

## Note from the Editor

By Pushpa Chari

In the twenty five odd years that I have had the privilege of being editor of the CCI Newsletter – also it's (on and off) news chaser, interviewer, proofreader and general dogsbody – the Newsletter has gone through several transitions. Its first look was a clutch of no – frills printed pages neatly clipped together, featuring craft news and snippets, happenings and programmes helmed by CCI and its affiliated councils along with hand drawn sketches. This was to morph over time into an elegant black and white magazine format with sepia-toned photographs and short, well-researched articles written by council members, on the country's craft and artisans both at home and those participating in events abroad. News from World Crafts Council was also featured periodically.

Into the new century, CCI decided to give the Newsletter another makeover. It changed colour, literally, into colours of shaded blue and yellow, and both printed matter and its presentation got a sleek designer look, conceptualised by Suchi Ebrahim. Two things, however remained constant, CCI President (later ex-President) Ashok Chatterjee's incisive lead articles which set the tone of the magazine, and the focus on the artisan and his craft, his triumphs, issues and growth.

Covid proved to be a game changer for the Newsletter. We went bravely online! Despite the devastating times, we were also able to get live video interviews from artisans across the country, getting to know them online, familiarizing ourselves with their problems in very difficult times, applauding their spirit and perseverance, and helping them as they picked up the threads of their lives and their creativity.

Today, we stand on the cusp of CCI Newsletter's latest 'today' look: online, digitalized, contemporary, packed with craft news and reaching out to all for whom crafts are a way of life.

### **Here are a few pointers which will define the 'new look' CCI Newsletter.**

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- a) The CCI Newsletter will be a quarterly online publication. It will be listed on the website.
- b) The Newsletter will have an online format, editorial, short videos on news from CCI, State Councils discussions on craft related issues and interviews with artisans.
- c) A larger editorial team will have tech and social media-sawy members on board.
- d) The CCI website will have links to the Newsletter, KAMALA, Happenings and Handmade and articles and interviews published in the Newsletter.
- e) The CCI Newsletter will have a presence on Instagram.

In the New Year, the new Newsletter will be out. I urge all of you to read its reader-friendly, contemporary content-rich avatar in any form of platform or portal of your choice. We are all travellers in the same journey, of making our millennia old craft-rich heritage and skills a relevant part of our everyday life and taking them into the streets of the future. The CCI Newsletter will help us in our collective journey and also help spread the word.

# **National Meet 2023**

If every craft tells a story, so does the lifework of its maker, the craft artisan. He often fights poverty, social apathy and access to influential people, yet continues to take his hereditary calling forward with grit, imagination and passion, even creating new, evolving patterns of craft expression. At CCI's 'National Meet' held in Hyderabad (24th of July 2023) a few craft artisans shared their stories of hard won success in conversation with Crafts Council members.

We present brief synopses of some of the conversation / interviews (The full interview can be reached at the Crafts Council of India's website [www.craftscouncilofindia.in](http://www.craftscouncilofindia.in))

# Santosh Kumar Chitragar

Santosh Kumar Chitragar belongs to a traditional artisanal family of Kinhal craft wood carvers and painters who make idols for temples. Santosh Chitragar is an innovator in the design concepts of Kinhal products, a revivalist of the craft and an entrepreneur – trainer of hundreds of young Kinhal craft aspirants in his village, giving a new and vibrant direction to the crafts 550 year old journey.



Santosh Kumar Chitragar learnt his Kinhal craft skills as a child. Growing up, since he also observed the general public's disrespect for the craft and its artisans, he decided to leave his familial craft calling and go in for higher education. He worked for 2 years in a 2D Animation studio, found the job creatively deadening and was soon back to his familial craft “because it is in our blood.”

Soon, Santosh was introducing new and innovative ideas into the Kinhal craft format while remaining to the craft process. First, was the introduction of imaginative toys for children, followed by the revival of the forgotten art of mixing of colours, giving the icons and toys a mellow and colourful beauty. His Kinhal products are selling very well in the market.



Today the village has 2500 artisans from 67 families working at Kinhal craft, many of them trained by Santosh Kumar Chitragar. His plan is to train 1,500 more artisans including aspirants from other communities, to meet growing bulk orders. The craft will definitely survive, says Santosh. It has a lot of respect, the number of artisans has increased hugely and bulk orders are coming in.

