The Crafts Council of India

Celebrating 60 Years of Craft

Rukmini Amirapu

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Designed by Malvika Mehra, www.artworksdesign.in

Printed by Sudarsan Graphics Private Limited, Chennai

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FOREWORD

CCI at 60 – Introduction

Sixty long years of service and institutional achievement should require no other reason to justify this effort at recorded history. Yet The Crafts Council of India is no ordinary institution, founded as it was under the towering influence of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and rooted in her experience of the Mahatma's struggle for India's freedom. Kamaladevi imparted her spirit of hands-on activism to the group of volunteers she brought together to create CCI, with them setting directions for service that has continued to this day. This chronicle is also set within a larger story linked to national well-being, expressed through a sector that understands well-being as that of humanity, of nature and as a quest for a better tomorrow by uniting the worlds of culture, technology and material. Against this backdrop, CCI's six decades have witnessed astonishing transformations in India and the world. The traditional wisdom of artisans and their crafts has been challenged by the rapid pace of change in patterns of use, in technologies and markets, in systems of patronage, and perhaps most of all by changing perceptions that reflect profound shifts in values and attitudes within communities that artisans have served for centuries. These pages thus offer a chapter to that larger history of India's movement between tradition and modernity, recounted here through the hands, eyes and hearts of its artisans and of generations of CCI volunteers responding to Kamaladevi's call.

At CCI's founding, crafts appeared secure as India's identity as a free nation seeking to be modern on its own terms. This confidence reflected both pride in heritage and the social and political churning over a century from which handcrafted khadi emerged as a nation's symbol of freedom and of hope. At the heart of this vision was a core belief in self-reliance and the empowerment of millions still at the margins of Indian society. To these million visionaries like Gandhiji, Kamaladevi and Jawaharlal Nehru understood that an independent nation would need to deliver livelihood and opportunity. They also knew that India's artisans belonged overwhelmingly to communities whose lives were surrounded by deprivation and neglect. To this was now added the tragedy of

Partition. To fully understand CCI, it is important to recall that Kamaladevi's pioneering work in crafts began not in the field of cultural revival but instead as an urgent outreach to refugees devastated by loss and in desperate need of hope and security. This urgency led those early pioneers to apply heritage skills to the creation of livelihood through new patrons and new markets, challenges that have been sustained through all these years of national and global transformation.

At Freedom, not only had India to address the human tragedy of loss that came with Partition. There were other urgent needs to which craft heritage was applied, among them jobs in rural areas and earning scarce foreign exchange that India needed to build new industries. It became apparent that there were profitable markets abroad, and growing markets at home, for what was made by hand, provided artisans could deliver quality products suitable to users very different to those familiar through tradition. Design and marketing skills now became essential capacities that a new craft movement would require. It is against this backdrop that CCI began its efforts at artisan outreach, product development, retailing and advocacy.

What unfolds on these pages is not the mere retelling of success stories or of documenting extraordinary craft wisdom, skill and beauty. Behind every project and product recounted here is the human story of makers and of teams who have given so much of their lives to enrich, revive and revitalise the force of 'handmade in India'. In the words of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, while handcraft continues to draw strength from the past, "it has also to be tuned to the present, evolve a new relationship with the current flow of life and thus create a new tradition. But there are certain values indispensable to mankind which craftsmanship reserves, and those craftspeople and craft lovers who draw on the perennial spring of inspiration as of old, can still realise and experience that same sense of fulfilment". In that spirit, CCI's history is part of a story that a nation can tell itself and that it can share with the world.

Ashoke Chatterjee
October 2025

PREFACE

As The Crafts Council of India (CCI) marks 60 years of dedicated service to the craft sector, we felt it essential to document our journey—not merely to commemorate the past, but also to guide and inspire future generations. Over the decades, CCI has played a vital role in supporting craftspeople across the country, stepping in wherever our assistance could make a difference, always within the resources available to us.

Like many NGOs, our pace of decision-making may appear slow. This is largely due to our deeply democratic structure, where all decisions are taken collectively by our 17-member Executive Committee. Yet, it is this very structure that has ensured inclusivity, reflection, and responsiveness to the real needs on the ground.

Our work has evolved organically over the years across multiple verticals. The book reflects this progression—beginning with Community Building in the 1980s and moving through phases of revival, design innovation, the introduction of new tools, marketing, and, more recently, engaging with the next generation of craftspeople. These verticals often intersect and overlap—revival leading to design, design to marketing, and so on—each strengthening the other.

Importantly, this book also showcases the contributions of our affiliated State Crafts Councils, highlighting initiatives from across India under the same thematic verticals. To provide a wider context, we invited some of the most influential NGOs in the sector to share their experiences and milestones. Their contributions form a special section titled *An Overview: The Indian Craft Space,* which we hope will offer both insight and inspiration.

This book is more than a chronicle—it is a tribute to the resilience of our craftspeople, the commitment of countless individuals and organisations, and a testament to the power of collective effort in preserving India's rich craft heritage.

We gratefully acknowledge the wholehearted contributions of our affiliated State Councils, who provided valuable material for this book.

We are deeply thankful to Jaya Jaitly, Laila Tyabji, Sibanand Bhol, Neelam Chhiber, Toolika Gupta, Hemendra Sharma, Nitesh Sangolma, Meera Goradia, Ashoke Chatterjee, and Priya Krishnamurthy, who readily contributed to the *Overview* section following our brief. We acknowledge their solidarity, their impactful work in the handmade sector, and their deep commitment to the artisans of our country.

A special note of gratitude goes to Ashoke Chatterjee, who cheered us on and urged us to document these 60 years of CCI's journey.

