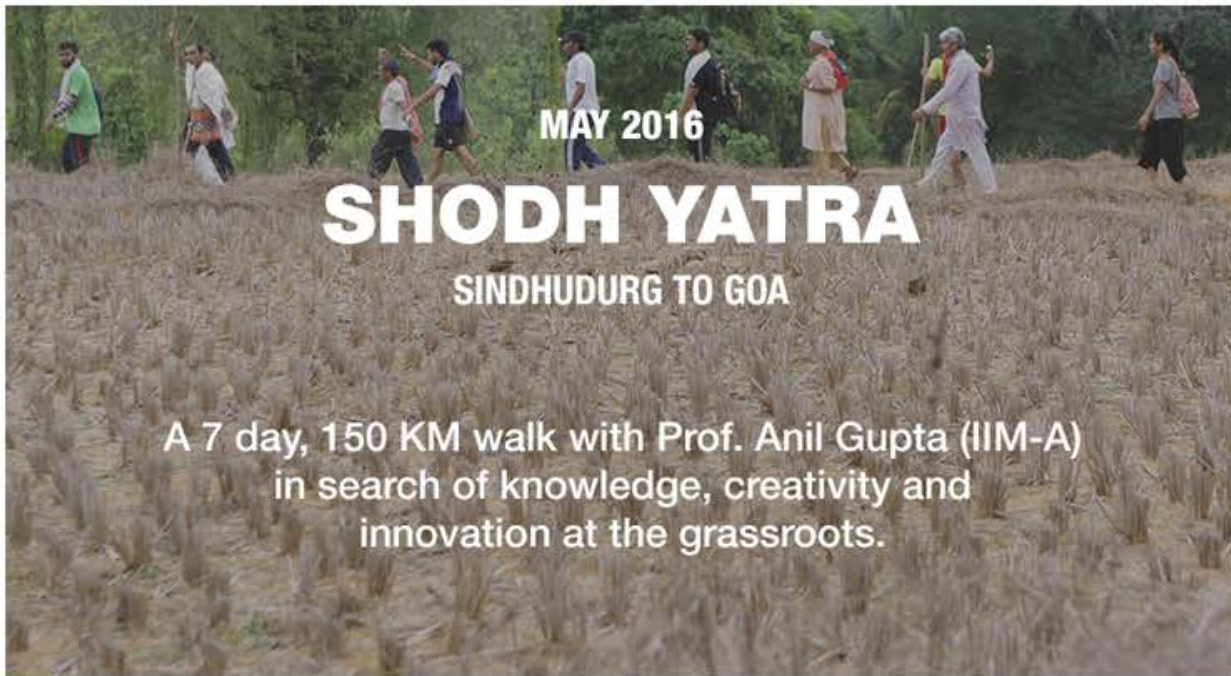




Summer 2016 Explorations

Aswin Yogesh R

July 2016



MAY 2016

SHODH YATRA

SINDHUDURG TO GOA

A 7 day, 150 KM walk with Prof. Anil Gupta (IIM-A) in search of knowledge, creativity and innovation at the grassroots.



JUNE 2016

THANAL

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A series of interactions with Ms. Usha and Mr. Jayakumar, to understand food sovereignty, sustainable resource use and living ecosystems



JUNE 2016

GRAMEEN BANK

DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Two week internship and immersion program at the Nobel Peace Prize winning finance organization founded by Prof. Mohammed Yunus, studying sustainable living and financial inclusion.



JULY 2016

WORKPLACE FABRIC

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

Two week internship to study and document workstyles in London offices and their impact on employee behavior and performance.

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Explorations during internship at Grameen Bank

A Cashless Society

What can a cashless society do to microcredit? High operation costs are cited as reason for the high interest rates of micro loans. This leads to the micro loans being among the most expensive loans in the world while the repayment rates are unbelievably high above 96%. This is a loan officer at work in a Grameen local unit.



Grameen Bank Borrowers

When we asked the members/borrowers through the translator if they have any problems with the Bank (providing the micro loan), this lady shouted from behind. "Ask them (the bank) to reduce the interest rate". With the banks pointing their finger at the high operation costs for the high interest rates, maybe it's not the bank's turn this time. We need a different approach from somewhere else.



