
ADVOCACY FOR THE “SECTOR OF SECTORS”

ASHOKE CHATTERJEE

The urgent need for planners to take the craft sector seriously has engaged CCI's attention, culminating in the fact-finding exercise now underway in cooperation with the planning commission and other central authorities. Recently, Shri. Ashoke Chatterjee was approached to address a letter to the Prime Minister on the sector and its needs. It was believed that the new government was eager to rationalize the manner in which several sectors are administered by the centre. There was perhaps an opportunity now for a more rational approach to handcraft, and for drawing attention to the current crises in the sector. This is the context for the letter below. Its contents may be useful for all of us who are asked to explain handcrafts and their importance to national life.

Dear Shri Manmohan Singh,

Congratulations on an election campaign that has given the nation your sustained leadership at a time of such challenge, at home as well as in the world around us.

I am writing to request your priority attention to the potential of Indian handcrafts in addressing some of the most urgent issues that confront your new administration, as well as to the inadequate position of handcrafts within current systems of governance. I ask for your consideration that this enormous sector of our economy — as well as of our consciousness, culture and identity as Indians — demands organisation and leadership of a kind that is critically missing today.

The importance of crafts extends beyond the economic to our social, cultural, and environmental milieus. Crafts are deeply ingrained in the highest values of our Indian ethos. All of this is endangered today through inadequate attention and understanding of this 'sector of sectors'. Handcrafts urgently need the guidance and oversight of a Ministry that can comprehend and reflect the contribution of crafts to sustainable development and social cohesion in India. This becomes particularly important at a time when domestic and overseas demand is at its most competitive, and so many at the margins of Indian society seek opportunities for their own empowerment.

When planning commenced in India some 60 years ago, handcrafts were brought under what was then the Ministry of Commerce & Industry. The perspective applied at that time was to meet the need of earning scarce foreign exchange through exportable Indian crafts. Later, as this Ministry transformed, the Offices of both the Development Commissioner of Handicrafts as well as the Development Commissioner of Handlooms came to be placed in the Ministry of Textiles. A major range

of non-textile crafts are thus today under a Ministry unrelated to its materials or manufacturing processes. Handlooms, although textiles, are under the purview of a Ministry preoccupied with the needs of the mechanised sector. The Khadi & Village Industries Commission, which is responsible for a large number of hand activities, is supported by the Ministry of Industry. This fractured approach extends from the Centre to the States. The result is that at a time of unprecedented challenge — as well as of great opportunity — the sector lacks the coordinated, professional direction that is essential for its survival.

The risks of dissipating India's craft advantages are enormous. In a recent speech, President Pratibha Patil reminded the nation that crafts is the second largest source of employment in India, after agriculture. This source of livelihood is also predominantly rural, providing non-farming earning opportunities where people are located and at seasons when non-farming activity is most needed. This is a major factor, one that also helps mitigate the enormous suffering and burden of migration. The handcraft industry makes low demands on energy. It is environmentally sustainable, and can take this 'green' advantage to benefit both the environment as well as earnings and the economy. Many handcrafts depend on the skills and involvement of women. They provide home-based opportunities that keep families united. Many craft markets are local, reducing distribution risks for the maker and stimulating other local livelihoods. Crafts have great potential in markets that are growing at home and abroad. This is true even at a time of recession, thanks to influences such as the green and fair-trade movements. Most artisans belong to tribal, minority and other disadvantaged communities who are at the centre of your concerns for growth and opportunity. Crafts are the source of Indian creativity, the most important resource for our nation's industries in an era of stringent competition. Hereditary craft skills and knowledge of materials are today applied not just to traditional products but to many contemporary engineering challenges such as space industries. Artisans are therefore national treasures, representing capacities to create and innovate that go well beyond the products of their traditions.

These multiple dimensions of Indian handcraft are seldom recognized. They demand integration of a kind impossible in current circumstances. Although many millions are involved, we lack even the most basic data on employment and contribution. (The Crafts Council of India is currently attempting to address this lacuna with the guidance of the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation).

To take advantage of the huge potential which craft activity represents requires organisational and management skills that are missing. It is for this reason that I write to suggest the formation of a Ministry that can address this potential for sustainable development, cutting across several economic, environmental, social and cultural sectors. I therefore urge you to encourage attention to an activity as relevant in today's circumstances of India's emergence as it was when Gandhiji made it central to our nation's struggle for freedom.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely,
Ashoke Chatterjee

Meet Shilp Guru

Shri. Mohan Prasad Verma

Pushpa Chari

Shri. Mohan Prasad Verma has successfully revived the technique of 'Gulab Meena' or pink enamelling, a precious part of our jewellery heritage which had all but died out. Shri. Verma comes from a hereditary family of jewellers. He learnt the special craft of 'Gulabi Meena' from his Guru Shri. Balkrishna Joshi and soon set about crafting the most delicately beautiful ornaments. By the 60's



due to his efforts 'Gulabi Meena' had once again become part of the Meenakari repertoire, encasing kundan in its bewitching pink glow. Shri. Verma has trained his

brothers and sons in this jewellery craft of Benares. He received the National Award in 1984 for his exemplary skills in this art.



Shri. Mohan Prasad Verma was honoured with Shilp Guru Award in 2004 by the President of India for his exceptional involvement in the art of Meenakari.

INTRODUCING KAMALA AWARDEES 2009

Pushpa Chari

Smt. AK. Dhaneshwari Devi

Smt. Dhaneshwari Devi was born at Thamkal Khong Wanghei, Imphal in a family of hereditary weavers. She learnt her craft from her mother while still a child and has been practising it since, with great diligence, dedication and commitment.