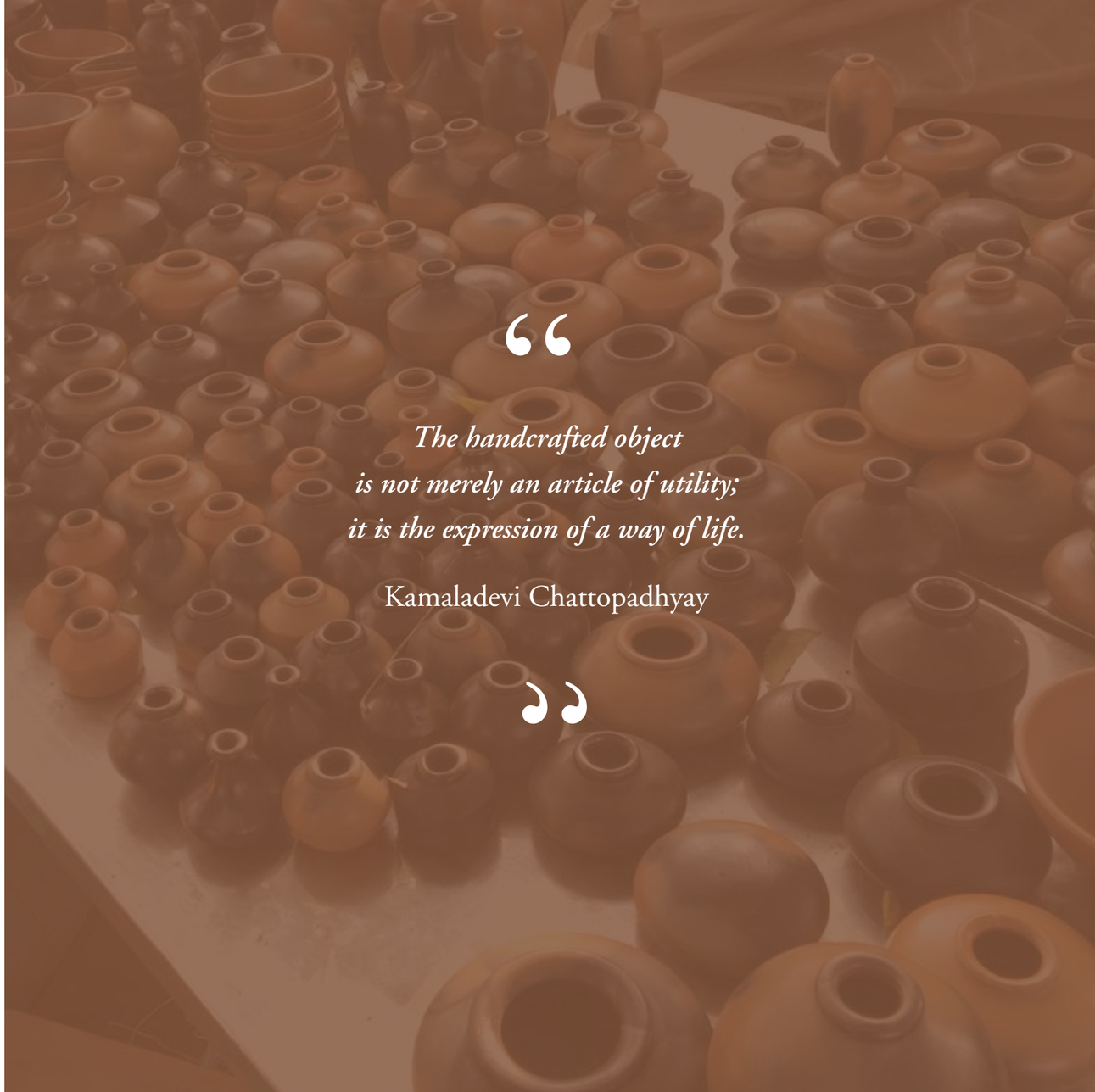
We also extend our thanks to Rukmini Amirapu. Despite the challenges of limited archival material, she brought CCI's history to life through her own research, weaving scattered threads into a coherent and engaging narrative.

Our gratitude to Malvika Mehra for designing this book with patience and creativity—coping with low-resolution photographs, most of them taken in the field on mobile phones, and waiting for missing images patiently.

Both Rukmini and Malvika worked seamlessly as a team, making the entire exercise a deeply satisfying one.

Finally, we acknowledge our meticulous editorial team—Pushpa Chari and Sudha Ravi—who worked in close coordination with me and ensured that the writing remained accurate, and engaging.

Gita Ram
Chairperson
Chennai, October 2025



CHAPTER 1

Crafted Through Time

1 Crafted Through Time

At an awards function of The Crafts Council of India held towards the end of 2024, Gajam Govardhana was honoured with the prestigious Kamala Samman for Lifetime Achievement in Craft. This accolade recognised his exceptional contributions to preserving and innovating the traditional Telia Rumal weaving technique, a double ikat art form from Telangana.

Telia Rumal weave from Telangana

He reminisced eloquently about his journey from seeking a livelihood, many years ago, to becoming a torchbearer for the preservation of the craft. His words resonate with the current trends in the world of crafts where many ancient crafts of India are struggling to stay afloat and remain relevant. Man's creative instincts, whether it is etching and painting cave surfaces, breathing life into yarn, giving shape to a block of wood, moulding clay into pottery, knotting wool into carpets, twirling molten metal into artifacts, or chiseling stone into sculptures propels him to rise above his mundane impulses, and produce beautiful pieces of art.

Top: Unicorn seal from Mohenjo Daro

Above: 'Dancing Girl' sculpture, from around 2500 BCE

Throughout the centuries, humanity's aspirational search for beauty has been expressed through craftsmanship, which has remained an integral part of our history and cultural evolution. However, due to geographical, political, social, and economic reasons, some crafts have experienced a decline—despite periods of revival and rediscovery through the ages. A combination of factors, including industrialisation, war, and globalisation, has contributed to the erosion of traditional craftsmanship. Despite the many challenges, they have been purposeful movements that aimed at revival and preservation of craft traditions. A growing disillusionment with mass-produced goods, coupled with increasing appreciation of handmade objects has sparked a resurgence of interest. This revival reflects a broader connect with cultural identity and deep regard for artisanal heritage. The work of today's artisans stands as a powerful testament to the enduring spirit of creativity and pride in cultural legacy.

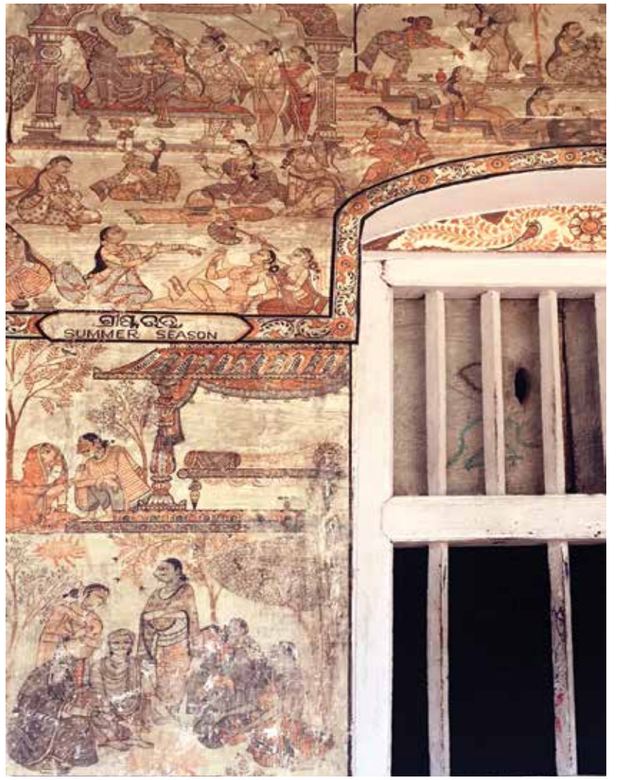
The rebirth and revival of craft was further encouraged by the support of organisations that came into being, along with technological innovations especially in stonework, woodwork and textiles, and the importance given to sustainability, and sustained financial support. Education in crafts starting from the school level has also addressed the issue of preserving craft. Craft schools and workshops bring the spotlight on lost crafts and the pressing need to preserve what is left and attempt to revive what has been lost. Continued resilience and the enduring creativity of the human mind ensure that crafts will never die, they are constantly evolving and shifting, perhaps disappearing for short periods of time but resurfacing in better, more sustainable formats. UNESCO's efforts too, to revive cultural heritage has given an impetus to document and protect traditional craft forms.

India's crafts have a rich and diverse history, influenced by its cultural, religious, and political contexts. The period before and after India's independence, saw significant transformations pertaining to traditional crafts, regional styles and contemporary developments. From antiquity, the Indian sub-continent has been replete with

Top: Kailasa Temple, Ellora
Above: Kantha embroidery

craft in various forms. Studies on the Indus Valley Civilisation, throw light on their skills in pottery, bead-making, metallurgy, seals and sculptures, the Dancing Girl being an enduring example. From the 3rd century BCE to the 12th century CE, when Buddhism flourished, stupas, sculptures and wall paintings were the highlights of their contribution to the arts. The Sarnath lion capital and the Ajanta-Ellora caves are outstanding examples. The Hindus and the Jains were rigorous in their promotion of the arts, including magnificent temple architecture, sculptures and paintings. The Mughal period witnessed an influx of Persian art which included miniature paintings, jewellery and architecture, the Taj Mahal being a prime representation. The colonial period saw a decline in handicrafts due to the introduction of machine-made goods. Fortunately, the Arts and Crafts Movement in the 19th century which had its origins in Britain had an influence in India. Sir Edward Lutyens who worked in India was known to adapt traditional architectural styles, was a significant figure in the revival movement and promoted traditional skills. Royal patronage, social reform movements and art collectors had their role to play in the rise of the Bengal School of Art in the 19th century.

