

# THE NEED FOR ORNAMENT

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## 1.0 Personalization of Transportation Technology in Asia

A wide spectrum of public transportation is used in Asia, such as rickshaws, trucks, taxis and indigenous vehicles called *chhakdas*. These functional modes of transportation that serve millions of people are adorned by communities who personalize them with their own narratives. In essence, the technologies that would otherwise homogenize the users thrive as platforms for cultural expression.

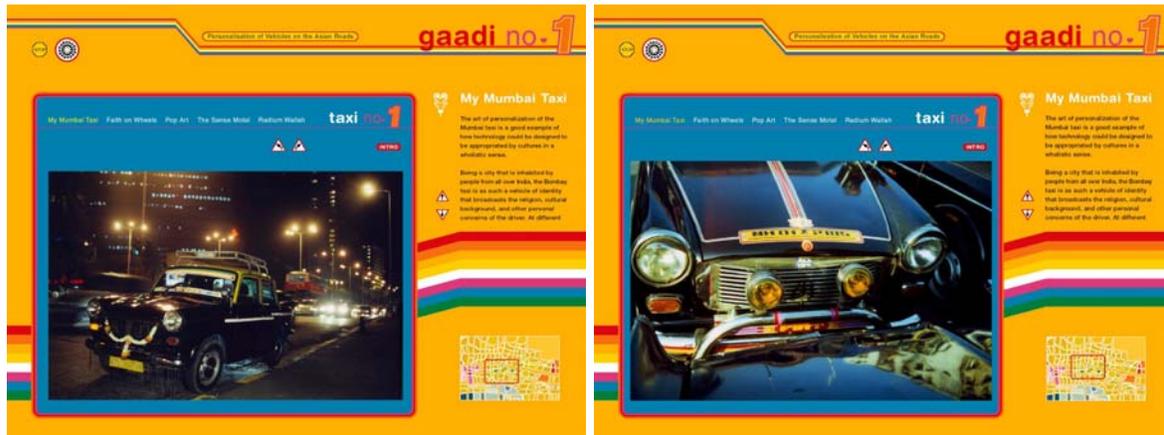
Communities of users personalize their vehicles to different degrees of ornamentation. The resulting array of graphics, textures, patterns, motifs, paintings, embossing, composite materials, talismans, quotes and decorative accessories present us with an amazing variety of anonymous artists and their indigenous art. This culture of ornamentation sustains street artists, who work with different styles of vehicle personalization, such as hand painting, poster art, paper cutting, audio mixing and accessory art.

One can delight in the diverse ways in which different communities collectively express their identities. This study focuses on vehicular graphic art as a point of departure to explore how the need to ornament is fundamental to Asian cultures. Since global companies are becoming interested in the dissemination and accessibility of ICT for emerging economies, this study in particular provokes one to understand the process of personalization so that future products and services respect this fundamental cultural need. This study infers that culturally rooted technology is a means to increasing accessibility of ICT in emerging economies.

In this era of globalization, we therefore deduce that technologies that provide for personalization can enable cultures to preserve their identities.

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## 2.0 Mumbai Taxi



The art of personalization of the Mumbai taxi is a good example of how technology is designed to be appropriated by cultures with strong Mumbai identities.

One finds different degrees of personalization in Mumbai taxis, ranging from totally bare and functional, to opulent and very ornamental. The art of taxi graphics is popularly known as "radium", based on the term used for the luminous adhesive vinyl that is used to decorate taxis. Taxi graphics include functional aspects, such as numbers for license plates, taxi routes, or traffic precautions, and extend to creative and skillfully executed typographic compositions, intricate patterns that highlight the form and design of the vehicle, images of gods and goddesses, political heroes, film stills, famous monuments or pilgrimage sites.

## 3.0 Auto-Rickshaw



The influence of Mumbai's Bollywood film industry is largely seen in Ahmedabad, and in a large part of Gujarat. What is surprising and interesting is that traditional film graphics are more popular here than with the taxi or auto-rickshaws of Mumbai. There has been a long-standing economic and trade relationship between Gujarat and Mumbai which is possibly the reason why Hindi films are so popular in Ahmedabad. Even the radium art which is popular in Mumbai is now spreading in Ahmedabad as well.

However, the most popular form of vehicle graphics is film graffiti style painting, generated by anonymous artists in the streets.