Identities

This Grameen member has been borrowing for more than 20 years and has actively helped her family and children in developing new assets. Here she is proudly displaying her grand children who are twins as her daughter-in-law looks on. They are a Hindu family and I was shocked to hear them identify India as their home during the interview. (They didn't know I'm an Indian). I also noticed that the minorities lived in village clusters. Right next to the Hindu village was a Christian village.



Religion

This couple who take care of the village temple invited us in and were very eager to show their religious affiliation.

கோவிலில்லா ஊரில் குடியிருக்க வேண்டாம்?
Wondering how much color human life
will miss without religion.



Poverty

This is a scene captured at Bara Kutra, a 350 year old Mughal monument and Dhaka's largest market. With attacks in Dhaka getting featured everyday both in local and international media, here's my reporting of a friendly streetfight. The city is packed with youth energy and shows great potential to come out of the urban #poverty it is known for.



Microfinance and self-reliance

In a village near Nawabganj in Bangladesh where I spent a day with Grameen Bank members who are potters, goldsmiths and farmers. It is nice to interact with the beneficiaries of the revolution kick started by Prof. Yunus that is now a game changer across the developing world. And, the country is beautiful. :)



Design

When customers don't pay attention, design to grab it. Ideas and innovations happen plenty when the competition is huge and particularly in challenging cities like Dhaka.

