



THE CRAFTS COUNCIL OF INDIA

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

February 2014

LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY

Kasturi Gupta Menon

The year was 1947. India had just been partitioned by the British, and a new country - PAKISTAN was formed by carving up the 2 states of Punjab and Bengal. Massive migrations had begun, especially on the Western Front, and in the Eastern flank too, what initially started as a trickle, became wave after wave after wave in 1948, 1950, and 1953 - the last massive influx of refugees taking place in 1964.

Because my father was in the Indian Civil Service, he was given a choice to opt for either India or Pakistan, and although his own village in East Bengal had become a part of the newly formed state called East Pakistan, he opted to serve in India. And that is how, around late 1947 the family reached Calcutta.

As most of the British ICS officers had opted to return to the UK, and the Muslim officers had opted to serve either in East or West Pakistan, India faced a dearth of experienced civil servants. My father had the responsibility of the Health and Education departments, Local Self Government as well as the Secretary of the Refugee and Rehabilitation department. This multiplicity of charge was the case with most of his contemporaries who served in the initial years of a truncated India in their respective state cadres to which they were allotted.

By early 1948 streams of refugees from the Punjab started to arrive in Calcutta, and my mother, with her NOAKHALI experience, again became immersed in relief and rehabilitation work. Bales of jungle green merino wool had been gifted from Australia for knitting garments for displaced families, which, for lack of space, was stacked in our 20ft wide verandah flanking a huge lawn at the rear. An army of volunteers would come everyday to take away a measured portion of the yarn. These would be returned in 3 or 4 days in the form of sweaters, socks, or caps. And gradually Ma and her friends found themselves drawn inexorably into the rehabilitation of the Punjabi and Bengali refugees through their affiliated organizations like the AIWC, Nari Seva Sangha, All Bengal Women's Union and the Mahila Seva Samity etc.

Women from other communities volunteered to lend a helping hand. There were Gujarati, Marwari, Malayali, Sikh, Punjabi & Marathi, and each one brought a whiff of their culture along with them. Once a week a Hindi master would come to teach them the Devnagari script (as Hindi had been voted the link language), and a huge " satranji " or dari would be spread out under the shade of a gulmohur tree at the far end of the garden, where all the women would sit each with a slate and chalk. Being all of 4 years old, I too joined, as there was no school for me to attend.

* * *

My memories of those women volunteers and social workers are vivid as though it was just yesterday. And I was most intrigued to see the various ways in which they tied their saris.

Mrs Tarabai Sathé invariably wore a nine yard checked cotton Puné sari which she tied between her legs like a dhoti. Yet she managed to look very feminine. The ladies from the Gujarat community wore

their pallus back to front, and had beautiful mirror-work or beads embroidered on them. I was fascinated by those tiny mirrors and beads, and longed for such a piece for myself. They also wore exquisite bandhnis and taught the rest of the group how to dance the garba.

Mrs Chinappa, (whose daughter Ranjini later became my classmate in Loreto House), was always elegantly clad in South-Indian silks which were perhaps a mix of Kanjeevarams, Arni, or Dharmavarams. And one day, after the Hindi class was over, she even taught the women how to make " dosas " in a make-shift stove brought out on the verandah. Mrs Ammini Menon wore stunning Madurai Sungudi, and Mrs Amal Prava Bose, dainty Shantipuris and Tangails.

Mrs Sushila Singhi (who was a child widow, and later had an arranged marriage with a widower from her own community) wore hand-block-printed saris (were they Sanganer & Bagru?) and glass bangles that always tinkled when she wrote on her slate. One day she brought me 4 tiny glass bangles for my hands, and also gifted me 12 red glass bangles when I got married to match my wedding Benarasi sari 25 years later. What an exchange of ideas and colour there were from the members of each community !

* * *

And each institution organized their own rehabilitation package for the displaced, and widowed women. These included -

- (i) weaving (napkins, swabs, & coarse cloth for dusters (jharans)),
- (ii) block-printed table mats, bed-covers, & table cloths,
- (iii) batik on saris, and
- (iv) a range of ceramic pottery.

Miss Bina Das' 'Uday Villa' was set up and Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay used it as her first Regional Design Center for the All India Handicrafts Board. And when she visited Calcutta, it was as though all the colours of the rainbow had come down to earth. (I have narrated my memories of Kamala Devi in an earlier article in a CCI newsletter.)

* * *

Now sixty years later, when I do merchandising for Kolkata's Kamala, and look for the tiny cotton checked Puné handloom saris, I find they have vanished. So also the Madurai Sungudi that Mrs Ammini Menon wore. And the cotton bandhnis of Gujarat have priced themselves beyond the reach of middle-class women. And in Bengal we are struggling to revive our Shantipuri and Dhaniakhali handlooms which is fighting a losing battle with the power loom lobby.

I have left out many names, not deliberately, but because the list would then be endless. Enough to say that it was a collective effort which brought out the best in each of the women volunteers. And all the organizations then set up are still going strong.

" This issue will be on ' Handlooms ' - so write something about that " Pushpa said. But while I began to write, my thoughts went back to my first memories of Calcutta, and the colourful ladies I had then encountered and their different kinds of attire. Each one was a visionary and dedicated to rebuilding a new and united India, and each one proudly wore her traditional handloom from her state. Sadly, many are now on the " endangered " list, like some of our wild-life, and need to be " protected ". That is where the CCI's role is critical.