Smt. Dhaneshwari Devi received the National Award for Excellence in her craft for her modified Ningthoupee Saijonba sari. The design for the award winning sari is derived from the ancient costumes worn by the Meiti Kings while the weaving techniques follow those of the traditional Manipuri Moirangphee 'chador' which is woven by a technique similar to the 'jamdaani' technique.



This invests the modified Ningthoupee Saijonba sari with the light, transparent and ethereal feel of the Moirangphee chador.

With her brilliant sense of innovation and design, Smt. AK. Dhaneshwari Devi has succeeded in popularizing the Moirangphee 'chador' by diversifying the items for mass use by its conversion into a sari while retaining its ethnic identity.

Smt. AK. Dhaneshwari Devi was awarded the Shantha Prasad Award for Outstanding work in Weaving for the year 2009 at a function in New Delhi in February 2009.

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Shri. Babu Kazi Sakya



Shri. Babu Kazi Sakya was born in Nepal in a family of metalcraft artisans. He learnt metal statue making from Chandra Lal Moskay and made his first model of the Chogyal Tashi Namgyal at the age of 17. Working with Tibetan Khampa artists in Sikkim where he relocated early in life he crafted many statues for the famous Rumtek monastery in Sikkim. Such was the brilliance of craftsmanship that he was invited by the royal family of Bhutan to decorate the altar of the Thimpu monastery.

Shri. Babu Kazi Sakya has participated in many exhibitions all over India. In 1991 he was awarded the State Government of Sikkim Award for his "Life History of Carving Buddha" a superbly crafted statue made in silver. Shri. Sakya was honoured with a special award for outstanding small scale entrepreneurship by the President of India in 1991.

His exquisitely finished statues are made at his factory in Sajong and showcased at his shop in Gangtok.

The Crafts Council of India bestowed the Kamala Award for Excellence in Craft Skills for the year 2009 on Shri. Babu Kazi Sakya at a function in New Delhi February 2009.

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Shri. A. Rajasekaran

Shri. A. Rajasekaran was born in Tamil Nadu in a 'paramparik' family of stone sculptors. A gifted artisan, sculptor and designer, Shri. Rajasekaran graduated in 1989 from the Government College of Architecture and Sculpture, Mahabalipuram, Madras University with a B.Sc in 'Sudhai' sculpture and a Diploma in Stone Sculpture. He holds a Diploma in Advanced Stone Carving from the City and Guilds of London Art School where his training scholarship was sponsored by the Crafts Council of India and the British Council, Chennai.



Shri. Rajasekaran took part in the Stone Tech Workshop in 2004 organised by The Crafts Council of India in Chennai and subsequently in CCI's Advanced Stone Tech workshop at Agra, Bangalore, Pondicherry, Jaipur and Bhuvaneshwar held between 2005 and 2007 and as Assistant Coordinator, Crafts Council of India's National Product Development for Traditional Stone Artisans.

He has won many prestigious awards at the Stona International Granites and Stone Fairs. He has also carved 'grotesques' for St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, his design having been chosen from that of ten other contestants.

The Crafts Council of India bestowed on Shri. A. Rajasekaran the Kamala Award for Contribution to the Craft Field at a function held in New Delhi in February 2009.

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Know Your Craft: Ajrakh

Vidya Sastry

A craft is not just its production process. It conveys much more – its origin, the people and so on. This time, we decided to publish this larger aspect of a craft through the eyes of a young journalist student who spent many days with the craftspeople.

Excerpts from

“Ajrakh: Heaven’s imprint on desert sands”

A document “in partial fulfillment of the Post Graduate Diploma at the Asian College of Journalism”

By Natasha Ginwala

2006-2007

The Journey

My mother bought a blue-red, block-printed bed spread from a craft fair few years ago. I was instantly drawn to it and asked her where it was from. “I think it was made in Kutch” – she said. I had not known then that I would travel there just to study the origins of this amazing textile – Ajrakh.

As I traveled across Kutch, by shared autos, jeeps, private and S.T. buses, I learnt about the diversity of this land. It is a melting pot – a brilliant collective of craft identities co-exist on this soil; unified by nature’s forces, yet – anthropologically; entirely distinct.

When I first reached Dhamadka, I did not have to glance at the crooked signboard at the edge of the road; the several rows of dyed fabric that lay strewn about, told me I had reached my destination.

When I first saw a Jat herder wearing an Ajrakh lungi, I understood this textile as a manifestation of cultural expression. Later, as I sat beside a master artisan selling Ajrakh at a craft exhibition-sale in my city, I understood it as an ‘exotic’ handicraft.....

.... This is also a study on human relationship – the symbiotic bond between the block-maker, the block-printer and the trader; the social alliance between the ‘Harijan’ craft labourers and the Muslim Khattris.

Moreover, this is a story of change; from Block print to Screen-print, from Natural dye to Chemical dye, from Dhamadka to Ajrakhpur.

From Azrak to Ajrakh: The beginning

Ajrakh – Is it a colour? Is it a distinctive printing process? Is it an anthology of motifs? Or is it simply a commodity – a double-sided block-printed fabric? – the true definitions lies somewhere in between.

The master block-printer, Khatri Mohammad Siddikbhai of Dhamadka, Kutch used to say: "...Imagine a star studded sky on a moonless night; trace the pattern formed by the hundreds of Constellations in this sky. Then, transfer them onto a piece of cloth. What emerges as a result of this... is Ajrakh."

The etymology of Ajrakh is most often traced to Azrak, the Arabic term for the colour blue. Indigo, one of the oldest dyes known to man – is the dormant colour used in the Ajrakh dyeing and printing tradition.

