



THE CRAFTS COUNCIL OF INDIA

"...ensuring sustainability of artisans and their craft..."

FEBRUARY 2012

LEARNING TOGETHER: A LESSON FROM CRAFT ECONOMICS

Ashoke Chatterjee

It has been such a long journey, and yet a journey that has only just begun. The August Business Meet in Chennai provided an overview of CCI's first incursion into what should perhaps have been its foundation: what it takes to make the case for sustainable livelihoods through heritage crafts. We can look back on the seminar which CCWB and CCI together organized in the Victoria Memorial in February 2008 as a Council watershed. We had by that realized the scale of ignorance of the contribution artisans make to national wellbeing. Their economic contribution translated into national production and income figures was needed if wellbeing in other terms (social, political, environmental, cultural, spiritual) was to receive acknowledgement. The consequences of ignorance and neglect had become apparent. Like other activists in the sector, CCI and state chapters seemed destined to run between pillar and post begging for support that awareness could have made automatic. Why had such a lacuna come about in a country with the world's longest tradition of living craft, where craft had been at the centre of its struggle for Freedom, had been incorporated into national planning once Independence came, which only the other day was tom-toming its achievements in 'craft renaissance', and where even its President acknowledges handcraft as the largest source of Indian livelihood after agriculture? What could be done to resolve the lacuna? Who would do what needed to be done? How long would it take?

The Victoria Memorial may have seemed a strange setting for such reflection. Was it not a symbol of a Raj that had forced the decline in Indian handcrafts so as to encourage British exports of machine-made products, a strategy Gandhiji would later counter through his swadeshi movement? Yet as Gopalkrishna Gandhi reminded us, perhaps our setting was not bizarre. After all, VM was built by Indian artisans. They had brilliantly adapted traditional skills to what was for them a contemporary need of commemorating Her Royal Majesty. It was precisely their capacity of innovation and moving with the times which CCI has endeavored to support and promote since its inception.

That 2008 seminar shared our dilemma with participants from several sectors of knowledge and experience. What became clear in Calcutta was that our fears were genuine: there was indeed no reliable data on our sector, little appreciation of the cost of this ignorance to national progress, and no place where the responsibility for change could be clearly assigned. Yet change was needed --- and quickly, to counter a growing prejudice that dismissed craft heritage and activity as a 'sunset' industry irrelevant to Shining India. The change agent, it soon became apparent, would have to be CCI. No one else seemed to be around to do the job now. CCI might lack experience in data-gathering and statistical methodologies. It might lack economists on its teams and even contact with research institutions. As a small NGO, it could hardly claim the national reach that a data-gathering task like this requires. Yet first steps were needed, studies would have to begin, pilot demonstrations would have to be made --- not tomorrow, but starting yesterday. For this, CCI would require partnerships entirely new to it: with economists and other disciplines related to statistical analysis and planning.

Partnership has been the key feature of the journey since 2008. It has taken us through many weeks and months of investigation, exploration and research, culminating in the "Craft Economics and Impact Study" (CEIS) shared with Council chapters in Chennai in August, and then with 20 partners brought together at the Crafts Museum in New Delhi in September, followed by a first round of discussion with senior experts at the Planning Commission. Along the way we have interacted with researchers, scholars and statisticians --- learning from them, and they in turn learning from CCI about a sector vital to every citizen and yet invisible to most despite its enormous scale and significance. As I write, CCI is preparing for another round of discussions in New Delhi. Raghav Rajagopalan in Chennai (who took courage from his development background to lead the CEIS team) is interacting with new partners representing national planning for skills, Shikha Mukherjee (who has strengthened

the CEIS team with her economic reporting and networking skills) in Kolkata has just unearthed a treasure-trove of livelihood data and insights, and Ruchira Ghosh at the Crafts Museum is contributing economics know-how not usually associated with the collections in that marvelous institution. Wisdom has come from many sides, with amazing generosity. Development Commissioners for Handicrafts and Handlooms have given us opportunities to participate in the drafting of the 12th Five Year Plan, enabling us to bring to the table knowledge and concerns generated by the CEIS. Far from suggesting that CCI should leave economics to the experts, Planning Commission economists have appreciated the CEIS as a step that had to be taken to impact a much larger context of national policy and action. For them as with others, the CEIS is all about learning together.

Learning together is perhaps the key lesson of these months of effort. Learning the economics of handicrafts is just the beginning of what is needed if India is to walk its decades-old talk about our glorious craft heritage. The work on cold statistics is enlivened by fresh understanding of values and issues that go well beyond numbers. We now have evidence to back past hunches of how 'organized' and innovative artisans really are (challenging the labels of 'unorganized' and 'informal' imposed on them), the resources of creativity and innovation they bring to industry well beyond crafts (machine tools, space applications, watches, industrial design), the huge contribution of women to the sector (as much as 50% in key production processes), the critical importance of craft activity to millions still on the margins of our society (women, minorities, tribal communities and those in remote and sensitive regions), the importance of hand production to environmental sustainability (use of local materials and the huge advantage of low carbon-footprint), the deep commitment of communities (including youth) to their heritage...the list goes on. This is a 'sector of sectors'. To strengthen it demands bringing together many streams of knowledge and experience. Economics is clearly one of these, and yet only one. The future of Indian handicrafts now demands inter-disciplinary teamwork on a scale we have yet to imagine. CCI is familiar with building teams of artisans, craft activists, designers, marketing managers, administrators and planners. Tomorrow's teams may include the economists we now know and a range of other expertise: livelihood management, sociology, anthropology, finance, corporate management, human rights, environmental science, media?.

