



This issue of the Newsletter brings you 'Artisans' Voices' which tell stories, in their own words of life lived during the corona virus pandemic by artisans across India. Stories of devastation and despair, touching both their personal and professional lives, yet faced with a degree of equanimity, courage - and even burgeoning hope. Their stories are not yet over, nor indeed, is the pandemic.

The pandemic and us: Where should we go from here?

Ashoke Chatterjee

Through 2020, a year like no other, every Council and colleague working for the craft cause has had to face the massive Covid challenge. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's vision was of a CCI that could help sustain India's craft heritage and the well-being of those in whose hands that heritage rests. Could Kamaladevi have imagined a situation in which every human is at simultaneous risk and those already living on the edge, like millions of artisans, are being pushed over it? Gandhiji certainly understood what unmindful 'progress' could do to this country and to the planet, warning of a failure to differentiate between need and greed. Today, scientists tell us that a virus let loose by biodiversity imbalance in distant China and the virulence of climate change are nature's dire signals -- Covid 19 has swept through a year devastated by natural calamities on every continent. This dreadful year adds resilience to disasters to the many strengths artisans can provide humanity. Suddenly, the slogan that emanated a decade ago from a corner of the European Union takes new urgency: "The future is handmade".

Resilience and sustainability are conjoined. In recent years the Council has repeatedly drawn attention to how critical our sector can be to the achievement of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Elsewhere in the world, this link is recognised. At home, the handmade sector's SDG relevance is largely ignored, despite India's status as the world's largest resource of artisanal skills and wisdom. The pandemic's human tragedy of millions forced to trudge homeward should have underlined the critical importance of building sustainable non-farm rural livelihoods. Crafts are an obvious answer. There is no hint yet that authorities concur.

This situation is part of a long experience by craft activists at encouraging decision-makers to take the handmade sector seriously. Widespread ignorance and indifference to its contribution to the economy and to well being continue. India should at least know how many artisans it holds and what their contribution is to the economy. The sector's future can depend on reliable data. Despite a landmark achievement of getting artisans into Economic Census for the very first time in 2013, seven years later India has yet to move into what EC 2013 recommended as an essential next step: a census, or Satellite Account, specific to 'handmade in India'. Is the pandemic experience an opportunity for change? If data existed on how many artisans are in need and where they are located, could this past year's disaster have been better managed?

Just before the pandemic hit, artisans groups advocated measures critical to assisting the craft sector at a time of economic downturn and market uncertainty. With the Covid 19 onslaught, priorities were again brought to official notice: GST waiver, smooth access to raw material, market opportunities to unload stocks, access to finance, building e-commerce capacities, taking demand creation to another level, and the critical importance of social security. The pandemic added fresh demands for income transfer to put money into artisans' pockets and food on their plates, bringing crafts into MGNREGA, incentives for moving inventory, urgent attention to e-commerce and to recognizing craft entrepreneurs under MSME regimes. In each of these critical areas official movement has been slow or non-existent. Beyond a few ad hoc gestures, the major 'development' has been to dissolve the All India Handloom & Handicraft Board in the midst of the pandemic, not to re-imagine it for future leadership. Whatever light can be seen at the end of the Covid tunnel has come from the resilience of artisans and the commitment of civil society.

What then are the lessons of this dreadful, anxious year? The first may be the need for a manirbharta. It is citizens and artisans who have come together in practical response and solidarity. Councils, NGO partners and new networks have demonstrated what the sector can achieve with a little help and encouragement. One lesson is that while government intervention is important, and we must continue to lobby for it, the sector must not be dependent on official patronage. Another lesson comes from artisan, individual and NGO action and from partnerships and networks that have emerged in response to Covid 19: the potential for problem-solving within the sector is huge.

Examples of creative leadership distinguish these months of suffering. CCI and several Councils moved rapidly despite lockdown to do what had to be done, including food and financial relief to those on the brink. KAMALA helped artisans move stockpiles, organized craft hampers, and placed orders on anxious artisans despite lock down risks. Others did the same, and new alliances emerged not only as emergency response but to move beyond Covid toward future growth. These alliances include the National Federation for Handicrafts & Handlooms, Creative

Dignity, Hand for Handmade and 200 Million Artisans. Efforts have drawn on Dastkar, Indus-tree, Urmul, Baaya, Dastkar Haat Samiti, Bangalanatak dotcom, Paramparik Karigar, Sewa, Kala Raksha, Somaiya Kala Vidhyalaya, NIFT, NID, AIACA, Charaka, CCI and many others. Laila Tyabji, Jaya Jaitly, Prasanna Heggodu, Mohan Rao, Rajeev Sethi and others have been tirelessly speaking out on behalf of artisans over these anxious months. NFHH and Prasannaji have mobilised Parliamentarians, MLAs and ministers. New and young leaders have emerged, demonstrating a practical capacity that may augur a craft future beyond past imagination. Overnight, handmade masks became an indispensable handmade product for every citizen. The creativity of craft communities has been demonstrated on an astonishing scale, whether it has been their swift move into mask-making or the amazing creation of Covid safety messages by Pattachitra, Madhubani and Gond creators. Sasha (Kolkata) innovated a Covid hygiene kit with a range of handmade aids. E-commerce and social media channels have been energised in stellar efforts to leave no stone unturned. A start-up enterprise in Ahmedabad, Karigar Clinic, raised Rs.5L in a few pre-Diwali days, creating websites for individual artisans, their brand identity backed by gift packages targeted at corporates. The Dil Se national prime-time NDTV craft marathon organized in collaboration with Habba (Bangalore) was unprecedented as media support.