Shri Kodidas Parmar, a well-known Gujarati letterateur traces the origin of the term to a Sanskrit word "a jharat' which means a thing that does not fade....

The splendour of Ajrakh lies in the antiquity of pattern – these floral and geometric motifs embedded in Indigo and Madder dyed, hand-spun cottons have remained unaltered for centuries. Though many of these motifs are no longer produced for mass consumption, this design dictionary has been carefully preserved and expanded upon by generations of artisans. The block-printers of Kutch consider Ajrakh patterns an integral treasure of the family heirloom – to be passed on from father to son.

The natural dyes – Indigo based blue and Madder based maroon perform the function of temperature regulation based on 'dynamic equilibrium' when printed on both sides of the fabric. The indigo cools on receiving heat and the Madder exudes warmth on exposure to the cold. This magical property established the popularity of Ajrakh as a multi-use garment suited for the extreme desert climate. The camel and cattle herders, known as the Rabaris and the Maldharis are the earliest consumers of Ajrakh....

... the essential feature of an Ajrakh is its dual patterning; the bipuri – has the exact print or a purposeful variation in motif exists on either side of a single fabric. Once indigenous demand reduced to a trickle and the 'adoptive' market did not require this feature; the ekpuri became the creative norm and in a sense Ajrakh lost its exclusivity. This departure marks the beginning of the textile's radical personality transformation.

Very few block-printers still possess the skill to produce a natural dyed, bipuri Ajrakh. Today, it is created in its original form either for high-society clients, who savor it for its 'prestige value' or when a block-printer seeks to contest for the National Award for his craft and attain the status of 'master artisan.'

The People

More than four hundred years ago, the Khatri – a community of expert dyers and block-printers migrated from Sindh, now in Pakistan; to Kutch on the invitation of Rao Bharmalji I, who ruled the district between 1581 and 1631.....

... This population of printers is subdivided according to the medium of resist dyes used by them. Each group decided to settle in different pockets of Gujarat and Rajasthan;

most remained largely clustered around Kutch. ... the Khatriis who specialized in the use of a wax resist (batik) settled in Mundra, those who specialized in a tied resist (bandhini) moved to Mandavi and Anjar. The block-printers who specialized in the Ajrakh technique settled in Dhamadka in eastern Kutch.

Pattern and Motif

... Ajrakh is a geometric exploration; the grid becomes the frame allowing the artist to innovate and to conquer this space. Systematically filling each square within it with a fragment of the larger visual, the pattern painstakingly comes alive – part by part. Geometry allows the block-maker to achieve a perfectly synchronized inter-relationship between the part and the whole. The parts come together to become the whole – the whole being eternally greater than each individual part.

Colour

... with the influx of synthetic dyes and commercialization of the block-print, it became evident that the use of organic colourants could not be sustained without the support of a committed clientele. The local consumers of Ajrakh – the herding communities and the resident Sindhi population were instantly attracted to its brightly coloured naphthol dyed version when it was sold at the local bazaars in the early sixties. Today, the Khatri has virtually lost all his traditional buyers to cheaper imitations of his craft.

1973 to 2001

... the Suran River that flowed along Dhamadka dried out by 1988. until then, the natural alum deposits and iron sulphate salt cakes which formed in the riverbed were used as fatakdīs – mordants. The death of this natural water source signaled the entry of screen-printing workshops in Dhamadka. As indigenously built wood patias were replaced by massive printing tables, and hand carved blocks with screens, the Khatriis entailed a huge investment for the first time.

The pints of Dhamadka were forced to compete in the 'open market' with the screen-printed fabrics produced on a large-scale at the Textile centres in Rajasthan – Jaipur, Sanganer and Barmer....

2001

Dhamadka was one of the villages that was completely destroyed during the earthquake of 1956; it was later rebuilt three kilometers away from where it had originally stood...

... Soon after the earthquake, the Khatriis of Dhamadka decided to re-locate to a new village. They called it 'Ajrakhpur' – the village of Ajrakh....

... As one half of Dhamadka meticulously pieced back their homes, the other half was busy planning the move to entirely new homes....

The Way Ahead

Vijaya Rajan

If a century ago Ananda Coomaraswamy bemoaned the traditional Indian artisans' termination of his connection with the essential root of his craft, namely the villages, we are faced with the much more serious problem of more and more artisans terminating their connection with their craft itself. Essentially, CCI addresses this root problem with its philosophy and multi pronged strategy of craft revival and sustenance through design and product development, workshops, training and exposure of the craftspersons to new tools and technology and most importantly, providing marketing support for his product. We have made steady progress in achieving a few landmark successes based on a sustained relationship with craftspersons through our various programmes through the efforts of our state councils and CCI members. Yet resting on our laurels is perhaps the last thing on our minds.

My thoughts flow in many directions when I think of how much needs to be done by each one in the CCI family. To begin with, I feel we need to work with larger number of craftspeople as networking is a foremost area. Ten state councils no matter how committed, is not the answer to address the problems of craftspersons of 33 states. We need to network more vigorously to widen our reach and contact. We also need to get more states forming State Craft Councils. We will explore all avenues and opportunities to establish contact points so that we can help and support larger numbers of craftspersons and craft groups.

Another related need is advocacy amongst government, corporates and the younger generation to emphasize the vital importance of the craft sector to our economy. There is urgent need for such advocacy. We are also looking at a clear cut agenda which can be highlighted in the media from time to time. If industry as well as government agendas can be highlighted from time to time, surely CCI too can speak forcefully of its vision in the various branches of the media. We aim at sustainable livelihoods for our living heritage sector which is also the second largest employment generator after agriculture. We need to create more incentives to encourage creativity and more marketing opportunities for the younger generation to stay in the craft field. To achieve this what is urgently needed is more forceful advocacy through private and public forums.

