisans and students have launched initiatives like heritage walks, workshops and documentation of the craft.

“This is not Bidriware. It’s machine printed. Nobody’s hand is so steady,” said Muhammad Yaseen, a craftsman in Hyderabad’s Murgi Chowk area”⁸

Cheap screen-printed pieces are being passed off as hand-crafted Bidriware and lack of awareness has unscrupulous traders are printing the designs onto black plastic or zinc plate. These poor imitations are being passed off as original. Even after bidri being protected by the Geographical Indications (GI) Registry.



Fig. 16: Bidri tableau at a republic day parade Fig. 17: Bidri display at an exhibition

5.3 Craft Community

- Skill gaps** - A lot of the craft practice is ancestral and many of them have inherited the skill. Very less artisans tend to adapt this knowledge. As the chain breaks the transfer of knowledge to new people and other artisans is reduced.
- Education** - lack of defined knowledge transfer from one generation to another leading to decrease of resources as well as interest amongst younger craftspeople. All Indian handicrafts board and export promotion council for handicrafts came up programs kike Artisans training programs and USSTAD project with various benefits such as easy loans, participation in domestic and international fair. The Craftsmark program enables Indian craft workers and craft organizations to take advantage of economic

opportunities in international and domestic markets. It helps in promoting and distinguishing the authentic and non authentic products. Craftsmark increases consumer awareness about handicraft traditions and purchase quality. Education among the craftsmen will give the craft security and their and protect it from imitation because any attempt to duplicate it is illegal under GI registry.

6. DESIGN PROPOSALS FOR BIDRI CRAFT IN INTERIORS

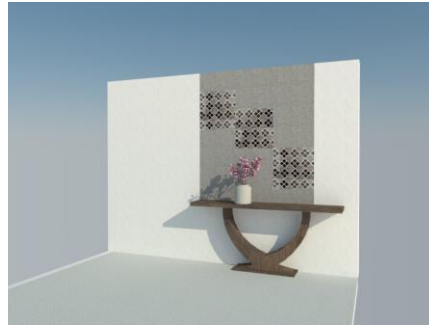
1. This ceiling design is structurally based with combination of a Gypsum board and metal highlighter created using the Bidri craft for interiors and the craft serves as the main component while featuring as an aesthetic element.



2. These structure integrated door designs uses a variety of materials and contrasting designs for metal panels. The craft intergration satisfies both traditional and contemporary themes.



3. After furniture wall tiles are an easy adaptation for surface cladding and finishes hence these highlighter tiles can be adopted as a focal element for a range of colour palttes. The design on the tiles can be minimum and adaptation of other extinct designs as well.



4. wall partitions are versatile and so can their be purposes, from utility to privacy and creating a theme or everything together. The use of tarkashi pattern sheet plates serves perfectly well for drawing attention the structure and diving the room by allowing full privacy.



7. CONCLUSION

Design solutions by interior architects by creative approaches can create demand for products and interior space which are socially sustainable. An attempt has been made to implement the concept of social sustainability and collaborative design process by integrating Bidri craft in interiors with respect to individual elements, space making and by creating a narrative. Primarily such models will celebrate the craft while sustaining them and redefining their lost place in the 21st century. Interpreting and studying the age old Bidri craft and its historical process can help in translating an interior space which can implement the craft in built space with varied approaches, design features and techniques unique to the craft.

The end product is not only an object but a work model which can be achieved by the collaboration of design development of architects and interior designers with strategies and skills of craftsmen. The implementation of the craft can either be designs that are structure based or integrated, surface finishes and claddings along with adaptations of craft features which are now extinct. Impact of such models and its implementation at various scales can strengthen and generate opportunities for both the domains by recognizing Indian crafts and craftsmen in multi dimensions. Such environment celebrates the community while paving new ways for futuristic development.

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