Through the centuries, traditional Indian handicrafts have stood the test of time evolving, shifting, adapting and surviving through political, cultural and social upheavals. Traditional crafts like handloom weaving of fabrics like silk, wool and cotton were woven into exquisite textiles like that of Benares and other regional areas. Pottery was another enduring



Pattachitra painting on the walls of a house in Raghurajpur, Odisha

handicraft prevalent in most parts of India, particularly the distinctive styles of Bengal and Gujarat. Jewellery and metalwork have always been the expertise of Indian artisans especially during the Mughal period.

The rise of nationalism and the fight for independence from British rule provided a great impetus to local crafts. The Swadeshi Movement was a significant factor in the revival of traditional crafts and the promotion of indigenous rural industries. The making of the khadi cloth during this period, served to revive local weaving and also created a sense of self-reliance. Certain traditional crafts like Madhubani painting, Warli art, pattachitra, and kantha embroidery, particularly in rural areas, witnessed a revival.

The period spanning the pre-independence and post-independence stages acted as a bridge between the rich traditional practices of the past and the shift towards modernisation and contemporary craft. Global influences and encouragement, also ensured that there was continuity in the preservation and protection of India's rich traditions of crafts. Tradition and modernity have gone hand-in-hand to keep alive the abundant and beautiful handicraft traditions that have been prevalent from time immemorial in India.

In the post-independence period, the newly-formed government took measures to safeguard and preserve the languishing handicraft sector. The plan was to set up institutions that would oversee the handicrafts sector giving it a formal structure. As a consequence, the All India Handicrafts Board was set up in 1952 and was a significant step in ensuring that traditional practices were preserved and the

artisans were given training. It also helped in providing an avenue for the products to reach different areas, nationally and internationally.

Above: Kalamkari originated in the regions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

Right: Contemporary bronze from Tamil Nadu

Hand-in-hand with the establishment of national agencies, the government started schemes to benefit and support the handicraft sector. Marketing Support and Services Scheme started in 2002 provided help with marketing, technology and skill development. As early as 1952, the government introduced the national awards for craftspeople. In 2002, the Shilp Guru Award was introduced to recognise the outstanding talents and contributions of the individual artisan. This acknowledgement of their skills brought them local and international attention.

Along with government support there are several NGOS, private and social enterprises that promote, protect, support and revitalise crafts. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission works on empowering artisans by providing training and better working conditions. Dastkar is an organisation that helps artisans improve their skills and organises skill development workshops. It provides platforms to sell their work. Some of their initiatives are organising craft bazaars and ensuring environmental sustainability. The Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India (HHEC) is a government-run entity that partners with NGOs to provide better opportunities and recognition to artisans and connects them to global markets. The India Foundation for the Arts is a non-profit institution that supports the preservation of Indian arts, including traditional crafts and also offers grants.

Some of the institutions that are working in the sector are the National Institute of Design, the Raza Foundation, the Jaipur Rugs Foundation, to mention a few. Most of them work towards self-reliance and skill enhancement for the artisan, connecting them to broader markets and ensuring that the products reach the consumer nationally and internationally. Some of the organisations work directly with the artisans in the rural areas and provide them platforms like fairs and exhibitions to display their products. The National Institute of Design, being a premier institute in design education, collaborates with traditional artisans to elevate their craft through innovation in its outreach programmes. It plays a key role in fostering creativity and enhancing design thinking.

The Geographical Indicator (GI), a certification that is given to products that have unique or distinct characteristics from a particular geographical region,

Geographical Indications

India is a repository of a rich tapestry of traditional crafts and these are distinguished by assigning them Geographical Indications (GIs), which signify the craft originating from specific regions. GIs are awarded to agricultural and food products too. They possess qualities inherent to that location and correspond to a specific geographical location or origin.

A website describing the GI tag states, " India, as a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, which came into effect from 15 September 2003. GIs have been defined under Article 22 (1) of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) as: "indications which identify a good as originating in the territory of a Member, or a region or locality in that territory, where a given quality, reputation or other characteristic of the good is essentially attributable to its geographic origin."

Darjeeling tea was the first GI-recognised product in 2004-05, by the Government of India. The first handicraft product to receive the GI tag was the Aranmula Kannadi of Kerala followed by the Pochampalli ikat from Telangana. Some of the other handicrafts that have been awarded the GI tag are Madhubani paintings from Bihar, Kanchipuram silk sarees from Tamil Nadu, Channapatna toys from Karnataka and Muga silk from Assam.

has promoted the preservation of crafts, for example, the Pashmina shawl, the Madhubani paintings or the Kanchipuram sarees. Presently, the e-commerce sites and digitilisation have spread awareness on traditional crafts and boosted sales of these products.

In this milieu of disappearing and re-emerging arts and crafts, The Crafts Council of India came into being in 1964, set up by the redoubtable Kamaladevi Chattopadyay, freedom fighter and social reformer, with a clear mandate to revive, sustain and promote all kinds of craft. She took up the cause of India's

Badhoi baskets from Uttar Pradesh

Decorative stoneware

rich storehouse of crafts and pursued their preservation relentlessly. An excerpt from the Foreword in her book, *Handicrafts of India*, published in 1975, elegantly knits together her life and work, which she dedicated to the craftspeople of India. "In the ancient books of the East it is said that when the hands of a craftsman are engaged in his craft, it is always ceremonial. Tools are after all an extension of the personality of the craftsman to reach beyond the range of human limitations. The craftsman thus combines within his being the tradition that embraces both the producer and the consumer within the social fabric."

Today, The Crafts Council of India is a leading body that has had a significant impact on the socio-economic development of the artisans, the revival and preservation of ancient and diverse crafts, in introducing technology in craft-making, in craft education and policy making at the government level. The following pages will recount the development of the organisation from its fledging roots to the influential entity it is today, as it successfully completes sixty years of service to the world of crafts.

Gajam Govardhana – Master Weaver

Gajam Govardhana was the recipient of the Padma Shri in 2011 for his contributions to the Telia Rumal tradition of weaving. Telia Rumal is a method for oil treatment of yarn and belongs to the ikat tradition of using natural vegetable dyes on textiles.

Gajam Govardhana was born in Putapakka in the Nalgonda district of Telangana and began his weaving journey in his youth. Telia Rumal weaving was originally found in Chirala in Andhra Pradesh from where it moved to Puttapaka and subsequently Putapakka Telia Rumal was accorded GI status in 2020. Presently, Govardhana heads the Padmashali family which keeps the Telia Rumal tradition alive and employs over 500 artisans in the State. He has transformed what was originally a regional headgear into a globally sought -after textile featuring sarees, dupattas, bedspreads and much more. His innovative approach, and the use of new tools to enhance the weaving process, while using modified looms, has helped in production and popularisaion of the textile.

In 2022, Govardhana established the Gajam Govardhana Telia Rumal Art Gallery in Hyderabad. This museum is a repository of over 170 rare textiles, including pieces dating back 200 years. It also stocks over 200 books documenting the art form. He has written several articles and publications and received many awards, including a UNESCO Award of Excellence (2002), National Master Weaver Award (2006), Cheongju International Craft Biennale Award, and the Shilp Guru Award (2007). He received the Kamala Samman Award in 2024, a testament to his unwavering commitment to his craft and India's rich textile tradition.

