

**Folk and Minor Art in India**  
**Prof. Shatarupa Thakurta Roy**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur**

**Lecture - 43**  
**Need of Paradigm Shift I**

In this lecture, we are going to focus on the possibility that is shifting the existing paradigm for folk art to ensure its sustainability for a longer duration. In this context, we must first focus on the existing plans and policies that we are going through and apart from shifting the paradigm and then slowly try to justify the alternative mediums and as we talked about the alternative context now, it is very important to see whether we can change the medium and cope up with the demands of today's time.

As we discussed in many instances that what can we give to the newer generation, can we bring the older tradition and show them the same thing over and over again and is it possible to show the traditional performances and proliferate the cultural knowledge to the new generation through folk and minor art and the kind of performance that it involves or is it really possible to include that into our regular lifestyle which has changed to a large extent.

So, when the lifestyle is not surviving or altered. The older one is no more than which is tradition because what is happening today is also making another tradition and there is no contradiction as such. Every day, we see that the tradition is getting added and anything as we say that everything changes with time and nothing actually dies, it is only changes and it is like we get a new form to it. So, rather than entering into the philosophy, let us see like what are the policies and other things that we are able to find out from the available information. Folk art forms that survives within the particular lifestyle that becomes its context and if taken out and placed against a different situation then that may act differently and that will result into the delusion of its essential language having been lost in translation. So, when we look at altering the context there are many other things that come into the scene in terms of the policies that we make.

So, I will just talk about one particular instance where it was published in August, 2013, page 4 of the epaper, Hindustan times, Kolkata version 17th August. There it was written that government to create art village for patachitra artists and it is said in the report that

the art galleries has as many as 65 houses, a museum for patachitras and a retail outlet, all these things are going to be set up in Naya village and the work is still on and it is happening in a rapid motion. So, a guest house for tourists the beautification or renovation of all houses in the village, electrification of the village roads, renovation of water bodies and the entry gate to welcome the tourists and this is how the state tourism department wants to develop Naya village in west Midnapore district in West Bengal and a destination for lifestyle tourism is planned there which is converting the informal segment to a formal sector as a government policy.

So, this is fine with the kind of initiatives because Naya gram is still a little out of reach and it is very difficult to reach there through the conveyance are not really up to the mark, but then again according to K G Subramanyan, this can be read or interpreted as an effort to create a cultural pocket, what about the naturalness? How to preserve the natural growth of a culture? As we wondered that whether we are putting them into an artificial surrounding or are they growing in a natural surrounding as such. So, bringing artists to different art styles under the same umbrella in workshops also shows this kind of a risk that within the country and abroad they come and participate in different workshops now and they mix with each other. So, that way when we say that they are in risk to survive in cultural pockets, these are good platforms where they come together and they work and at the same time when they come together, they appreciate and critically look at the other styles that is there, but it is often seen that the artists are very particular about their own style.

For example, the odisha's patachitra painter Bibhu Maharana told me in a personal interview that he often sees Madhubani painting with great appreciation, but he knows that Madhubani painting does not have angularity into it and they are very organic and linear, very free flowing and that is not the characteristic of Odisha's patachitra painting. Whatever interest he takes in that artwork he likes it but he does not practice that or try to combine that particular style with his own traditional training and because of the fact, he knows these are the two different kinds of expression in terms of the elements and it follows two different principles of execution of forms. The making of the forms are very different in these two things which is giving them some distinctive identity and the artist is aware of that and it is a decision from his side not to experiment too much to combine them and come up with a style that can become very hotch potch and confusing for the

viewers. So, these are the individual understanding and there is also kind of policies in two different states but that has happened into the sector of craft where they were very particular in preserving their culture into the small periphery and this is how the scene is.

Bringing artists from different places to a single platform that is one endeavor which is done many a times and then the cultural policies of the government in the post independent era primarily looked into the economic viability related to traditional art and crafts keeping their worldwide popularity in view. They kept traditional art and craft under the government of ministry of industry, trade and commerce to begin with. The ministry of culture supports folk art and at present the research findings show that there is certain amount of in discrepancy into the execution of policies perhaps due to the complexity of the artistic drive that the artists are having.