Yet each day we have also learned of artisans pushed against the wall, reduced to selling vegetables, driving rickshaws and taking children out of school. So where can we go from here to win them back to craft, and to support those who have persevered with hope in a time of such anxiety?

Past experience demonstrates the risk of continuing as a sector incapable of protecting its own interests, dependent on out-dated official schemes. Even as constituting India's second largest source of livelihood after agriculture, can one imagine artisans capturing national attention as farmers are doing? Unlike other industries, artisans still have no influential associations with a voice that authorities listen to. Can a space now be created to bring together sector voices in some coherent joint strategy toward intelligent policies and national priority that can at last respect India's incredible handmade advantage?

Perhaps a first step could be to consolidate these emerging networks and partnerships, helping them to flourish well beyond the pandemic. How should we do this? Unlike other sectors of the economy, neither NGOs nor the craft sector are distinguished by ability for joint action. Issues of identity, credit and territory have weakened the voluntary sector. Can this change, at least on behalf of voiceless artisans? Can we envisage a national consultation, on line perhaps, with partner organizations toward a longer-term plan to address current priorities strategically? Could CCI be a catalyst for such sharing?

Next, can we together invest in capacity-building within artisans communities, learning from their pandemic needs? For this, we need to build linkages with concerned authorities for access to tax-payer resources while simultaneously developing practical proposals and systems of accountability that can attract corporate investment and donor priority. This may not be easy when companies are encouraged to divert contributions to government programs, away from the non-government sector. Yet the effort needs to be made with a strong focus on livelihood and other evidence-based economic and social arguments.

Just as the December World Craft Council-Asia Pacific Region demonstrated, there is global support for such efforts, including the need to acknowledge achievement. Can we bring together and honour artisans who have demonstrated wisdom and skills in a pandemic context? As Usha Krishna said at WCC-APR, it is our duty to recognise and support those with such extraordinary stamina and creativity in the face of huge odds. This could be an opportunity to tell the nation why these national treasures are what they are: frontline heroes in their own very special way!

The handmade sector's strength can be its unity, inspired by the practical demonstrations of caring that have emerged during these anxious months. This crisis may continue for a long time. Millions of artisans may be wondering if the future will indeed be handmade. We need to signal that indeed it can, and to show how.

Artisans' Voices

Artisans speak of Corona virus times

Covid 19 struck with devastating effect on the artisanal community across India. Unsold stocks, lockdowns and movement restrictions leading to the closure of shops, exhibitions and other marketing platforms, inability to procure raw material and job losses led to acute financial distress, with artisans facing poverty, hunger and lack of work opportunities in their craft. Government help with rations and money transfers, help from civil society, NGOs and donors, the gradual opening of lockdowns, shops and other marketing venues, on-line sales, etc. have led to some alleviation of the problems in the lives of the artisans, yet they are far from their comfortable pre-pandemic position.

We bring you 'Artisans Voices' speaking of their corona virus times.

Craft Stories from Kashmir Valley

Master artisans Shaukat Ahmad Dar, Hilai Deva, Firdose Ahmad Jan and Mohammad Shafie Dar – Pashmina Shawl Weavers and Embroiderers

Shaukat Ahmad Dar

“I am a resident of Alamgari Bazar and have been a weaver of Pashmina shawls for 40 years. During the pandemic and lockdown we had no source of income, no raw material to weave. It was like doomsday for us. My young daughter faced depression due to the lack of resources. Our family suffers in so many ways”. His eyes are filled with tears as he repeatedly says “Only God almighty can help me now...”

Hilai Deva

“I am a weaver of Pashmina shawls. During the pandemic and lockdown we faced tremendous difficulties. There was no raw material available for weaving and my whole family depends on weaving Pashmina shawls as a family livelihood. All doors of help were closed for us as no NGO or individual came forward to help. My children too suffered in school, since all schools had started online classes and unfortunately my children do not have smart phones as I can't afford the cost. I just have a simple phone to talk to clients”.



Firdose Ahmad Jan

“I live in Alamgari Bazar and do embroidery on Pashmina shawls and scarves. The pandemic brought a slew of problems. No raw material available for embroidery and no financial help from NGOs before or after the pandemic. Our whole family depends on embroidery as our sole source of income. After the lockdown there are a few orders/requests from customers for our craft. But for many months our production was zero”.



Mohammad Shafie Dar

“I have been doing embroidery on Pashmina shawls for the past 50 years. The Covid 19 pandemic was too difficult a time for me to recount. I am a kidney patient, so for me to meet my nephrologist during the lockdown period was impossible which resulted in my problems exacerbating both my craft practice and my health. It was very difficult to make both ends meet during the pandemic”.



Craft Story from Odisha

Apindra Swain

Pattachitra Artisan

“I am Apindra Swain from Heritage Village, Raghurajpur, Chandanpur, Puri, Odisha. I am facing so much difficulty and problems by this Corona pandemic situation. Due to the pandemic, I did not get any programme from last January 2020 to January 2021 and also my products and paintings did not sell in this situation. I and all my karigars are suffering in our daily activities in these bad times. Sometimes different companies come to our village for distributing necessary ration items. All visitors or tourists did not come to our village during this time. That is why we are facing many problems for selling our painting items. We are also not getting any government help in this time. In this period we have done so many varieties of Corona paintings with our ideas. I have done a painting about the Corona story which is approved by India Post to print on the postal envelopes. I also participated and got a certificate in a painting competition about Corona in Lalit Kala Akademi, Bhubaneswar and also got a certificate from World Craft Council, Asia. I am facing problems still, as I have got only some small painting orders”.