You are all aware of our recent continuing work with the stone and wood craftspersons in a series of workshops to expose them to design and product development as well as the use of new tools and technology related to the two fields. And of course we have year round craft exhibitions. I strongly feel that we should expand our activities through more promotional shows, workshops, outlets, etc for craftspersons working in various fields.

Our marketing has been through the three Kamala outlets which showcase some exquisite handcrafts made by our artisans. The USP of Kamala outlets is quality crafts at

competitive prices. Yet Chennai known as the cultural capital of India still has to establish a Kamala outlet, Chennai definitely needs a permanent space to showcase quality crafts which brings me to marketing – the bottomline of the CCI thrust. Not only do we need more marketing strategies we need to get exporters, designers, entrepreneurs and craftspersons together to strategize new lines in creativity and marketing. We need physical space to establish a point of contact, a facility where creativity can take wings.

CCI's scholarship schemes for the education of hereditary craftsperson's children working in crafts has taken off. We also need to debate whether our vision can expand to include higher education in advanced craft training at institutions both at home and abroad for deserving CCI scholarship recipients. Readers might remember that Shri. Rajasekharan, stone artisan trained in the City and Guilds of London Art School under the aegis of CCI and the British Council, Chennai.

Our next focus will be healthcare for craftspersons. With our expanding reach and activities, we not only need donors to contribute but also space where our plans can unfold. As we develop we need to make CCI space a focal point for craft researchers, academicians and students. Our library too needs inputs by adding more books to make it a reference point for research scholars.

Dream teams like Shri. Manmohan Singh's seem to be the flavour of this Indian summer !. We too have a very understanding and committed dream team, but we need create a common body or platform which will represent the craft sector and highlight the craft issues to the Government, corporates and donors. We also need volunteers to help from our general membership as well in many areas.

May I repeat for assistance in every form from all of you. I can visualize that with total commitment and a bit of good luck, CCI will achieve most of its targets within a framework of say three years. For this to come true we need everyone of you to pitch in.

GenerationNext

Gita Ram

The average age of the current generation of weavers in Tamil Nadu we understand from reliable sources is 45 years. The average age of an artisan anywhere in India would be about the same. The next generation is being educated which is good. It is implicitly understood that the child will be seeking a livelihood other than the craft of either parent. The parents gently guide them in this direction because they do not want their child to go through the trials and tribulations of financing, and producing craft products only to find that there is no ready market for it.

There are instances when the child of the more depressed craftsmen comes back from school to sit down and work on the craft so that the money lender-trader can be paid off.

Fifty years from now how many weavers potters, wood carvers, stone carvers will be left still producing the finest of cloth or water pot or vessels?

We need to now urgently turn our attention to the next generation of artisans. Can we ensure that these children can go to school and learn the traditional craft of their parents ?

Delhi Crafts Council found a unique way of addressing this problem more than twenty years ago.

The Kamaladevi Puraskar (scholarship) was awarded to children of traditional craftspersons .The scholarship is intended to encourage the children to work at their traditional family craft while they also attended school. The award instilled a sense of pride in the young minds about the great gift they had in their hands.

Since 1986, 108 children have been awarded the Puraskar. Of them, DCC still works closely with about 50 of them. Some of them have moved on to become National Awardees or Merit Holders. These children have been given encouragement by DCC who have ensured that they are exposed to market forces. Given all this, they have worked hard .Their parents are proud of them.

The bottom line is that their craft sells.

The Crafts Council of India instituted a similar scholarship two years ago to children of traditional artisans, who are between middle school and high school. For the few exceptional ones, apprenticeship training was provided as well.

Recommendation for the students comes from NGOs working in the same area.

CCI hopes to target 100 by end 2009 and 500 children by 2012.

The annual contact programme bringing all the children together will impart classes in spoken English, Montessori maths, history and art. The mentors will also interact with them.

The aim is to be in touch with the young generation of artisans even after their scholarship period is over

The reach of this scheme will depend on the donations received. So far the response has been good, with some donors covering a child for three years.

What Price Progress

Lalitha Prasad

Today India has 'arrived'. We are an emerging economy with a remarkable growth rate a nuclear power with a vast pool of resource people. We are a knowledge power as well.

Yet a few questions persist. Are dreams of heritage and culture and tradition challenged by television, education and modernization? Should one cancel out the other?

A case in point is that of the Banjara Needle Craft Scheme. Our best efforts to expand the area of operation in the other thandas close by have met with cold indifference and disinterest.

Doubtless over a period of two decades the original group of twenty has grown to one hundred and fifty. At the same time the market too has grown and there is more demand with not enough supply.

As a group the members would stand to benefit in many ways by belonging to an SHG. All profits would be equally divided among them depending on their individual output. Every effort has been made through various means to explain why it would be more beneficial as well as profitable to the group to work as an SHG rather than as wage earners of Crafts Council of AP. But sadly all of them fail to understand the importance of working together.

This presumably stems out of a basic inbuilt suspicion among them. It is a piquant situation where they would much rather trust Crafts Council of AP than one of their own members!

Another point is that they do not want to risk their money by way of investment and wait for the returns. They do their beautiful embroidery only when they feel the urge and not out of economic necessity.

Yellammathanda nestles among the famous rock formations of the Deccan plateau. The Banjaras own most of the land in this area. Dry and arid, it is dependent on the monsoon and therefore not worth much. Some agricultural operations were carried out on a small scale. However when the land boom came even these rocky tracts attracted good prices and the smart Banjaras sold some of their lands to rise out of poverty and become more 'comfortable'. They have invested in lorries and auto rickshaws that they ply between Ibrahimpatnam and Hyderabad and Yellamathanda. Business is brisk and lucrative. Because of connectivity the children, including girls are well educated with some studying for their degrees.