KNOW YOUR CRAFT AND ITS MAKER

Master Artisan Gajam Anjaiah

Shri Gajam Anjaiah, a dedicated Handloom Master Weaver and a Master Designer is widely recognized in the Handloom industry for his innovations and development of tie & dye handloom products along with the Telia Rumal technique of weaving (Ikat / tie & dye process). He was born in Puttapaka in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh. At the age of 13, Gajam Anjaiah involved himself in the family profession under the guidance of his father Shri Narasimha. Shri Narasimha was the first person to bring the Telia Rumal technique to Puttapaka village from the Chirala area of Andhra Pradesh, where it has become extinct. During the process of the learning stage itself, Shri Anjaiah came across social, economical and professional problems faced by the handloom weavers and dedicated himself to improving their living standards. Some of the weavers who use tie & dye weaving process in different villages like Puttapaka, Chandur, Ghattupal, Koratikallu, Narsinghatla, Munugodu of Nalgonda district and Amangal in Mahboobnagar district worked under his guidance. This is one of the reasons for the popularity and continuation of the production of Ikat weaving in some parts of Nalgonda and Mahboobnagar districts of Andhra Pradesh.



Gajam Anjaiah



Sixteen lucky symbols sari

Recent innovations of Shri Gajam Anjaiah include the production of a cotton sari with 16 auspicious symbols depicted in the literature of Jainism. Another innovative tie and dye cotton sari is currently under production with 108 astrological symbols which has much more intricate designs. Each astrological symbol is depicted in a size of 2.25-inch space with very minute detailing.

Shri. Anjaiah has given training on his own to 40 weavers in the village of Chundur in Nalgonda district and 20 weavers in the village of Amangal in Mahboobnagar district. The learning designing / weaving of saris includes Gadwal and tie and dye combinations, traditional Kancheevaram, Uppada and Kota. He has also met relevant dignitaries / officers and presented the problems of handloom weavers and suggested possible solutions.

Shri. Anjaiah won the National Award for Best Craftmanship in Telia Rumal sari in 1987. He has also won the Sant Kabir Award for his contribution

to the Handloom Industry in the year 2010. The Government of India honoured him with the " Padma Shri " award in the year 2013.

The Crafts Council of India takes great pride in felicitating. Shri. Gajam Anjaiah on his being bestowed with the Padmashri Award by the President of India.

LEND A HAND TO THE WEAVERS

Shikha Mukerjee

The perception of drudgery needs to be reviewed first because half the hassle for handloom weavers and their families comes from lack of basic services and poor delivery of entitlements.

Living traditions that are neither precariously poised on the verge of extinction nor languishing, and not thriving either, are notoriously difficult to fit into the mould of policy and prescriptions. Especially so when every weaver worth his name declares himself to be an "artist" rather than a humble artisan.

It is unpardonable that the guardians of the heritage, especially the Ministry of Textiles – confronted with the formidable task of creating policy for this bewildering variety of fabrics and its producers – has settled for using the formula of "continual improvement". Chased by the spectre of modernisation, the ministry has been, since May this year, set on the modernisation-reduction of drudgery journey plus a new definition. It has loaded "improving living conditions of handloom weavers," on to the same review exercise, which is puzzling, since all schemes promoted by the ministry are intended for precisely this purpose. Is the review, re-definition and categorisation of "small power loom units / weavers into a separate group" an admission that despite the heroic efforts of the ministry the schemes for handlooms and power looms have not worked?

If that indeed is the case, then the quest for answers to the problems of this vast and varied sector has to begin with an acknowledgement that handlooms and power looms are distinct and different sectors. The perception of drudgery needs to be reviewed first because half the hassle for handloom weavers and their families, especially the women, comes from lack of basic services and poor delivery of entitlements. The hazards of the power loom sector, especially the deafening noise needs to be acknowledged in order to appreciate that modernisation and mechanisation imposes a cost on the weavers and their families. In other words, machines and modernisation are not instant and infallible remedies. And then, there is the incontrovertible fact that reviews undertaken by the Centre cannot be meaningful without regional consultations, since handlooms and power looms are administered by the state governments.

There are 43.32 lakh people directly and indirectly employed by the handloom sector, of which 77.90 per cent are women, 10.13 per cent belong to the Schedule Caste, 18.12 per cent to the Schedule Tribes and 45.18 per cent to Other Backward Classes. Together with handicrafts, the hand-made sector in India provides employment to about 112.18 lakh people. It has been famously described as the second-largest employer after agriculture. And yet, there are concerns about the sustainability of handloom, which reveals the paradox that the sector poses: It is an export earner and provides over 16 per cent of the clothing for India's 1.2 billion population.

Apart from the famous and protected heritage textiles like Benaras brocade and saris, Kanchipuram silk, Bagru prints, Bomkai saris, Baluchari and dozens of other such exquisite products enjoy, even the ordinary gamcha has a tradition and a distinction that identifies it as a product of some obscure place but special to those who use it and care about it.

Across India, virtually every community of weavers adds a little something to the hand-woven product which asserts itself as a distinctive gharana, marked by its "khasiyat". The weavers are, therefore, as individualistic as the designs and though the tradition by itself is homogenous, the product has bewildering variety. Recognised as a "timeless facet" of India's heritage, the mechanisation-modernisation formula could end up by being injurious to the health of heritage.

The struggle to keep the tradition alive is not helped by fears that it is in danger of being encroached upon by power looms and mills that can "replicate" the "look" at a much lower cost. The concern voiced is

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The struggle to keep the tradition alive is not helped by fears that it is in danger of being encroached upon by power looms and mills that can "replicate" the "look" at a much lower cost. The concern voiced is

not by cultural or craft activists; it is the Office of Development Commissioner of the Handlooms (DCH) that has these fears, expressed in the context of popularising the handloom mark as a symbol of " assured originality ". The encroachment by power looms with its capacity to produce tawdry lookalikes is a fear shared by weavers like Swadesh Bhaumik of Santipore in Nadia, West Bengal, where the 500-year-old weave, guarded by a geographical indications is nevertheless vulnerable to power loom piracy. If both the protector (DCH) and the victim (handloom weavers) are assailed, then guaranteeing a future for handlooms requires a rethink of policy and strategy.