Craft Story from Kutch, Gujarat

Dr. Ismail Khatri

Ajrakh Master Artisan

The lockdown impacted the lives of the craftsman in many unforeseen and unexpected ways. And very suddenly without any warning, almost everyone was out of work. Orders suddenly

stopped. Almost all the previously confirmed production orders got cancelled within a week since the lockdown began in March.

Many lives depend on our craft. Particularly vulnerable were the small scale artisans like printers, dyers and washers. And the women artisans who help our textiles with hand-finishing and stitching. The lives of these small scale artisans depend on monthly work they get from the crafts with no significant savings in their accounts. We used our savings to create ration kits in order to support these artisans. We distributed 1000 ration kits to these families in the months of April and May as an immediate relief measure. We used our savings and funds for business expansion to create this emergency fund for the ration kits.

This was very important to do as there is a chance they might leave for daily wage labour work at nearby factories and construction sites in order to sustain themselves.

The government schemes were inefficient. The families in our village received the ration kits from the government only twice in the last 6 months since the lockdown began.

On the other hand, we too were uncertain about the future. Many online platforms mushroomed. This had a negative impact on the craft with artisans, in order to sustain themselves temporarily, giving away their stock at much lower prices than the actual value.

We (our family) used this time to re-create very ancient ajrakh block designs which are not used anymore and also make new block patterns. Sufiyan (my son) started using online platforms like Instagram to write stories about designs, process and the craft of Ajrakh. This helped us to reach a new audience globally.

Things started looking positive from June. New orders began to flow in. But the customers were hesitant to pick up the orders once the production got ready, as they too were uncertain about the financial and market conditions.

Right now the production is up to 25 – 30 % of the normal production capacity. But the future is still uncertain. But there has been a steady gain in demand for Ajrakh. We are taking stock of things on a weekly basis. As of now we are just happy to get through these challenging times and to be able to survive with basic living and good health.

Craft Stories from Delhi

As the Pandemic started and the lockdown began, the craft community all over India faced many problems and challenges. Delhi Crafts Council contacted various artisans and craftsmen during the lockdown to get an overview of their situation. Following are interactions of few artisans and craftsmen with whom DCC interacted and provided support to.

Kapileshwar

Weaver from Kotpad, Odisha

The lockdown period has been tough for Kapileshwar and the weavers of his community. As everything came to a standstill, work slowed down too. Still Kapileshwar continued doing his work which was not enough to sustain himself and his family. Delhi Crafts Council joined hands with Pankaja Sethi and through the DCC COVID-19 funds supported 20 women dyers in the Kotpad region, Kapileshwar's wife being one of them.

Post lockdown work is slowly reviving. Production of stoles, dupattas and yardage has started. An opportunity to sell his products to the State Handloom in Bhubaneswar has come up for Kapileshwar. But as the cases are on the rise there, it is on hold.

Jeenu Panika

Natural Dyeing in Al, Kotpad, Odisha

With restrictions due to the lockdown, there was not much work in demand. As a result of which production was at a low. Jeenu lost her father also during the lockdown which was very hard for the family. Delhi Crafts Council provided monetary support which helped sustain the family. Post the lockdown period the sales have been very slow. There is a lot of stock lying with Jeenu which she had made during the lockdown period which needs to be sold for her to sustain herself and her family. Currently she is doing a job which entails Farmer Registration. She looks forward to more work so as to sustain her family.

Reshama***Kota Doria Weaver, Rajasthan***

Before the lockdown, Reshama had managed to do one exhibition for Paramparik of Mumbai, the response for which was good. She was scheduled to take part in DCC's KAIRI in March which got cancelled due to the pandemic. Work was slow for Reshama during the lockdown and there were not many orders to fulfill. DCC organised 'KAIRI at your doorstep', an online sale through whatsapp to help artisans and craftsmen sell their products. Through this exercise Reshama managed to sell a few products which brought some relief to the family. AIACA and DCC have helped by providing monetary support and in propagating sales. Things are a bit better with the easing of the lockdown. Work is still slow but production of Kota Doria dupattas is under way.

Sanju Devi***Sujani Embroidery, Muzaffarpur, Bihar***

Muzaffarpur, initially a 'green zone' when the pandemic broke out, rapidly changed into a 'red zone'. Strict lockdown was enforced. Work almost came to a standstill for Sanju Devi. She concentrated on completing the orders received pre-lockdown. As the orders got completed, she and the women from the village who work together started making masks to sustain themselves. This was a substantial boost as the masks were in demand due to the rapid spread of the virus. As the lockdown eased and life started to return to the new normal, Sanju Devi struggled to find new orders. Currently there is a small work order of making cushion covers and masks but no concrete orders. There are not many buyers and no exhibitions to take part in.

