



# THE CRAFTS COUNCIL OF INDIA

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

August 2020



## When there's nowhere left to turn: The need to support Indian village crafts Loop

(27 April 2020)

*Ashoke Chatterjee*

(Ashoke Chatterjee issues a call for support to help India's artisans cope with the unprecedented crisis of a national lockdown.)

The current crisis demands that we pay careful attention to the context of ignorance and neglect within which the craft crisis is unfolding. It is becoming clear that our real problem is the dominating pattern of "development" that has taken over our country—a pattern that mistakes statistics and infrastructure as "development" rather than the wellbeing of the vast majority of our people or of the environment that shelters them. It was this dominating pattern which a decade ago rejected our efforts on behalf of the sector as a useless endeavour on behalf of a "sunset industry". As we look back, we can see the neglect of rural India and its potential within this pattern. Artisans were being discounted because rural India was being discounted. With it came an acceptance of migration into urban slums as an indicator of "progress" for the millions—artisans among them. Today their blistered feet, suffering and death on our roadways tell us exactly what they think of the uncaring cities to which they had journeyed in the hope of survival. As we look at what each of us can do to alleviate immediate suffering and build a more sustainable future for "handmade in India", we may also need the patience and the application for greater homework to understand the context of the mess we are in. We cannot succeed alone. We need to be part of an alternative paradigm that goes beyond craft or any one sector. This communication is an attempt in that direction, drawing on what has happened over the past two weeks. Your particular attention is invited to Prof Krishna Kumar's piece on the Indian village, which has appeared in The Hindu April 23 and is an eye-opener and which draws attention to the situation of artisans within the rural context. Another important document has come from Ruchira Ghose: a policy insight on the impact of the lockdown on those who are most vulnerable, by a team of economists that includes Prof S Subramanian (retired Madras Institute of Development Studies) who was part of the IIMA / NID volunteer team that almost 50 years ago joined artisans in Jawaja in an experiment toward rural self-reliance led by the late Prof Ravi Matthai, so significant and revealing all these years later.

Some will have received the poster sent out by the NHHF group, translated into several languages, and already welcomed by artisans as a significant boost for morale and hope in this difficult time. Please use it and share it.

The crisis is powerfully captured in a cartoon from AP shared by Mohan Raoji. In it, the Indian artisan is seen caught between two devils: the Coronavirus and official neglect. Over the past few days, colleagues have brought attention to this situation in mainstream media. Following her article in the Indian Express on April 16, Jaya has written another piece for the Business Standard April 25. She also draws our attention to a letter to the Prime Minister by Sundeep Bhutoria in which the need for priority attention to artisans and crafts is made in the context of the future



of Indian tourism, a dimension of the crisis to which the Tamil Nadu Artisans Welfare Association has also drawn attention on behalf of 1.5M members. Laila has written for The Hindu April 24 which several have commented upon. Shibani organized an on-line review of the situation through Baaya Design on April 18, which is to be followed by a Baaya Design webinar on Thursday April 30 with a focus on immediate market implications. Association of Designers of India organised a webinar on the sector's challenges on April 24, in which Laila, Neelam and Dr Toolika Gupta were among the discussants. Against this backdrop, many are addressing the crisis in a variety of practical ways. Following my communication of April 14, Dr Toolika Gupta has shared with us the IICD response to the current crisis, including both relief supplies and work opportunities. Gita indicated that Trifed reports Rs. 100 crore of unsold stocks and is releasing Rs. 500 crore now to get support to tribal families in remote forest areas, and is working with 16 technical institutions toward building marketing capacities within tribal communities. Sreya has shared with Delhi Crafts Council an AIACA list of some 30 craft clusters in need of relief, and this information has been communicated to CII. DCC and AIACA have reached out to women weavers in Kota in need of nutritional relief. The NFHH Delhi Group mentored by Mohan Rao has been drawing attention to relief requirements of weavers in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere. Rajeev and the Asian Heritage Foundation have been raising support for AHF relief work on-going in West Delhi, Jharkhand, MP, Bihar, Telangana, Rajasthan and West Bengal. Ghatit has shared with us the experience of the recently-formed Kutch craft collective, through which five groups have come together to recommend what needs to be done in the COVID 19 context. Laila has shared a summary of official guidelines for managing the pandemic, while recommendations from Industree were included with the April 14 note. Radhi informs us of an initiative from the World Hope Forum with its aspirations for design responsibilities in a post- COVID context, while from Australia, Kevin Murray of the World Crafts Council – Australia informs us of a pandemic impact study being prepared for Oxfam, in addition to ideas about e-commerce and other innovations that can respond to the pandemic. Of significance last week was Prasannaji breaking his 8-day fast in Bangalore, undertaken to draw attention to the suffering of migrants and to the need for India to reflect on its responsibility toward the village and local economies, which he describes as India's "Sacred Economy". This belief brings us back to Prof Krishna Kumar's wisdom. The most immediate actions, in addition to essential relief supplies and masks, that emerges from these past days is the call from Laila, Jaya, Gita and others for urgent attention to functional, cost-effective, value-for-money handmade products of everyday use that can be promoted with Govt agencies, corporates and the public to give artisans work for a market that will be impacted by changes in demand and in the ability to purchase. High-end crafts may take longer to recover and we need to build a market for what may be a frugal spell. Festive celebrations will always be with us, but even these might need to be scaled to what will be affordable. Even when markets resume, it may not be business as usual. Huge changes seem likely and the sector needs to prepare and be nimble. NID, NIFT, Srishti, IICD, IIT / IDC should all be a part of this design movement to segment markets, build new markets and find the opportunities from the ground up. It is almost a decade since some of us came together to draw the Government's attention to the neglect of India's great craft advantage and found ourselves face-to-face with the "sunset industry" syndrome. We have been

