



Bamboo cane development institute, agartala

Project report

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bamboo cane development institute, agartala



foreword

This report is of one short month spent in what one might call a remote part of India. How many of us actually know how the states in the north east india are distributed? To be frank i didn't. And as vaguely as my notion of indias map was so was my idea of its people.

No, im not saying that i know everything now, but truly it has made me wary of faulty assumptions made sitting in a design studio. Different place, language, people, living. you name it and, believe me, its not the way we assume they do it!

Traveling through the north east by road showed me the change in landscape and with it the people, their houses, but through the journey the constant companion outside the window were the bamboo clumps spread all over. I had never seen so much bamboo like this before and it was seen in man made things all over. Its sheer presence made its importance seep in me. i was slowly getting rid of assumptions



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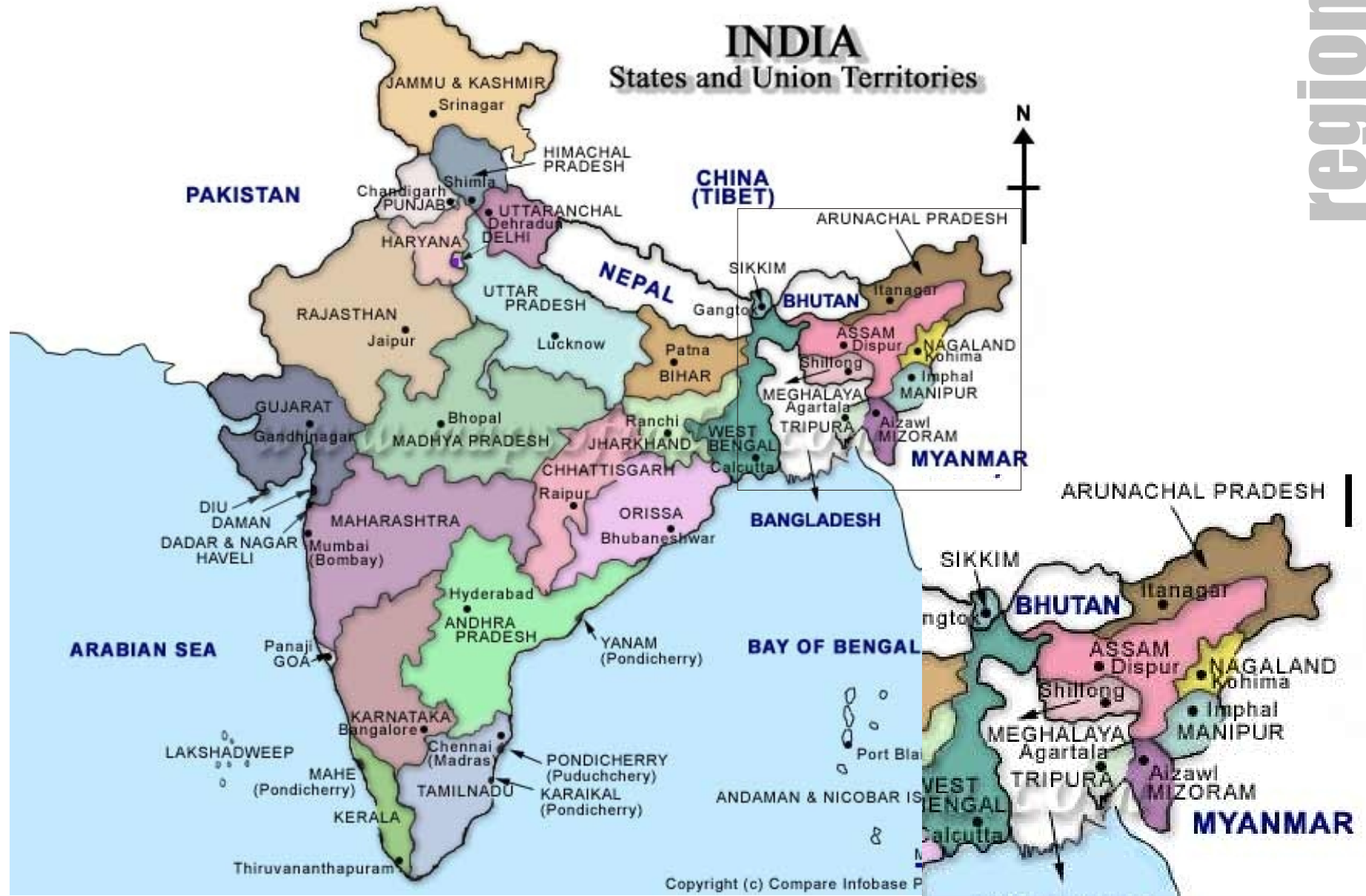
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Mirrors covered with mat or veil
Chicken coups
Pachras (woven sarongs)
Sital patti mat as bed cover.
Photographs of dead body of ancestor with family sitting around it.
Clothes rack
Bamboo hand fans
Photos of popular personalities
Bamboo fences
Dhow (peacock shaped legs)for vegetable cutting
Economic use of water in kitchen
Clothes rack
Beds with poles for macchardani
Weaving loom