Craft Stories from Tamil Nadu

Visalakshi Ramaswamy speaks to artisans in the Chettinad area



Natraj

Master artisan, Tile maker and Entrepreneur





Mr. Alex
Selva Industries



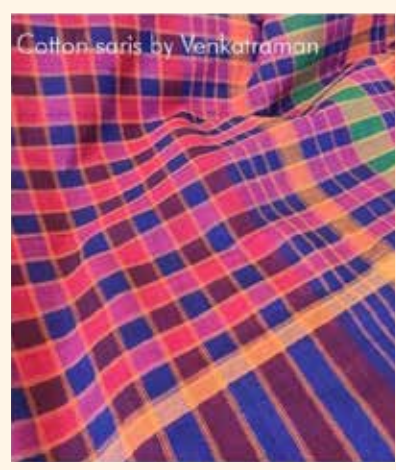
Mr. Natrajan
Ganapathy Tiles



In Athangudi, famous for its handmade tile craft, work in many of the units came to a standstill since tile making cannot be done by a single person. Natraj of Ganapathy Tiles recounts, “I was forced to let half my workers go, since lockdown restrictions did not allow for the full strength to work together”. Natraj and other master craftspeople like him generally employed a team of craftspeople to work under them. “During lockdown, many of us were forced to take loans from private sources to pay our workers their wages in spite of not being allowed to work and zero sales. Even now work is limited and I have been left with a huge amount of stock. Prior to Covid, I was able to execute tile laying orders in others states but due to transport and travel restrictions, I have been forced to make do with limited local orders” says Natraj. He further mentioned that the situation has returned to normal now and he has taken back those workers he was forced to retrench, but orders are still limited. The major problem for Natraj has been lockdown restrictions on transport. He hopes that he could receive some monetary assistance from the government.

Venkatraman

Handloom Weaver



Mr. Ganesan
Senthil Textiles



Mr. Venkatraman



Venkatraman, who runs a cotton textile weaving unit and employs other weavers says “Business was going well before the lockdown for Covid-19. With the onset of the lockdown, the looms could not be run, but the weavers had to be paid. I had to pay their salaries for three months from whatever money I could scrape together, and by taking a loan against my property. Luckily, I was able to retain all my weavers”. Transport of raw material and finished saris was also not possible. Even with weaving the minimum required to keep the business afloat, stock has built up. I did not receive any government assistance, and received help only through a benefactor from the area recounts Venkatraman.

Once the lockdown ended in June, sales have picked up again and sales through social media avenues like WhatsApp has sustained his business. However compared to last year, sales have been comparatively less and Venkatraman still has 2000 saris in stock that he needs to sell urgently to recover his costs, repay his loan, and keep his business running.

Now, except for the dead stock and slower sales, he doesn't have any problems directly as a result of COVID in terms of material sourcing, labour, logistics, and transport. Venkatraman is hopeful that he might receive some assistance from the government or organizations that can provide him avenues to sell his stock.

Muthamperumal

Floral Artisan



Says Muthamperumal, an award winning sixty year old traditional flower weaver from Nagercoil: “The initial three months of the lockdown were extremely difficult. This was mainly

the closure of temples as most of my regular work came from Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple, Thiruvananthapuram. I also saw the cancellation of 4-5 wedding orders for which I had been booked. There has been a little improvement after the temples were allowed to open, as I slowly started receiving orders again. However, wedding orders are yet to resume since people have had to have smaller weddings with smaller budgets due to the lockdown restrictions.” Now work has started picking up with the festival season, and the temple has begun giving regular orders again. His daughter has also started working with him on the orders. Muthamperumal has received some monetary help from private individuals during the Covid period.

While things are slowly picking up, they are nowhere close to normal, and most craftspeople have a huge quantity of unsold stock. They need support and patronage to market their products so that they can sell their stock and keep themselves afloat in the coming months and look towards a positive new year in 2021.

Bhanumurthy

Weaver



I was born in Ramaswami Kuppam in Tiruvannamalai district in a weaver’s family and studied

up to ninth standard. From a very young age, I learnt the intricacies of the art of weaving and I have been helping my father ever since. However, I wanted to try new methods so from 1987, I tried korvai designs. What two people try to do with the korvai weaving shuttle, I tried to replicate in the loom. I tried various ways to achieve this and finally succeeded in the year 1993 to do korvai with one shuttle, which takes two weavers to do with three shuttles.

In the year 2000, I gave training on the loom in Kalakshetra in korvai weaving. I have won many awards ‘Shrishti Samaan Award’, DCC’s award for weaving and the CCI’s Kamala Award in 2015. I have given training in handloom weaving in Maharashtra, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. Since the advent of the Corona virus, all weavers have been going through very trying times. Because of these adverse circumstances, I had to reach out for help. I was lucky to receive help from donors and also from The Crafts Council of India who sourced my saris for their Kamala showroom.

During these difficult times, I set up small looms and imparted training to 15 children. My ambition and dream is to establish a handloom weaving and training institute which will include disciplines like dyeing techniques, sizing, design inputs, weaving jacquard designs, etc. Because of lack of funds, I have been unable to get this initiative started.

Gurunathan

Papier Mache artisan

“My name is Gurunathan. I make clay and papier-mâché fancy dolls. As usual this year also I made many varieties of dolls including dancing dolls, theme based ones like shop keepers with their merchandise, dolls depicting families, besides the usual deities. My wife and family members also work in my unit. Unfortunately, since March due to the Corona virus, I have had no sales at all and hence no income. My children haven’t gone to school.

The Government has been very active and local officials visited us frequently and enquired about the wellbeing of the family. I have received ration from the Government twice and Rs.1000 per month for two months. I am very thankful to them. As I have had no sales, I have no money. So I am not able to buy clay, card board, dyes etc for my work. I do not know any other work and

hence have had no means of earning my livelihood. In August, I pledged my wife's jewels. I tried working for outside enterprises. They would give dolls for me to paint. But that was infrequent. I was hoping to sell my dolls once the lockdown was lifted. But very few retailers came forward this year. Usually they are the ones who provide loans for carrying out new work. So there has been no money for work.