battling that ever since, and the resistance we have had to encounter demands an understanding of context: of how the crisis in craft is part of a much larger crisis, one that regards progress as statistics and infrastructure, not as human wellbeing. Who would have thought that it would take a killer virus to underline the urgency of the arguments we have been making all these years, often to deaf ears? Surely it is significant that we have nothing—repeat nothing—to share as news of official outreach at this time to millions of artisans other than references to “the unorganized/informal sector”. So do get the poster out to as many as you can! We need to be heard, and for artisans to be finally identified in their own right.

## Dear Colleagues:

Occasionally things coalesce in a revealing way. In the space of a few days, our crisis and the opportunity as well as the threat have all been brought together by the Fourth Estate. Take a careful read. Our future could lie between these lines. See also the larger extracts reproduced below from the links. First, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has just shared an extraordinary insight: “In a crisis of this magnitude it certainly cannot be claimed that no one suffered any inconvenience or discomfort. Our labourers, migrant workers, artisans and craftsmen in small-scale industries, hawkers and such fellow countrymen have undergone tremendous suffering....” (Indian Express, May 30 2020). Inconvenience, discomfort and tremendous suffering. Can this revelation mean that some attention will be paid at last to millions of artisans pushed to the wall by demonetisation, GST, recession in the economy, political turmoil in craft-rich regions, and now the virus? Next, what about us in civil society? Will we be allowed to come out of the shadows and be given a measure of respect? Look what Mr Amitabh Kant (NITI Aayog CEO) had to say a few days earlier in an article in the Indian Express: “Civil society and voluntary and non-government organisations constitute the backbone of the collective articulation of citizen interest in a democracy”. We haven’t heard anyone in authority speak so appreciatively of NGOs for years. He went on: “ There is nobody better placed than the NGOs to understand the pulse at the grassroots and engage closely with communities...The response from NGOs was heart-warming... An outstanding contribution of NGOs was in developing communication strategies in different vernaculars which went a long way in taking awareness measures to the community level....” <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ngos-private-sector-international-organisations-fight-against-covid-amitabh-kant-6425547/>

And then, the very same day, Pushpa Sundar observed in Business Line

(<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/ngos-being-starved-of-funds/article31670090.ece>) that NGOs are being starved of funds. She reports that at the beginning of the crisis Mr Kant wrote to over 92,000 NGOs appealing to them to help the Government in its fight against the virus. Yet NGOs are being systematically starved of funds – CSR funds being diverted by income-tax exemption to PM CARES, niggardly grants, and “obstacles in their attempts to raise

money from other sources such as foreign donors or the private sector...” It is within such mixed signals that today we seek a compass that can help find a path in a Covid 19 situation in which the only certainty is that nothing can ever be the same for India’s artisans or for those who seek to serve them.