For example, in Gurusaday Dutta Museum, Kolkata that has a significant collection of folk paintings and it is right now coming under the purview of the ministry of textile because of the fact that there are certain textile examples the Bengal Katha which are preserved there. So, instead of coming under the ministry of culture, they are still coming under the ministry of textile and which is not doing much good to them and it is not identified properly. So, issues are very subtle and intricate and it has to be addressed by the researcher and taken proper measure for it. So, the reason is that they hold a large section with the collection of age old Katha sketch embroidery that was identified by Stella Kramrisch long back. It is something like they were not able to support a good maintenance and the support which is for its conservation and restoration because the kind of support which they are getting is more suitable to preserve the textile works, not so much for the paintings. So, this is very unfortunate in instance.

Then the culture, society and the religious complexity which is another factor that we discussed and it has to be addressed as another issue which is making the entire fiber much more complex. The theme of folk art is not always drawn from religious means and there are some which are derived from the social scandals, the crime stories, the real life incidents and many other secular factors. With comments on social value system and its decline in modern life modernizing as a purpose of certain creation and these paintings gave its makers, the artists a different status in the society as painters cum balladeers. So, they are involved into conveying the social messages as well as talking like working as a pure artist who are free with their artistic expression.

It is a different kind of life where somebody is into the society, working for the society and at the same time they are not into the rigid norms of the society. So, they enjoy a very different status. The syncretic culture and religious plurality to put them midway between Hindu and Muslim in many context especially in Bengal possibly because the wealth and power and the area which was in the hand of the different religious groups that came by turns. They often have both Hindu and Muslim names and observe both customary rights, perhaps to secure their acceptance to different households from both religions because it is needed for them to be accepted by everybody. The community often goes under fundamentalist pressure from all sides to confirm to one or other religious group and that is also very crucial till date. These are the experience shared by many people which I am expressing here.

So, the charm of folk narrative painting lies in the exclusiveness where not two works are similar in spite of the same subject matter and episodes break ups and that is actually mentioned by K G Subramanyan in one context where we see that even when a single painter is working on a single theme. There also we see so much of variation into their creation and then there is no point in thinking that it is getting stagnant. They are not identical at all and they have some commonality in terms of the outer look, but inside they are very dissimilar to each other to give it that kind of an expression each time they are executing it and it is also very unfortunate sometimes to see that when the art works because of its market today is getting widespread. They are picking up the thing and it is like depending on the market and when they find a good market, they are into mass production and most of the time the kind of work which they are producing are very fine and intricate, but there is no expression that is there.

So, the soul of the art is missing in many points and in fact, when we read about the kalamkari of Shakuntala Ramani, she makes the same comment that the art is losing its soul because it is something which is very subjective, very fine to understand that where because of repetition if we do not consider it as the way of expressing our ideas. These are nothing but the visual representation of ideas then there are chances that it might become very repetitive rigid mechanical and it may die untimely death from that perspective

We are now entering to the topic of the need of the paradigm shift. So, there was a time when cinema as a mode of popular entertainment largely took over the culture of folk

narrative oration and painting and the folk painters out of desperation began to move to different professions but off late, there is a realization that bought back the culture. This time it is more responsible in a conscious way and it is not that they are coming back leaving the cinema or any other medium, but they realize the importance of folk art and they saw it from a very different perspective. So, it is no longer an alternative of cinema and cinema is viewed from a very different perspective the other, the theater and the other things and every other medium is finding its own cultural identity.

So, a folk art specially the patachitra paintings, the narratives and there had been a time when it was slightly confused in a state, but slowly it has come back and realized in a very different perspective which is very positive and then as we also discussed earlier that this is all about a practical effort of the field which is explored to shift its traditional paradigm to reach the need of the society. So, I will again quote K G Subramanyan that what is at the bottom of the interest and the fact is that between the visual image which they present and their narrative singing, the part or the special kind of communication art they could be called the comic strips of Bengal village presented with a live commentary. So, the traditional process of making artworks involves preparing the color, preparing the brushes and preparing the ground on cloth or paper or any other surface.