They have sold bits and pieces of their lands and 'modernized' their homes. Gone are the tile houses with a well and a courtyard where they could dry their grains and sleep on hot summer nights. Instead small stuffy rooms with fans that don't work because of the

erratic power supply have taken their place. Every household has a TV. set and a gas connection. These are considered 'status symbols' and important assets within the community.

The Banjara women have stopped wearing their beautifully embroidered costumes and taken to wearing synthetic power loom saris. The Andhra thali bottu and mangalsutram has replaced their traditional jewellery. The changes have 'happened' so fast that very soon they would have integrated completely into our communities and the Banjaras as a people apart would only be found in photographs in coffee table books...

But progress is every citizen's birthright. How can we suggest that communities stagnate in the name of heritage without education, employment, health, hygiene and sanitation and new agricultural inputs? While pursuing these goals people will tend to set aside certain aspects of tradition and heritage. With education will come the desire to take up jobs in the city. Life in the city will be an attraction as compared to life in the village.

On the other hand certain areas of Kutch and Rajasthan abutting the desert are semi arid regions where there is not much agricultural operation and water is a precious commodity. So the prevailing source of income is necessarily the beautiful handwork produced in these parts. Many NGOs have started working in these areas and exquisite hand worked products are exported around the world. But when development comes to these areas too the number of people wanting to do this kind of embroidery will also dwindle.

Often we read that a craftsman/artisan has become an auto rickshaw driver or set up a paan stall because it is more lucrative. Most craftspeople naturally prefer to send their children to school and do not encourage them to learn the craft.

Conscious about the extent and wealth of our craft heritage we cannot afford to allow it to slip into oblivion. The facts are there in some form or other for all to see. We do not have the answers or solutions to the problem. How should we go about it is the question

Report on North East Festival, New Delhi

Gulshan Nanda

The Crafts Council of India organized the North East Festival in Delhi from 27th of January to 9th of February, 2009. It had many components : a Crafts Bazar at Dilli Haat, a Film Festival at India International Centre, an exhibition of museum quality handicrafts at Crafts Museum and most importantly a seminar aimed at problem solving of craftspersons. The Dilli Haat events of Seminar, Crafts Bazar and demonstration had cultural performances twice a day with folk dances from all the states.

It was ambitious, adventurous and a total learning experience. More than 50 percent of craftspersons had seen Delhi for the first time. They were new to the logistics, language and style of living as well as food. But I must say they were a sporting lot and we were in love with each one of them by the time they left – a hundred friends who smiled inspite of their problems, inspite of their getting lost at the railway stations. Entry to platforms was closed. So our volunteers had to wait at every entrance of the railway station to receive them and bring them to their guest houses where accommodation was arranged for them.



North East Festival, New Delhi

Our members traveled to all the eight states to contact craftspersons before inviting them to the Crafts Bazar and Seminar. Merchandise that would find a market in Delhi, had to be identified. But it was an experience that each of the members who were lucky enough to travel would cherish.



Exhibits at the North East Festival

We are grateful to DONER, Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Crafts Museum, Ministry of Culture and IIC for helping us wholeheartedly inspite of our meager funding. It would take three or four such festivals for merchandise from North East to become a part of mainstream sales items in Delhi.

The craftspersons need help with design, raw material, marketing strategy which can only come with regular exposure to markets in metropolitan cities.

Freight is a major handicap, even subsidies upto railheads are not enough as railway freight is so high – help with packing, packaging and costing needs to be given to these craftspersons. Our seminar was a great contributor because Government officers, providers of raw material, providers of funds and designers were able to discuss their problems and sort out some of them. Hopefully, the exhibition of cotton, wool and silk yarn as well as natural dyes was a high point of the exhibition.

A STEP FORWARD

Ritu Sethi

In 2008 at the preliminary planning on the Festival of the eight North-Eastern States a need was expressed to further enrich the craftsperson's experience by creating a forum for interaction simultaneous to the sales and marketing being conducted at the Festival. This started a dialogue with the craftsperson's that culminated in a seminar cum workshop titled 'A Step Forward' held at Dilli Haat from 2 to 4, February, 2009. A core part of the Festival, 'A Step Forward' was an engagement with the craftspersons (many of whom were in the capital city for the first time) covering issues that they grappled with at work. These blocks to progress were garnered through observation and conversations with the craftspersons by the teams that had travelled to the 8 States preliminary to the Festival.

'A Step Forward' was conceived and coordinated by the Craft Revival Trust, spread over three days, attended by 100 craftspersons. The day was divided into two parts. The morning session, with speakers from academia, government, lending institutions, capacity building organisations, retail stores and design colleges tackled issues from how to access government schemes to valuing the hand crafts. Additionally the need for Geographic Indications Act were discussed, while the importance of logistic planning, freight, pricing and raw material procurement issues were also discussed. Accessing retail stores in urban cities, raw material procurement were topics other than speakers touched upon.

The afternoon sessions termed the 'Panchayat' were one on one sessions at the craftsperson's stalls with experts in the field of design and technology, retail and merchandising, raw material and production management, costing and pricing and group building to develop entrepreneurship. The experts brought their learning and applied it to the issues engaging individual stallholders through a hands on problem solving approach. A tutorial in the best sense of the word with the expert minds bent on matters that could help craftspersons take the next step to self reliance and commercial viability.

The seminar and Panchayat was conducted in languages spoken in the North East. This broke barriers, created an atmosphere of sharing and a flow of information that enriched all those involved.