I request Crafts Council to help me sell my stock and also help me procure a bank loan to resume my doll making. Except for the mortgage of my wife's jewels I have no other loan. Please help me".

When CCI spoke to Gurunathan about the possibility of a donor coming forward to help, he said that he only wanted a loan and did not want any direct financial aid. The best way to help him, he said was to help him sell his stock.

Craft Story from Puducherry

Saktivel

Handloom Weaver

My name is Saktivel. I am a handloom weaver in Puducherry from a small village called Alankuppam. My wife and I have been involved in handloom weaving for the past fifteen years. We are able to make with cotton threads various items like hand woven cotton yoga mats, swings, lamp shades, etc. We have been successful in marketing these products at sales, exhibitions, etc mainly organised by the Crafts Council of India. With this gainful employment my wife and I along with our three daughters have led a decent life.

With the advent of the Corona virus pandemic our business has been going through very trying times. When we were struggling to make ends meet, a lady from the Crafts Council of India stepped forward and extended a helping hand. Necessities for our household were given to us to tide over the immediate crisis. Due to the lockdown goods worth Rs.1,60,000/- were left unsold. Photos of these unsold goods were published in a website that helped us to sell goods worth Rs. 70,000/-. When we were in dire straits, this helping hand from CCI was like manna from heaven. Our business now is limping back to normal.



Craft Stories from West Bengal

National Awardee, Asish Malakar, Sholapith artist speaks in an interview:

Q: Asish, I know that your families have been practising this art form since last three generations. I have known your grand-mother Katyani Devi and your father Sri Aditya Malakar. Both were National Awardees.

A: Yes, we have been practising this craft form since last three generations. My late grand-mother was a National Awardee (1979) and my late father was National Awardee (1974) and in (2007) he got the Shilp Guru Award. It was simply a magical performance when he held his knife after touching it on his forehead and sharpening it under his foot.

Q: I am happy that you have followed their / his footsteps.

A: Yes, I also received the National Award (1990). I have built a 20 feet gate made of fireproof shola-pith which was organized by Smt. Nandita Palchoudhuri. I have been sponsored by the National Council of Science Museum, Govt. of India.

Q: The current pandemic situation must have been affecting you and the other craftspeople

in your village. What is the situation?

A: Since the beginning of the appearance of Covid (Corona) 19 and the lockdown lasting for all these long months, I have been at home along with the rest of the world. Also to make things worse road transport has not been running and we cannot participate in any fairs and melas. My fellow artists in this village are facing great financial difficulties.

Q: Are you thinking of any alternative means of livelihood?

A: No, I am not thinking of any alternative means, I will stick to my craft practice as I feel that I am managing better than other craftspeople in my village. My family is certainly going through a bad time and social distancing has also affected us and my family.

Q: Any problem to get raw-material?

A: No, there is no problem with raw-material as this reed grows in marshy land. This year the heavy rainfall has affected its growing in abundance. Due to financial constraint, I am not able to buy in sufficient quantity. But my fellow craftspeople are facing considerable difficulty due to buying the raw-material and also lack of marketing their products.

Q: Due to lockdown you cannot see your friends and relations. Is this affecting you?

A: Yes, this is causing us distancing from them and causing morbidity. It is only the mobile phone which helps us to communicate to a certain extent.

Sital Fouzdar, Dashabatar Ganjifa Card artisan, speaks in an interview:

Sital hails from the Fouzdar family who were generals of the Malla Rajahs since 10th century. It was Bir Hambir one of the important Malla Rajahs who introduced this style of Ganjifa, adapted from the Mughal court. The cards painted on parchment consist of 120 in number and the subjects are ten manifestations of Lord Vishnu - Matsya, Kurma, Baraha, Nrisingha, Buddha (Jagannath), Baaman, Ram, Balaram, Parshuram and Kalki.

Q: Since how many generations has this art form being practised in Bishnupur? What is the history of your family?

A: We have been practising this art form since 87 generations. One of the Malla Rajahs, visited the Mughal durbar and on his return he introduced this type of playing cards (Ganjifa). It was the general in his army who prepared the cards played by the Mallah kings.

Q: Did any of your family members win the National Awards?

A: No one so far.

Q: Your connection with Crafts Council of West Bengal (CCWB).

A: I have been greatly benefited by CCWB. I have demonstrated this art form of playing cards in many of their exhibitions. This has also created awareness of the craft form.

CCWB has also helped me to provide marketing facilities by bringing domestic and foreign visitors to my residence which has also created awareness of the craft form abroad and which has helped me earn my livelihood.

Q: This present situation of the pandemics affecting the country and the world. What is your present financial situation? What about the other artists?

A: Due to this lockdown situation, everything is closed i.e., transport / shops / fairs / exhibitions etc, all are affected. The other artists and I are closed up in home custody. We are all affected financially to a great extent. We are all going through hard days.

Q: Are you thinking of any alternative means of livelihood?

A: No, I do not have any capital to invest on any other alternative livelihood.

Q: You family must be going through hard days in their daily lives?

A: Yes. Due to this long period of lockdown everything is closed i.e., transport / shops / fairs / exhibitions, etc all are affected and we have no means to gain alternative livelihood.

Q: Due to lockdown you cannot see your friends and relations. In this affecting you?

A: Yes, this is causing us distancing from them and causing morbidity. It is only the mobile phone which helps us to communicate to a certain extent.

Q: Are you having problem to get raw material?