These are products commonly found in the houses



some peculiar sights

An introduction to the people and the place they live in is necessary in order to show the importance that bamboo has in their lives.

Bamboo houses line the road and a large number of them have their own ponds, where they sit and fish. Trees like jackfruit, mango, betel nut and other local; fruit trees grow within the bamboo fences. Inside, the bedroom doubled up as the living room and the house is decorated by the objects of everyday use. There is no put on decoration but a frank description of everyday life. (In one house a modern sofa showing family affluence was a complete misfit). The kitchen is a room attached to the main room where people sit on the floor to eat. (A dining table looks pretty oversized and a misfit for these houses) however the introduction of the lpg burner separates the server from the served. (The act of making a chaapati demands the person cooking be close to the person being served the hot chapatis) the introduction of this alien implements makes the poor lady bend down twenty times. The toilet is never attached to the house and is even considered as bad design if it is so. However in a city an attached bath is supposed to be an extra advantage feature.. Visiting peoples houses was like an eye opener for me. The reason for mentioning these above points is to emphasise the point that design made sitting tightly in ones design studio would be a design based on assumptions.

place

working with bamboo



It was important to get the feel of the nature of bamboo before i could do anything. A few hours regularly for the first two weeks went in handling bamboo. I got to know of the types of bamboos that were typical to Tripura, and their naturesa. One such variety was “Konkaish” found in the kartlamara area near agartala. Its property was that it could bent and still mentain strength without splitting.

I learnt to bend whole bamboo as well as splits. Working with the “dhow” revealed its versatility. Dividing and subdividing the splits to make strips worthn weaving into a mat was quite an experience. Sometimes the process of mat weaving is something that takes one into a different plane by the sheer complexity and repetitions.. Bending bamboo splits into precise shapes require some practice before on can manage it easily.

Working with the material gave an idea of how it splits, its weakness and strengths, and its special properties like its flexibility.

Top: sharpening the dhow

Middle: making splits for mats

Bottom: splitting bamboo

bamboo cane development institute, agartala



Bamboo cane development institute (BCDI) is located in agartala, tripura, in an area called khejurbagan, after the khajoor trees that grow there. It has been carrying out training of people to work in cane and bamboo. In 2002 the National Institute of Design (NID) has been invited to reconfigure the teaching procedure and to set up a course structure for the training. Headed currently by Mr. Pulaha Dasgupta, who is the project in charge, the course aims to teach basic skills of drawing to the trainees besides teaching them the skills to work in bamboo. The trainees are asked to develop a design, make drawing and then actually make the drawing a reality. NID plans to introduce more facets to this course in the coming years.

BCDI also has skilled craftsmen who do intricate weaving and carving.

During my stay the BCDI campus was being used to manufacture bamboo furniture that was a part of an export order to holland.

Top: trainees sitting at the porch of the BCDI building

Middle: the khejur trees that give the area the name Khejurbagan

Bottom: view from the BCDI corridor

interaction with the trainees



The batch consisted of 18 trainees.

The people coming to BCDI have had no previous experience in drawing. Their skills have been developed by the years of traditional design made from cane or bamboo. Some of them don't even have this background.

Drawing aims to improve quality consciousness in terms of dimensions and angles. It will also help in understanding designs that are non traditional and the ones that have not been made. But drawing cannot be taught in six months as it is a totally alien concept.

A product collection has been an inspiring factor for the trainees to design product of everyday use, and not only the traditional products. Importance is laid on the quality of the finished product.