From the European Union has come that wonderful phrase "The future is hand-made" --- hand-made in India by a myriad partners holding hands?

KNOW YOUR CRAFT

Kite Making

Ruby Palchoudhuri

Kites, the flimsy, colourful diamond shaped paper mounted on slender, but strong bamboo sticks, are so familiar and 'ordinary' that rarely do they appear to be the outcome of intricate craftsmanship and knowledge. Yet kite making has to be learned from a master knowledgeable in the 'secret' art of converting the everyday into an aerodynamic marvel.

The three-phase Kite Festival conceived and organized by the Crafts Council of West Bengal began from August 17, 2011 and will conclude on January 17, 2012.

Phase One was launched, coinciding with Vishvakarma Puja in West Bengal, a day when the tradition of kite flying is celebrated by Crafts Council of West Bengal in partnership with the West Bengal Government, Department of Tourism and the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre as well as the participation of two internationally famous kite flyers - Kirti Thakar and Dilip Kapadia. The Kites Festival was inaugurated by the West Bengal, Minister for Tourism, Mr. Rachpal Singh at B B D Bagh, a stone's throw from the State secretariat, Writers' Building in a colourful ceremony that included kites and the release of the now rare hot air balloons, otherwise known as Phanush. An exhibition of kites from all over the world and other parts of India was arranged at the historic Sovabazar Natmandir in North Kolkata, where local kite makers demonstrated their skill in producing large and small kites using tissue paper, sticks and glue. The third event of Phase One was a kite flying competition at a park in North Kolkata, where hundreds of kites and rollers with strings were distributed to children, aficionados and amateurs. The fourth event was a kite flying demonstration and competition organized by the West Bengal government's Department of Tourism on the sprawling Maidan that attracted wide public participation.



Phase Two was a workshop in collaboration with the Indian Museum on the making of kites and demonstration for teaching students and interested members of the public the art of flying kites as part of the National Heritage Week programme, from November 17 to November 25. Spurred by the infectious enthusiasm that the idea of kites produced, the Indian Museum conceived a brilliant exhibition on "Games and Pastimes Through the Ages". The kite making and flying workshop joined the living and intangible heritage embodied in the tradition of kites, their making and their flying with the tangible heritage of objects in the Indian Museum's collection. "The Games and Pastimes Through the Ages" brought to public attention the variety of board, indoor

and other games and pastimes in India that continue to be a living tradition, though mostly in the rural areas. From terracotta toy carts from Harappa and Mohenjodaro to exquisite ivory chess pieces, ganjifa cards, dice and a variety of balls made from stone to intricately woven cane, the exhibition explored the connection between crafts and the artifacts, for each object was a piece of extraordinary craftsmanship. Participants included students from schools, Government College of Art, Calcutta University, Rabindra Bharati University and enthusiastic members of the public.

The Crafts Council of West Bengal's success in reviving popular interest in kites as a game and a pastime is evident from the public participation in each of the programmes and the Indian Museum's imaginative response in organizing "the Games and Pastimes Through the Ages" exhibition. Each game or pastime, every festival in India is associated with a craft form. The Indian Museum explores the connection between heritage and the present in which the livelihoods of a diversity of crafts producers are dependent and on keeping alive traditions such as kites and other games or pastimes.

CRAFTING TRADITIONS FOR POSTERITY

(Excerpts from a newspaper article)

Jaya Jaitley

Should India's traditional handcrafters occupy an elevated space in people's minds or should they remain on the pavements, bazaars, haats, and perhaps marginally in malls, to be looked at as poor street cousins of India's other cultural practitioners? Sixty years after three important Akademis were set up to promote cultural arts that come under the heading of dance, music, drama, literature and the fine arts, it may be time to take note of the huge reservoir of cultural heritage passing from generation to generation through the hands of craftspeople towards establishing a body that nurtures this heritage and builds respect... A Hast Kala Akademi could be created as a more compact, private-public autonomous institution promoting all non-commercial explorations of the craft sector, while indirectly benefiting its economic prospects as well.

Crafts practitioners are repositories and propagators of India's folk and classical wisdoms, creativity, techniques, skills, and mythologies. They belong overwhelmingly to those social categories for which reservation is sought as a tool for empowerment... We can raise the stature and self-worth of these very people by providing institutions and platforms that go beyond a noblesse oblige style of patronage and a handful of departmental schemes that merely assist them in producing and selling better products in India and abroad. When the window through which we look at them is small, they will remain diminished when compared to other sections of society within the creative community.

Since Independence, government agencies handling craftspeople and their work have been divided between the khadi/gramodyog department and various ministries such as Industry, Rural Development, and Textiles. Sometimes programmes are duplicated, some slip between the floorboards altogether, or crafts interests are crushed under the weight of bigger interests within the same ministry. These divisions have left crafts floundering in the cultural field since no ministry deals with such aspects other than the Ministry of Culture. A composite appreciation of the cultural world from which crafts emerge and a forum for their sustenance and propagation cannot come if crafts are considered merely a cottage industry, manufacturing merchandise that needs subsidies forever.