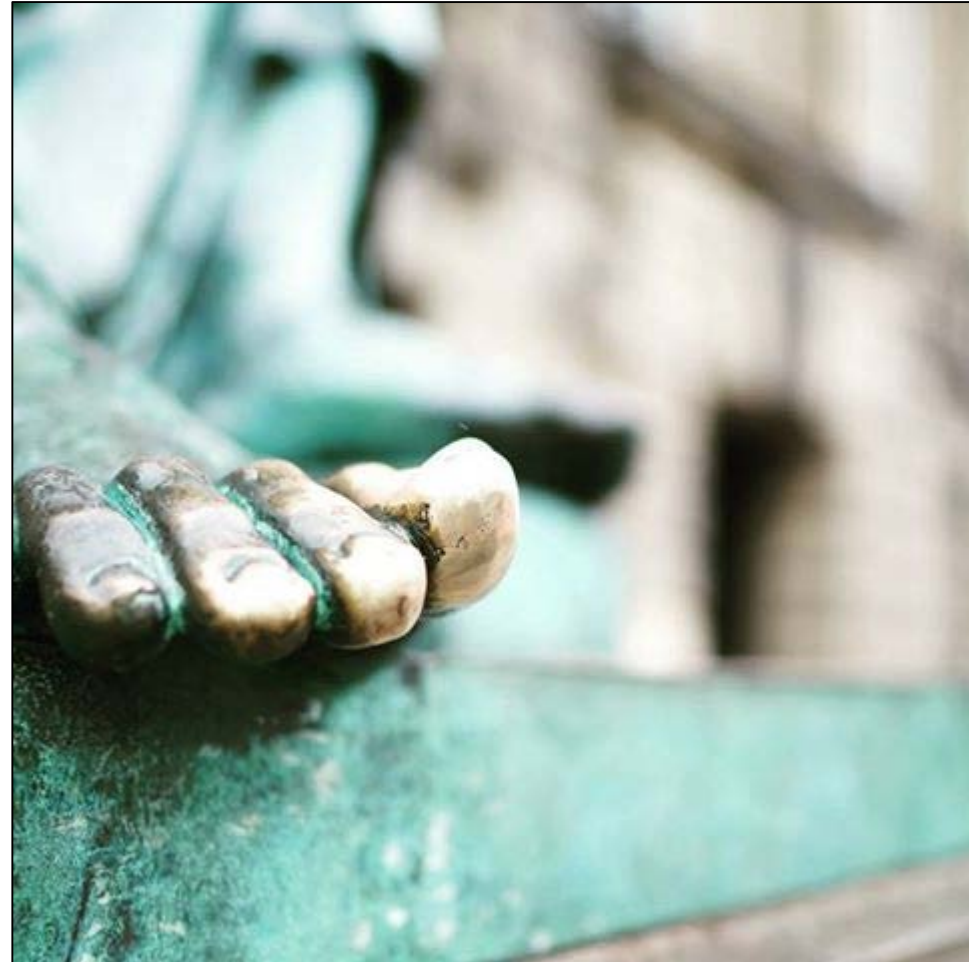


London, United Kingdom

What the west had to offer

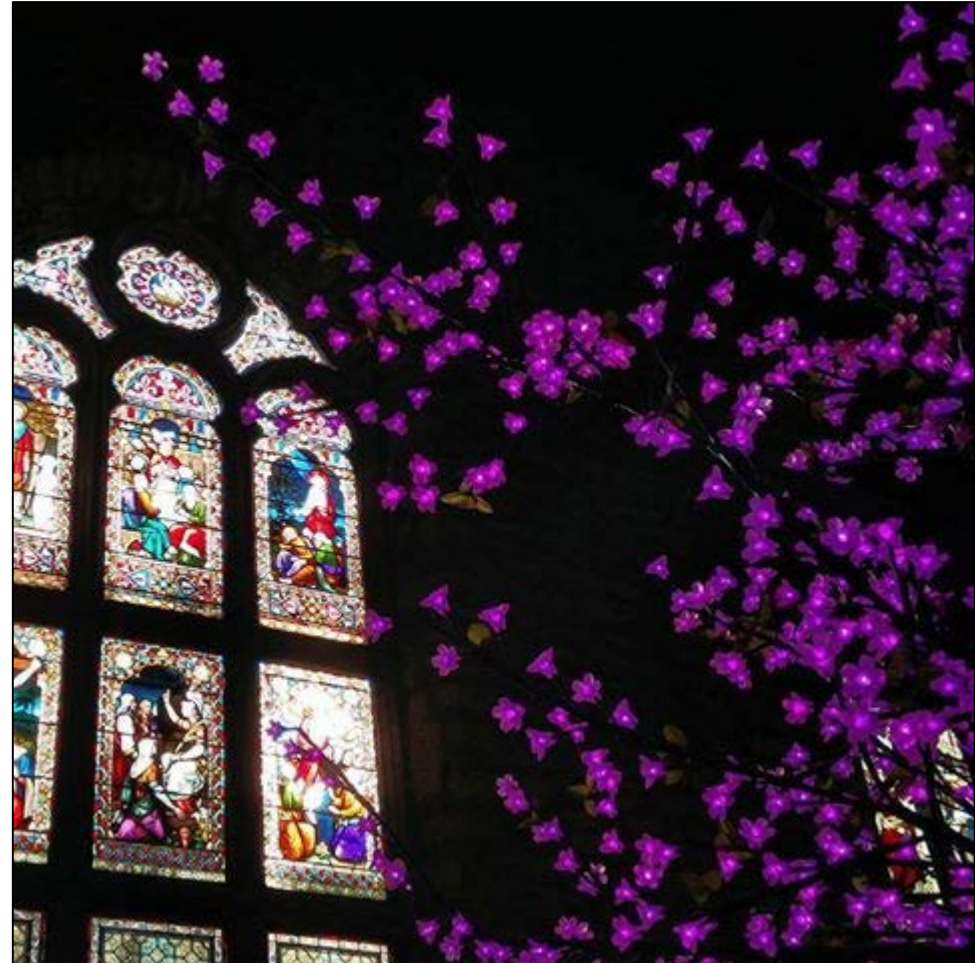
Interaction Design

This is the toe of the statue of David Hume made by Alexander Stoddart on the Royal Mile (the main road leading to the castle) in Edinburgh, Scotland. I consider this a fine example of designing interaction. Bronze statues naturally develop a layer called Patina due to oxidation. This is the reason why the statue of Liberty looks green even though it's outer layer is copper which should normally look shiny yellow. In this case of the sculpture of David Hume the philosopher, Stoddart decided to keep the plinth (platform) reachable by hand and made the right leg and toes extend outside the plinth. This encourages the pedestrians to engage with the sculpture and over time a habit of pedestrians rubbing the toes of the statue developed. Students of Philosophy in Edinburgh particularly do this hoping that they could rub and take away some of Hume's knowledge, while David Hume himself was against superstitions. Here the property of copper oxidation, human tendency to develop new habits and a master sculptor's wit play together to make notice a Philosopher who was once brushed aside because his thoughts were too hard for people to understand. A sculpture bridged the gap.