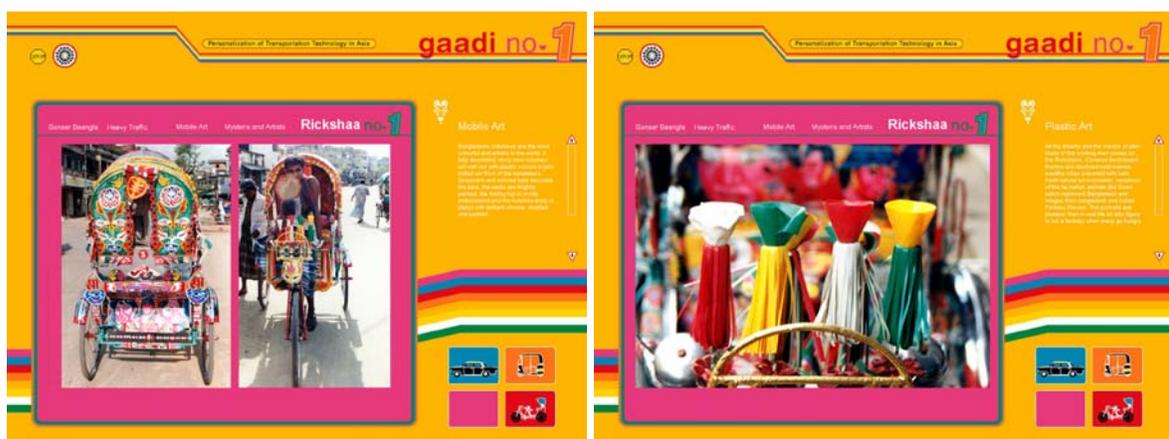
## 4.0 Chhakda



### The Bullet Cart: An Indigenous Technology

The *chhakda*, an indigenous vehicular form of public transport, is found extensively in the Saurashtra belt. In the local dialect, the term stands for a six-seater mode of transport, but this is now a generic term used to describe many hybrid vehicles that are in-between the size of a tempo and an auto-rickshaw. The *chhakda* initially used to be a contraption consisting of a Bullet Enfield or Harley Davidson engine attached to a metal cart. These vehicles are elaborately decorated with an array of accessories, hand painting and other forms of personalization. The localization of technology is superimposed with the personalization that each driver does to his vehicle.

## 5.0 Sonaar Baangla Rickshaws



Dhaka is not only the capital of Bangladesh but also the world's cycle-rickshaw capital. Over 300,000 cycle-rickshaws have a great influence on the city and many busy streets are crowded with rickshaws, plying wheel to wheel in every direction.

## **Rickshaw Personalization**

The rickshaws in Dhaka are not only prolific, they are also more colorful than anywhere else in the world. Dhaka is where the cycle-rickshaw becomes a mobile work of art. The Dhaka rickshaw follows the standard design, linking an off-the-shelf bicycle front assembly with a rear sub-frame carrying the passenger seat and rear wheels.

Bangladeshi rickshaws are the most colorful and artistic in the world. A fully decorated, shiny new rickshaw bleeds with plastic colors in jars bolted up in front of the handlebars. Streamers and colored tape decorate the bars, the seats are brightly painted, the folding top "canopy" is vividly embroidered and the rickshaw body is plated with brilliant chrome, studded and painted.

The rickshaw is designed to be bold and eye-catching to attract potential customers. Rickshaw artists decorate the vehicles with as much drama and color as possible. Caption strips on rickshaws typically display the aspirations of Bangladeshis to create wealth and affluence.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

This study presents us with beautiful examples of how communities create and represent their identity, and of how technology "ceases" to be just a "technology" and becomes an extension of a community. The field of application in this study is automobile technologies, which have been integrated into the social fabric of Asia over a hundred years. However, these show the rich examples of the Asian community's need for ornamentation, customization and personalization. The richly ornate technologies described in this paper actually become a valuable benchmark for designers of ICT, and set an important design value towards the design of culturally appropriate computing in developing nations.

## **Acknowledgement**

Consultant, Hewlett-Packard Labs, Palo Alto; Technology collaboration with, Imaging Systems Lab, Neerja Raman, Director.

Principal Investigator / Project Director - Ranjit Makkuni; Honorary Consultant - Dr. Madhu Khanna; Mumbai Taxi - Ahmedabad Auto Rickshaw and Rajkot Chakkda: Content Research - Kalpana Subramanian; Still photography and Videography - Kalpana Subramanian; Bangladesh Rickshaws: Content Research - Rajesh Gupta; Still photography - Rajesh Gupta; Graphic design - Anoop Patnaik; Computer programming and Integration - Dinesh Bhatia, Saurav Sinha; Acknowledgements, Artists and Support - Camera Assistant, Mumbai - Ranjit Pathak; Mumbai Taxi Drivers - Anil Kumar, Bhaskar Pote, Madhav Sanap, Dattatreya Bhagvan Shinde, Rajkumar Sharma, Radium Graphic Artists, Mumbai - Vikas Ganpal Manutre, Ashok Gownde, Sonu; Auto Driver, Ahmedabad - Nasir Bhai; Chakkda Driver, Rajkot - Bhodu Bhai; Rickshaw Artists Dhaka - D.C. Das, P.C. Das, S.C Das; Acknowledgements - Enrol Pires - Faculty, NID Ahmedabad, Aditi Ranjan - Faculty, NID Ahmedabad, Allen Show - Rajkot, Surabhi Bhomic - Jaipur; Acknowledgements, Bangladesh - Mr. Mohammed Hanif, Mr. Mohammed, Shimul.