Best, AC

## CCI reaches out to Craft Artisans in the time of the Corona Pandemic

*Gita Ram*

We have been through three months of the pandemic already, applying our mental brakes on practically everything to help craft and craftspersons caught in the devastation of the pandemic. Our Business Meet on zoom last May was a boost to our morale with every Council reporting on what they have done in spite of Covid19. It was really heartening to note that every Council has responded to calls from the artisans and weavers in their regions, first with facilitating rations distribution and next with follow up on programs that had to be cancelled so that the loss to the participants is minimised. We hope we continue to have the energy to keep working during the next few months. Food and rations having been sorted out up to now, our energies are now diverted to helping the artisans to pick up the threads to mend and move forward. This is going to be a challenging task. It will be a long time from now before we can move into an exhibition / sale or bazaar mode.

The artisan already has built up stock that would have got sold at these events had they been held. We have to put on our thinking caps to see how best to help sale of products. The sentiment for buying Handmade is high and we have to see how best to cash in on this. The kind of products the artisans make would also have to change. If we as Indians want to replace everything Chinese with Indian, we need to have many designers move into the sector to work this out.

It is time for the government to help out by engaging artisans in infrastructure projects. We cannot forget the images of the Madhubani artists working on painting the Madhubani railway station a few years ago. It was a transformative experience for handicrafts to move forward.

It is time for institutions to make it mandatory for the employees to wear handloom at least once a month and for institutions where uniforms are worn, to have them made with handlooms. It is also time for all of us to look at other areas that would help secure better livelihoods. We could attempt to move artisans at the bottom of the pyramid into an MGNREGA program that accepts work of handlooms or handicrafts. MSME framework could work well for some artisans who have scaled up impressively.

We hope the next Newsletter will carry more stories of HOPE.

## Delhi Crafts Council's Outreach

*Anjana Somany*

When Covid 19 pandemic hit us, at Delhi Crafts Council, the first thought turned to the overwhelming number of affected crafts persons spread across the country, without a safety net for health, education or housing. To understand the level of the adverse impact of the Corona outbreak lockdown, we began our efforts with members speaking to artisans we were in contact with. DCC created a small 'Artisan Help Fund' to prepare for a situation that may turn critical in the coming months; we received generous support.

We realized that the worst hit was the ancillary craft worker, who constituted the bottom of the value chain. We first concentrated on this segment and provided assistance of Rs. 1000/- each to almost 200 spinners, dyers and helpers in Maheshwar, Nagpur and Kota. They were identified through AIACA, Women's Weave and the Kala Swaraj Foundation. Further relief was extended to Kotpad dyers and Pilkhuwa artisans.

Kairi is Delhi Crafts Council's summer textiles exhibition held annually to provide direct sales to weavers. The much-awaited exhibition was cancelled only a week before it was to be held. We decided to launch 'Kairi at your Doorstep', a unique WhatsApp selling campaign, with a selection of textiles from all our exhibition participants, who were not charged any commission. We hope to alleviate the acute distress they are facing due to stalled sales and the much needed finances required for purchase of raw material.

While we continue our efforts, the resilience of our artisans amazes us. Indeed, many have taken proactive steps to minimize the impact. And we, like everybody else, are reinventing ourselves to get accustomed to the new normal.

## Crafts Council of Karnataka's Outreach

Assessing the economic distress of artisans, Crafts Council of Karnataka initiated programmes to extend financial help to craft-persons by making online transfers to their respective bank accounts. Craft artisans from different crafts and clusters were identified and online money transfers done. Those helped included 10 artisans from stone carving clusters. 12 artisans from Kinhal, 5 Kora grass mat weavers from Shabalu, 5 artisans doing Hasi Chitara art from Shimoga District, 25 Bidri craft artisans from Bidar, 6 potters from Khanapur and 1 lacquerware artisan from Channapatana. Our contribution and help will continue....

## Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu's Outreach

*Jayashree Ravi*

The Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu (CCTN) has been actively reaching out to the artisans in the state to assess the impact of the Corona virus pandemic and to determine the need for assistance and relief.

The stone work artisans in Thirumuruganpoondi on the outskirts of Tirupur are concerned whether they will receive payments for the granite statue work that has already been completed and is waiting to be picked up by their clients. They have requested for relief packages for senior stone work artisans, who solely rely on stone work for their income which in turn will help them with their medical expenditure in the coming months.