Blasphemy

These are the stained glass windows of Tron Kirk an old Parish Church on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh which is not used for prayers anymore. It looks beautiful, but I will share just one incident to challenge that. In the year 1697, an 18 year old student Thomas Aikenhead said this while walking past the Church with his friends, "I wish I were in that place Ezra calls hell so I could warm myself". He was later charged for Blasphemy for saying this and executed by hanging to death.



A Muslim, Jew and a Christian

Speakers' Corner is an area for open air speeches and debates in London's HydePark. One can speak on any subject as long as he/she wants and the police are quite tolerant about it. Here's a scene today where a Muslim, Jew and a Christian are fighting it out through words.



Stolen Treasures 1

This is a part of the Great Lion Hunt relief of the an Assyrian King from the Palace at the ancient city of #Nineveh which was once the largest city in the world more than 2500 years ago. I clicked it at the British Museum where it is displayed (the entire wall is moved here and its quite long) since it was stolen like many other treasures from across the world by the English. With our contemporary times looking like they are providing the most efficient and instant communication technologies ever, looking back at history is telling me otherwise. The message overloaded in these stone walls are not simply for artistic reasons. They play psychological games with the minds of the viewer, in this context the subjects of the King and citizens of his Kingdom as to how much he must be feared and what happens if someone tries to go against him. The 50 or 100 years of our current times are nothing compared to what mankind has achieved in the 3000 to 5000 years we are capable of looking back with some kind of precision. I'm glad the British stole it and presented it here before the IS could destroy it (Assyria covers the northern parts of Iraq). I will now go back and continue designing #Android applications and watching F.R.I.E.N.D.S



Stolen Treasures 2

This is Nebamun, an Egyptian accountant with his wife and daughter on a fishing boat in the marshes of the Nile 3400 years ago. The caption on it says 'enjoying himself and seeing beauty'.

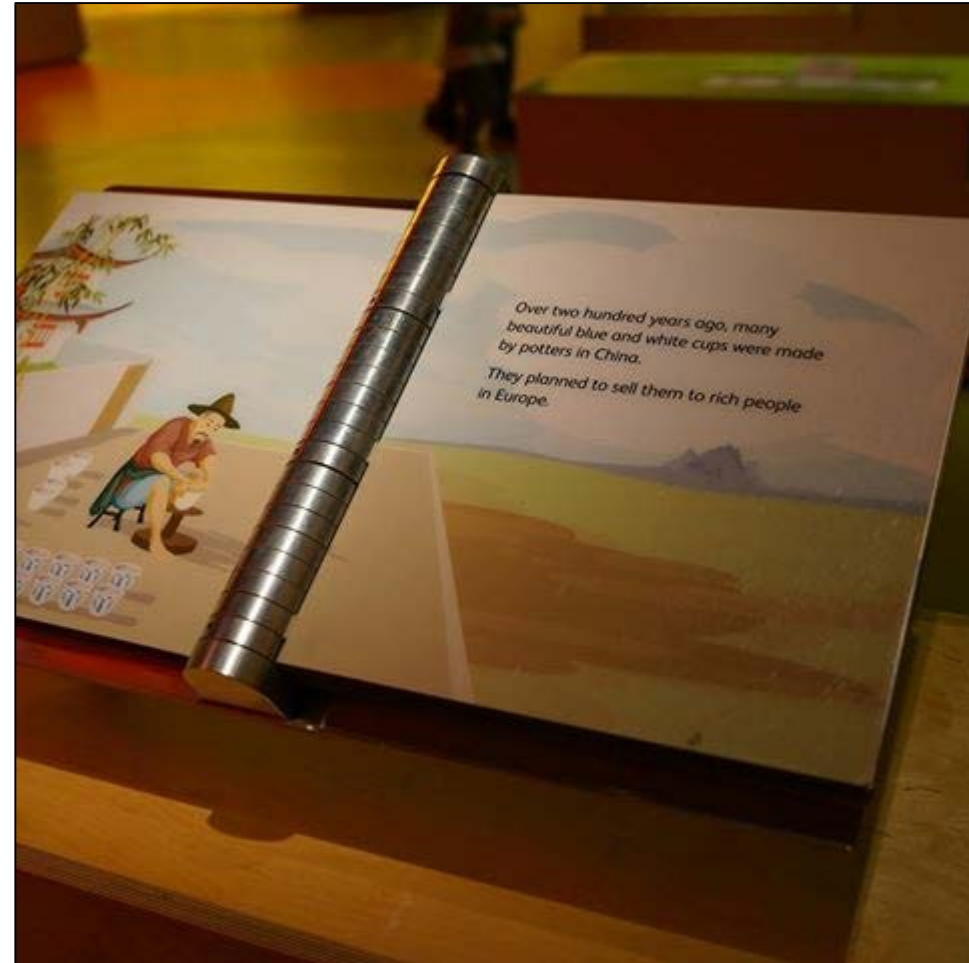
Thousands of years later, we still do the same - posting an idealized photograph with a caption on instagram. Haven't changed much.. have we? Oh wait.. It's midnight already. "Ok Google. Wake me up at 7 AM."