CHAPTER 2

The Birth of CCI

2 The Birth of CCI

WORLD CRAFTS COUNCIL

The genesis of The Crafts Council of India can be traced back to the establishment of the World Crafts Council (WCC) in 1964 in New York city. WCC was founded by Aileen Osborn Vanderbilt Webb, Margaret Patch and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, to initiate a global craft movement and to secure a better future for artisans around the world.

The WCC sought to preserve cultural heritage while creating opportunities for artisans on a global scale. It promoted the exchange of ideas and techniques among artisans, across borders, fostering mutual support and collaboration. By offering an international platform, the WCC enabled artisans to showcase their diverse skills and unique traditions to a wider audience. For Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, in the Indian context, the WCC held a particular significance. She saw it as a vital instrument for empowering women and revitalising rural economies. Beyond cultural preservation, the ultimate objective was to ensure sustainable livelihoods and economic resilience.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903-1988), Padma Vibhushan awardee (1987), was a prominent citizen of India and from her youth showed a strong determination and commitment towards the pursuit of her goals. She was driven by a passion to restore, revive and preserve Indian handicrafts. In the 1950s, Nehruvian economic policies favoured an industrialised India with mass production of factory-made

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

products. At the same time the All-India Handicrafts Board was established in 1952, of which Kamaladevi was the first Chairperson, and this body aimed to protect and promote India's traditional handicrafts. She was an advocate for the preservation of traditional handicrafts, especially in the post-colonial period, the dominance of industrial products being a threat to local crafts. As India was one of the key countries to respond to the WCC's initiative, The Crafts Council of India was initially set up in Bombay in 1964 and shifted to New Delhi in 1966. Its prime objective was to preserve, promote and support India's rich craft heritage, work towards the welfare of artisans, and establish links between craft traditions and contemporary markets.

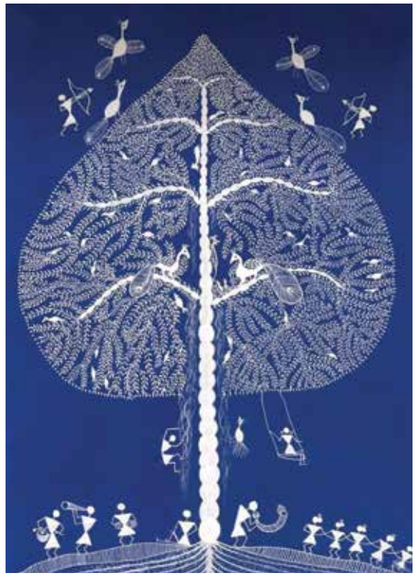
Vijaya Rajan, Founder-Chairperson of CCI Chennai, in an interview held with her in February 2025, throws light on the early days of the Crafts Council in New Delhi. She was introduced to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and later assumed charge as Secretary of Delhi Crafts Council. In 1977, The Crafts Council of India shifted its headquarters from Delhi to Chennai. This move was driven by Kamaladevi who believed that the South, having a rich craft tradition was becoming an active hub for the revival of traditional handicrafts. There was also a growing impetus to set up State Crafts Councils, more of which were from the South, thus creating a strong network in the South. It was also found that the South proved to be more conducive to holding exhibitions and training programmes for the artisans. Documentation efforts were also promoted widely in the South.

Rather providentially, Vijaya Rajan moved to Chennai and became the Founder-Chairperson of The Crafts Council of India. In her article, *Golden Memories* from the CCI newsletter of September 2014, she reiterates, "My journey with CCI began with my guru Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the renaissance figure of Indian crafts who formed the CCI and saw fit to make me, the first DCC Honorary Secretary in 1964 and Chairperson, CCI in 1976. Equally dedicated to the cause of crafts was Rukmini Devi Arundale, CCI's first Honorary President with whom

I had the good fortune to share space." She goes on to add that Ashoke Chatterjee became the Honorary President and describes him as an erudite administrator, writer, economist and craft lover. He was a mentor and guide every step of the way in CCI's journey. CCI grew under his umbrella in many ways. The process continued under the Presidentship of Kasturi Gupta Menon whose long and distinguished career as a bureaucrat involved in crafts, along with her innate love and sensitivity towards crafts made her an ideal guide.

The early struggles of the fledgling organisation have today resulted in a credible not-for-profit entity that has created a lasting awareness of the social, economic and cultural importance of traditional artisans and their work. The 1970s saw the introduction of the many crafts of India to people in other regions. For the CCI, it was a time for learning about the diverse crafts, about the people and communities who made them. Some of the early exhibitions organised in Chennai (then Madras) were Toda embroidery, kalamkari of Machilipatnam

The art of Kalamkari and a Tanjore painting



and Srikalahasti, Tanjore paintings, Warli painting, Jawaja dhurries, crafts of the North-East, etc.

The first attempt to raise funds for the cause of the artisans was to take an exhibition-sale of Indian embroideries to Dubai, UAE in 1981.

CCI is a registered society and in the early years, it functioned out of the Secretary's home, as it lacked an office space for administrative work and meetings. In 1991, with a generous donation and nominal funds accumulated with CCI, a small ground floor apartment was purchased in T Nagar, Chennai. CCI has functioned from there ever since.

As a registered body, the Executive Committee serves for a term of two years. Elections are held to the Executive Committee and the office-bearers are nominated. The President is non-executive and is nominated. All affiliated Councils follow the same pattern. They are autonomous bodies and each decides on their sphere of work according to the needs of the artisans. A National Meet is held every year with all Councils in attendance. This is followed by a Business Meet where exchanges take place and every Council reports on their work for the year.

Top: Warli art. Above: Toda embroidery

The essence of the Crafts Council's ethos is volunteerism—as envisioned and mandated by Kamaladevi. The members volunteer their time and travel on work at their own expense, and the administrative expenses are met by fund raising. A unique pattern followed by all Councils is organising spectacular textile shows with 20-40 participants—both designers and weavers. A part of the sales proceeds goes to the Council for administrative purposes. At every show

Crafts Council of India office in Chennai

the Council makes sure that an expert curation and a substantial footfall are assured.

The continued and compelling impact of this volunteer-driven organisation has ensured sustainable livelihoods and provision of opportunities through education and training. The key words to describe the work of the CCI are *support, promote* and *sustain*. The artisans have been supported through technology upgrading and enhanced techniques, a prime example being the use of power tools for stone and wood carvers. Marketing support is also an important activity of the CCI. Craft bazaars and thematic exhibitions provide marketing opportunities for artisans. Product development and design intervention also ensure marketing support. The Kamala stores showcase the products of the artisans and help them reach a wider market.

For the CCI, sustainability is a key factor to ensure family survival and economic security of the artisans. Many children of the artisans are compelled to seek greener pastures and abandon the craft that has been a part of their livelihood for generations. To counter this problem, the CCI has adopted the Educate to Sustain programme that provides scholarships to children of artisans by ensuring growth and opportunity that will bestow dignity on the individual and advancement of the community.

The CCI takes up advocacy for the craft sector in collaboration with several NGOs. A pilot project—Craft Economic and Impact Study done in 2010 by CCI showed lack of a detailed database for the handicraft sector. This comprehensive study and consequent lobbying for action resulted in a separate column for Handicrafts and Handlooms in the Government of India's Sixth Economic Census. CCI has also been asked to participate in the working group sessions for the Five-year Plans. The coming together of several NGOs in the sector with

National Meet, Mangalore, 2019

weavers from across the country to lobby against the possible change in definition of 'handlooms' by the Government worked well to show the importance of a cohesive group.