A: There is no problem to get raw material. But our main problem is the financial constraint and lack of transport prevents me to go to Kolkata to get my raw material.

Q: The Covid 19 (Corona) has affected yours and your fellow artists' lives. Do you think you will survive?

A: No. Depends how long this situation is going to continue.

Kamala Awards 2020

The Kamala Awards were instituted by The Crafts Council of India in memory of Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay to recognize and honour hereditary artisans and craft activists for excellence in craft skills and for their contribution to the craft sector.

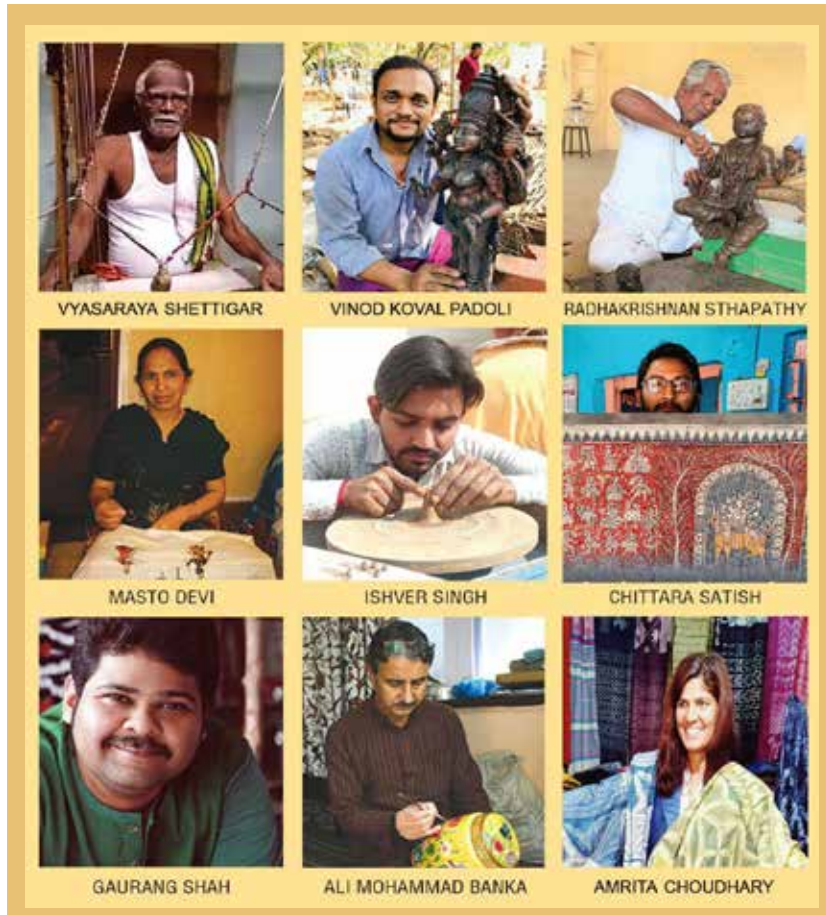
The Crafts Council of India congratulates all the winners of the Kamala Awards 2020.

Kamala Award for Excellence in Craft 2020

Shri. Radhakrishnan Sthapathy is the recipient of the Kamala Award for Excellence in Crafts 2020.

This living legend in the field of bronze iconography was born in Erode, Tamil Nadu into a traditional Vishwakarma family of bronze casters. He learnt his first lessons in icon making from his father. Today, his exquisitely crafted Pallava, Chola and Hoysala style icons of gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are worshipped in major temples across India, Singapore and

Malaysia. Shri. Radhakrishnan has been honoured with many prestigious awards including the Shilp Guru Award instituted by the Government of India.



Kamala Award for Excellence in Craft 2020

Shri. K P Vinod from Kerala is the recipient of the Kamala Award for Excellence in Crafts 2020.

Belonging to a traditional family of metal casters, Shri. Vinod learnt the craft from his father. Among his outstanding ‘panchaloha’ and brass creations are 5 ft tall panchaloha Brahma, a 6 ft tall Ashtalakshmi lamp as well as brass metal urlis, vessels, etc. His deities are installed in temples in India, Singapore and Malaysia, South Africa and Canada.

Kamala Award for Excellence in Craft 2020

Shri. Ali Mohammad Banka is the winner of Kamala Award for Excellence in Craft 2020.

Shri Ali Mohammad Banka has been associated with papier mache craft since childhood. His lyrically beautiful paintings of the Valley's flowers such as nargis, rose, tulip, chinar leaf and fields of saffron, transform papier mache vases, wall hangings, lamp stands, etc., into works of art.

Kamala Award for Contribution to Craft 2020

Smt. Amrita Choudhary from Shekhawat, Rajasthan is the winner of the Kamala Award for Contribution to Craft 2020.

After years of struggle with gender discrimination, poverty and patriarchy, Smt. Choudhary, practising bandhini and shibori artisan, is today President of the Disha Shekhawat Women and Girls Institute. Many socially and economically marginalized women of the region are trained at the Institute in the local crafts of tie and dye and in Shibori, empowering them through their skills and ability to be economically independent.

Kamala Awards for Revival of Languishing Craft 2020

Smt. Masto Devi from Himachal Pradesh is the winner of the Kamala Award for Revival of Languishing Craft 2020.

Masto Devi has been an invaluable and talented embroiderer at CHARU, Delhi Craft Council's Revival Project of Chamba Rumaal, an art form which fuses embroidery and miniature art to create embroidered narratives done on floss silk and handspun cotton. Apart from being a skillful embroiderer, Masto Devi is a relentless motivator of the other women embroiderers of CHARU.