The obvious solution is to create a policy and strategy only for handlooms, one that recognises its uniqueness and potential as a contemporary, new-age fabric that satisfies the demands of a low-carbon footprint and sustainability.

It was striking that none of the weavers or the technologists, who were innovators as well, complained about the " drudgery " involved in handloom production. What they said instead was breathtakingly simple: adaptation of existing machines to reduce the labour involved, which is very different from a proposal from the Ministry of Textiles that despite being shot down for now keeps bobbing back to life on the unspecified " modernisation " to reduce " drudgery ". Inability to distinguish between better machines that do not contaminate and so corrupt the handloom's uniqueness and motorisation is just one of the reasons why an entirely separate handloom policy is necessary to simultaneously protect the tradition and promote its efficiency as a sector.

If programmes within an independent handloom policy could address the issues that weavers believe would improve their quality of work and life, the fears of undue encroachment and sunset industry would be minimised. As mostly rural inhabitants, the weavers want better housing (about half of them live in kuchcha homes), sanitation, water, electricity, healthcare and education services. As artisans they need marketing and design support, easier access to hank yarn, better dyes, easier credit, technological inputs at the doorstep and generally less hassle to do their creative-industrial best. This is not a tall order; it is a demand for greater administrative efficiency on the part of the state governments delivering the targeted schemes of the Centre for the benefit of the weavers.

A handloom policy that retrieves the hand-woven cloth and hand-spun yarn from the perception of it as a second-class product and restoring to it the identity, dignity and viability and, in fact, presents an alternative is needed.

(*The writer is a senior journalist in Kolkata*)

WHY HAVE WE ALLOWED HANDLOOM SARIS IN TAMIL NADU TO DISAPPEAR ?

Bamini Narayan

Saris are the backbone of the handloom industry, particularly cotton saris which are perfect for our weather and woven in resplendent colours. Traditional textiles also give us a sense of identity and an emotional and spiritual connect with our heritage. To lose it without thinking of the consequences would be to say the least short sighted. How one wonders when and why were handloom saris allowed to disappear from the Tamil Nadu textile heritage.

What a shame if we did nothing to halt the process. To think that future generations will not enjoy the unique korvai sari is a bleak prospect. It is only one of the many marvels that our artisans have crafted. Needless to say, we have to value our textiles and honour our artisans if they are to continue in this profession. They are our Living Treasures. Caught today in the cross currents of a fast moving world and a changing social milieu they are marginalised and pushed into thinking of a change in their

traditional profession, downgrading their status in the process. The CCI programme Educate to Sustain (E to S) attempts to empower the crafts communities across eight states and to halt the process of migration of the Gen Next weavers to other jobs.

E to S seeks to energise these communities through education, access to computer skills, spoken English, design inputs and credit from banks. An empowered entrepreneur stands a greater chance of selling his products and earning a decent living. Access to the internet is something we take for granted. Now the children in Veeravanallur are in a position to get to that level in a short while. They will hopefully teach their parents who in turn will have access to markets across the country. Traditionally our crafts have always enjoyed patronage and the artisans were a respected community. Kaivalam, the International Craft Summit organised by the World Crafts Council in October 2012 has emphasised that very emphatically. Let us support this initiative and hope to arrest the disappearing and endangered species.... our craftsmen.

Veeravanallur is just starting to awaken to a new dawn. A summer camp with brilliant resource persons made them aware of the panorama of the world outside. They will not stop now, we hope. A sustained effort towards increasing their incomes should be the goal. If they are assured that the next generation can make a decent income they will stay in the craft. ' Nokkam ' an Education Fair, is scheduled for January 2014. Educationists, psychologists and management consultants are some of the resource persons who will be inspiring the children and their parents. The future beckons... A future in which creativity will flourish and prosperity return to our artisans.

LOOM

Gita Ram

The realization that I wouldn't be able to understand the current crisis of " changing the definition of handlooms " unless I understood all the processes involved in creating handlooms led me to download from Wikipedia the ' three essential hand motions' of a handloom fabric.

A loom is a device used to weave cloth. The basic purpose of any loom is to hold the warp threads under tension to facilitate the interweaving of the weft threads. The precise shape of the loom and its mechanics may vary, but the basic function is the same.

Weaving

See also : Weaving and Textile manufacturing terminology

Weaving is done by intersecting the longitudinal threads, the warp, i.e. " that which is thrown across ", with the transverse threads, the weft, i.e. " that which is woven ".

The major components of the loom are the warp beam, heddles, harnesses or shafts (as few as two, four is common, sixteen not unheard of), shuttle, reed and take up roll. In the loom, yarn processing includes shedding, picking, battening and taking-up operations. These are the principal motions.

- Shedding. Shedding is the raising of part of the warp yarn to form a shed (the vertical space between the raised and unraised warp yarns), through which the filling yarn, carried by the shuttle, can be inserted. On the modern loom, simple and intricate shedding operations are performed automatically by the heddle or heald frame, also known as a harness. This is a rectangular frame to which a series of wires, called heddles or healds, are attached. The yarns are passed through the eye holes of the heddles, which hang vertically from the harnesses. The

weave pattern determines which harness controls which warp yarns, and the number of harnesses used depends on the complexity of the weave. Two common methods of controlling the heddles are dobbies and a Jacquard Head.