The practice confined to the village has always drawn sources from nature over commercial materials but with the growing demand of the method and material are not restricted to natural sources any further and for all the practical reasons where we are getting acid free papers which gives us better longevity. It is good for the buyer who are buying and trying to preserve it for a longer time and also the colors that are available in the market are very convenient to use. So, why not shifting to that and incorporating that into the folk and minor art and also when the artists are exposed to all these things, they are affordable and are doing it. Also the commercial products ensures durability, a culture is bound to acclimatize to new circumstances but needs cautions not to fall victims of empowered technology and that may cause improper aesthetics to yield from that.

The new medium of execution if explored carefully and restrictively, it may prove to be quite beneficial and the other way it may also lead to danger. So, Kalam Patua for example, stated that he painted on paper that are used for printing newspapers which is the newsprints that are available in the market and found the experience very satisfying

because it has a blotting tendency to it. The papers are low in price and has the right capacity of absorption and very supportive of his style of painting but later he shifted to acid free archival paper as the former hardly had any longevity and his paintings are on high demand and his paintings are sold to customers all over the world now in good prices and thus he should not compromise on the quality of the material which is the practical side of it.

The late Channo Devi, the pioneer of godna painting in Madhubani coated cow dung on the paper as a base and used extracts of flower leaf and seeds to paint. Her style of painting is being carried over by many of her students and follows but her works need thorough restoration as they are losing their luminance over time. They are almost disappearing the kind of material that she used. Moyna Chitrakar is instrumental in demonstrating her ways of making paints to the visitors and at the same time, she cherishes her experience of working for printed books and illustrations.

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So, this is Sita's Ramayana by Moyna Chitrakar and this can be called as a paradigm shift from her painted scroll to the form of a book which is also designed with careful effort. Samhita Arni and Moyna Chitrakar, they worked together on the script and their paintings are mostly done by Moyna and Sita's Ramayan is an imitative from tara books.

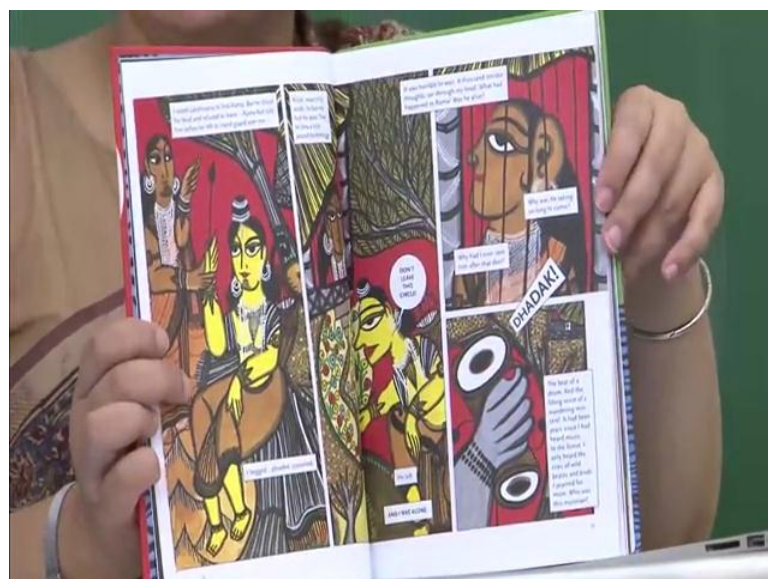
So, this is the first paper where it shows a very beautiful texture which is connected to the story. It is the sea that is all connected to Sita's life and it was the only barrier which put her away.

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Then in the next page, it is very interesting how the characters are all introduced and of course, in this script when the patachitrakars speak about all these things we have seen that they often introduce the characters to begin with and then the story starts and in Ramayan that is hardly needed but see how it is designed in the book.

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This is just an alternative of the existing Ramayan where the script is translated into English and the story of Ramayan is told by Sita, it is her version of Ramayan and everything is translated to fit to the new text. So, this is how Sita's ramayan begins and the story goes on. It is like from a vertical scroll to a book a picture book, a graphic novel which is very well designed by the designers of Tara in collaboration with Moyna Chitrakar. This is how it goes, the paintings are same as Moyna's other paintings and we can see that there is one sound effect DHADAK that is the dugdugi and the beggar comes there and Sita is wondering that why I am taken by this one.