During my course of interaction with the trainees i used to help them out with detailing of their design. At the same time they taught me of what they had learnt in the last six months. This interaction taught me that communicating had to be in simple terms. The basic necessity was to convey an idea.

Top: monimala at work

Middle: the workshop space

Bottom: cleaning up bent bamboo



Bending whole bamboo



Bending split to fit mould



the furniture project



The project consisted of an export order of bamboo furniture to holland.

10 dining chairs

64 single sofas

16 double sofas

6 single beds

2 double beds

40 rocking chairs

400 hangers

The designs were chosen by a company from holland after they saw the NID exhibits at a exhibition in delhi. This assignment came as a pleasant break for BCDI as this was its first international order and creditable to NID.

My role was to see that the correct time schedule was being followed. I had to check for dimensional correctness, and the quality in terms of marks left on the product like pencil and glue mark. I had to also check for their stability and levelling. While interacting with the craftsmen i got to learn the peculiar ways they hold and utilize their instruments to achieve a certain kind of use..the work also revealed the time and effort consuming nature of work.

Top:framework of a chair

Middle:making the horizontal splits

Bottom: joining splits to main frame



Getting the parts ready



Bamboo mixed with Mseal used to fill gaps



Brass nut and bolt used to hold the joint





Top: single bed

Middle: fixing the the splits on the underside of the bed

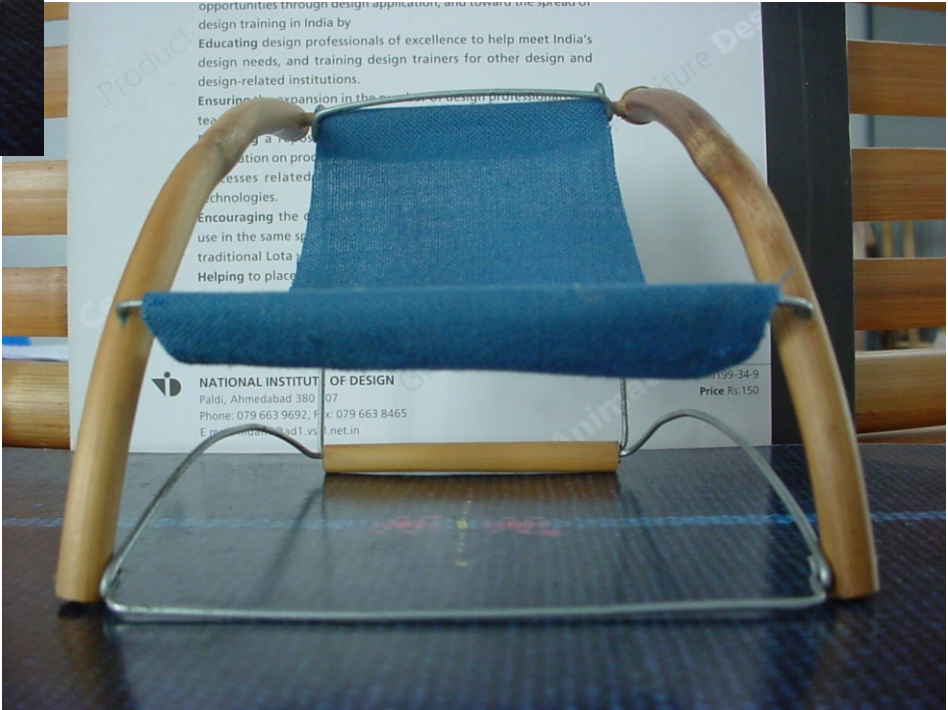
Bottom: the completed chair

Above: the workshop

design in bamboo

These are a few things that I designed while at BCDI. There was very little time for designing as such as the other activities took up most of the time. One of them was this folding chair in wrought iron and Konkaish bamboo.