Shuttles

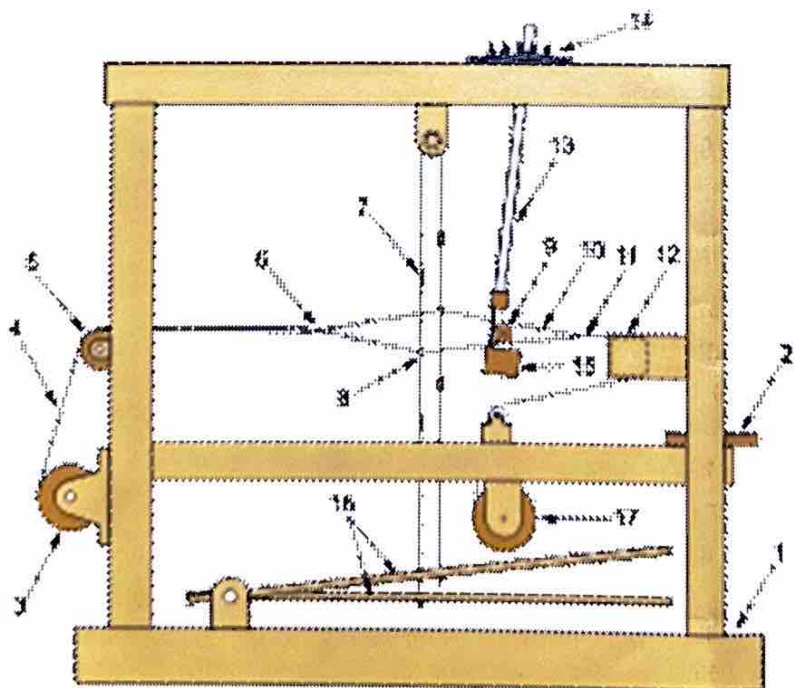
- Picking. As the harnesses raise the heddles or healds, which raise the warp yarns, the shed is created. The filling yarn is inserted through the shed by a small carrier device called a shuttle. The shuttle is normally pointed at each end to allow passage through the shed. In a traditional shuttle loom, the filling yarn is wound onto a quill, which in turn is mounted in the shuttle. The filling yarn emerges through a hole in the shuttle as it moves across the loom. A single crossing of the shuttle from one side of the loom to the other is known as a pick. As the shuttle moves back and forth across the shed, it weaves an edge, or selvage, on each side of the fabric to prevent the fabric from raveling.
- Battening. Between the heddles and the take up roll, the warp threads pass through another frame called the reed (which resembles a comb). The portion of the fabric that has already been formed but not yet rolled up on the take up roll is called the fell. After the shuttle moves across the loom laying down the fill yarn, the weaver uses the reed to press (or batten) each filling yarn against the fell. Conventional shuttle looms can operate at speeds of about 150 to 160 picks per minute. [2]



There are two secondary motions, because with each weaving operation the newly constructed fabric must be wound on a cloth beam. This process is called taking up. At the same time, the warp yarns must be let off or released from the warp beams. To become fully automatic, a loom needs a tertiary motion, the filling stop motion. This will brake the loom, if the weft thread breaks. [2] An automatic loom requires 0.125 hp to 0.5 hp to operate.

Handloom

Elements of a foot-treadle floor loom



- Wood frame
- Seat for weaver
- Warp beam- let off
- Warp threads
- Back beam or platen
- Rods - used to make a shed
- Heddle frame - heald frame - harness
- Heddle- heald - the eye
- Shuttle with weft yarn
- Shed
- Completed fabric
- Breast beam
- Batten with reed comb
- Batten adjustment
- Lathe
- Treadles
- Cloth roll- takeup

A handloom is a simple machine used for weaving. In a wooden vertical-shaft looms, the heddles are fixed in place in the shaft. The warp threads pass alternately through a heddle, and through a space between the heddles (the shed), so that raising the shaft raises half the threads (those passing through the heddles), and lowering the shaft lowers the same threads—the threads passing through the spaces between the heddles remain in place.

HANDLOOMS

Manjari Nirula

At the Delhi Crafts Council we have been assisting the team from CCI, spearheaded by Mrs Gulshan Nanda, Mr. Ashoke Chatterjee, Mrs. Kasturi Gupta Menon, Mrs. Gita Ram and others in supporting weavers in their struggle with the Ministry of Textiles.

Weaving is a three-step process, beginning with beating (pre-loom), shedding (on-loom) and picking (post-loom). The Ministry of Textiles would like to change this definition of handloom and the weaving community across the country fears that this will ruin their tradition.

Weavers from Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have signed petitions that have been sent to the Government asking them to withhold this change of definition.

For the last eight years the Delhi Crafts Council has been supporting the traditional skills of weaving through the presentation of the Sutrakar Samman at our annual Saree Exhibition. It is an award that honours a weaver for both his excellence in weaving skills and for his commitment to continuing the rich tradition of handloom textiles of a particular region.

The awardees of the past eight years are listed below.

Pitabas Mehar for Ikat in Natural Dyes (Orissa) for 2005, Jiban Krishna Sen for Dhoniakhali (West Bengal) for 2006, Madhu Sudan Panika for Korpad Tribal (Orissa) for 2007, Niranjan Kumar Poddar for Bhagalpur Tussar (Bihar) for 2008, Jamini Payeng for Natural Dye Silk (Assam) for 2009, Guda Srinu for Telia Rumal (Andhra Pradesh) for 2010, Naseem Ahmad for Benares brocade (Uttar Pradesh) for 2011 and Hilal Ansari for Maheshwari Sari (Madhya Pradesh) for the year 2012.