There is a cluster of olai work artisans in Tuticorin with stock worth over Rs. 50,000. Under normal circumstances, they would have sold this stock of olai fans and other articles in temple and church festivals. But since such gatherings have been banned for the time being and they do not foresee a way to sell them in the near future, they have requested for assistance from CCTN in selling their stock. A few olai craftsmen in other areas have switched over to farm work to tide over the current crisis and make ends meet.

CCTN is planning to assist some of these artisans to showcase their products using the social media platform and connect them to potential buyers, which in turn, will convert into sales and generate revenue for the artisans. CCTN will continue to stay in touch with the artisans and provide assistance during these unprecedented times.

## Crafts Council of Telangana's Outreach Team

### Crafts Council of Telangana

Crafts Council of Telangana moved into 'CCT SPACES', its new premises in November 2019 with its impressive exhibition halls for holding craft exhibitions and workshops. CCT SPACES is the fruition of CCT's founder members vision to have a premises of their own to benefit crafts and craft persons. However, our own plans to hold Samman Award 2020 and the Kausalyam Craft Exhibition in March in CCT Spaces had to be put on hold due to the outbreak of the pandemic.

And we began our journey of supporting craftspersons in these difficult times.

Seeing the Govt using Social media successfully to reach out to our 1.3 billion population during this crisis, CCT decided to take the initiative to interact and brainstorm with Design Entrepreneurs from all over India and create a platform to find solutions for craftsmen to survive this crisis. This culminated in the successful 'HANDMADE IN INDIA' Social media campaign. It reached every small weaver in the country and gave him the hope that WE ARE THERE to look out for him.

Consolidating the gains from this campaign resulted in 'CREATIVE DIGNITY' through which communication channels were established between all stakeholders within the craft community. The outcome as we all know, is the questionnaire which has been sent out to artisans across the country to understand their problems and come up with a relief mechanism.

Simultaneously, through another group - 'A HAND FOR HANDMADE' - we have coordinated in pooling resources and contacts to create an open source data bank with the objective of facilitating extensive interaction and exchange of ideas through conferences and webinars.

While navigating through these platforms, we came across "BAS EK MINIT" - a one minute video - showing a craft process made by Mr Ayush Kasliwal of Anantaya. With his permission we initiated its translation into all languages along with a voiceover. This video was sent out to all craftsmen so that they can learn to film their craft process. Similar videos are being made to teach them digital banking, packaging and customer relations, to better equip our craftsmen to face and overcome the current challenges of production and marketing.

CCT is now the nodal point for all these activities for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Our senior members have been continuously interacting with the artisans we work with to mentor them to go digital and to facilitate online sales on Go-Coop and other online portals.

Our junior members have volunteered to form a team to help artisans to catalogue their products to enable online sales.

On another front, our young members Aditi Bishnoi and Madhav Raj Bhat, have been busy showcasing CCT's activities on Social Media platforms. In January, posts were shared on Facebook and Instagram to promote our signature Exhibition - 'Aakruthi Vastra'. In February, posts highlighted the conference 'Business of Handcrafted Sustainable Luxury' by Mango Tree Designs hosted by Hyderabad's International School of Business, on 20th February. With professional assistance from a digital media company, they put up articles on how our craftsmen have used their craft to spread awareness about Covid-19.

Between March 23 and May 4 the Social Media team ran a 'Quarantine and Learn' campaign focusing on those craft forms that CCT had sourced for the Kausalyam Exhibition. On April 24, the 'Handmade in India' campaign was started on our pages. In tune with this they ran a 'Quiz Trivia'. They have been continuing with posts to keep our pages active in order to catch and sustain the attention of Patrons and Gen X on Craft Awareness.

It is through this platform and through WhatsApp that we have managed to spread the word and showcase the exquisite craft pieces sourced for Kausalyam Exhibition. These pieces were displayed in our premises and were shown to patrons while following strict social distancing norms. We have sold 60% of the pieces - including some of high value - and thus managed to support our craftsmen.



We shall all work together to overcome this crisis. With an approx 12,000 sq ft available in CCT Spaces for holding exhibitions and workshops for craft activities, we will be happy to make available these spaces to our craft community from all over the country. We request all Councils to contact us to plan these activities as soon as the situation eases.

These are the URLs for Creative Dignity and Hand for Handmade.