... A Hast Kala Akademi could support many exciting activities like a) resurrecting dying crafts, b) encouraging skills that could come under UNESCO's list of intangible heritage, c) encouraging research into processes, skills and traditional technologies, d) commissioning studies linking objects to rituals, myths, legends, festivals and ceremonies, e) commissioning academic and informative publications to include documentation of rare crafts including region-wise processes of natural dyeing, f) commissioning documentaries of craftspeople in their own cultural habitat and, g) organising high quality exhibitions in museums of art and ethnology in India and around the world, demonstrating the relationship between India's crafts and its performing arts and classical literature. There are endless creative possibilities that will energise this sector and are quite apart from what any museum can do.

It should be possible for the Government of India to set up a body constituted on the same – or even slightly altered lines – as the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Sahitya Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi to bring crafts onto a higher platform. If there were a Hast Kala Akademi it would add just that missing component that leaves crafts behind in national and international minds.

.....
(The writer is founder and president of Dastkari Haat Samiti.)

IN SEARCH OF MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT EDUCATION CCI AND THE TRADITIONAL INDIAN ARTISAN – PART II

Vidya Sastry

In the last issue of the Newsletter, we discussed the options and criteria for possibilities for higher education for children of artisans, an issue that emerged during the discussions at the National Meet in March 2011. CCI's quest in getting an understanding of the education needs continued – After the National Meet, we also began discussions with the children themselves, to understand from them their ideas, dreams and aspirations.

We chatted with some of the children from Tamil Nadu during a camp in Chennai and through a student intern who traveled to Orissa, Rajasthan and West Bengal.

The situations, as we always knew, is different in each location. The children from Orissa had tremendous exposure and were proud of their parents' craft – being in a tourist location; they see a lot of interest generated by tourists. For the children in Jawaja, Rajasthan there is scope for interaction with designers, management graduates, etc yet no effort has been made for the children on this count. In West Bengal, the children have no scope for exposure normally as they are in remote villages. Among the children from Veeravanallur in Tamil Nadu, almost all of them practice some part of the work at home.

What surfaced was that before we begin looking at higher education needs, there was tremendous ground to be covered even at the school level and in our programme.

First of all, if ensuring the sustainability of the craft is the primary aim of CCI through the "Educate to Sustain" programme, then mechanisms would have to be worked out by which we could ensure at the time of induction itself that the scholarship goes to a child who would definitely continue his/her craft related work after schooling.

After the induction of the children into the program, workshops or camps should be conducted regularly both with the intention of exposure as well as specific skill training.

The lack of exposure of the children was evident in all discussions. Exposure is required in a variety of areas that would build the scenario of the potential for their craft – contemporary markets, design, the types of material

available and options available for craft related higher education. Exposure is also bound to information about the history of their craft, about the entire process of the craft from raw material to buyer and the issues faced by the artisan all along. Specific skill training would also strengthen their ability to choose craft as their livelihood.

Having done these two steps (during the process of induction and later while the child is in the programme), we would also need to organize proper career counseling at an appropriate time. Only then would the child be empowered to take the right decisions for their higher studies.

HEIRLOOMS, A RECENT EXHIBITION IN EDINBURGH ON THE CENTURIES-OLD TEXTILE TRADE BETWEEN INDIA AND JAVA

Ruby Palchoudhuri

Lining the walls of the galleries of the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh recently was a selection of rare textiles from India and Indonesia. The exhibition "Heirlooms" organized for the Edinburgh International Festival was presented in partnership with Dovecot Studios at the studio premises. It showcased "the centuries-old exchange between Indian and Javanese textile traditions", and the interaction through trade between the two countries. The contemporary influence of Indian textile traditions on Scotland was brought out through the commissioned work of three artists from Dovecot. The exhibition sought "to show how tradition is a continuing thread influencing modern present day visual culture".

Indian silk double ikkats were highly prized in Indonesia, and so too were the beautifully dyed and printed cloths of India. The ikkat weaves were exquisitely replicated on the batiks of Java which revealed skill in the use of "canting" - wax pen - as well as natural dyes. The Indonesian section of "Heirlooms" had many of these prized specimens on display. While the historical exhibition was curated by Jonathan Hope and Ben Divall, the contemporary display and exchange was coordinated by Elizabeth Guest.



The exhibits in the Indonesian section were from the private collection of Jonathan Hope.

A striking wall hanging in Batik executed in the style of "wayang kulit" (shadow puppets) showed long nosed, stylized figures of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, gazing belligerently at each other. Another showed a line up of female figures. Placed strategically at the centre of the hall it was in the tradition of Jain paintings. The religious cloth was used for ceremonial occasions. On display too were skirt cloths in earth colours decorated with lotus blossoms floating in the water, metres-long bordered material intricately patterned in browns, off whites and blacks, and sumptuously decorated material lit up by Garudas and Mt. Merus. Trouser cloth patterned with elephants and tigers, replicated from ikkat, breast wrappers with rust borders, and elaborately printed sarongs were some of the fabrics ushered by royalty. Books on the extraction of natural dyes and on methods of dyeing and printing completed the display.

In the Indian section, beautiful Dacca, Balachuri and Jamdani saris were on view, many of which belonged to the 19th century. More than a century old embroidered Kantha material was also on view as well as contemporary works such as the exquisite piece depicting palanquins and their bearers, western men in trousers and women in gowns, and birds and fishes.

