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**Perspectives on Work, Home and Identity from Artisans in Telangana: Conversations around Craft**, Chandan Bose, (2019), Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 311 pp., ISBN 978-3-030-12515-8, h/bk, £79.99

Reviewed by Alice Kettle, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

This is a book about craft, ethnography and the relevance of heritage practice. It is about so much more as well, the experience of how craft was made and is being made within the proximal spaces where other kinds of experiences occur. Equally it is about how ethnography is '*being made*' (Bose, p. 51) through experience, inscribed in conversations and through its own emergence (Bose, p. 305). The author Chandan Bose links making to maker and maker to place and place to kinship as an interconnected set of relationships. In these interactions he describes the past corresponding to the present within the politics of identity, with localism and with nation state. By assembling these connections through multiple perspectives, Bose offers us a powerful view of craft through the voice of the maker and that of his own self-reflexive account of ethnography, which 'traces a constantly evolving body of knowledge that moves along a pathway' (Bose, p. 6), akin to fellow anthropologist Tim Ingold's ideas on knowledge creation which leaves imprints for others to follow (Ingold, 2011). Bose says he is trying to strike a relationship between ethnography and craft, which establishes the genealogical narrative of the maker and of his making practice.

He visits and observes makers in their studios, saying 'While the artist talks about a craft, the chronicler crafts a way of talking (Bose, p. 40). Accordingly, he traces the track of knowledge creation in craft and ethnography in the past and as he and the makers are making them in the present. Of Vaikuntam Nakash, one of the key makers in the text, he says he 'popped the question which encapsulates all the anxieties which the discipline of anthropology has been grappling with since the umbilical cord with its colonial legacy was cut, he asked "What is it exactly that you have come to do here?"' (Bose, p. 31). Thus, writer and maker become implicated in this relationship of understanding and communicating everyday lives, making craft, anthropology and ethnography, which are relative to much broader economic and structural tensions.

Chandan Bose is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the Department of Liberal Arts in Hyderabad. The book focuses on the characteristic and celebrated narrative paintings on cloth in the Telangana state of Southern India, which were produced as part of the story telling or '*patam-pradashan katha*' tradition. This story-telling form is unique to the region in its scale and particular to each community, since it serves to support the corresponding lineage of one defining occupation in each area (and patronage '*jati*' distinct to each), be they 'weavers, barbers, herdsmen and leather workers' (Bose, p. 7). The cloth scrolls, which are intricate and sophisticated episodic narrative paintings, were produced as story-telling aids alongside murals, ritual masks and carved and painted wood figurines. Chandan Bose, in his first-person writing, presents a progressive discourse through the chapters much like the scrolls themselves, of scenes and what he calls juxtapositions of his own thinking and analysis and those of the artisan makers. He suggests that the story scrolls themselves allow different constructions of craft to emerge in relation to their locations, to historical practices and in relation to each other.

The introduction, which is also chapter one, critically situates the scope of the text by outlining the surrounding debates and telling us what and how the research came about. In references made to craft discourse there are the familiar craft theorists (Adamson (2013), Greenhalgh (1997) and Sennett (2008)) as well as the more social anthropological writers (Ingold (2011), Marchand (2009), Stoller (2016)). But the breadth of writing of unfamiliar authors such as Jones on studio spaces (2010), Jackson on truth (2008), and a range of Asian critical writing on arts and ethnography (Thagalevu (1998), (2012), Krishnaraj (1992), Malik (2005), Mitter (1994), Prasad (2007), Venkatesan (2009)), are just a selection to which I was introduced. The illustrations are in colour and plentiful, some are the artistically framed and well illuminated type whilst others are moments captured, making documented, much like family snapshots taken by a friend.

The second and third chapters go into the studio with descriptions of making observed as physical actions of the body and with material, of maker and subject forging a relationship with the environment (Bose, p. 50). The process is carefully recorded and is revealed via conversations taking place throughout the book. There are many detailed and remarkable observations through the anthropologist's eye, for example in Vaikuntam's studio, they

discuss the notion of *odupu*, which means trying to capture something, grasp the sense of its interiority and to bring forth a presence: '*odupo* lies in the finer details...in the garments...in jewellery' (Bose, p. 123). No such word exists in English that I can think of.

The fourth chapter links this relationship to heritage and identity, maker and positionality, with the following chapter advancing this discussion to locate craft within the history of the familial Danalakota studio household in Cheriya. Here the kinship strategy of proximity ensures continuity and impetus for emerging methods and aesthetic practices. Chapters six and seven ask questions about contemporary production, with heritage practices redefined through economies and marketplace and in relation to the nation state: 'artists read meaning into practices of the nation state, apportioning the practice a central role in the heritage project of the nation through the recognition of the 'Master Craftsman', and through its stewardship in the form of welfare, where artists can articulate expectations of the future' (Bose, p. 51).

I approached this book believing I would find little to relate to my own craft practice. In fact this brilliant book reflects the way we tussle as makers and humans with our place in the world, securing our identities to material and place, imagining future possibilities, telling the stories of who we are and what we do in our homes, communities and nation states. There are many uncomfortable issues attached to all of these stories, those of power relationships, sustenance, authenticity and loss. These are played out constantly between maker and material, chronicler and subject. Bose poses us questions by asking them of himself, thus we interrogate memory, responsibility and identity as an unfolding discovery of craft with its social and political inferences. This important book shapes thinking on craft as a globalised practice, but the critique is much wider at a time when we must confront challenges with our relationship to the environment and to each other.

I shall leave Bose to make the final commentary:

' Vaikuntam[']s] location within the nexus of neoliberal powers, state structures and market interests...offer ethnography ways to rethink about capitalism, colonization and history...the ethnographic text is the result of a collective will to

remember the craft. It is this collective will that spirits this material trace of memory...with an agentive purpose- to demonstrate the way in which the craft practice becomes a site for practitioners to express their capacity to imagine and act on possibilities' (Bose 306).

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### **Author biography**

**Alice Kettle** is a contemporary textile artist, writer and lecturer. She is Professor of Textile Arts at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University, Visiting Professor at the University of Winchester and Chair of the Embroiderers' Guild. Her work is in

international public collections including the Whitworth, Manchester, the Crafts Council, London. She co-authored *Collaboration through Craft* (2013) and *The Erotic Cloth* (2018).