<https://instagram.com/creativedignity?igshid=7lpd7dfkcvmq>

<https://instagram.com/ahandforhandmade?igshid=1umockje0iszi>

## Creativity in the Time of Corona Virus

*Pushpa Chari*

India's artisans crafting and weaving stories of the Coronavirus pandemic in the imagery of their own craft genre and in ancient weaves, makes a fascinating story in itself. A story or many stories of the creativity and resilience, of craftspersons of pride in their familial craft and a desire to take it forward even in the most difficult of times. Acute financial distress and even hunger have bedevilled most artisan lives since the Coronavirus pandemic broke out and craft production and sales stopped with lockdowns. Despite financial and other help from the Government, NGOs, Corporates and the citizenry the distress continues. Yet the artisan from Shilp Guru and craft maestro to the bottom of the pyramid, craftspersons have appealed rarely for donations and mostly for support in helping them restart production and to market their products. One can hear their voices raised in Webinar, conversations, articles and appeals, eager to begin their creative lives, to walk and innovate with changing times. A potter friend from Kodambakkam known as 'anna' wants to begin crafting small terracotta tumblers which can be slipped into handbags to be used when drinking water or tea from outside. And K. Palanisamy, bronze artisan from Swamimalai tells me, 'we all want work, if we get financial help we can rotate the money and give back to society'.

As indeed, they are. Literally an 'in your face' craft celebration. One can see a profusion of colour drenched exquisitely painted, embroidered, block printed and handwoven cotton masks in the online market place, celebrating crafts as diverse as Madhubani, Warli craft, Phad painting, Rogan art and Pattachitra art, the unique beauty of Ajrakh, Jaipur's blockprints, Toda and Phulkari stitches, the exploding colours of Kutch embroideries, the ikat weaves of Pochampalli and more. In his ethereal Pattachitra wall art canvases, folk art Apindra Swain tells stories of social distancing, of beautiful, masked women washing their hands at the village tap and depictions of Covid 19 hospitals softened with the colours of flowers and leaves. Kalyan Joshi's wonderfully executed rural vignettes of Rajasthan depict life in Coronavirus times with the nuanced brush strokes of miniaturised Phad art. And while the war against the virus by India's artisanal hands gathers momentum, khadi too

has jumped into the fray with top line designers like Tarun Tahiliani, Rahul Mishra and Anita Dongre designing unfussy couture and daywear in this resurgent fabric of all seasons.

All this creativity and more can be viewed on line in the websites of designers, NGOs, entrepreneurs, etc. And so the stories continue with artisans in diverse regions defining and depicting changing times and moves touched with unique craft flavours and underlining opportunities thrown up for handicrafts by the pandemic.

## *Dayaben*

Let me begin by saying Namaste and introducing myself.

I am Dayaben B Dohat from Banaskantha, near Tharad in Gujarat where I live in the Shivenagar Society.

I want to tell the story of my soof embroidery and all that it has taught me and given me, in life.

I was born on 17th December 1970. My family of 17 members fled to India from Pakistan during the Bangladesh war and stayed at the remote Jura camp in Gujarat. They left everything behind bringing with them only their inborn talent for the ancient art of soof kaseeda embroidery. For generations my great grandmother, my grandmother and my mother had worked on this craft.

From four to five centuries ago when a girl was of marriageable age she would be taught this skill. After completing household tasks, she would work on her embroidery. Over time she would put together her trousseau and dowry in the form of skirts, kurta, half-saree, armbands, saree pallu pieces that we call rento, pretty toilet bags into which would go a handmade kerchief, comb, kohl powder and trinkets. They would also always be a fine pouch for the bridegroom which would be filled with aromatic, mouth-freshening spices.

I am told that when my family came from Pakistan, word of their craft spread and people came to meet them, curious to see what novelties the new arrivals had brought with them. But having come away as homeless refugees they had nothing to show.

My father, Ratilal Bhanani was a teacher. He built a small hut of wood and mud near our dwelling in the camp and started a school. Soon several children enrolled in it. Parents and other relatives who came with them stopped by to see our craft. A visitor named Chanda Shroff, who later started the organisation that everybody now knows as Shrujan, was impressed by it and gave us orders for soof embroidery. Each karigar used to earn one or two rupees a day.

We stayed at Jura for seven years but the region did not support agriculture or any other form of livelihood. We were then evacuated to live in Sumrasar Shekhvali near Bhuj. The state

government allotted us land for cultivation and food rations. My father continued to teach, as that was what he knew best.