Many of the heirloom saris belonged to the collection of Ruby Palchoudhuri of Crafts Council of West Bengal, some of the pieces were from Chotelal Bharany's collection. Ruby accompanied by Jamdani weaver Jyotish Debnath and Kantha embroiderer Bina Dey was present at the exhibition.

"Dovecot is a tapestry studio set up in 1912 to revive this traditional art," said David Weir, Director of the Dovecot Studios which is housed in an aesthetically converted Victorian public bath. "The old art is revived but

always with a contemporary touch. The founding weavers came from the famed William Morris studios. Since 2008 we are giving this studio a wider context by working with international partners. The director of the Edinburgh International Festival, Jonathan Mills' East meets West theme this year has been a perfect opportunity for us to further cultural exchange with India. I see this as the start of a long conversation with India".

Ruby Palchoudhuri came in contact with Dovecot when she visited Scotland for a story telling project on the Scotsmen who came to Bengal during the Raj. This led to the cultural exchange programme, with the three artists of the studio visiting West Bengal to familiarize themselves with Kantha embroidery and Jamdani weaving.

Naomi Robertson, master weaver at Dovecot who has been with the studio for 21 years, said she was asked to produce a contemporary piece and she decided to tell of her journey in India. Her tapestry "Kantha Diaries" is woven with the images of daily life as in traditional Kantha Ambassador taxis, mosquitoes, temple decorations, women in sarees, rickshaws, and even cockroaches merrily coexist on a rich blue background. "There is no point in producing replicas - our experiences and responses should come into the work" she said.

Artist Deirdre Nelson's "Repository of Memory" "fuses the traditional skills of Kantha with contemporary references to Information Technology in India". While Sarah Sumsion's creation "Threads of Life" is about "the symbolism and importance of colour in everyday lives" in India.

Elizabeth Guest, the curator of the Indian section said, "We are trying to show the importance and beauty of Indian textiles both in the past and present. Pieces from Gujarat that went to Indonesia were highly prized". As for the minimalistic touch, she explained, "The focus is on the styles and techniques of embroidery that influenced artists of our studio who visited India. There is such a wealth of Indian textiles. Unless you are focused, you can't do much. We had to focus on living textiles, to connect the past and the present, their heirlooms of the future."

THE ART OF VOLUNTEERING

A NEWBIE'S POINT OF VIEW

Deepa Ramaprasad

I am a housekeeper. My only child decided she had enough of me hovering around her and worrying about her tiniest sneeze and packed me off to use these talents elsewhere. Seeing that my qualifications were nothing much to write home about, and noting that my age was against me for a 9 - 5 well paid job, we concluded that volunteering my time would be the ideal solution. There was no contest as to where to join, CCI won hands down, mainly because my aunt is a part of it and we love crafts.

Whenever we travel, we look for what is unique to the country we are in, in terms of architecture, food, crafts, cottage industry, clothes, hats, jewellery, etc. This is proving to be more difficult as most cities are becoming clones of each other, from the ubiquitous skyscrapers, shopping malls, fast food joints, clothes just about everything. This then makes it imperative to keep our crafts alive and thriving as this is what identifies us as uniquely 'us'.

What I've been seeing increasingly, is that, indigenous crafts, in order to survive, are being reinvented. Let's take wicker work. When we were in Bali last year, I saw a wide range of wicker products adapted for current use. A simple example is that of a tissue box. The product was beautifully finished, practical and useful but most importantly, marketable and so the craft survives.

Some crafts are inviolate and should not be adapted, for example, the Chamba Rumaal. Historically, it is a gift wrap and adapting it to anything else will destroy its value. Or, for that matter, the Chola bronze which is a 'heritage' in itself.

Coming back to the CCI, it is a very important platform from which to understand the various crafts around India and to keep our identity intact. But the CCI is short staffed in terms of regular volunteers. The beauty of this NGO is that a handful of volunteers and their passionate involvement has kept this organization alive. The office is lively enough when we have members meeting regularly to discuss future projects and events. We'd like to see more of you participating frequently in our Tuesday morning gatherings. And perhaps extend them to other days as well.

WOOD IS GOOD

REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ART AND JOY OF WOOD

Indu Parthasarthy

The International Conference on the Art and Joy of Wood was held between the 19th and the 22nd of October, 2011 at the J.N. Auditorium, Bangalore. The conference had speakers from various countries and diverse backgrounds presenting papers on different topics related to wood. The 15 - 20 minute talks were followed by question and answer sessions.

The constant thread linking the disparate subjects discussed in the conference was the theme "Wood is Good". These included:



- a) Role of wood in sustainable development,
- b) The evolution, history and status of wood culture in different countries,
- c) Wood utilization in architecture,
- d) Furniture and wood products sector,
- e) Timber industry,
- f) Promoting wood culture in the future,
- g) Technical aspects of wood and
- h) Artistic aspects of wood use and design

Through the theme that 'Wood is good' the conference brought together many voices from many countries. The sheer variety of wood related subjects was fascinating.

The importance of protecting and planting forests is undeniable. Forests play a critical and vital role in combating climate change and global warming. Wood holds carbon in perpetuity (carbon sink) and prevents it from escaping into the atmosphere, thus reducing the effect of one of the drivers of climate change. Ecosystems can flourish in thriving forests.