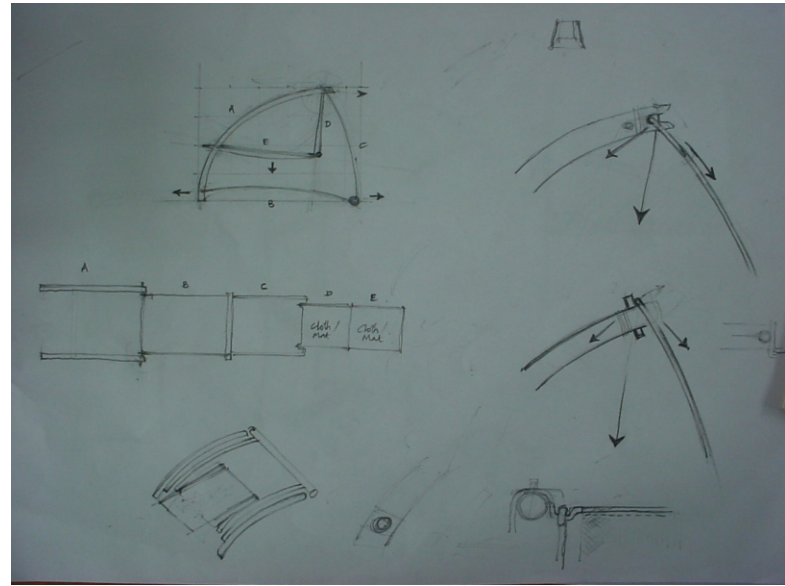
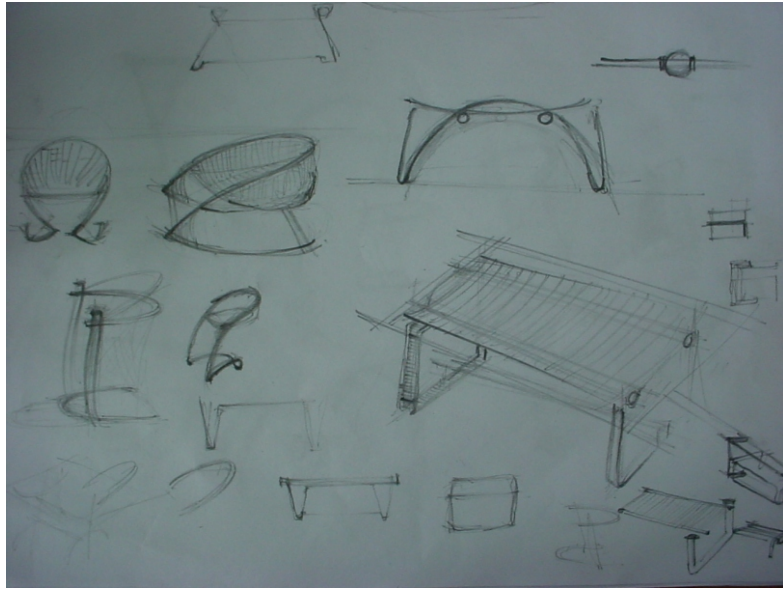