All this while we women kept our embroidery work going.

I studied only up to the 4th class. Even though my father was a teacher, schooling for girls was not taken seriously in my community. Soon after I left school, at the age of 10, I learnt soof embroidery.

My work was attractive and neat from the start and Chanda Kaki paid me Rs.12 for every one metre of a border. That was the time when she was planning to start the Shrujan hand-embroidered textiles business. Soon she took many of us as her employees. My work was appreciated and she used to reward me particularly from time to time.

When I was 12, some of us at Shrujan were interviewed by Akash Vani Radio. The interviewer had written some questions which I could not read. The lady there made fun of me. I felt unhappy at that time but then thought, What if I cannot read and write? I will get ahead with my kaseeda.

After a while the Gurjari Nigam was launched. Many women from our village were able to get work with them. However, when it came to me, the manager, Vijaya Kotak said my name was not in their list of known suppliers. Determined to make that list, I came home and started to make an intricate and beautiful piece. When it was done I went back to Vijayaben with my brother Prakash Bhanani. She was surprised and impressed by it. When she added that I was clearly a true artisan – others were just in name – I was thrilled! She then gave me many regular orders and in a very short time my name was counted among the best crafts people supplying to Gurjari. Soon they included me in a special handicrafts programme at Gandhidham near Bhuj where I was honoured by the Chief Minister of Gujarat at that time, Chamanbhai Patel. I was only 16!

Over the months I kept getting appreciation for my work. I decided I would make full use of the opportunities coming my way. An official from the Zila Parishad saw my work and said that I had gifted fingers and was deserving of an award. I bought a piece of cloth 15” x 26”. I did not have much time to submit it but I worked 17 hours a day every day. After three months and 17 days I completed it as a wall hanging. Prakash showed it to the Zila Parishad official where it met with his approval and was sent on to Delhi.

Soon after, one day Prakash was standing by a store in a bazaar in Bhuj with a bag I had embroidered. A lady foreigner spotted the bag and asked, “Is this hand work ? ”

Prakash said, “Yes, my sister has made it.”

She introduced herself, saying, “I am Judy Frater, from America, and I like handicrafts very much.” Prakash then invited her to our house so that she could see the embroidery as it was being done. She accepted and came to our home. With that began our long association with Judyben. She visited us often, watched and admired our work. She remarked that even a machine could not create the fine embroidery we were doing by hand, that our work was worthy of big awards. She soon started staying with us and became like a family member.

I met another great supporter of handicrafts during this time, Laila Tyabji. I mentioned to her that I had submitted a soof wall hanging to the Handicrafts Committee in Delhi. Meanwhile Judy Frater and Prakash started a small project of which they made me the head. We created large quantities of piece goods for sale – borders, kurtas, sarees, dupattas, jackets, bags and other accessories for women, including files and folders. Sales and orders kept increasing. Meanwhile Laila Tyabji was elected to the National Awards committee and my hopes rose.

I felt that to be able to get more recognition and success, I should get more creative with my designs. I remembered that when I was 14, Chanda Kaki used to compliment me on any pattern I made up, and always give me an extra tip or two. Surely this meant that I was good at design!

She had also said we should stand on our feet, set up our own production unit and sell directly in the market. We had done that in a small way but we were also selling to Gurjari where orders would often be infrequent. I refused to be disheartened. I made new designs and kept going back to Vijayaben Kotak. My persistence paid off. I got regular orders and never looked back.

A few months later my wall hanging was seen by the Handicrafts Committee in Delhi. Lailaji told me that as soon as she saw it she knew it must be my work. On 18th December 1989 I received a letter saying that my work was selected for a National Award. I was only 20 years old! I was very happy that one of my dreams was coming true.