The Sutrakar Samman for 2013 was awarded to Shri P.L. Bhanumurthi from Tamil Nadu. Born into a family of weavers, he learnt the skill of weaving from his parents beginning at the young age of nine. He now has over thirty-five years of experience working as a Master Weaver

He has been a fundamental part of training weavers over many states throughout South India in both the basic and the complex korvai weaving techniques. The korvai technique was traditionally developed for weaving the traditional silk sarees of Tamil Nadu, creating beautiful and colourful borders interlacing seamlessly with the central part of the saree. However this process requires two weavers on the loom, is a laborious and time-consuming process, and the technique is rapidly disappearing.

Bhanumurthi has extensive experience and in-depth knowledge of the loom and with some simple modifications and adjustments to the conventional loom has made the entire process of korvai weaving much simpler requiring only one weaver. This reduces both the labour and the eventual cost of the saree. His commitment to the industry has been unwavering and he currently owns looms on which he creates traditional Kanchipuram and Chettinad saris.

WINDOWS INTO WORLD CRAFTS : A JOURNEY TO KUWAIT & CENTRAL ASIA

Usha Krishna

President, WCC Asia Pacific Region, Dr. Ghada's gracious invitation to attend the Afro Arab Handicrafts event in Kuwait had us enjoying a trip to Kuwait. The Afro-Arab Handicrafts show in Kuwait was a dream come true for me, as during my tenure as WCC President, I had identified Africa as a thrust area. So it was exciting to note that some 24 African countries participated in the Kuwait exhibition. It was a momentous occasion as the second African Assembly was held in Kuwait, the first having been held at Chennai during Kaivalam. The "Kuwait Declaration" was formulated and signed by the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of all the African regions assembled there. It highlighted the role of local governments in supporting and encouraging the activities of WCC.

The 8th International OIMO Festival was celebrated in Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan and we were invited to attend. It was organised by Dinara, Vice President - APR / Central Asia with support from the Ministry of Information, Tourism and Culture. There were seminars and presentation of papers read. The craft stalls of the festival were fascinating, as also the Kyrgyzstan folk dances and music. This festival also saw the announcement of the initiation of the 'Kyrgyzstan Craft Organisation'. The main event took place in two cities, Bishkek the capital and Cholpon-Ata on the shore of the beautiful Issyk-Kul lake.

Kyrgyzstan is a beautiful country surrounded by the Tian Shan mountain range, which provides a spectacular background to its capital Bishkek. The artisanship in Kyrgyzstan caters to the large tourist traffic and has adapted itself to the varying tastes of not only neighbouring Central Asian countries, but also to regions whose citizens make Kyrgyzstan a very famous tourist spot. Some of the crafts were silverware, felt, silk ikat and traditional costumes. Dinara did a wonderful job organising the event.

This visit also gave me an opportunity to visit the other 'stans' - Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan where crafts play a very important role in the economy of the country.



WCC APR - Inlay demo

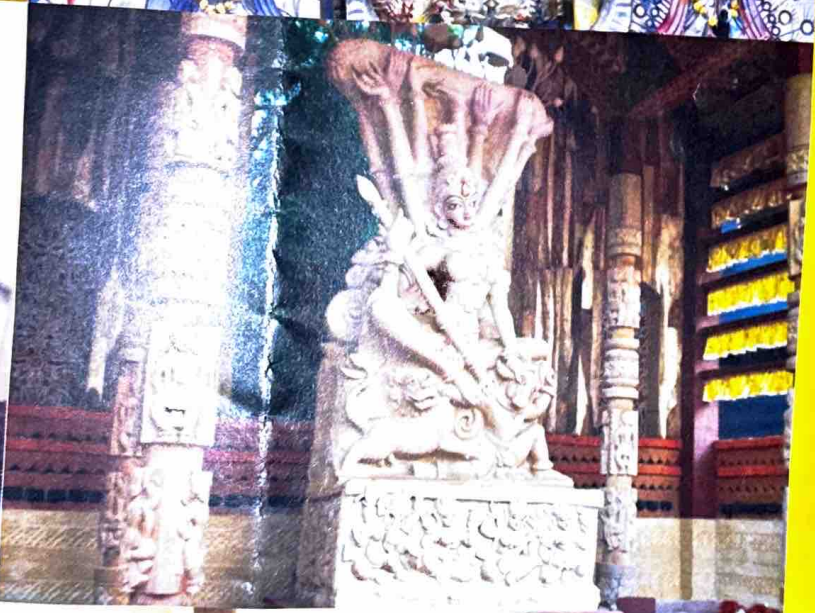
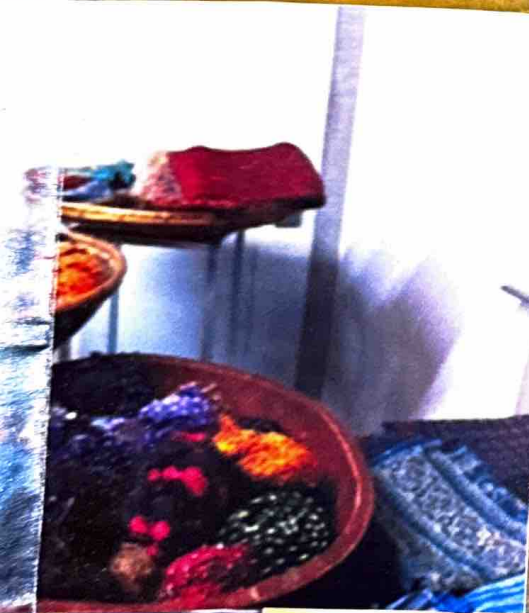


WCC APR - Display



WCC APR - Woman at the loom





Tajikistan is dominated by the Pamir mountain which occupies 90% of the landmass of Tajikistan. Their crafts, such as felt and wooden products, are restricted to utility items. Dushanbe, the capital city is very beautiful and has a rich history.