We can see in this picture that Sita's ear is slightly larger and this is a very interesting expression. We can see in the picture that Sita's ear is much larger for this frame. This is an amazing expression that she is alert and she listens to the beggar who is playing the dugdugi, the instrument and asking for alms and it takes her out of the house and that was the great matter of regret for her. She makes the mistake and then finally, she is captured by the demon. So, the kind of drama which is there with the dialogs, it is just an alternative and perhaps it has more appeal and convenience for today's viewer to understand the story because the dialect is a translated dialect and the entire frame is rich with the traditional aesthetics and it is another version of the complete Ramayan from Sita's eyes.

Another very recent example where I talked to Bibhu Maharana and he said that Devi art foundation for their project and they approached him with a question that was actually asked to many artists but it is from his perspective, he said this is the first time I was approached to work on my dream project. They said that you do not worry about the fund and you write a proposal what is your dream project and what would you like to work if you are supported by some funding. You write about it and if it is approved, you are going to get the fund readily.

So, he said that he connected the thing, he just picked up the local boats that are like Raghurajpur which is the part where it is a confluence of the sea and the river there and the boats are a symbol of that place and he wanted to paint to entire boat and also make a wooden character standing on the boat entirely painted. He painted the entire thing on a different surface and from paper and cloth, he shifted to a wooden surface which is also a three dimensional surface, it is not a flat surface. So, this is something that he experimented and he also said that I make sure that I am using the right quality paper and



the material and the quality of the material should be good and one artist has every right to demand that when it is available.

So, the recent example of converting the narrative oration based on art forms, animated films by Nina Sabnani. She has contributed to the revival of the kaavad storytelling of Rajasthan which was popular as an oral tradition in the region of Mewar and Marwar and those who have visited the marketplace of Udaipur must have come across the site of the folk performance where the narrator unfolds the portable wooden shrine with multiple folded panels as they recite stories based on genealogies of their commissioners and we talked about it in the discussion of phad painting in our earlier lectures. So, the formation of such artworks is based on multiple aspects and it is not only the painting, but the making of wooden shrine as a prop and forming a narrative oration that is engaging enough to hold the audience during the performance to give it a completion. An animation film in this case, is an apt alternative of this medium to expose the art forms to a larger audience. So, her works are available in internet and of course, from the regular direct sources.

She has also illustrated many books and it was more like an endeavor to preserve the culture and revive it altogether by giving it alternative paradigm. So, while initiating a change in the existing medium, one must work with great responsibility to examine and understand the context of the art form. The expert should be involved into the project so that it takes the right route because there are always risks of distortion. The salient features which is indicative of its identity, the form and content that determines its style and the way it communicates to its recipients. The folk art forms which we often encounter over glorification and propogative tendencies are connected to its essential humor. So, as we saw in Sita's ramayan that one of the ears of Sita is slightly exaggerated just to indicate that she became alert by listening to the noise that is coming out from the dugdugi or the instrument which we usually see in Shiva's hand and it was the Jogi. Ravan was in disguise of a Jogi, who was playing the dugdugi he approaches in and she reacted to it. Those exaggerations and the expressionistic qualities make it very enriched.

So, this is also very important to understand in this context and there are two things we are coming into and the art forms are being intrinsically connected to the ethnic route which is rich in indigenous flamboyance. Indian modern art has drawn influence from folk art and successfully rebuilt its ethnic identity and that is one thing because it has