Wood activities and wood related activities (logging, saw mills, wood treatment, engineered wood industry, furniture, house-construction, crafts, boat-building, cottage industries, natural remedies and so on) give employment to millions.

Policy makers, relevant institutions, the directly related stakeholders, scientists, all need to work together to ensure the judicious and efficient use of wood and the planned planting of trees with an understanding of the geography, climate and the people residing near and in the forests. Reduction in wood waste and adequate wood pre-treatment to extend its life span could go a long way to reduce the pressure on forest ecosystems. Corrupt dealings fuelled by greed, illegal poaching and felling should be strictly monitored.

Substituting wood for concrete in building construction will significantly help the environment. Statistics show that if 1m³ concrete is replaced with 1m³ of wood, the release of 1 ton of CO₂ can be prevented. In the long run, using more timber instead of steel, concrete and plastic in building construction will greatly reduce green house gas emissions.

The aesthetic joy of wood has been known to people from ancient times. Wood objects, be they functional or purely artistic





Stone project



Chief Guest interacting with artisan at the Bazaar



10/10/2011

DCC's Sutrakar Sammaan awardee Naseem Ahmed



CCWB's Kite making workshop



Resource person Devika
with CCI's Scholarship students



CCK's patri



Delhi's 'Kamala' at Antara



MRm.Rm.Cultural Foundation at Antara

provide a unique happiness, perhaps due to their organic nature. Wood lasts long, is easy to use and comes from a renewable source. By encouraging their use, traditional craftsmen can continue their livelihoods, while the consumers can bring in a small part of nature back into their homes. Most significant perhaps is the fact that forests can ensure the future of planet Earth for future generations.

THE HANDICRAFT SECTOR IN ANDHRA PRADESH: AT CROSSROADS

Meena Appender

Each generation is faced with choices; the Handicraft sector in India is no exception.

A few decades ago, the Indian crafts sector was at a crossroad of sorts with handicrafts and handlooms which had flourished before and immediately after independence gradually being replaced by products that were flooding the market as a result of liberalization.

At this point, craft enthusiasts, the development sector, as well as the Government, each for different



reasons, concentrated their efforts on creating and providing sustainable livelihood opportunities for craftspeople. This naturally led to modelling handicrafts in a manner which enabled them to attempt to compete with mass produced goods.

From the perspective of NGOs like the Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh, which worked with the Handicraft Sector, the lines between craft revival and the assembly line production of crafts were often blurred.

Presently we are faced with newer challenges - How are we going to keep quality crafts alive?, How are we going to enable our craftspeople to find niche markets for their products? How are we going to ensure this in the case of every craft and handloom centre we work with?

We could begin by identifying the challenges faced by specific crafts, in terms of their conceptualization, manufacture, and marketing.

Terracotta- There is no market in the villages in which they are produced as rural consumers have shifted to plastics as more cost effective alternatives. Terracotta is too expensive to transport to urban areas which may still provide an esoteric market, except in summers when lorry loads of clay containers are brought in to cities and sold immediately as well as during Deepavali when moulded diyas are still used.

Tholu Bommalu- Originally groups of story tellers travelled from village to village retelling the Ramayana using leather puppets (made by themselves) as characters. This oral performance tradition which in the recent past has been rendered redundant in light of increased literacy rates, cinema halls and television, forcing the craftspeople to give up performance and make lampshades and wall hangings in order to earn a living.

Ettikopaka- This craft has adapted well to the current needs of consumers. The products that have been developed are attractive, cost effective and relevant to today's aesthetics.

Kondapally- These craftspeople have gracefully adapted their products from serving as playthings for children to slightly more innovative and functional accessories for present day homes.

Gadwal - A large number of weavers who have adopted new designs and techniques to create products which may not be appreciated by traditionalists, but serve as their only means of livelihood.

Puttapaka - A village which a few years back had 500 weavers now has barely 50. Puttapaka's proximity to a booming Hyderabad makes the lure of unskilled but well paying employment more attractive than their traditional laborious tie and dye weaving. There are however a few weavers who have interacted with contemporary designers and exporters and have done very well for themselves.

Venkatagiri - Very little is seen of the fine pure cotton and zari butta saris.

Cheriyal- The scroll painters and mask makers of Cheriyal, can be counted on ones fingertips. Here too, adaptation seems to be the key, considering the success of Cheriyal artists who have been trained to use computers

by animations houses resulting in various versions of Hindu mythology animated using the Cheriyal technique.

The Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh, like other organisations working on craft revival is confronted with the irony of being able to take advantage of an upcoming generation of youngsters who are interested in 'investing' in craft and artisan products and are easily able to do so by virtue of their financial capacities made possible by the very same economic system that has rendered traditional craft occupations unfeasible to many.

