

## Sustaining Artisans Economically

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# A

wide range of beautiful handicrafts form one of the most significant traits of the rich cultural heritage of our country.

Be it *Kutch* embroidery of Gujarat or *Zari-Zardozi* and *Chikankari* of Uttar Pradesh, wooden toys of Karnataka or bamboo craft of Assam, puppets of Rajasthan or *Sikki*, *Tikuli* and *Madhubani* arts of Bihar; all these are not only the traditional arts of the respective provinces but also form an important source of alternative income for the artisans. This is one of those market segments that have led India to establish its distinct identity in the international market.

Handicrafts include the products produced by hands /and or a combination of hands and simple technology. Like the unique diversity of our country, our handicrafts are also very diverse and can be placed in innumerable categories. Some of these may be decorative, religious, historical, artistic, ornamental, daily utilities, symbolic and so on. The sector also includes village-cottage industries, handloom and carpet sectors. Handicrafts are known for their use of locally available raw materials. This is again a huge range consisting of natural and artificial inputs like bamboo, clay, stones, threads, canes, fabrics, beads, glasses, natural and artificial dyes, motifs, metals, ceramics, and glasses, to name a few.

**Our country is gifted with a rich range of beautiful handicrafts. Almost every state of the country has its unique handicrafts. These products are a part and parcel of the culture of the concerned communities. Passed on from generation to generation, these handicrafts have the potential of sustaining the artisans economically. Contribution of this sector to the Indian economy is immense.**

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Almost 70 per cent of our country's population residing in rural areas is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture as the primary source of livelihood. In non-agricultural or lean seasons, handicrafts become an alternative means of subsistence for this population and safeguards them from food insecurity. In this way, handicrafts become an important source of livelihood for a large chunk of the Indian population. There were 68.86 lakh artisans as per the census of handicrafts conducted during 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. The magnitude and strength of this sector can be very well understood from this fact. The

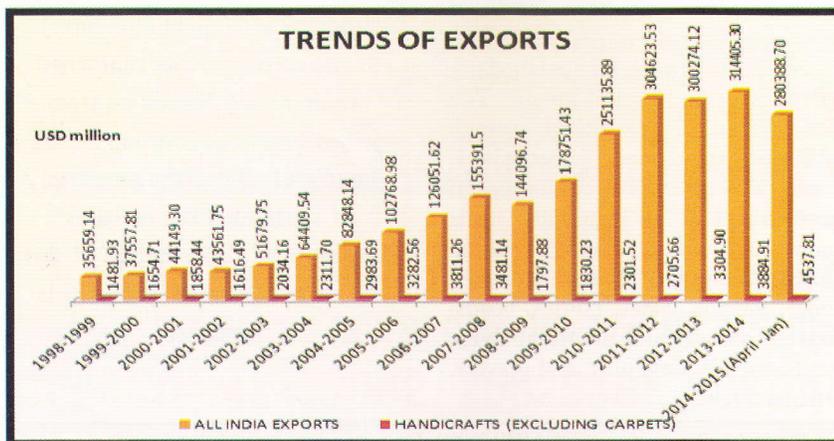
sector provides employment in various forms to the artisans. This can be production of raw materials like motifs, production of finished goods and their marketing.

There is another sub-segment of this sector employing another set of people. They are the people engaged directly or indirectly in export of handicrafts. The export segment of handicrafts is emerging as a potential source of foreign exchange earnings. Figure-1 establishes the fact that export of handicrafts is on a rising trend and heading towards a significant share in the domain of all India exports.

According to government sources, it was estimated in the year 2015-16 that total production of handicrafts including handmade carpets was to the tune of Rs.41,418 crores and export of handicrafts was Rs.30,939 crores. The figures prove the role of this sector in the Indian economy.

Purchase of Indian handicrafts by domestic and foreign tourists as a

Figure:1



Source: Website of Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textile, GoI

**Handicrafts bring fame to their practitioners**

**Smt Godavari Dutta, the octogenarian practitioner of Madhubani or Mithila painting has recently been awarded the Padma Shri award as a gesture to recognise this time-tested handicraft of Bihar. Godavari Dutta has been nurturing this art for last fifty years. She has showcased her art in several countries. As a result of the dedication of Smt. Dutta and some other artists, this genre can be seen in a new form in Bihar; right from Madhubani railway station to walls of various public places in Patna.**



souvenir is a tourism ritual. Handicrafts add value to the tourist spots and attract tourists providing an income for local artisans and other petty vendors/service providers in the surroundings. Since most of these vendors and service providers belong to the unorganised sector, there is hardly any data available on the income earned by them with an indirect support from the handicrafts sector. Still, it is evident that there is an important contribution of handicrafts to the tourism sector of the country.

Due attention has also been given on the marketing of these valuable products. Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) organises product-specific shows and also

'Indian Handicrafts and Gifts Fair' bi-annually. There have been efforts like product based-exhibitions and live demonstrations by artisans for promoting these products abroad.

Market Development Assistance (M.D.A) and Market Access Initiative (M.A.I.) envision better marketing of these products through fairs, exhibitions and producers-buyers meets. 'India Handloom Bazaar', an online marketing portal is based on marketing of the handicrafts through facilitating direct interaction between buyers and sellers. Around four hundred *Hastkala Sahyog Shivirs* were organised in two hundred districts in October 2017 that supported a large number of weavers and artisans

in strengthening their micro enterprises through various measures.

The focus is now on the artisans and their enterprises to utilise the facilities enabling them to contribute towards our economy as well as socio-economic upliftment of the community. The artisans and their associations should move forward to get Geographical Indication (GI) tag to enhance the credibility of their products. GI tag is the sign on the product showing its region of origin. Some of the handicrafts which have received GI tag are-Kangra paintings, Varanasi brocades and saris, Bustar wooden craft, Villianur terracotta works etc.

On a macro level, initiatives to strengthen the sector will support in preserving this cultural heritage and transferring it to the next generation as a potential source of livelihood. While on the micro level, various socio-economic issues like unemployment, poverty, migration and indebtedness will be addressed. In turn, these will add to strengthening of the Indian economy and thereby ameliorating the conditions of Indian society. □

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