An additional feature was representation from reputed yarn suppliers from all over India. The special emphasis on this aspect resultant hinged on feedback from weavers on their difficulties in obtaining regular supply of small quantities of different varieties of yarn both natural and dyed. Active business was conducted by the suppliers and contacts established.

Many lessons were learnt from 'A Step Forward' the foremost being that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and kicking and craftspersons are keen on taking their business to the next level and reaching out to markets beyond their state boundaries. There was a strongly felt need for additional, regular training modules of this kind on topics where the craftspersons perceive that there is a gap in their learning for their push to the next step forward.

Crafts and Textiles of the North East- Crafts Museum-Feb 2009

Uttar Poorva Utsav

Purnima Rai

It was about two years ago that CCI decided to take up the Festival of the North East in Delhi. Among the numerous events, an Exhibition of museum-quality, rare crafts from this region was also planned. We found the whole idea very exciting, particularly the fact that we may be able to travel to the North East and explore crafts that we were not exposed to so far.



Textiles of the North East

When the project came through, Gita Ram and I made trips to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland with the express purpose of locating private and Museum collections for the Delhi Exhibition. It was an instructive and illuminating experience! On the one hand, we were struck with wonder at the natural unspoilt beauty of the region and the quiet pace of life. At the same time, we despaired at ever being able to achieve anything in the little time we had. From out there all our concerns did indeed seem remote and distant.

The Museums that we visited, at Guwahati, Itanagar, Aizawl and Kohima had amazing collections. But, the task of getting selected artifacts to Delhi seemed insurmountable. Equally disappointing was the response from some of the individuals whose private collections we were able to see. They were extremely helpful but, understandably, not so keen on the idea of loaning their precious heirlooms for a month long exhibition in Delhi.

So how was the exhibition going to happen? We were really at our wit's end.

All we seemed to have with us at that point was Mr. M.P.Ranjan's collection of baskets donated to the crafts museum. Our visit to see this collection and discussions with the officials there gave us our first glimmer of hope! Crafts Museum readily agreed to collaborate with us on holding the exhibition. The venue was ideally suited, and a peep into their reserve collection indicated a rich haul of wood carvings, jewellery and weapons, bronze items and of course textiles from this region, most of which had never been exhibited before! At last we were ready to make a go at holding the Exhibition! Preparations went ahead now in full steam and we were grateful for a fairly generous budget by Crafts Council standards!

From the start, it was clear in my mind that the main display structures would be done with bamboo. It was while working on these structures at the Crafts Museum that our next

brilliant idea came. Mr. Meher and Dr. Pal of the Crafts Museum and I were casually discussing the work when they mentioned Pablo Bartholomew, a young and brilliant photographer who had done a study of this region. Luckily, Pablo was in Delhi and agreed to lend us all of his superb photographs, over 40 of them, at very short notice.

The display of photographs lent a very special aspect to the Exhibition. It was striking that many of the actual objects on display, particularly jewellery and ornamentation, could actually be seen worn by people in the photographs.

Besides the photographs, we now had a fairly comprehensive collection of wood carvings, jewellery, textiles baskets metalware and a wonderful collection of Neelmani Devi pottery from Manipur. Small gaps if any, were filled in with items loaned privately by friends and colleagues.

Ruchira Ghose, who had just joined as a consultant at the Museum, helped me with the most arduous of all tasks in exhibitions, that of making the captions and texts. Of course we were putting these up till practically the last second before the opening! Ruchira also managed, through Doordarshan, to arrange for a series of videos on the folk dances of the region. Our exhibition seemed complete at last!

A measure of its success, besides the many comments in the visitor's book, was that the Crafts Museum requested that it be extended for another month so that more people could view it.

We were a small group who worked on this Exhibition and made it happen, but the sense of commitment, excitement, and enthusiasm was wonderful.

Personally, for me this has been a deeply enriching and satisfying experience. Just a glimpse into this extraordinary world, much of it dying even as days pass by, has illumined my understanding of it.

SELVEDGED VOICES

Sabita Radhakrishna

The Embassy of Chile in India, the Honorary Consulate of Chile in Chennai and the Crafts Council of India with support from the Confederation of Indian Industry (CCI) put together a wonderful show of Narratives in Textiles- Chile in India, curated by Dr Skye Morrison Canadian folklorist who has done extensive research with indigenous Indian craftswomen. Past President of WCC, Celina worked on the Chilean side to collect the exhibits and craftspeople. The show was held at Tidel Park from March 20 - 22 this year.

To quote Isabel Allende “most women are weavers of stories and ones who perpetuate the oral tradition...they record the truths of history-not the struggle for power or vanity of emperors, but the pains and hopes of everyday life...” Chile saw a period of terror, strife, censorship and torture between 1973 and 1989 during the long dictatorship of General Pinochet. Women were victimized and became providers for their families while their men disappeared behind a curtain of darkness. The Arperillas Movement, a unique form of protest took seed, where scraps of cloth were sewn together with simple stitchery, and what was suppressed and left untold, burst forth into stitched narratives.

In India, women work on textile narratives in a traditional exercise, with the themes varying from state to state. The Bihar Khatwas and Suzinis in appliqué form and straight running stitches depicted the state of women during elections, weddings, festivals and so on. The Chamba Rumal a languishing craft, which has since been revived was worked by Brahmin women depicting mainly religious themes. The Bhuj women narrate everyday events through embroidery. The objective was to create and curate an exhibition of Arpilleras and Khatwas, Suzinis and Chamba Rumaals, bringing the vast canvases together to exhibit the Narrative Fabrics of Chile and India as also to highlight the similarities of two cultures. It was also meant to create a bridge of understanding between the people of two different countries, Chile and India, cutting across the borders of politics, power, religion and social status to create a pictorial commentary on the two cultures.