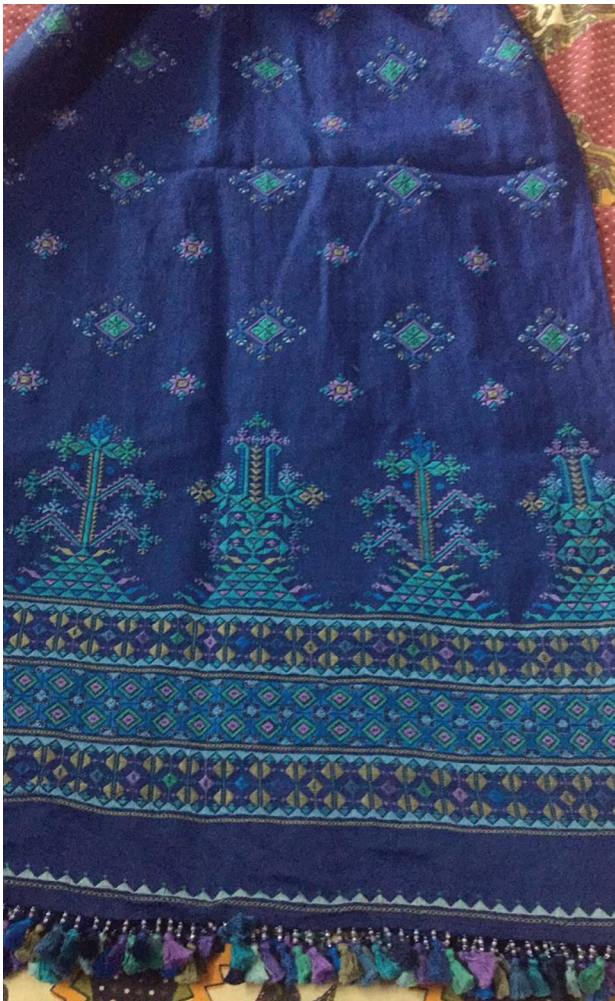
On 12th December the next year I received the award from our President R Venkataraman. It was a moment of enormous pride. Over the years I met other great national leaders such as P V Narasimha Rao and Shankar Dayal Sharma, and later Ashok Gehlot. All this before I was 23 years of age.

When I was 24 I married my husband, Bhuraji Dohat. He comes from a similar family background from the same community in Tharad that originally fled from Pakistan. He encouraged me to continue my craft and together we set about training many women in our community in Tharad.

I then met Jaya Jaitly of Dastkari Haat Samiti and she encouraged me too. Jayaji took me to England in 2007 and to Sri Lanka in 2014. Indira Gandhi awarded me the title of Kalanidhi. In 2017 three of us women artisans accompanied two ladies to France, Kokilaji and Shehnazji of Paramparik, Mumbai, to show our ancient traditional art. The grand old lady of handicrafts, Sita Setalvad was the one who had originally introduced me to Paramparik, of which I later became the Secretary which post I still hold. She was an unforgettable support to me.

Celebrities such as Shabana Azmi, Jaya Bachchan, Kirron Kher, Mallika Sarabhai, Rani Mukherji, Deepika Padukone, the wives of Saurav Ganguly and Ajay Jadeja, Raja Pratap Singh of Kutch of Aaina Mahal fame, to name a few, have admired and bought my work. The daughter-in-law of the father of our nation, Bapuji visited my home in 1993 and bought a few things too. I was memorably honoured by the then Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi. Today my work can be found at the





Taj Khazana, the Kamala shops of the Crafts Council of India and the store of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sanghralaya (formerly Prince of Wales Museum) in Mumbai.

I have done embroidery for the labels of Ritu Kumar and Anuradha Vakil.

I have conducted workshops in big colleges such as NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology) in Delhi, and Sophia College and SNDT Women's University in Mumbai among many other institutions.

I received the Kamala Award from the Crafts Council of India in 2008, an award in Surajkund in 2011, the Indira Gandhi Kalanidhi award in 2013, and the World Crafts Council award in 2019, among many other recognitions.

I do a thousand salaams, a thousand times, to my kaseeda that it got me such accolades and fame.

I don't earn more than 25-30% of the sale of my goods. I have not looked to any help from the government or donation from sponsors or bank loans. I don't have savings of lakhs of rupees but I am proud that I stand on my own feet. I am also able to help many needy artisans - for

wedding expenses, for medical treatment, for the education of their children or for that matter, any difficulty or emergency.

I am in a position to place orders on 200–250 artisans in a number of surrounding villages – for blouses, kurtas, dupattas, stoles, shawls, scarves, jackets, bags, coin purses, drawstring pouches, spectacle cases, covers for cushions, pillows, and mobile phones, lunch bags, table napkins and runners – in many, many designs, shapes and sizes. I use only natural dyes and work only with natural weaves such as cotton and matka silk.