Some answers that occur to us in Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh are:

- ❑ The responsibility for creating livelihoods in terms of numbers should be left to the government and their various employment guarantee schemes. The Crafts Council should concentrate on reviving, creating, and maintaining quality craft.
- ❑ We should help our skilled craftspeople find a 'niche market' with the help of innovative designers and a little push in the market. Once a product catches on, the numbers will automatically follow. We have seen this in practice, in cases where designs developed by certain craftspeople have been copied en masse and have been extremely successful commercially. Other crafts like Kondapalli and Etikkopaka have increased production quantities manifold after design intervention.
- ❑ Presently Councils of the various states work independently of each other. A common platform, at least with regard to design innovation and marketing would make possible the pooling in of resources, ideas and experimentation resulting in the high quality crafts and textiles we hope to enable craftspeople to produce.
- ❑ One possible model for this collaboration could be:
 - a. A Central Committee consisting of people who have experience and knowledge in crafts and textiles who decide the specific crafts each state should work on.
 - b. A Workshop Committee that decides on designers, workshop modalities and prototypes.
 - c. A Marketing Committee which decides which products are to be sold, when and where they are to be sold and at what prices they are to be sold at.
- ❑ Each Council can then have specific focus areas, while also working in tandem with the other Councils, as opposed to the current system which often results in repetition and overlaps, as well as a lack of interaction in terms of information and ideas. This synergy seems absolutely essential at this point, in order to adopt a 'business model' to ensure the revival and continued survival of the crafts we so dearly love.

PARIJATHAM: GARLAND MAKING WORKSHOP

Pushpa Chari

It was roses, tuberose and mogras all the way at 'Parijatham', a flower garland stringing and flower art workshop organized by World Crafts Council, Poompuhar and Government Museum in Chennai. Six traditional 'pookaras' whose wonderful garlands, tapestries and venis were on view at the venue, trained 25 eager participants in stringing, folding, decorating and embellishing flowers and birds with breathtaking effect. For artisans Muthumperumal, K.Ramu, Murugan, Devram and others it was not just about teaching their craft to generation next but taking forward the cultural heritage of offering flowers in wondrous shapes to the gods as well as decorating auspicious spaces and festivals.

The 25 trainees were avid learners and by the end of the 5 day workshop could string malaas and jewellery of commendable quality. WCC hopes that their tribe will increase and that traditional floral expressions will continue to be part of our future culturescape.



DIFFERENT STROKES, DIFFERENT STORIES

Pushpa Chari

Every craftsperson has a story to tell. And the stories are not just about the stories within stories which his hands craft as he conjures up a dot infested deer of singular grace deep in the jungles of Chhattisgarh, creates a meditation inducing panchaloha Nataraja in Swamimalai, kites in Ahmedabad and Raja Rani dolls in Tirupati, the lace like silver 'juda' pins of Puri or weaves ethereal textile dreams in Imphal, Varanasi, Patan or Kanchipuram. Or even strings up wooden beads or plaits reed chiks down the road. He brings with him his stories compounded of existential hope and despair, his experience and passion for his vocation, liberal openness of outlook and practical wisdom as he trudges from often remote rural locations to the fairs, melas, bazaars and 'craft expos' of Chennai. Today's Indian artisan lives in a connected world, is reasonably well traveled and aware, in sync not just with his roots but with market needs. He is inventive, innovative and fairly experimental, traits which are reflected in his work and his stories which I have been privileged to hear. Here are some of them.

Umar Farukh's father, a National Awardee brought up Bagh prints from tribal wear created by the Khatri Muslim community in the small village of Bagh in Madhya Pradesh to the iconic status of elegant block printed textiles which it is today. Apart from his father, Umar, his mother and all 5 brothers are national awardees. Says Umar 'Today Bagh prints are in demand all over the country. And I think it has a secure future. My brothers and I are constantly experimenting with creating new colours, formats, printing on bamboo chiks, etc. Though some younger members may be leaving the craft, many educated ones like me and my nephews are passionate about taking it forward. My father won his National Award for printing a bedsheet with 1500 different blocks and my brother demonstrated the Bagh block printing technique in Greece. I want to achieve something spectacular as well' The famous Ajarakh block printers of Gujarat and the Bagru printers of Rajasthan are also nationally acclaimed and doing brisk business. Their stories too resonate with a touch of hope in the future.

Paramparik potter Bhaira Ram of Jaisalmer makes charming sculpted mud tiles with a distinct rural flavour for urban interiors and gardens. "Matkas and khullars are now not used at all by this plastic generation", shrugs Bhaira Ram, so I've switched to decorative tiles, bird baths, lanterns and magic lamps etc. "When availability of became less, we agitated and the Government allotted us 10 bighas of land. So we work through the year" As does Jaideep Rana of Barapali district of Orissa. According to Rana he fashions his exquisite bird mobiles, bird baths, lanterns, etc because there is a demand in cities" My fellow potters and I walk 20 km to get mud from a local pond for 2 months of the year during which we store a whole year's supply in our homes. The mitti regenerates itself, so there's no dearth of raw material". Which is what Pam from Manipur too feels about the black rock mixed with feldspar out of which her village of Longpi creates a stunning line of black tableware and cookware. "It is an ancient art" says Pam "and we only cook in these terracotta vessels. Due to exposure all over India our tableware is greatly in demand with hotels in Delhi placing orders. I work with a group of women potters and am very happy" Yet in the more developed areas of the country potters' colonies are disappearing along with mud khullars and 'matkas'. The potters are relocating to urban centres for casual jobs or as flower pot makers.