By this exercise it was hoped to bring into focus these silent, lesser known women who were no less powerful, and to enable them to take their craft forward, thereby contributing to women’s empowerment and economic freedom, and to open up markets for craft artisans in both countries.

The hall at Tidel Park was transformed with the magic touch of CCI member Thota Tharani.. He created a maze of “walls” which provided ample place for display of the colourful appliqués and embroidery from Chile and India in perfect sync showing them to advantage.

The chief dignitary was Her Excellency Dr.Michelle Bachalet Jeria President of the Republic of Chile. She was accompanied by His Excellency Alphonso Silva, Ambassador of Chile in India, and the members of the delegation from Chile. She was brought in with Jende music which consists of a haunting beat with drums.

Dr Michelle is a trained doctor, with graduate studies in Military Sciences. Despite traumatic events that affected her family and the country, Her Excellency continued studying and graduated as a surgeon in 1982. She joined different political organizations in a bid to restore democracy. In 2006 Madame Bachalet became the first woman in Chilean history to hold the highest office in the land. She inaugurated the exhibition, declaring it open with the traditional lighting of the lamp. The show started with the invocation song by Ms Kanya Ramesh.

The Welcome Address was given by Sunita Shahaney, Consul for the Republic of Chile in Chennai and Dr. Michelle Bachalet gave the inaugural address. Mrs. Vijaya Rajan Chairperson Crafts Council of India presented Madame President with a memento from CCI. Mrs Usha Krishna, President World Crafts Council presented a memento from WCC.

Mrs. Prema Paranthaman, Hony Secretary, CCI proposed the vote of thanks. We were treated to a superb presentation of Chilean music and dance by gifted young musicians from Chile, and from our side the Santhal tribal women from Jharkhand gave us a song and dance dedicated to Gandhiji and his ideals. They presented a memento to Madame Bachelet.

The exhibits complemented each other with disarming open, expressions in appliqué and stitchery and were colourful in their bold themes. The artisans demonstrated their art, and a platform was provided to sell their craft to interested buyers.

The whole programme went like clockwork, and the ceremony was beautiful, but the footfalls to the exhibition were very few. Since people could visit this exhibition only with an invitation, there were limited visitors owing to the tight security. We wish this could have somehow been circumvented, as the amount of passion and endeavour put into the exhibits was worthy of more viewership.

CRAFT BYTES

- The Uppada saree gets a Geographical Identity trademark

The following [hypertext](#) takes us to a site that lists all GI trademarks in the country today with special reference to Andhra Pradesh.

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/9881856/GI-on-poccham-palli-ikat-designs>

- The Hindu carries an article on Geographical Identification
www.hindu.com/2009/04/21/stories/2009042153200500.htm
- The Craft revival trust has a case study of GI for the Chanderi saree.
www.craftrevival.org/casestudyDetails.asp?code=79
- Thanjavur dolls too acquire the GI trademark
www.law-wire.blogspot.com/2009/01/thanjavur-dolls-acquire-gi-status-india.html
- A counterpoint that claims the right to free speech over trademark rights can be found in
<http://mail.sarai.net/pipermail/commons-law/2005-March/>
- The present economic slowdown has had its impact on the craft sector. An Asian report can be found in www.adbi.org/e-newsline/090.216.html

Activities

The Crafts Council of India

- Sangamam (11 – 15 January '09): The Crafts Council of India collaborated with the organizers of Chennai Sangamam, an annual festival celebrating and showcasing the states unique culture in the form of street plays and theatre, exhibitions, music, folk dance, food and much else. CCI collaborated with the Sangamam organizers in presenting the beautiful crafts of Tamil Nadu.
- Natural Dye Exhibition (15 – 21 Feb '09): Craftspeople working with natural dyes in their crafts were invited to a very successful exhibition. Textiles such as Ajrakh, Kalamkari, block prints from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh were a great draw.
- Vishwakarma Exhibition (25 Feb – 3 March '09): 'Vishwakarma' a brilliant exhibition showcasing the work of National and State awardees, Shilp Gurus and Unesco Excellence awardees gave the Chennai craft cognoscenti a treasure trove of craft products to choose from. Living legends like J. Gurappa Chetty, Surendra Meher (Orissa ikat), Ram Soni (Sanjhi papercut), Kanubhai Salvi (Patola) and others lent special grace to the exhibition which was an outstanding success in terms of superb quality and appreciation from craft lovers.
- Textile & Jewellery Show (13 & 14 March '09): CCI's biannual Textile and Jewellery Show presented the best of the country's textile heritage. Once again, the craftspersons sure touch, wondrous weaves and designer saris drew huge appreciative crowds to the exhibition.
- Selvedged Voices (22 – 22 March '09): A moving exhibition of patchwork wall hangings from Chile and India was held in Chennai. While the Chilean 'Arpilleras' were a voice against horrific oppression under a fascist regime the Indian khatwas and sujinis were a celebration of tribal life, both its highs and lows.

Crafts Council of Assam

- Crafts Council of Assam is now stretching itself to Assam's picturesque neighbour Meghalaya. The colourful and friendly people of the state come mainly from the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes. The first two confine their crafts to mostly basketry whilst the latter are excellent loom weavers. Natural dyes are commonly made and used.
- At the moment CCA are looking mainly at basketry and natural dyes. Nandini Dutta has been travelling to the interiors of the Khasi and Jaintia hills with Iora Dkar of the Rural Development. The craftspersons of this region combine craft work with agricultural and other work.