I have been the Secretary of the Kala Raksha, Bhuj for several years now. Partnering me fully are my supportive husband Bhuraji Dohat and my elder son Prateek Kumar Dohat. We have the complete backing of my in-laws. As a family we are committed to keeping our craft alive forever.

While Prateek manages the handicraft business, my younger son, Hemant Kumar Dohat is studying for his MBA in the Philippines.

To reach this position I have overcome many obstacles and difficulties in my life. Today I am happy with the results. I am grateful to Lord Shiva for granting me all that I wanted in life.

This is the story of my life, and the story of my craft.

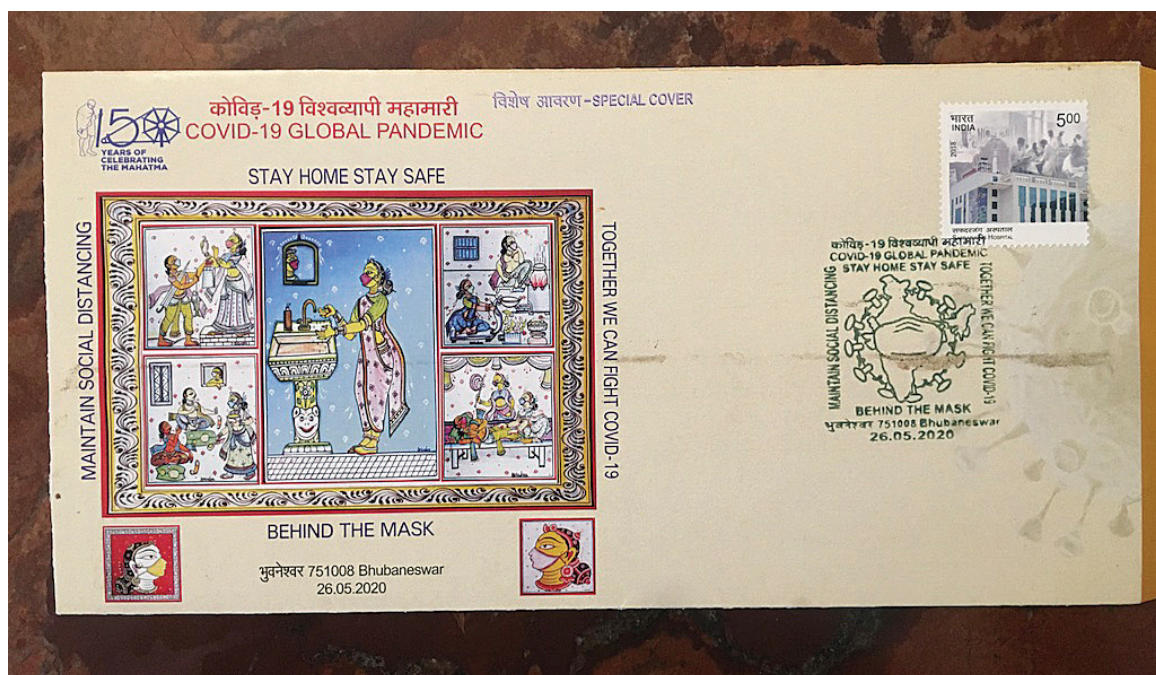
## ‘Bridging life’

*N. Sashidhara*

As part of a new initiative from Mannapaapu, Mane and Prachi Foundation, we are conducting events to preserve local skills and practices.

In a village like Maala, having many streams, bridges play a major role in people’s lives. It could be big concrete bridges across wide streams for cars, bikes, etc. or small wooden bridges for narrow streams for crossing on foot. Concrete bridges last for decades, but wooden bridges have to be built once every year or two. Areca nut being the main cash crop here, they are used to build the bridges. Trees that are dead but still strong are selected to be used. These bridges are a living culture, connecting our lives with our neighbours. This yearly ritual is now fading as the population density in remote area of villages is reducing, so is the use of bridges. Our motto is to retain this skill of building Areca tree bridges using only natural materials. If a concrete bridge is built, people start to forget the skill of building wooden bridges. But opting to build wooden bridges is an opportunity for people to get together, as well as saving an important skill. Over the period of next few weeks, we will be building about 4–5 bridges with the help of our neighbours and skilled personnel. Each bridge will be of different design. The first bridge has been completed with the help of Srinivas Appanna and team, who are local indigenous people who are highly skilled in construction using local materials.





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