Kamaladevi's vision for the State Councils focused on work at the grassroots level in various regions, for the welfare of the artisan and for craft promotion. She believed in a federated structure with the State Councils being affiliated to the CCI and working locally in the various States. Their functions would be documentation of local crafts, organisation of exhibitions and fairs, providing of marketing support, advocating for artisan rights and facilitating training and skill development. With the creation of the CCI, the State Councils were gradually established, forming a network of councils that functioned autonomously.

The Craft Council Network

The Crafts Council of India is a network of ten affiliated State Councils with their headquarters in Chennai. Each of these ten Councils is an autonomous registered Society with a membership of volunteers. In addition to having a plan and set of activities of their own (as required by the crafts in their respective States), the Councils work together on some common issues, events, etc. A brief description of each of the councils follows.

Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh (CCAP)

Set up in 1987, the revival of Kondapalli toys, leather puppetry and the success of the work with a group of Banjara women on the outskirts of Hyderabad have been the highlights of this Council. Andhra Pradesh has rich craft and weaving traditions and Craft Tourism has been one of CCAP's recent initiatives.

Crafts Council of Assam (CCA)

The CCA was set up in 1991 and since then, this Council has worked tirelessly in the areas of natural dyes in textiles. Eri and Muga silk weaving and the bamboo and cane industry are given support by the Council. But more important has been their contribution to ensuring the representation of craftspeople from the North East in as many events as possible in different parts of the country. Assam, basically had two types of artisans—craftspeople working with cane and bamboo, making mainly utility crafts and the very talented weavers who catered to local needs. The State lacked the concentration of craftspeople in one particular area and are scattered in individual or small numbers, leading to difficulty in communication and interaction.

Delhi Crafts Council (DCC)

The DCC came into being in 1967 much before The Crafts Council of India, Chennai. Led by numerous senior crafts activists in the past, DCC is today known for its work in the revival of chiks, Sanjhi craft, Chamba Rumal, etc. With design as a stronghold of this group, their most recent contribution to the network has been in managing and making a success of the first Kamala retail outlet of CCI in what is probably the heart of India's crafts market. Today, Kamala is known as a storehouse for innovations by young artisans. Many of these artisans have received the Kamaladevi Puraskar, an annual DCC scholarship to encourage young people in the craft sector. Sutrakar Samman and Vastra Shilpi Samman are some of the other awards given to weavers and others in the handmade textile industry.

Crafts Council of Gujarat (CCG)

The Crafts Council of Gujarat was set up in 2023 in collaboration with Weavers Service Centre. They believe in empowering artisans especially women through weaving, applying grassroots initiatives aimed at reviving traditional handloom practices through skill development and knowledge sharing.

Crafts Council of Karnataka (CCK)

The Crafts Council of Karnataka was first set up in 1967 and registered in 1982. The CCK has been known for its strength of publications. Their contribution to the network has been immense, especially towards organisation of large-scale events. At the systemic level their major contribution has been in creating a tie-up between Canara Bank and tool manufacturers for the benefit of artisans. CCK promotes Ilkal saree weaving, the famed Mysore silk sarees, Channapatna toys and Bidri work. Stone carving from Badami and Hampi are also supported by CCK.

Crafts Council of Odisha (CCO)

A Crafts Council for the State was overdue when a few craft lovers joined together to form the Crafts Council of Odisha in 2019. Born around the same time when Covid brought everything to a halt, the Council started its activities by providing relief to artisans who lost their livelihood, participating in virtual exhibitions organised by CCI for artisans to display photos of their products.

Crafts Council of Puducherry (CCP)

The Crafts Council of Puducherry was set up in 2021. Puducherry's contribution to crafts has been formally recognised in 2011 with two GI tags—Villianur terracotta works and Thirukannur paper mâché crafts. They have also introduced a Handicrafts Awareness Programme for Pondicherry Youth (HAPPY). They are in the process of creating a craft map that will show locations of artisanal work in Puducherry and Auroville.

Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu (CCTN)

The Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu was set up in Coimbatore in 1988 with about 25 members. Keeping the aims and objectives of its parent body, Crafts Council of India and the World Crafts Council, CCTN had started off with encouraging the hand skills of artisans like the Todas, the mat weavers of Pattamadai and the Kurumba *kambili* weavers of Kalangal.

CCTN has also largely worked in the areas of stone, flower garland-making and palm leaf crafts. Kanchipuram silks, Madurai sungudi, Tanjore paintings, bronzes, Chettinad crafts, ari embroidery work and pottery receive support from CCTN.

Crafts Council of Telangana (CCT)

The Crafts Council of Telangana was set up in 2017. Originally it was a part of the Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh in undivided Andhra Pradesh State which was established in 1987 by a group of 15 members inspired by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Today CCT membership is 167-member strong, which includes many artisans.

Crafts Council of Uttar Pradesh (CCUP)

CCUP, founded in Lucknow in 1991, has had fluctuating fortunes but continued to work with chikankari women artisans. Over the years, CCUP has organised more than 40 training programmes in various crafts such as block making, block printing, chikankari embroidery, Tharu patchwork (UP tribal art), Daraz (a form of appliqué used in chikankari), and screen printing. These training programmes help artisans learn crafts and become self-reliant. In the past three decades, CCUP, in collaboration with DC Handicrafts, has organised over 30 exhibitions in more than 20 cities across various states of India. These exhibitions showcase products and crafts from artisans hailing from different parts of the country. Notable exhibitions have been held at the Lalit Kala Akademi in Lucknow in 2015, 2018, and 2019. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, one was organised in Bhopal.

Crafts Council of West Bengal (CCWB)

The State of West Bengal is known for its vibrant culture and artistic legacy. The CCWB (set up in1966) has managed to keep its focus on crafts, artisans and the communities.

It was at the initiation of late Kamaladevi that the Crafts Council of West Bengal was formed with Ila Palchoudhary as the Founder-Member. After her passing, her daughter-in-law Ruby Palchoudhuri took charge in 1975 and she recounts how the CCWB revived various languishing crafts chief among them kantha work, solapith, lost wax metal casting and Satgaon quilts.