The painting was literally chopped off from the original location using knives by the usual suspects, the British. I'm now crime partners with them. My camera replaced the knife.



Stolen Treasures 2

During the '200 years ago' mentioned in this storybook for kids, China accounted for almost 35% of world GDP and together with India about 50%. I'm curious about the choice of telling the kid that the Chinese made 'cups' and Europe was 'rich'. It's clear the British had a tough time putting together exhibits that are their own rather than things stolen elsewhere.



Western Ghats

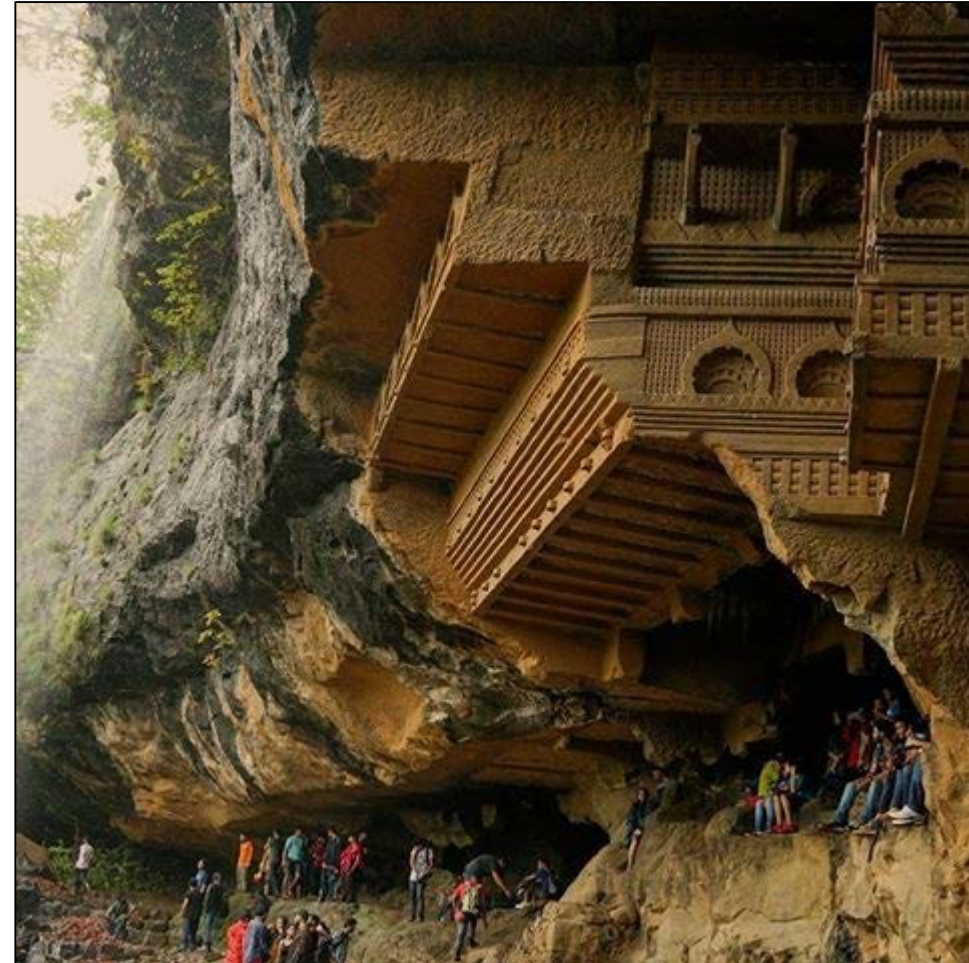
Shodh Yatra and beyond

North Pole and Western Ghats

Around the same time when Jesus Christ was crucified, Muziri in present day Kerala and Nala Sopara which is just outside Mumbai were key ports trading with the Romans. It was also the time when Buddhism was challenging the class system established by the then Hindus and the trading communities were adopting the simpler Buddhism, a reason why it spread far and wide.

The Buddhist missionaries and the traders established a network and worked towards mutual benefit. (Does it sound like the British and the Christian Missionary collusion?) The rich #traders would fund construction of temples and rock-cut caves which will be used as places of worship and abode for the monks and then double as traders' lodging houses when they are on the road. This is why many of these caves will be located along the #ancient trade routes.

The Kondana cave is among the first rock cut temples in this region and about 120 km from Nala Sopara along a road to the Deccan. It is believed to have been made around 2000 years ago and went out of use 400 years later. I'm perhaps Sherlocked to find out after my little amateur investigation that the Kondana cave temple went out of use just around the same time when Nala Sopara got silted due to raised sea levels and stopped being a port trading with the west in 4th Century CE. Ice melting in the North Pole can after all influence whether a man living in the Western Ghats will be a Hindu or a Buddhist.



Portugal and Goa

St. Francis Xavier, the patron saint of Catholic 'Missions' wrote to the King of Portugal John III in the year 1545 requesting what is known as the Goa Inquisition. This remained in place for another 250 years of which no records survive, 57 people were burnt at stake and hundreds more killed.

When I read the actual Papal Bulls (kind of license to the Kings), particularly the one titled Romanus Pontifex issued by Pope Nicholas V in the year 1454 to Portugal which said among many other horrible things 'seize the lands and enslave the non-Christians, pagans and vanquish them and take all their possessions and reduce them to perpetual slavery and use them to profit', without doubt it became clear that the Catholic Church was among the main reasons why such misery was put on to this world by the Europeans.

In Goa during these 250 years at least, no new Hindu temples were allowed to be built, 300 of them were destroyed, no Hindu weddings, no cremation, ban on Konkani, no sandals so on and so forth. People of Goa revolted in 1583 and a few Jesuits were killed. Later during a peace talk, 16 of the local leaders were captured and 14 of them were executed leaving the natives without a leadership.

Keeping a Tulasi Vrindavan (altar) in the courtyard, worshipping the Ancestors were among the many things Goans were prohibited from doing during the 400 years and particularly the 250 years of Inquisition. Throughout my long walks in the Goan countryside, I was surprised to see that these are exactly the things all Goan households do better than the rest of India. There's almost not a single house without a Tulasi grove, each one unique, colourful and deeply valued. Even the Christian houses had a similar structure with a cross in the place of Tulasi. Culture goes much beyond religion! A few weeks later as I walked into the Hindu villages of Bangladesh, I found equally rich and colourful Tulasi Vrindavans.

It is known that organic beings tend to reproduce at a high rate for survival, particularly under external pressure. It is rather fascinating to see even 'ideas' like a Tulasi Altar reproduce and fight like organic beings.