Kazakhstan, by virtue of possessing rich oil fields, is among the wealthiest of the Central Asian nations. Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan, is a beautiful city with lovely tree-lined avenues and a variety of interesting restaurants. In Almaty, I was able to visit Aizhan Bekkulova's lovely craft shop which is a treasure trove of beautiful craft products. The silver workmanship in Kazakhstan is world class. She hosted a traditional dinner with music and dance in a very unique restaurant.

Turkmenistan is a dry, arid country with very little rainfall. Eighty percent of the area is covered by the Karakum desert. Its capital Ashgabat is a city built of Carrara marbles and presents a pristine visual effect. The country possesses vast resources of natural gas which gives it high economic strength.

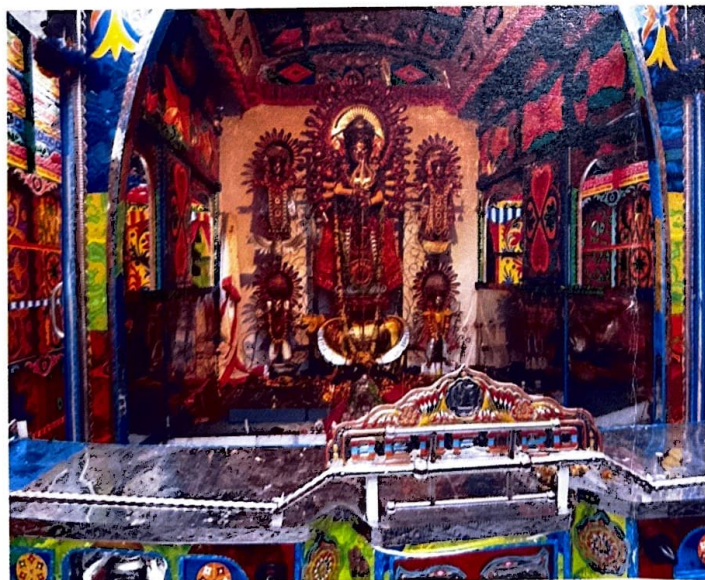
While at Turkmenistan, I also had the opportunity of visiting Mary, Merv and Konya-Urgench of the old silk route. The archaeological city of old Nissa, the capital of the Parthian empire more than 2000 years ago, was also an attraction during our visit there.

We came away with a wonderful feeling of having witnessed the local crafts making an impact not only on tourism, but also the local citizens who value their craft heritage, respect their artists and use the craftsmanship in maintaining their lifestyle.

DURGA PUJA MANIA

Ruby Palchoudhuri

Durga Puja is a spectacle built on imaginative themes, each year surpassing the previous year. It cannot solely be defined by the bright lights, the frantic energy and fabulous food. One is taken aback by grand displays of installation. It is a mania or a kind of "paglami" that takes over the Kolkata public. It is magical how the city and its anonymous alleys and its non-descriptive streets are transformed into a spectacle showcasing the talent and creativity of the local artists, designers and artisans. The themes range from educational topics, scientific explorations, history of Bengali films, myths, literature, astronomy,



Goddess in vibrant colours

current topics like ecology, recycling of waste and yet the religious spirit remains. All rituals are observed with spirits raised by the sound of drums everywhere which makes the festival so unique. Art flourishes everywhere be it folk art or architecture of Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kashmir or even the influence of French artists like Chagall and Dali. Artists with a high degree of intellect conceive the themes which are given shape with the help of artisans. There is also international collaboration which brings in their street artists. Children participate in some pandals decorating them with their drawings and nursery

rhymes. Another important aspect of the festivities' uniqueness is the intricate link between the festivities and social engagement such as planting trees, distributing uniforms and text books to under privileged school children, blood donation, providing free medical eye check-ups and so on. This growing mega creative zero land occupying industry in India has grown so fast without any financial support from the government. Funds are raised by the community and corporate participation. The budget varies from Rs. 40 to 50 lakhs. It is business time for the textile and fashion industries, jewellery, book publishers, music record companies, food and entertainment business. This unorganized segment generates more than Rs. 200 crores revenue within three months. It is regrettable that our Government has failed to market this creative industry as an international event.

CRAFT NEWS : INNOVATION, RESEARCH, REINVENTION

- Biologists and engineers at the CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory in India had been searching for a more environmentally friendly way to dye silk that wouldn't consume a lot of water. They experimented with feeding silkworms mulberry leaves that had been dipped in azo dyes. Previous experiments done elsewhere had shown silkworms that would produce colored silks when fed specific dyes, but the dyes used were very expensive. Azo dyes, in contrast, are much more affordable.

Out of the seven different dyes tried three resulted in colorful cocoons and only one color remained after the silk was processed, a red dye that resulted in a lovely pink silk. It also turned the silkworms the same pink.

Further experiments are on and the future might offer silks spun by worms in every color of the rainbow. Until then, if you want naturally colored silks, consider looking at wild silks which come in a variety of hues from off white to golden yellows.

- Kala cotton is an ancient and rare variety of cotton indigenous to the Kutch region of India. It is easy to grow and can be grown without irrigation even in the hot dry Kutch climate. Kala cotton has the deepest roots of any cultivated cotton, and means it can survive in times of drought and in high winds. It's also resistant to pests, harmful bacteria, and high levels of soil salinity.

Kala cotton is also grown without pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, as the natural traditional fertilizers are all that Kala needs to thrive. Kala farmers therefore invest minimal money into the crop.