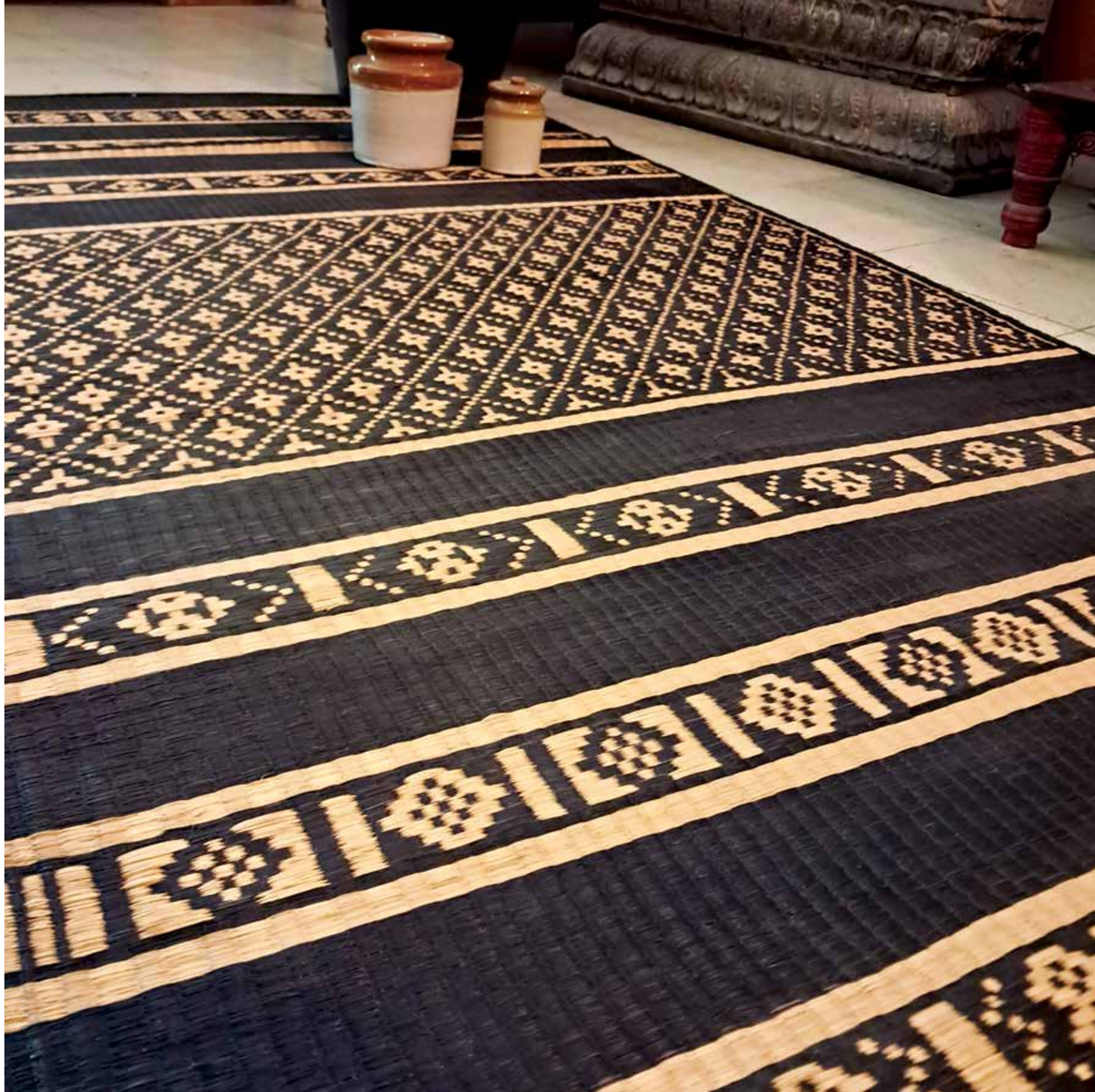
CCI and World Crafts Council (WCC)

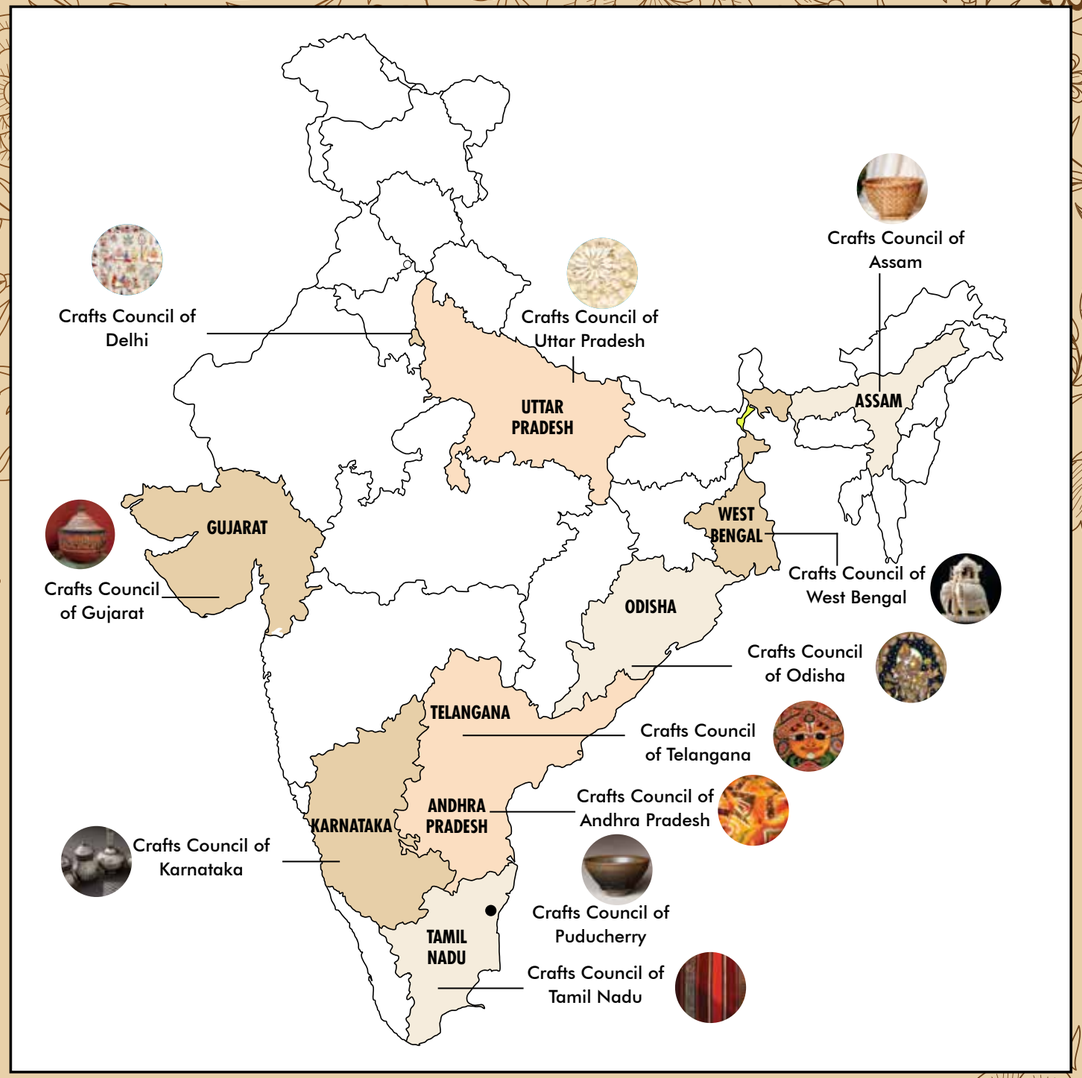
Usha Krishna, President, World Crafts Council helmed two major craft events in India during her tenure (2008-2012). Early February 2011 saw the unveiling in Delhi of 'Abhushan – Design Dialogues in Jewellery', an International Craft Summit. Indian artisans were able to meet and interact with other artisans and learn about design concepts from across the world, opening new windows of creative imagination for the artisans.

Usha Krishna also organised 'Kaivalam – World Craft Summit' in 2012, bringing the craft universe together to create, for the first time, a Festival of Crafts. Held in Chennai from 7–10 October, 2012, Kaivalam presented a dazzling and meaningful coming together of every aspect of craft, comprising a seminar titled 'The Future is Handmade', featuring presentations by leading Indian and international craft scholars and experts.

The CCI has forged many fruitful partnerships that have furthered the cause of the preservation of handicrafts. Government collaborations, work with NGOs and international organisations like the UNESCO have benefitted the artisans in the fields of technology, design and education. In addition, private individuals, institutional tie-ups and experts in the field have lent their support to the CCI.

Ashoke Chatterjee in his article, *A Golden Opportunity for Reflection* commemorating fifty years of CCI cautions against taking heritage for granted. He adds that despite the leadership of the Mahatma, Gurudev, Kamaladevi, Pupulben and so many others, it took the European Union's slogan 'The Future is Handmade' for India to wake up to its wealth of handicrafts. He reiterates that India has an advantage that is economic, cultural, social, political, environmental and even spiritual, in the creativity and innovation of millions of its artisans. In a fitting message for the future of CCI he writes, "Getting that message across — that every nation should understand the centrality of craftsmanship to future survival, is bound to keep CCI and its allies busy, as India moves into another chapter in its history. Our Golden Jubilee offers an opportunity for reflection and preparation, and for celebrating a heritage that still awaits true understanding."