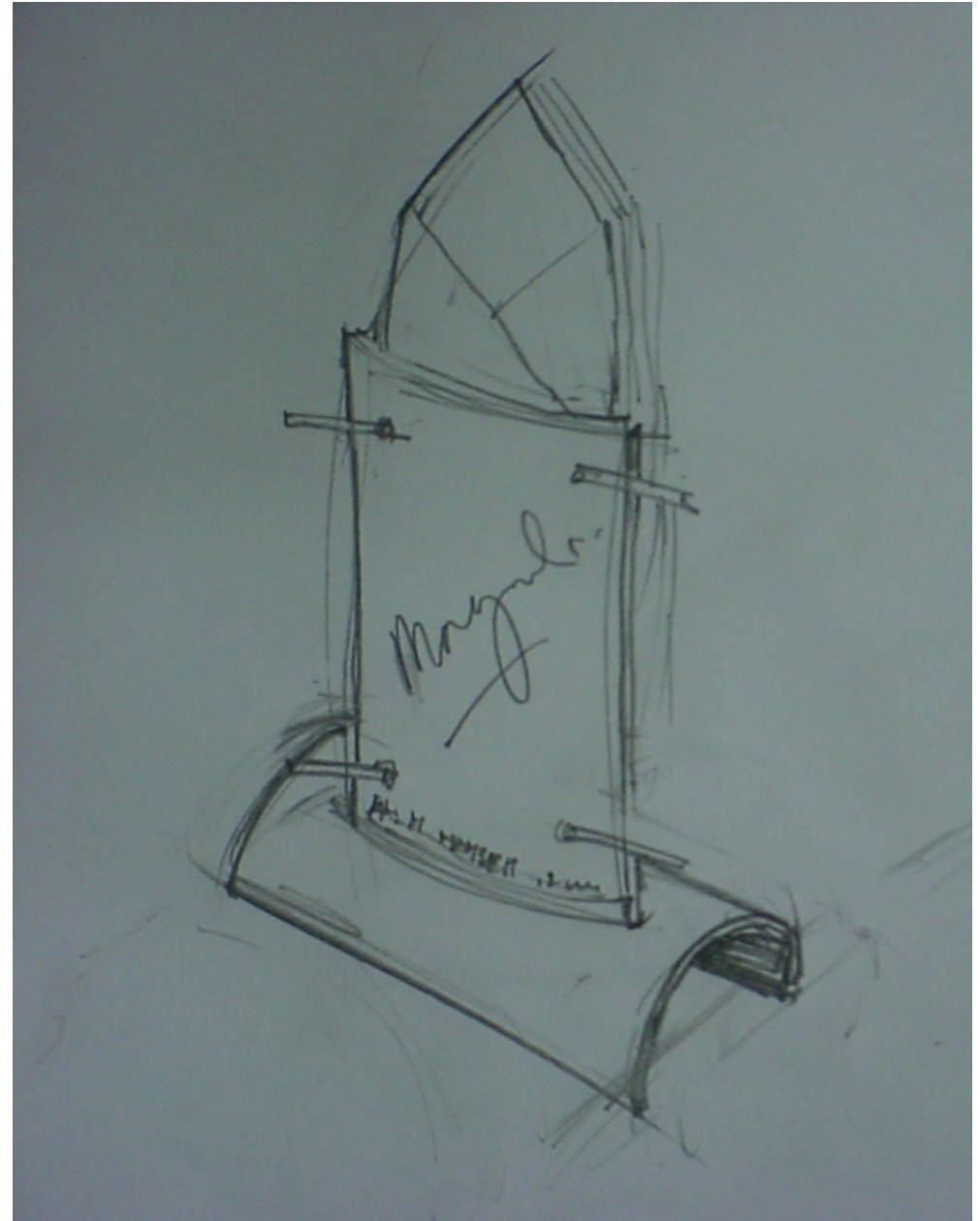


Top: experiments

Bottom: more experiments



A napkin holder conceptualized on the basis of a ladies hair clip available in the market. The horizontal bamboo splits tend to straighten out keeping the napkins in place



visit to cfc



The common facility centre (CFC) is a workshop provided with machinery which allows local craftsmen to speed up their manufacturing process.

There were machines to split whole bamboo, remove the knots, convert the splits into circular twigs, and a sanding machine that helps to polish the material obtained. There was also a facility to weave mats.

Another department of the CFC was the handloom department where skilled craftswomen wove handloom cloth.





music workshop



Towards the end of my one month at BCDI prof. Ranjan and Prof.Nina Sabnani from NID conducted a music workshop. The idea was to design instruments from bamboo that make different sounds. The introduction to sounds came by listening to sounds around us and identifying them. Simple instruments were shown as examples like the mexican rain pipe and the bamboo from bastar (madha pradesh) that produced a haunting flute sound when just rotated. These examples were enough. To kick start the workshop and everyone came up with a lot of ideas.



summary

The month spent working at BCDI , agartala and the entire experience of travelling to and from there was a rich learning experience. I not only got introduced to this fantastic material, bamboo, but also to the rich habitat it grows in. Meeting the people, seeing their customs, eating their food the way they eat it, talking to them and learning what are their needs and aspirations that drive them gave an insight into a different world.

This time also made me think about the approaches used by the institutes here and discussions about what was good and what was missing.

Bamboo is a representative of the north east and can play a major role in the economy of the region. One should have a forward looking approach to craft. What i mean is that we should revert to the old meaning of craft, which actually is the making of things of everyday use, rather than defining craft as something to be cared for in showcases. Unless craft becomes a part of the everyday life it cannot be economically viable. Old skill should also be mentained at the same time and adapted to the change in needs. A healthy combination of craft skill, a keen overview of the market needs should be the resulting design. Its all to simple to say and im sure there are a million loop holes.

But this one month actually got me thinking about it.



my sincere thanks to..

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