However, since it is harder to process than most varieties due to the tough shell covering the boll and the short-staple length, for a time it appeared as if the Kala might become extinct, especially after the introduction of genetically modified Bt cotton. Fortunately, Kala is starting to make a comeback of sorts. The organization Khamir is currently working with local weavers and international artists to create markets for handwoven Kala cloth.

CRAFT BYTES

Interesting crafts sites worth visiting :

<http://shalomooty.com/node/27>

<http://khamir.org/unique>

www.indianmirror.com/tribes/banjaratribes.html

<http://blog.jaypore.com/post/61003589002/the-story-of-coppreblog.mymela.com/2012/.../rebirth-dying-art-story-sawantwadi-lacquerware>

Activities

THE CRAFTS COUNCIL OF INDIA

- Textile and Jewellery Show (4 & 5 September) : CCI's fund raising Textile & Jewellery show was a great success with large numbers turning up to do their festive shopping. Exquisite Chanderis, Maheshwaris, Benarasis, Paithanis, Tanghails and block printed cottons, chiffons and georgettes formed part of the festive collection.



Crafts Bazaar inauguration

- Crafts Bazaar 2013 (27 September - 6 October) : The Bazaar was a celebration of exquisite quality crafts from every part of India. More than 150 stalls manned by the artisans showcased every craft from silver filigree, horn craft, stone sculpture, palmyra leaf craft, pattachitra, phad and madhubani art, masland mats, dhurries, kantha and tribal stitchery from Gujarat to textiles, paper kites and grass dust bins. The aesthetically decorated bazaar was also well organised and proved a perfect venue for the very satisfied artisans and customers.

CRAFTS COUNCIL OF ANDHRA PRADESH

- Exhibition (July) : Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh's fund raising textile exhibition was a great success.
- Design Intervention : CCAP have initiated a design intervention programme with the Banjara Needle Craft group, in the hope of bringing younger and educated girls into this craft.

CRAFTS COUNCIL OF WEST BENGAL



At the seminar on Liberating the Freedom Cloth

- Ratha Yatra Festival (8 - 11 July) : The festival was celebrated with much enthusiasm at Artisana with crafts / artisans and Folk Performing Arts from Odisha participating in it. Sri Alok Kumar Panda who came from Sambhalpur, Odisha gave a demonstration on various types of folk dances and music from this region.
- Seminar on Liberating the Freedom Cloth (8 - 11 August) : On the occasion of the 67th year of India's Independence, Crafts Council of West Bengal in association with Rabindranath Tagore

Centre, ICCR, Kolkata, organized a two day Seminar-cum- Demonstrations as well as an Exhibition-Workshop titled " Liberating the Freedom Cloth ". The exhibition featured only hand spun hand woven cloth from Bengal and other states.

- Crafts from Bhuj (3 - 7 September) : An exquisite Crafts and Textiles collection brought by Shrujan, an NGO working with tribal embroiderers in Kutch, charmed the visitors. This was a promotional activity taken up by the Council to promote crafts from other states.
- CCWB's Pre-puja " Agamoni " exhibition (11 - 15 September) : Held at Artisana, the exhibition mainly focused on Bengal handlooms. The collection was brought by Rahut Khan from Chanderi, Ibrahim Textiles from Varanasi N. Pandaria from Andhra Pradesh. Other handloom textiles added to the puja collection.
- Interns from Jaipur Institute of Design : Sri Milan Das has done research and documentation on "Jamdani Traditions of Weaving" while Smt. Sumita Chatterjee has been researching on " Hand Block Printing of Textiles " in Sreerampore.
- Deepavali Exhibition (23 October - 1 November) : The Festival of Lights was celebrated with various types of terracotta oil lamps designed by Arun Pal. Textile items were another feature of this exhibition.

DELHI CRAFTS COUNCIL

- Chamba Workshop at the DCC Office (September) : Three embroiderers working at Charu, the Chamba Rupal Centre in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh travelled to Delhi for a three-day workshop. Under the guidance of the project head, Masto Devi, Tulsi and Sonia worked closely with members of DCC to experiment with new colours, materials and compositions. The centre continues to run smoothly and new talent is continuously recruited and trained, creating a sustainable livelihood for the craftsmen who create stunning embroidered pieces.
- United Art Fair (September) : DCC worked with gallery owner and art collector, Peter Nagy based in Delhi to curate a collection of tribal art and craft to be presented at the United Art Fair. Eight artists and craftsmen contributed fifty-six artworks to the Art Fair held at Pragati Maidan.

Members worked with the artists besides holding painting and craft workshops at the DCC office to allow the craftsmen to experiment with new materials and broaden the scope of their work for this exhibition. It was an extremely rewarding journey and DCC were thrilled to see the works displayed in a space shared by some of the leading contemporary and modern artists of this country.

The participant - artists were Kailash Chandra Meher (Odisha Tree Painting), Chandrabhushan Kumar (Madhubani Painting), Ambika Devi (Madhubani Painting), Chakradhar Lal (Paper Machie), Raju Kalbelia (Embroidery), Hira Kanth (Madhubani Painting) and Soni Jogi (Dot Painting). In an effort to promote the works of these upcoming artists; the organisers of the United Art Fair will continue to display the works at different venues across Delhi over the next six months.



Tribal dot paintings

to the unlimited opportunities that are possible today. The latest crisis could eliminate India's rich handloom advantage forever.