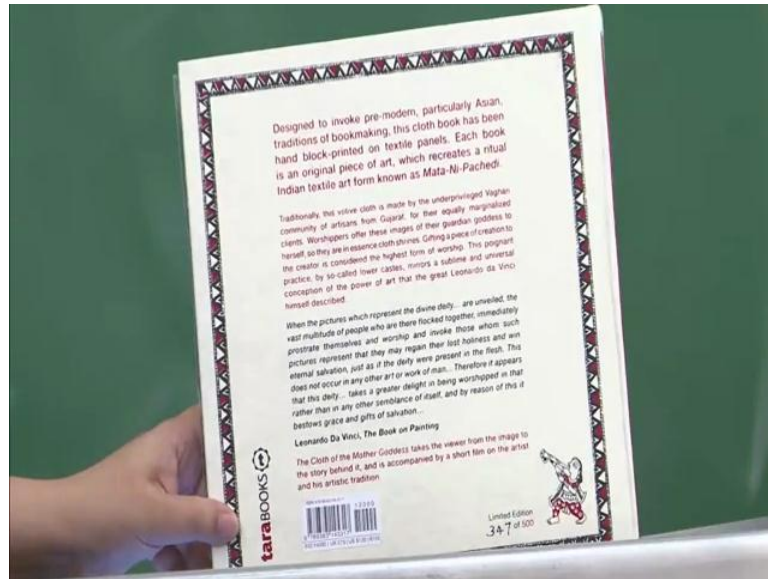
some expressionistic qualities into the rendering, the exaggeration of form the simplification. They are so spontaneous in primitive tribal art, folk art and all these categories and the artists of the mainstream were drawn into it from time to time and today it is like we are standing in one part where we are trying to rename them to some terms so that it gets its appropriate identity. So, a structural and semiotic approach of experiencing the narrative physical and ethical and also the visual contrast of the folk paintings have always benefited the viewers to realize its situate in the contemporary cultural milieu for a very long time.

We will try to see that with the two of the examples as we say it is a paradigm shift. So, there are new endeavors where this wooden shrine that was made by the phad painters that we talked about. The kaavads in the form of kaavad that was very common if we bring the shrine it is like a portable temple that is coming to the marketplace to the public place and there are people who are going and getting the hang of that shrine where there are many doors that will open and each door will unfold a new sequence of the story and that is very popular. Now, there are very few people who would go and spend time and looking at those narratives and other things they will do it occasionally, but kaavads are being made into smaller forms and we are bringing them into the houses for decoration and realizing its cultural value.

Now, I will show you a very recent product by Tara books where they have picked up another tradition named Mata Ni Pachedi which is from Gujarat and as we know that the tradition, it had the combination of block printing and printing. So, the basic drawings are done in blocks by wooden blocks one carves it out and prints it and after that they fill up certain areas with the colors which is similar to kalamkari the dyes now this is one tradition which died because of many different reasons and specially after the earthquake it just happened that you know during the after two thousand all these people they shifted to the main city of Ahmedabad and they are finding it difficult to carry on with their tradition.

So, I will just show you the recent endeavor by Tara books how they have changed the paradigm to very subtle and limited extent and they have come up with another version of it in the form of the limited edition print. So, it is printed in limited edition to maintain the value everything is hand printed and done by the artists themselves and I will show it in the physical form.

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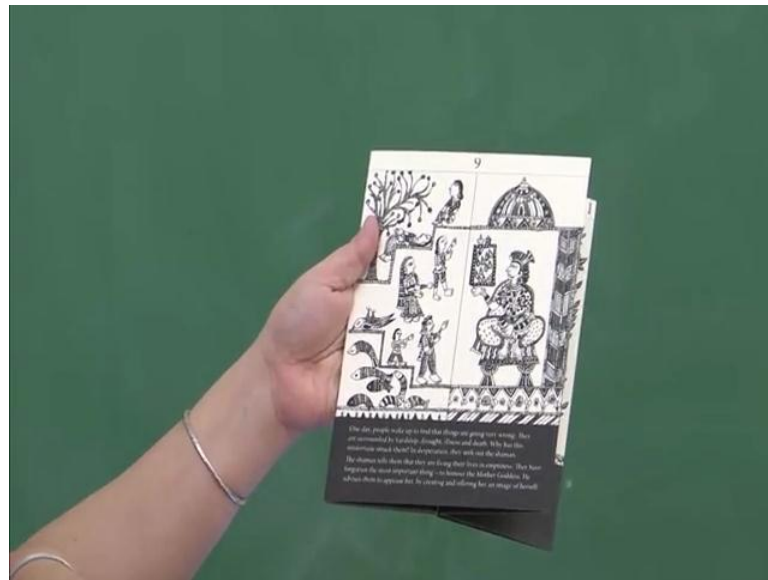


So, this is the recent product by Tara books made by Jagdish Chitara in collaboration with many other designers. The cloth of the mother goddess Mata-Ni-Pachedi, beautifully packed product which adds to the value and a detailed description is written at the back that it is designed to invoke pre modern, particularly Asian traditions of book making, This cloth book has been handblock printed on textile panels and each book is an original piece of art which recreates a ritual Indian textile art known as Mata-Ni-Pachedi. Traditionally, the motive cloth is made by the underprivileged Vaghari community of artisans from Gujarat for their equally marginalized clients. Worshippers offer these images to their guardian goddess to herself. So, they are in essence cloth shrines.