"Most crafts in India are languishing today" says Shilp Guru L. Rathakrishnan. Most artisans are leaving the vocation though there is a demand for bronze icons both at home and abroad. I myself have trained 65 craftsmen under a Government of India scheme. But the numbers of artisans is declining". "This is equally true of Machilipatnam Kalamkari block printing" says master artisan P.M. Eashwarudu. His spectacular 'Tree of Life' conceived for the Festival of India in 1982 is still talked about and his oeuvre of bedspreads, wall hangings, saris, fabric and table linen is a hit with every craft cognoscenti. According to Eashwarudu, government schemes hardly reach the artisans, there is much dilution in design and the educated opt for white collar jobs in cities.

But for Lambani embroiderer Devi Bai and tribal ironcraft artisan Sonadhar Vishwakarma the glass is half or even quarterful. Devi Bai works with NGO Sandur Kushala Kala Kendra which she says has honed her skills, made her design savvy and given her financial stability and status. "Can I ask for more", she says with a smile and Sonadhar repeats the rhetorical question 'Can anyone else make ironcraft products like us?'

But above the exigencies of profit and trade, aesthetics and value another overwhelming issue surfaces as well. Gond artist Anand Kumar Shyam points to a fat cat full of dots and says these dots are symbolic of Gond identity. "When J.Swaminathan's team entered our jungles in 1981 so dazzled were they by our wall art that they asked us to paint it on paper. Now with prolific Gond art done by us on paper, wall art is vanishing and along with exposure to the outside world, our culture and language too is disappearing. We make good money but our identity is gone".

Different strokes, different stories. Will a composite craft future emerge out of all this.

CRAFT BYTES

- ❑ The Export promotion Council for Handicrafts will be recognizing 103 companies engaged in the export of handicrafts on the 20th of December in New Delhi. An annual event since 1989, this platform recognizes corporate houses and craftsmen alike for their contribution to the craft sector.
news.indiamart.com>apparelnews>awards/reconition news
- ❑ Indian craftsmen including 6 mastercraftsmen took part in the just concluded 'Festival of India' in Argentina
news.indiamart.com>apparelnews>event/announcement news
- ❑ The World Crafts Council will hold their next general assembly, end 2012 in Chennai. This promises to be a primordial event that will give the city an occasion to showcase its heritage and craft culture.

www.worldcraftscouncil.org

ACTIVITIES

THE CRAFTS COUNCIL OF INDI



- ❑ Textile & Jewellery Show (9 -10 September 2011): Organised by CCI, the Textile and Jewellery Show was a huge success with theChennai textile and craft cognoscenti with its rare traditional weaves, superb embellishment and vegetable dye saris and fabric. The wonderful variety of the country's textile heritage and the innovative touches of morphing them to suittoday'sstylerequirements, found a tremendous response in the discerning Chennai shopper.

- ❑ Crafts Bazaar 2011 (September 23rd-2nd October 2011): High quality, innovative and some exceptionally brilliant craft products were on sale at

the Crafts Bazaar organized by CCI. This is an annual event looked forward to by Chennai craft lovers who came in large numbers for a shopping experience like none other.

- ❑ Antara (5 - 11 December 2011): The leitmotif of 'Antara', a home décor exhibition organized by CCIwasIndia's great craft traditions brought into contemporary frames, Kalamkari furniture and cushions,sanjhi craft screens and Gond art, palmyra artifacts and boxes and stone decorative products were among the many quality craft products on view at this hugely successful exhibition. CCI's own craft outlet at New Delhi "Kamala - The Craft Shop" also showcased its products which were a runaway success.

