

Magic of Gifted Hands: Empowering Handicraft Artisans

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The origin of Indian handicrafts goes back to the early man living in caves and giving creative expression to his/her emotions through various carvings made on rocks. It travelled through the ages through various forms of skill, techniques, art forms preserved in various folk traditions and aesthetic expressions. The artisans of India have always been recognized for their craftsmanship, sense of design and color. The excavations of Mohenjo daro and Harappa show that even during the second millennium before Christ the excellence of Indian artisans was established and was recognized world over. The cottage industry provided not only employment to the rural artisans but also played an important role in building a parallel rural economy. Even now the small scale and cottage sector helps to solve social and economic problems of the artisans, by providing employment which also includes a large number of women and people belonging to weaker sections of the society.

Handicraft is rightly described as craft of the people and in India it is not just an industry as the word is commonly understood but is the aesthetic expression of the artisans which not only fulfills the daily needs of the people but also satisfies their aesthetic desire. The definition of handicrafts as per Honorable Supreme Court in Louis Shoppe judgment decided on 12.03.1995 says "it must be predominantly made by hand. It does not matter if some machinery is also used in the process. It must be graced



Masterpiece of Plastic Inlay on Wood by Shilp Guru Awardee Shri Rupan Matharu from Hoshiarpur, Punjab

with visual appeal in the matter of ornamentation or inlay work or some similar work lending it an element of artistic improvement. Such orientation must be of a substantial nature and not a mere pretence".

The handicrafts sector plays a significant and important role in the country's economy. It provides employment to a vast segment of craftspersons in rural and semi urban areas and generates substantial foreign exchange for the country,

while preserving its cultural heritage. Handicrafts have great potential, as they hold the key for sustaining not only the existing set of millions of artisans spread over the length and breadth of the country, but also for the increasingly large number of new entrants in the crafts activity.

There are approximately 70 lakh handicraft artisans in the country, which includes 20 lakh artisans related to the carpet sector, practicing more than 500 types of crafts such as Metal Engraving,

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Masterpiece of Stone Carving by Shilp Guru Awardee Shri Kalpataru Maharana from Cuttack, Odisha

Zari Zardosi, Teracotta, Stone Carving, Phulkari, Wood Inlay, Chikankari, Cane and Bamboo, Wooden Toys, Blue Pottery and Kutch Embroidery. Out of these, 35 crafts have been recognized as “Endangered Crafts” such as Assamese Jewellery, Rogan Painting, Sanjhi Crafts, Ganjeefa Cards and Chamba Rumal and 92 crafts have been registered under “Geographical Indication Act” like Ganjifa cards of Mysore, Kashmir Paper Machie, Madhubani paintings, Kathputlis of Rajasthan, Odisha pattachitra, Varanasi Glass beads and Warli painting of Maharashtra. 56 per cent of the artisans are female.

The handicraft artisans are mostly working in an un-organized set up which makes them prone to exploitation by middlemen. The handicraft sector has challenges of working capital, poor exposure to new technologies, absence of full market intelligence and institutional framework. Series of efforts have been taken to redress these problems and the sector is now witnessing good growth in terms of product development, domestic sales and exports during the 12th Plan.

The office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) is the nodal agency in the Government

of India for craft and artisan-based activities. It assists in the development, marketing and export of handicrafts, and the promotion of craft forms and skills. The assistance is in the form of technical and financial support, including in the form of schematic interventions implemented through its field offices.

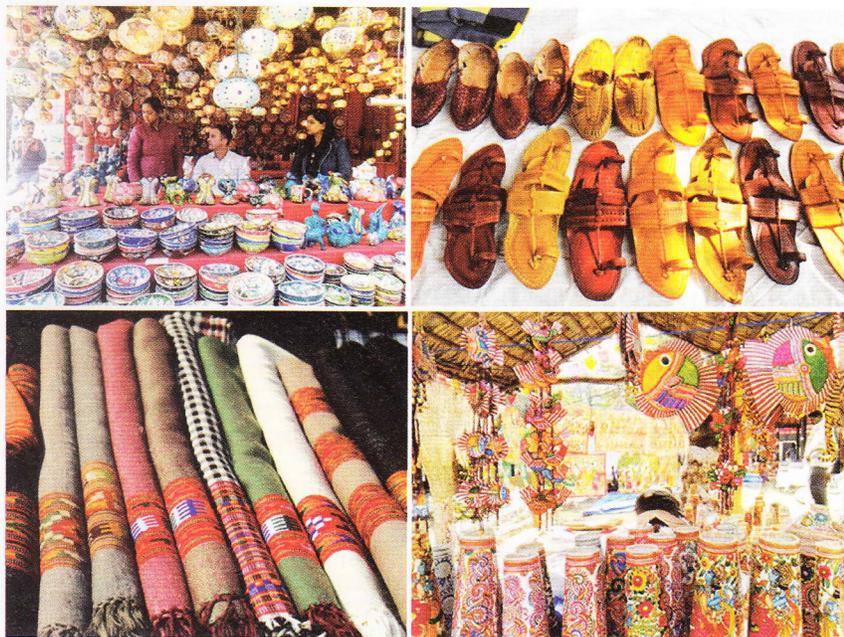
As the nodal agency, the Development Commissioner spearheads the country’s efforts to promote the handicrafts sector. The office supports the artisans and the sector through its six regional offices at Mumbai, Kolkata, Lucknow, Chennai, Guwahati, and New Delhi and its 53 field units.