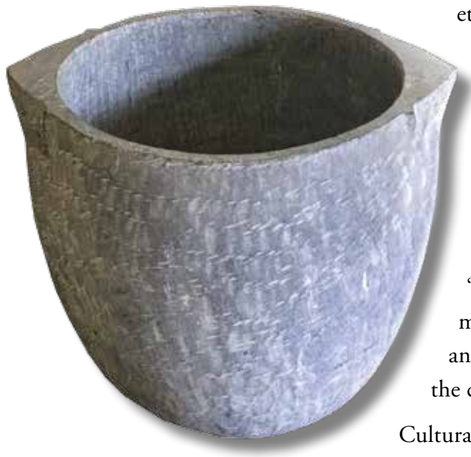
The following chapters will detail the work of the CCI in its sixty years of existence, pertaining to revival and design, technology, community building, marketing, relief, education and advocacy. This book also endeavours to record the contributions and measures taken by the State and Central Governments, organisations, and private individuals to preserve and protect the handicraft industry. The crafts sector in India encompasses a wide array of culturally rich traditions of craft. There are more than 3000 craft forms spread across the different areas of India, contributing towards rural employment and providing a livelihood to millions of artisans.

CHAPTER 3

Revival and Design: Reimagining Tradition

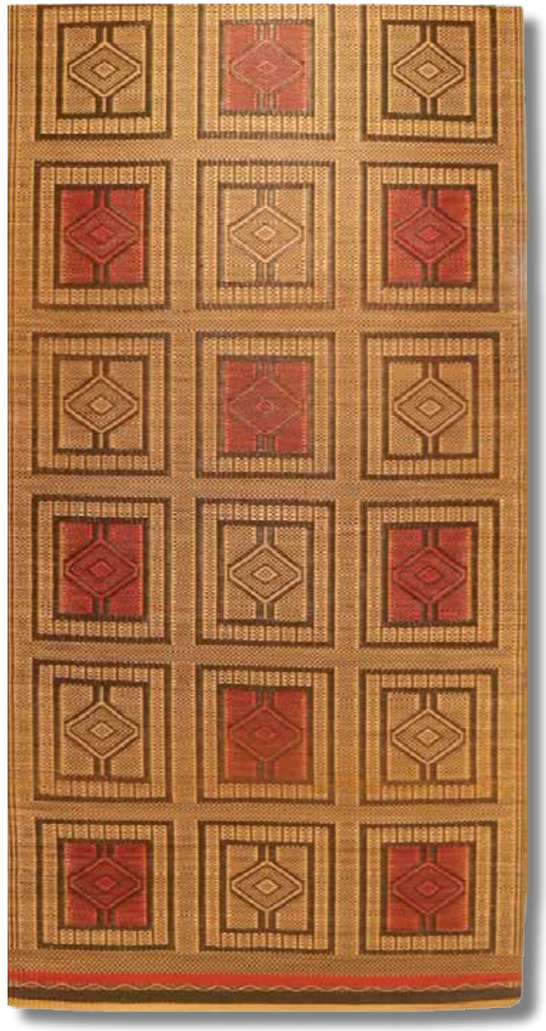
3 Revival and Design: Reimagining Tradition

The CCI's primary objective is the revival of traditional handicrafts which were once an integral part of various communities. The restoration of these culturally rich crafts not only preserve the past but also create a sustainable future where these products have a place in modern society. This kind of revivalist movement reconnects with history, fosters and supports ethical consumption, encourages creativity and supports local artisans. Products that once were essential to the economic welfare of communities have faced a decline due to the rise of mass production, globalisation and industrialisation. CCI has consistently recognised the need to nurture these crafts to ensure their survival and relevance. CCI's efforts have borne fruit in a few instances where the crafts continue to thrive and flourish. Gita Ram, Chairperson CCI, says, "When a craft has languished any effort at reviving that craft must involve both changes in design to make it more acceptable and facilitation with marketing. This chain must be followed if the craft is not to languish again."



Kalchatty

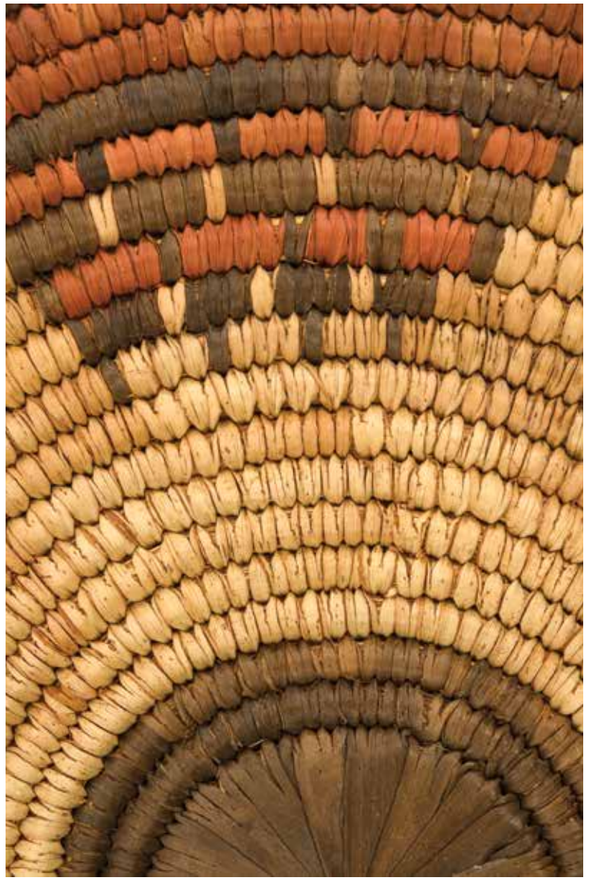
Cultural preservation ensures that the community retains its true identity and values, and reviving them act as cultural markers for future

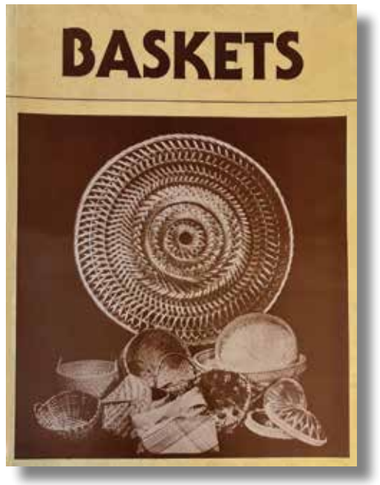


Killimangalam mat

generations. The techniques of the craft that are passed down keep the skills alive. Sustainability is also an important factor in revival where locally-sourced materials are used and there is minimal waste. Revival reduces poverty and creates jobs, and results in stable economies. Most traditional handicrafts come with personal stories and the consumer feels more connected to the creator. Fair trade practices are observed which results in ethical consumption. By reviving traditional handicrafts, the artisans can be innovative and create designs for contemporary markets. Challenges to revival do exist with the younger generations not willing to learn intricate craft techniques which could be unprofitable and time-consuming. The risk of commercialisation also exists. The CCI has been successful in reviving crafts like the Killimangalam mats, the Pattamadai mats and the kalchatty. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's words about the revival of kantha work are symbolic of the revival of all handicrafts. "Kantha is an example of a strange contradiction, for here is thrift, by transforming worn-out textiles that would normally be thrown away, into objects of rare beauty and which have in the course of time become legendary."