Kamala Awards for Revival of Languishing Craft 2020

Shri Gaurang Shah from Telangana is the winner of the Kamala Award for Revival of Languishing Craft 2020.

Shri. Shah, fashion designer non-pareil, has revived and innovated the ancient and languishing weaves of jamdaani and khadi, fusing them in his fashion and couture line of saris, 'kurtis', 'anarkalis', stoles, etc. He is hugely celebrated in national and international markets for conscious fashion and unique designs.

Kamala Award for Young Artisan 2020

Shri. Ishver Singh is the winner of the Kamala Award for Young Artisan 2020.

Shri. Ishver Singh was born in a Prajapathi Kumhar family of Rajasthan and learnt his craft from his father. Using his burgeoning knowledge in pottery techniques, he began to focus on miniature pottery forms. These nuanced and minutely crafted pieces are much sought after by collectors, curators and as home decoratives. Ishver Singh is also an expert in crafting 'Kaagzi' pottery.

Kamala Award for Young Artisan 2020

Shri. Satishbhai Chittara is the winner of the Kamala Award for Young Artisan 2020.

Shri. Satishbhai comes from the only family practising the art of creating 'Mata-ni-Pachedi', a figurative art form done on cloth featuring Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Completely handmade, the concept is drawn on cloth with bamboo twig and then hand printed with mud or with wooden blocks dyed in natural dyes. The effect is mesmerizing.

Shanta Prasad Award for Excellence in Weaving 2020

Shri. Vyasarayya Shettigar of Dakshina Kannada district, Karnataka is the winner of the Shanta Prasad Award for Excellence in Weaving 2020.

Master weaver Vyasarayya Shettigar has worked towards the revival of the Udupi cotton sari, saving its weaving skills from extinction. He began weaving at the age of 18 and continues to do so till age 80. By reviving this languishing craft through training others, and through workshops, Shri. Shettigar has given livelihoods to hundreds of weavers in this region.

Activities

The Crafts Council of India

Presentation of Kamala Awards 2020 (3 October, 2020): The Kamala Awards were presented in various categories to 9 artisans at an immaculately presented and organised Webinar on October 3. The presentation of awards underlined the excellence and expertise of the awardees' craft work and its reach.



Kamala Awards 2020 - Presentation through Webinar

CCI's Dye Workshop (3 - 7 November, 2020): The aim of the workshop was to teach the masterweavers the correct use of dyes and to standardise colours. Shri. Ananthamurthy, dye expert from Bengaluru taught 21 participants, many of them women, exposing them to improved design, colours, etc. The participants worked with 10 colours.

Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh

Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh started with the social media platform Instagram and FB to put out stories with voice overs to bring awareness to our crafts and weaves.

Craft Dialogue: CCAP initiated 'Craft Dialogue' in an Instagram programme in which we covered masters in many crafts: Etikopakka's Chinnayachari, Mangalagiri's Lakshman Rao and son, Bidri craft's Tahir, Telia Rumal's Gajam Govardhan, Narsapur Lace's Girija B, and Srikalahasti's Kalamkari master artisan J. Niranjana.

CCAP joined Creative Dignity to empower artisans with digital literacy with special emphasis on making catalogues to start online sales. This included classes in photography, Google slides, creating Instagram and Whatsapp business catalogues and on how to deal with online platforms, etc.

Delhi Crafts Council

Fund disbursement to Artisans: Delhi Crafts Council regularly met online on Zoom from April to July to do fundraising for artisans and craft communities hit by COVID-19. DCC provided assistance of Rs.1,000/- each to almost 200 spinners, dyers and helpers in Maheshwar, Nagpur and Kota. The relief was initiated and disbursed through AIACA, Women's Weaves, and the Kala Swaraj Foundation. Similar relief was extended to women Kotpad dyers and Pilkhuwa artisans.

Handloom Day(7 August): On Handloom Day, Delhi Crafts Council organised the Vastra Shilpi Samman virtually given to Shri Hemanta Kumar Singh of Odisha for his skill in Tie and Dye designs on the yarn required for Ikat weaving. DCC also organised a talk on Odisha Ikat weaves by Pankaja Sethi, a Textile Designer from Odisha.

Webinar on “Insights into the Weaving of Handloom Textiles” (September): Shri B.B. Paul, Former Director, Weavers Service Centre and Handloom Weaving Consultant and Shri Gautam Sharda, Head of Crafts, Tata Trust spoke on the occasion.

Kamaladevi Puraskar (28 November): Kamaladevi Puraskar is a scholarship scheme devised by DCC and given to the young craftsmen of the craft community between the ages of fourteen and twenty. The award consists of a citation along with a monthly scholarship for the period of one and half years. Smt. Ruby Palchoudhuri, Former Chairperson, Crafts Council of West Bengal gave away the awards to the six young craftspersons from Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Arunachal Pradesh. It was a zoom event avidly watched by many.

Crafts Council of Karnataka

Crafts Council of Karnataka held Webinars and online programmes from July 2020 – January 2021 to spread awareness of many crafts and their makers. Among those showcased were:

Odisha Weaves by Vriksh (25 July - 5 August, 2020): A contemporary collection of hand woven silks re-imagined from historic maritime trade routes. The event was organized by CCK's craft store 'Kamalini'.

Durga Tantra Collections (25 September - 2 October 2020): The online event explored the

evolving aesthetics of South Indian Temple jewellery, Karimnagar filigree and Kundan to present a new grammar in ornaments. Many orders were received.