CRAFTS COUNCIL OF ASSAM

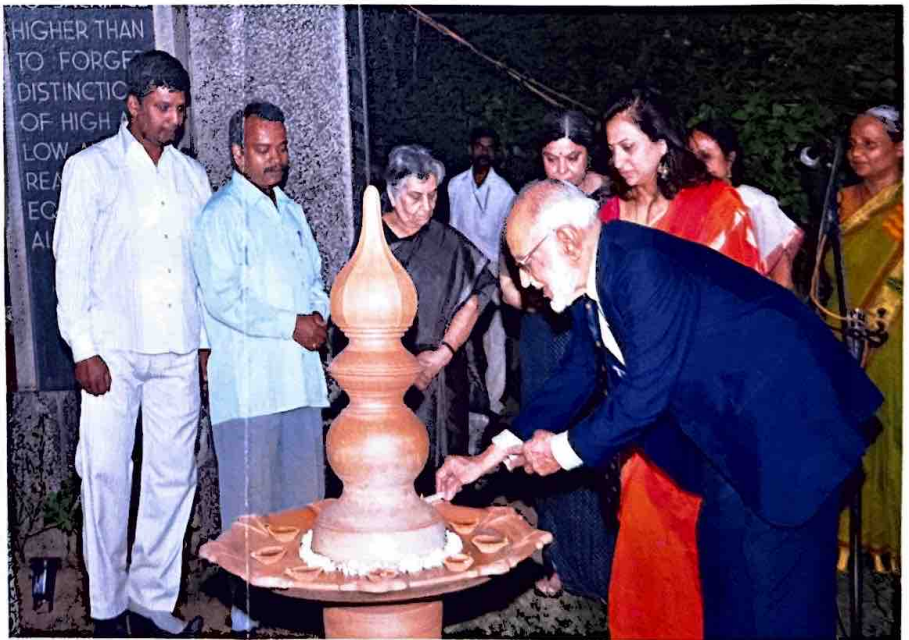


- ❑ CCA has been working closely with the Institute of Entrepreneurship, Guwahati, an organization which has set up cluster groups throughout the North East. The Institute and CCA have worked together on marketable products mainly from Manipur and Assam. Some of the items like traditional jewellery and basketry products are being worked upon for the Kamala shop.
- ❑ CCA has recently made forays into rural Kamrup to work with the Gandhi Smarak Samity. This is a setup of plains tribal women learning the skills of weaving to earn a livelihood. CCA has started designs and development products to make the items more market friendly outside the state. Dye workshops will be conducted in the future. Regular interactive sessions with the artisans in Guwahati have also been conducted. Younger people are encouraged to attend these sessions.
- ❑ CCA has taken part in all the exhibitions in the Kamala Shop and has had good response for the products with reasonable sales. There have been bulk orders for gift items from corporate houses
- ❑ Amongst CCA's future plans is to tie up with some corporate houses on skill development. A pilot project in a few schools to encourage and create awareness among children about traditional crafts has been initiated.

DELHI CRAFTS COUNCIL

- ❑ Stone Project (8-19 October 2011): For the last several years The Craft Council of India, under its 'Shila - Shilp' Project has trained over 250 artisans working with stone in new designs and the use of improved technologies.

Building on this programme, Delhi Crafts Council has further worked with a few of the trained craftsmen to create innovative products. These were showcased at Dastkar's Nature Bazaar, October 8 - 17, 2011 at the Crafts Museum. The response



to the collection was very encouraging and the products are now being stocked at the Kamala shop.

- ❑ Sari - 2011 (10, 11, 12 October 2011): Sari 2011 was a resounding success. It is heartwarming to see the renewed interest in handlooms which was apparent from the footfalls. There were 20 participants, most of whose work had some design intervention. This year's Sutrakar Samman was given to Naseem Ahmed for his proficiency in jala making techniques of Benarasi weaving; a technique which is almost on the verge of extinction.

- ❑ IIC Experience, (October 15-21, 2011): As a homage to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the Delhi Crafts Council showcased the work of 7 recipients of the Kamaladevi Puraskar. It was a particular joy to see a younger generation of craftspersons not only carrying forward an inherited skill, but innovating with just the right touch of modern sensitivity within the parameters of traditional designs. The Gandhi-King Plaza came alive with products of Sikki grass weaving, Sujni embroidery, wood carving, Madhubani, Kalamkari and pottery, offering interested visitors an opportunity to interact with their youthful, accomplished creators.
- ❑ Kamala shop (Patram 2011) : The season started with Patram, Kamala's exhibition of tableware and table linen. The main attractions were Har Kishen's glazed pottery and Pradyunma Kumar's Trees.
- ❑ Sind Haath Heart Exhibition: Designed by Ryoko Haraguchi, this exhibition unifies Indian and Japanese textile traditions of weaving and dyeing.

In addition to these programmes, the Kamala shop was represented at the India International Trade Fair at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi in December 2011.

CRAFTS COUNCIL OF KARNATAKA



- ❑ The Crafts Council of Karnataka held the prestigious Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Viswakarma Awards at Rajbhavan, Bangalore. His Excellency the Governor of Karnataka Shri.H.R.Bhardwaj presented the prestigious Awards to Smt. Bhagyalakshmi for excellence in Mysore Traditional Painting, Shri. S.Somashekhar for excellence in Bronze casting craft and Smt. Vidya Bhat for excellence in Ganjifa art and traditional miniature painting. The G.Venkatachalam Memorial Award was given to Shri.S.N.Chandrasekar, renowned Art Critic of Karnataka.

- ❑ A Design and Technical Development Workshop in Lacquerware Craft (Channapatna) (15-30 June 2011): The workshop was sponsored by the DC(H). The "Patri" artisans of Channapatna crafted utility contemporary artefacts. Designer Meera Naidu and Mastercraftsperson Shri. Kauser Pasha participated in the workshop.

❑ Vastrabharana 2011 (30 Sept - 4 October 2011): CCK's annual flagship exhibition of hand crafted textiles and jewellery was a great success. CCK's motto "Saris - Our heritage, our attire" printed on the invitation, is a small contribution towards the awareness of our prestigious sari heritage and culture.



CRAFTS COUNCIL OF INDIA

- ❑ Crafts Bazaar (August 3 - 9): CCTN's Craft Bazaar had an excellent response from the public. There were 90 stalls from different parts of India and all the craftsmen had excellent sales. The people of Coimbatore responded in big numbers to promote crafts.
- ❑ Shell Craft Classes (29 & 30 August): CCTN conducted shell craft classes at Saraswathi Vidhyalaya for 90 students.
- ❑ In September, CCTN initiated shell craft classes at Bharat Vidhya Bhavan, Erode.
- ❑ Shrishti 2011 (Oct 13 - 15, 2011): CCTN's annual fund raiser Shrishti 2011 was held at Ramakrishna Kalyana Mandapam. Most of the participants did well.
- ❑ A Workshop on Warli Art (Nov 10 to 13): CCTN conducted a workshop on Warli Art. Mrs. Falguni Khona from Cochin taught 45 participants. Some of the office bearers and committee members of CCTN sponsored 10 tribals from Anaikatty village who came along with a supervisor for the workshop. The workshop helped the tribals to improve on their skills and earn their livelihood from painting Warli art pictures which are being ordered by customers from Delhi and abroad.