The crisis became evident suddenly, ostensibly in an official bid to protect destitute handloom weavers with technology that can raise their productivity and earnings. In fact, this is a bid from power-loom operators to change the definition of 'handloom fabric' and convert handloom production into power-loom production. The strange logic is that this would give power-loom weavers the 'benefits' available to weavers under current Gol schemes. So one sector is to be weakened to strengthen another, even though it is common knowledge that very few of current handloom schemes are able to serve weavers' priority interests. The proposed change in the definition of 'handloom' production would be that even if one process is done by hand, and all the others motorized, the product would be declared as 'handloom fabric' and made eligible for 'handloom' incentives. If this happens, handloom production, with all its richness, would die and the output would be power-loom cloth. In a consultative process of stakeholders with Government that led to the 12th Five Year Plan for handicrafts and handlooms, this incredible idea was never mentioned. It has come to light as official teams have been visiting weaver clusters, and alarmed weavers have contacted those of us who work in the sector and begun morchas and other protests, most recently in Maheshwar. The Planning Commission has expressed serious concern over this development. Several meetings at the Commission have failed to halt this adventure, which is believed to be centred in Madhya Pradesh within concentrations of power-loom weavers facing acute difficulties in that state – one of which is the erratic power supply. (If for no other reason, this alone makes the current bid to change handloom definition a no-brainer. Where is the power for motorizing handlooms to come from?) The handloom weaver incentive schemes that are to be extended to power-loom weavers are an illusion. Reviews of these schemes during the drafting of the Twelfth Plan, and more recently at a seminar with weavers in Kolkata, revealed that many are out-dated and irrelevant in a changed market, requiring review and drastic reform. Weavers tell us the recent bid on changing definitions is an election-year stunt, to win over the power-loom lobby which is relatively affluent and more strongly organized than dispersed handloom weavers. Yet the impact of any change in definition would be immediate and unalterable.

A meeting was called at our request by Dr Syeda Hameed at the Planning Commission on October 21 to draw attention to all that is at stake for the millions dependant on handlooms and for the future of a major Indian advantage. Among the key issues protecting the definition of the handloom is perhaps the 'single-point agenda'.

The Handloom (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act 1985 defines a handloom as "any loom other than a power loom".

Weaver communities and craft activists across the country are alarmed by the reported intention of the Ministry of Textiles to change the definition of handloom cloth. It appears that an official memorandum to this effect was issued by the Ministry in May 2013. A committee was established to look into the matter. No weavers or civil society activists in the sector were included in this committee. (However, the power-loom industry was represented). There was no consultation with the Working Group established to help draft the 12th Five-Year Plan for the handloom sector, nor any communication on this policy intention to Working Group members.

The intention is to define handloom cloth to include the output of looms where only one process is done by hand (while other processes can be motorized). This proposal is utterly misconceived, and threatens the future of millions employed in the handloom sector, including weavers and all those involved in pre-and post-loom processes. Motorized production would fundamentally alter the definition of handloom cloth

as understood for all the decades of India's handloom movement and handloom promotion effort. The impact could be devastating on India's second largest source of livelihood after agriculture. A conservative estimate of the number of handloom weavers who would be affected is three million, not including those involved in pre-and post-loom processes which are largely managed by women.

The handloom sector is challenged by an era of rapid change in markets and by escalating competition. These current challenges can be addressed without altering and endangering the qualities which give India's hand-woven fabrics a global reputation for excellence and a unique competitive advantage. This is demonstrated by rising global demand, even in years of economic recession. (One estimate of handloom cloth exports from India in 2010-11 was \$156 million up 34% from the previous year).

To protect this status, the present definition of handloom cloth and handloom production must be held sacrosanct. Within this definition, there is ample scope to improve productivity and quality, to reduce drudgery, and to lift the earnings of weavers – and to achieve all this without any risk to what distinguishes this world-renowned fabric. The Weavers Service Centres (WSC) of the Government of India are the repositories of this technical know-how. What the sector requires is not power motors but rather aggressive efforts to spread awareness of available WSC technologies as well as training through these Centres and through other competent institutions such as the NID and NIFT networks.

Giving weavers access to technology needs to be matched with a national marketing strategy to raise and sustain demand for this great product at home and overseas. There is no other way to address the constant threat of competition and changes in consumer preferences, particularly among the young. Promoting the contemporary advantages of handloom cloth, building its value, and encouraging the consumer to distinguish between handloom and other production through a widely-advertised Handloom Mark could all be elements within such a national marketing strategy.

The recommendations and programmes outlined in the 12th Five-Year Plan for the handloom sector should be the focus of Government's efforts. The Plan has the acceptance of the entire sector, based on months of joint reflection on current challenges and needs. Motorization of handlooms is not mentioned in the Plan, which was the outcome of a long and inclusive process of consultation by the Ministry of Textiles with stakeholders. The consultative mechanisms established for drafting the 12th Plan should continue to support its implementation, including through the review of past schemes intended for weavers and for handloom promotion. Many of these no longer respond to the realities of changing markets and competition.

There is an urgent need for a fresh Handloom Policy to help guide the development of the sector in coming years. Such a policy must reflect the major changes in markets, technologies and competition that have taken place since the Handloom (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act was introduced in 1985, as well as the challenges experienced in enforcing it.

India's hand-woven cloth, once the ' fabric of Freedom ', is today a contemporary fabric without equal. It responds to some of the most urgent challenges of our time: sustainable and skilled livelihoods for citizens where they are located and a brake on the miseries of migration, livelihood opportunities for those still on the margins of society (including SC / ST / minority communities, and women), ecological sustainability and a low carbon footprint, unrivalled comfort and adaptability, rising global demand (even during years of recession) for what many consider the world's greatest fabric, and a major contributor to social and political stability. The arguments of justice and equity that Gandhiji raised during the Freedom struggle have a present-day resonance. Not just a product, handloom fabrics continue to represent a unique blend of values that are economic, social, cultural, environmental and even spiritual. An India without the integrity of handloom fabrics is an unthinkable prospect. An incalculable loss must be averted.

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