Poetry in Khunn by KaleNele(8 – 17 October 2020): In an online event KaleNele presented silk saris with Khunn motifs, re-imagining Khunn and Ilkal saris in different colours and motifs while retaining basic Ilkal weaving and design techniques.

Online Programmes(17 December –19 January 2020): Mura Collective and Seher were other online events and talks organized by CCK.

Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu

The following Webinars featuring artisans, social entrepreneurs and writers proved the focus of CCTN's activities during the pandemic.

Webinars:

- **'Indigenous Crafts of the Nilgiris'** was the theme of Ramya Reddy's talk on Toda embroidery, Kurumba painting and Kota pottery.
- **Baluchari:** Woven narrative in Silks of Bengal by Darshan Shah's 'Weaver's Studio', Kolkata gave one fascinating peep into the revival efforts being made of the iconic Baluchari sari.



- **The Journey of Punarnawa** by Subrata Pandey, traced the fascinating growth of Punarnawa, a Social Enterprise based in Odisha.
- **Kalamkari:** Niranjana Jonnalagadda, brilliant 4th generation Kalamkari artist, took one through the history and creative processes of making a Kalamkari piece.
- **Artisan Promotion:** CCTN created a virtual shopping experience featuring the products of craft regulars at their Craft Bazaars whose creations were lying in lockdowns due to the pandemic. Kandasamy of Namakkal's stone products, Vijayakumar's wooden products, weaver Prabhakaran of Sathyamangalam's handwoven cotton saris, Tirupathi of Namakkal's unique, customised soft stone 'patrams' and State Awardee Abraham Raman's decorative shell craft, all stole the show at the online Bazaar.

Last Word

A different Durga Puja, with poor craftspeople the hardest hit (from Vidura, a journal of the Press Institute of India)

Weavers, idol makers, pandal makers, designers, artisans, performers and even the dhaki, who beats the traditional drum, are in great demand during the annual Durga Puja. The Government and the private sector cash in on the celebrations while the skills and consummate artistry of these communities are showcased. This year, however, the picture was completely different. The lockdown combined with cyclone Amphan have taken a huge toll on the daily wagers, a huge chunk of who are potters, cane and basket weavers, sholapith artisans and weavers. Manjira Majumdar tells this story. (We print excerpts from the article).



Lady giving finishing touches to pandal art

In Kumartuli, the bastion of idol makers in North Kolkata, about 700 craftsmen work out of single or shared studios; some of them today are women. They also add the finishing touches by adding colour and adorning the idols in silks and artificial jewellery. According to the Kumartuli Mritshilpi Samity, this year most of them have received far less orders. Depending on the size – idols go up to 10 feet or more – the charges are usually fixed beforehand. Those shipped abroad can go up to lakhs of rupees.

The new government directives had ordered toning down the community pujas in more ways than one. Those who went ahead with the celebration opted for smaller images. In previous years, due to corporate awards in various fields, each locality clubs, housing complex, city residential block tried to outdo the other in a show of novel themes, creativity and innovation. The budgets were pruned drastically this time, with a stipulation that no one should be coerced to pay a donation.

As big structures are disallowed, Roopchand Kundu (well known professional installation artist) said he was not working on a single layout. As a result, the hardest hit were the artisans: those supplying terracotta figurines, paper lanterns, shola craft and other specially designed decorative items to adorn the pandal. Depending on the total budget, a big portion is set aside for the murti (idol) and mandap.



A 2019 idol (coppery finish) by artist Roopchand Kundu

The poor craftsman is always the hardest hit and the state government has been to their aid in previous years, offering them an outlet in the several textile and handloom fairs at the end of the year. This way, many of them belonging to the various districts such as Murshidabad, Bishnupur, Bardhaman and Nadia can directly sell to the public. The famous embroidery of kantha has received a huge fillip in this way.

The future is indeed grim for these weavers and artisans who incurred losses in raw materials during cyclone Amphan. Much of the loss is yet to be calculated since the workers are in the unorganised sector. The street food vendors too are staring bleakly at their empty kiosks.

The festivities began a month later this year after agomani, which marks the beginning of devipaksha. A city campaign urged citizens to donate one new handloom cotton sari to be distributed among the slum women. And reflecting the twin passions of Bengalis, politics and wit, the memes doing the rounds on social media depicted the corona virus as the asura (demon), with Ma Durga slaying him. And despite the fierce battle she emerges victorious, with her mask firmly in place.



Shyamal Das & his men give final shape to the idols before painting and accessorizing

Obituary

Shri. Jonalagadda Gurappa Chetty

The Crafts Council of India mourns the passing away of Padmashri Shilp Guru Shri. Jonalagadda Gurappa Chetty on 14 February 2021. Master artisan, scholar and writer, Gurappa Chetty along with his father Shri. Lakshmaniah led the resurrection and renaissance movement of Srikalahasti's Kalamkari craft from near oblivion to the much sought after and celebrated art form that it is today. CCI offers heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

Dr. Ghada Hijjawi-Qaddumi

The Crafts Council of India mourns the passing away of Dr. Ghada Hijjawi-Qaddumi, President, World Crafts Council / APR on 1 April, 2021. Indefatigable and ceaseless champion of artisans worldwide, Dr. Ghada was an able administrator who networked with organisations the world over to nurture the cause of crafts and its makers. CCI places on record its heartfelt condolences on the passing away of this tall figure of world crafts.

(A more detailed coverage of the two departed personalities will appear in the August edition of CCI's Newsletter)

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