Gifting a piece of creation to the creator is considered the highest form of worship and this poignant practice by so called lower caste mirrors a sublime and universal conception of the power of art that the great Leonardo Da Vinci himself describes when the picture which represents the divine deity are unveiled, the vast multitude of people who are here flock together and immediately posturized themselves as worship and such pictures represent that they may regain their lost holiness and win eternal salvation just as if the deity were present in the flesh. This does not occur in any other art or work of man therefore, it appears that this deity takes a greater delight in being worshipped in that rather than in any other semblance of itself and by reason of this it restores grace and gives a salvation Leonardo Da Vinci, the book on painting.

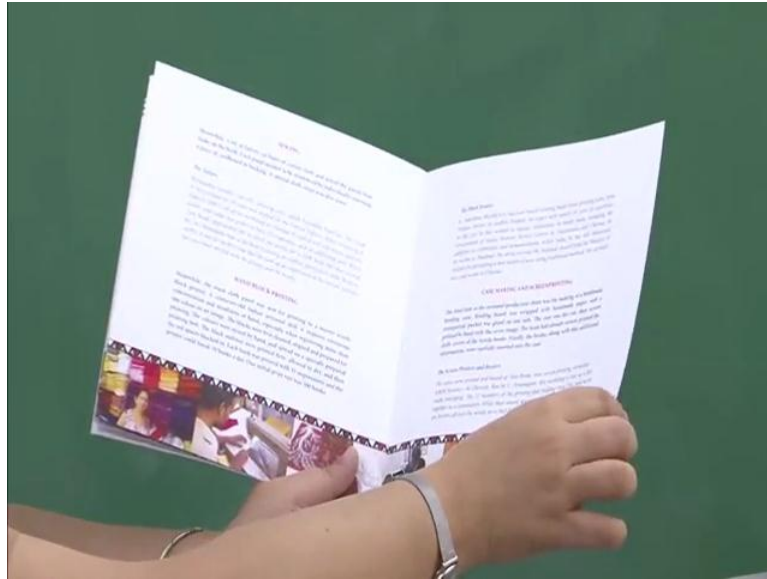
The cloth of mother goddess takes the viewer from the image to the story behind it and in companion by a by a short film on the artist and his artistic tradition that makes it complete. So, it is a limited edition work they have 500 editions and this is the 347th edition of it which I am displaying here.

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Now, what we see here is a simple version of a shrine. It is done in a paper just by the change of the medium. This is getting its identity how the shrine opens its doors and the back. I will just read a little bit. One day people wake up to find the things are going very wrong and they are surrounded by hardship, drought, illness and death and why has this misfortune struck them and in desperation they seek out the shaman. The shaman tells them that they are living their lives in emptiness. They have forgotten the most important thing to honor the mother goddess, he advises them to appraise her by creating and offering her an image of herself and all other details are there in all its pages.

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It is coming with another booklet from ritual art to cloth book, the detailed awareness of the theme and it is about the artist Jagdish Chitara, the tradition about the book, the universality the universal appeal of it form and material about the film. Process and labor then the block making, the detail of the block making is there and the handblock printing, sewing, case making and screen printing and everything that it involves.

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This is a beautiful cover where it is a proper block and combined with silk screen and then comes the actual shrine, the typical tree motives in the complete form.

So, the reason why I demonstrated this was to give you one example which is combining a whole lot of thing that we have been discussing and how to preserve the cultural knowledge, preserve traditional knowledge and it is almost looking at it from the perspective of knowledge preservation where we are preserving the thing in terms of their knowledge, information as well as to its basic ethic. So, it is only the change in the use of material, may be from the block it is coming to the silk screen prints for better longevity for convenience. At the same time, it is maintaining its spirit that this is going to have a limited edition and after 500 editions, it is not going to be available any more. So, it makes it all the more important to preserve it for long and anyway I will also read out quite a few things in this context as we discussed earlier.