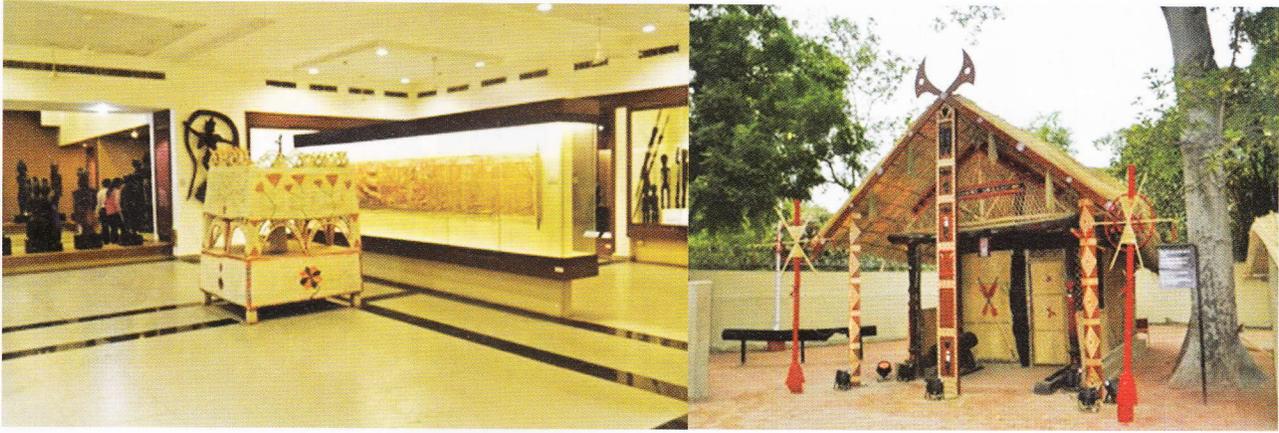
Market Linkages are provided through various domestic and international marketing events organized throughout the year in various parts of the country. Domestic marketing platform is provided by organizing Gandhi Shilp Bazaar, Crafts Bazaar, etc and organizing handicraft exhibitions in prominent shopping malls of the country. International Marketing platform is being provided to awardee artisans through participation in international marketing events.

The handicraft awards namely Shilp Guru Award, National Award, National Merit Certificates and

Design Innovation award are amongst the highest awards for the meritorious handicrafts artisans of the country. The objective is to give recognition for encouragement to outstanding craftspersons to maintain excellence in craftsmanship and keeping alive our old traditions. Every year, 10 Shilp Guru awards, 30 National Awards (including 5 National Awards to women artisans and 5 National Awards for promotion and development of endangered crafts), 40 National Merit Certificates, and 3 Design Innovation awards on co-creation basis are being conferred to the meritorious artisans.

India is one of the important suppliers of handicrafts to the world market. In the changing world scenario, craft products exported to various countries form a part of lifestyle products in the international market. The impact is due to the changing consumer taste and trends for the 7 million craft persons who are the backbone of the Indian handicraft industry possessing inherent skills, technique and traditional craftsmanship quite sufficient for the primary platform. However, in the changing world market, these crafts persons need an institutional support at their places of work i.e. craft pockets for value addition and for the edge with





National Handicrafts & Handloom Museum at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi

other competitors like China, Korea, Thailand etc. There is a high demand for Indian utilitarian and traditional crafts in the domestic and international markets. A total of 199 lines of products are now being produced and exported from India. India has been a large exporter of handicrafts over the years and the exports trend has been increasing year by year. The top ten countries contributing to export of handicrafts items (major items being art metal wares, wood wares, hand printed textiles, embroidered and crocheted goods) during the last five years are USA, U.A.E., United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands, France, Australia, Italy, Canada, Latin American countries, Japan and Switzerland.

India is the world's largest producer and exporter of handmade carpets since 2013-14. Currently, India's share is 35 per cent of total global exports. About 85 per cent of total production in the country is

exported to more than 100 countries. USA accounts for 45 per cent of total exports and Germany, UK and UAE together account for 20 per cent. China and countries of South America like Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Ecuador are emerging markets. Indian handmade carpets are renowned worldwide for their beautiful designs, variety, craftsmanship, eco-friendly dyes and quality services at competitive prices. India is the only country that makes handmade carpets that start from 16 knots per square inch to 2500 knots per square inch and also uses more than 10 types of raw materials and makes carpets in all sizes, shapes and colors.

Access to economic independence through the handicraft sector can address the livelihood issues and would lead to income generation in rural areas. Also, skill upgradation and development in handicraft sector is an excellent approach for development of artisans, poverty reduction and

providing income generation which would also help in achievement of sustainable development goals.

As recognition of India's contribution, India was made the Partner Country in the world's oldest and one of the best exhibitions "Ambiente". In the Ambiente 2019, which Germany organized w.e.f. 8th to 12th February, 2019 with India as partner country, more than 4500 companies from 80 countries participated. 517 Indian companies participated in the show displaying exquisite Christmas decoration, fashion jewellery, wooden handicrafts items, textiles furnishing, leather products, lamps and lighting, ceramics along with live demonstration of crafts skill by renowned mastercraft persons, GI craft display and Theme pavilion showcasing sustainable ecofriendly "Make in India" crafts from India.

National Handicrafts & Handloom Museum at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi is popularly known as Crafts Museum. The Museum's Architect facilitator is famous Architect Charles Corea. It is an amazing place to visit and enjoy the artwork and handwork of artisans and weavers. The museum experience can be learning and educative as people can directly meet the Master craftspersons, purchase the artefacts directly and can have a visual through craft demonstration. The museum is very spacious and the galleries display the cultural heritage of handicrafts and handlooms. □

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Direction of Handicrafts Export

USA	32.20%
Europe	21.65%
Rest of World	46.14%



Direction of Carpet Export

USA	47.40%
Europe	31.53%
Rest of World	21.01%