- On a recent visit Nandini travelled to Mysanram, a sub divisional town nestled in breath-taking beauty. This is a village market place to where craftspeople trek to sell their wares. There is little road connectivity and even less power. CCA have now established contact with grass root players who are so far removed from the everyday luxuries one takes for granted. The returns they get is a pittance. Middleman commissions are the biggest disincentive for the craftspeople. CCA have started marketing and value addition of the products.
- CCA's next port of call was 65 miles from Shillong and past the small town of Jowai in the undulating Jaintia hills. CCA's intention is to work with groups of women craftspeople who have set up a cooperative to make baskets and are also venturing into pineapple fibre. The lack of road transport and basic amenities are a hindrance. A common facility of the Bamboo Mission exists but with little road connectivity and no power most of the time, it is of little use to the remote villagers.
- Byrnihat is a small town on the border with Assam. Here a women's weaving cooperative has been set up, again with the Department's help. The mainly plain tribal weavers are doing some good work but only for the local market. CCA will be working with them on designs and marketable items beyond Meghalaya.
- Meghalaya so far is a learning experience to some extent. CCA is excited with the initial response.

Delhi Crafts Council

- Workshop on Khatua Applique Embroidery from Jharkhand (18 -24 Feb '09): DCC held a weeklong Khatwa workshop in association with Dr. Skye Morrison. Usha Prajapati and Pooja Ratnakar were the two designers who worked with the embroidery artisans to bring out new design for the Kamala Shop. The workshop also discussed aspects of design, colour coordination and costing with the Khatwa artisans.



Khatua Workshop in Progress

- KAIRI - 2009 (27 – 28 March): This is the summer textile exhibition of DCC. This year saw 14 participants with some outstanding saris on display.

- Kamaladevi Puraskar 2009: Seven child craftspersons were awarded the Kamaladevi Puraskar on April 15th at the Crafts Museum. The child awardees were MinmoyGhosh for leather work, Hensi Devji Bhai Venkar for weaving from Kutch,Pooja Ashokbhai for textile painting, Gujarat, Rangu Srinivas for weaving from Andhra Pradesh, ArpanMaity of West Bengal for mat weaving and Ajay Kumar for ironcraft from Bastar.



Child Craftsperson receives Award

Crafts Council of Karnataka

- Kuteera Exhibition (8 – 15 March '09): CCK's annual exhibition, Kuteera featured handcrafted products for the home from all over the country. This year's focus was on traditional board games of Karnataka handcrafted by craftspersons of Chittara and on lacquerware.



Exhibition of the work of National and State Awardees

- Exhibition of Handicrafts created by Karnataka's National & State Awardees: The exhibition showcased the work of Shri. P.C. Parameshwaracharya, Shri. Neelakantachar, Shri. K. Shamaraya Charya and Shri. Lakshmi Narayanacharya. Needless to say, the artifacts were brilliantly conceived and crafted.

- Biography of Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay in Konkani: CCK has given its contribution to a Konkani language biography of Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay the doyenne of India's craft renaissance.

- Kamalini Outlet Exhibition: An exhibition of handcrafted textiles by Saisuja of Chennai was held at Kamalini - CCK's craft outlet.

Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu

- CCTN's craft classes for school children have received a good response. CCTN had already reached out to three schools with collage art and have since then covered two more including a rural school. The innovativeness and creativity of the children is amazing.

- A 'Janoor Workshop' was arranged for CCTN members and non members. About 28 members participated. Different models of this versatile art form was demonstrated by experienced people. (Photographs enclosed).

- CCTN members visited the families of Kurumba weavers of Appanaickenpatti and Kalangal and discussed the possibility of creating softer material.



Janoor Workshop

- Council members also visited the weavers of Chandravaram and Lakshminayakanpalayam in the outskirts of Coimbatore to discuss the possibility of forming a cluster.

Obituary

Smt. Swatanrata Prakash nee Bhagat

(1921 – 2009)

The Crafts Council of India mourns the passing away of Mrs. Swatanrata Prakash in May 2009 after a brief illness at her home in Delhi.

Swatanrata Prakash was born in Lahore in 1921 and came to Delhi after partition. In her youth, she was greatly involved with the struggle for independence and came into contact with many famous personalities of the freedom struggle like Sarojini Naidu and Kamaladevi Chattopdhyay. Post Independence, her close association with Kamaladevijji continued till Kamaladevijji's death.

At Kamaladevijji's suggestion, she helped to set up Delhi Crafts Council, a voluntary organization to help traditional crafts of India which were in a stagnant, neglected state. She was both General Secretary and President for some years.

Mrs. Prakash, Gogo or Meiji to many, had a deep interest and commitment to India crafts. After joining the All Indian Handicrafts Board in 1956, she organized more than 150 landmark exhibitions both in India and abroad.

Everyone at the Delhi Crafts Council and the Crafts Council of India who have known her have fond memories of her and were greatly looking forward to her memoirs which she had been writing.

CCI and all craft workers will miss her presence as well as her guidance based on her vast knowledge and experience.

CCI Calendar of Events

Events	Date	Venue
Santa Fe Folk Art Market	11 & 12 July, 2009	Santa Fe, New Mexico
Integrated Design & Technology Development Project in Stone	July – November, 2009	Agra
Textile & Jewellery Show	7 & 8 August, 2009	Sheraton Chola Hotel, Chennai
Crafts Bazaar 2009	18 – 27 September, 2009	Valluvar Kottam Hall, Chennai
Natural Dye Exhibition with InKo Centre	18 – 27 November, 2009	Lalit Kala Akademi, Chennai

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Membership

The Crafts Council of India membership is open to all persons above 18 years of age residing in India. CCI members not residing in Chennai are required to become a member of the local council if it exists. If not, they have to become members of the Council as and when one is formed in that State.

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