# Srisailapu Chinnayachari



National Award Winner and master craftsperson of Etikopakka lacquer toys, Srisailapu Chinnayachari is also a doctorate holder in Indigenous Art. He is a trailblazer in the creation of ‘miniature marvels’ in the Etikopakka craft language and in opening the craft to ladies at his 140 strong women’s unit in his village.

Born into a very poor family of Etikopakka lacquer toy artisans, Srisailapu Chinnayachari began learning his craft as a very young child, from his father. He worked for 2 years under guru C V Raju in Etikopakka a natural dye revivalist. It was, while working under him, that he created his famous miniature ‘Egg with 51 eggs within which won him the National Award in 2005. Since working with hand lathe machines was a laborious and time consuming process, he switched to working with mechanical lathe machines, setting up his own mechanical lathe machine in 2015.



Since many artisans were migrating from the village in search of urban jobs, he set up his own unit in the village, with the help of a Rs.5 lakh loan given by Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh. The unit which began with 15 women today has 140 women training in the craft. Choosing women to craft Etikopakka toys, once a male preserve, he feels “is the main difference he brought to Etikopakka craft”. He has also brought natural dye into the craft and now specialises in his exquisite line of miniature Etikopakka toys. His 2 sons, while busy with their studies have also learnt the craft under the tutelage of this master craftsperson and are helping him to become computer and internet savvy.

# R. Prabhakaran

Born into the Vishwakarma Community, Sthapathi Prabhakaran joined his hereditary profession of metalcraft at age 33. A certificate holder of Govt of India's Art Metalcraft Training Centre, he crafts compelling gopurams, vimanams, kavachams in both precious and other metals for temples in India and different parts of the world.



Other prestigious projects followed. He has worked continuously for the past fifteen years. He has also worked on many gold chariots. While working on a big project in Germany he had some Germans in his team. He was struck by their discipline in adhering to timings and cleanliness.

Sthapathi Prabhakaran doesn't quite remember when he joined his ancestral calling though he woke every day since childhood to the sounds of his craft. After finishing his training at AMTC he began working in his field, along with his gurus. His first project was the Vinayagar temple in Kumbakonam.



Prabhakaran has trained 40 people in his craft, whom he employs in his projects. The problem he and other artisans face is transporting river sand to their locations or taking finished products to temples around the country or abroad. "Inspectors often take us for smugglers or illegal carriers of sand. We want official certification by UNESCO that we can transport our articles anywhere in the world."

# Obituary



## Suchi Ebrahim

The Crafts Council of India mourns the passing away of Suchi Ebrahim, a long standing and much loved member of CCI's Executive Council. Born in Chennai, Suchi did her schooling and graduation from Chennai and her post graduation from MFA Ohio University, USA. As a much sought after graphic designer, Suchi worked as Head of Graphic Design in HMV –EMI Gramophone Company, as Designer in several other companies, including freelancing as corporate Graphic Design Specialist. She was The Crafts Council of India's in house graphic designer, investing her design magic in every CCI publication, book and invitation.

Suchi, we at CCI will miss you, not only for your talents and your contribution to the craft scenario, but also for your never-say-die spirit in facing life, and above all, for your affectionate and sunny nature.

- Pushpa Chari

# Obituary



## Jasleen Dhamija

Renowned textile revivalist and craft expert, votary of natural dyes, author of compelling books on India's treasured handlooms and craft, persuasive speaker and more, Jasleen Dhamija wore many distinguished handcrafted hats with passion and charm. A close associate of Kamaladevi Chhattopadhyay, she played a significant role in the resurgence and growth of crafts and hand-woven textiles in post-Independent India.

Jasleen Dhamija's phenomenal achievements in the area of textiles and crafts are part of India's craft movement story. Briefly she was member of the All India Handicrafts Board in 1957, organizer of Iran's Handicrafts and those of 21 applicant countries, advisor to UNDP and the World Bank, and Co-Chairperson of the 'Handloom Development Working Group' in the 12th 5 Year Plan. She is also the author of many scholarly books on the Indian crafts and weaves. Jasleen Dhamija also taught at NIFT, Delhi, NID, and Universities of Minnesota and Canberra.

Jasleen Dhamija passed away peacefully in her Delhi home on 4th March 2023. The Crafts Council of India mourns the passing on of an icon of India's crafts and weaves.

- Pushpa Chari