In the early eighties, CCI organised national workshops that would highlight local craft like terracotta and basketry. A terracotta workshop called 'Glory in the Mud' was held in 1981 in Chennai. Subsequently, the Madras Institute of Development Studies documented information about the communities involved in making terracotta products and the problems they faced in getting the clay. With Government help, exhibitions





Clockwise from left: Coiled basketry; baskets on display; and Baskets, *a CCI publication*

were held in Madanapalle in Andhra Pradesh, in Kochi and in Coimbatore. The potters were given permission to sell on the highways in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and this practice continues to this day.

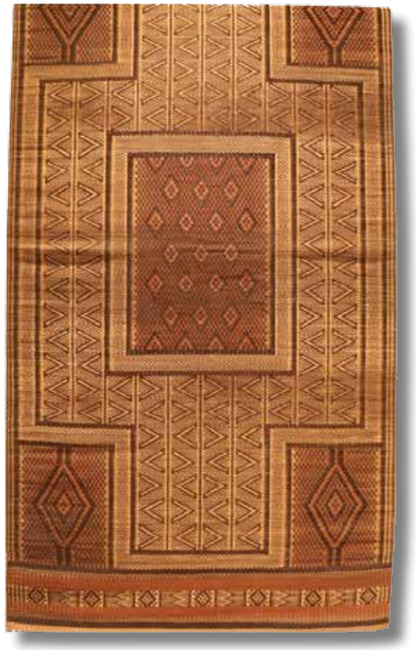
In February 1983, the CCI held a workshop on basketry in Chennai, the primary objective being to bring basket weavers and specialists from various regions

together. It also hoped to popularise the craft and its rich diversity. This exposure it was felt would lead to innovations in design to adapt to modern consumer needs. Several government organisations like the Office of the Development Commissioner and NGOs in the field, came forward to locate the artisans. The workshop led to new learning and brought together weavers, designers, marketing and export experts. The exhibition cum sale was a huge success with schools wanting to include basketry in their syllabus.

Killimangalam Mats

The CCI had a prominent role in reviving the Killimangalam mat of Trissur District in Kerala. Killimangalam mats are made from kora grass that grows wild by the banks of the Nila river. It had become a dying art when serendipitously an old worn mat was found hanging in in the office of the Assistant Director, HM&SEC Trissur (an extension of the Office of the Development Commissioner Handicrafts – Government of India). Despite the many challenges, CCI decided to take up the revival and traced an almost 100-member strong Killimangalam Cooperative Society in existence. The revival was made possible by Chami, the

Left: A Killimangalam mat Right: Washing the grass



master weaver, who knew the specific natural dye technique that was used earlier. The Society also received assistance from the Department of Industries and Commerce in the form of working capital. To begin with, the repertoire was limited to 4-5 traditional designs. CCI provided more design inputs, and this encouraged the Society to produce one each of the seven designs introduced.

Since then, the Society has been functioning fairly well. The Killimangalam mat received the UNESCO Seal of Excellence in 2004. The present scenario is that an elderly artisan named Aiyyappan works at the weaving unit, Sargalaya in Kanur, Kerala. He is the dye expert and has trained a few women there. The survival of the craft is now dependent on the Kerala Government which runs Sargalaya to ensure that it does not languish again.

Pattamadai Mats

The Crafts Council of India has had a long and enduring relationship with the Pattamadai craft and its weavers. The Pattamadai *pai* is a type of mat woven out of dry *korai* grass, in the southern region of Tamil Nadu and has also been given a GI registration. The grass is coloured using organic dyes and the mats are ideal for summer use as they stay cool. The skill of weaving of this mat is declining and CCI has intervened in their revival since the 1990s. They have been given design and quality inputs and marketing assistance. Dyeing of the grass using natural materials was another new introduction by CCI.

Top: A Killimangalam mat; Above: Aiyappan at the loom

New design inputs were given, melding the contemporary and the traditional. The introduction of a new and marketable range of lifestyle products was included, such as table mats, wall hangings, folders and handbags. The Council began marketing the new line of designer products at various

Clockwise from top left: The tank near Pattamadai village where the grass once grew naturally; Soaking the grass in the field; The fineness of a mat depends on how finely the grass is spliced; and a mat being woven

exhibitions all over the country with dramatic success. They have been displayed in the Kamala stores in Delhi and Chennai. CCI with the Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation, has jointly conducted skilling workshops for the Pattamadai weavers. A film capturing all the activities of the weavers has been beautifully produced.

Veeravanallur Mats

Veeravanallur, a village situated about 15 km from Pattamadai, is another community of mat weavers whose mats are less fine than the Pattamadai mats. Till the year 2000, the weavers had a large export order and were busy weaving mats. But with the global financial crisis export orders stopped. Twenty years later, a whole new generation of weavers did not know to weave. Seeing CCI's work in Pattamadai, they approached them for reviving the craft and to conduct training programmes and skilling in weaving.

Kalchatty

The kalchatty is cookware made out of naturally-found soapstone that existed since antiquity. Kalchatty, Tamil word for stone-pot, evokes nostalgic memories in women of South India who used it as a cooking vessel. It gave a special flavour to typical South Indian dishes.

Kalchatty products on display

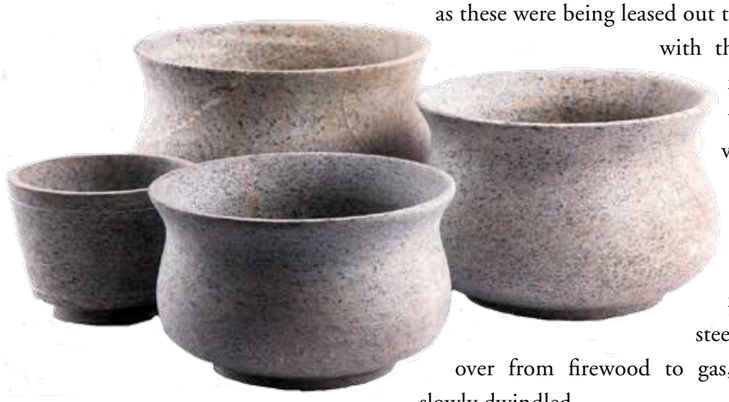
Top: Handmade. Above: Lathe turned

It has slowly gone out of use, mainly due to non-availability. The Crafts Council of India decided to bring it back, in line with its objective of reviving crafts that have gone into oblivion. CCI identified Thandangoundanpalayam near Salem, which had nearly forty households involved in the craft. Only the male members carried on the tradition, alternating between their regular vocation and crafting kalchatty vessels.

CCI's earliest efforts to introduce technology to the artisans started as early as 1983. A little later, in the early 90s, the stone carvers near Salem approached CCI to help them with their craft. When CCI decided to take up work in this craft, they found that the kalchatty, as an everyday kitchen utensil no longer existed.

There were many reasons for the dwindling in the production of the kalchatty. The two major ones for this were—the utensils were too heavy and thick-walled and the common kitchen fuel of today (LPG) was not suitable for this material. Cracking of the walls of the vessel was a common feature. Raw material was sourced from nearby quarries, the traditional process was very laborious, and marketing was either in local fairs or through visiting traders who also financed the craftsmen in times of need.

There were problems at the production end as well. Access to the quarries was limited,



as these were being leased out to manufacturers of insecticides. Along with this, the lack of markets, led to the number of artisans dwindling to two or three in the once thriving production village of Thandankondaanpalayam.

As price fixing was not in their hands, the artisans earned very little. With the arrival of alternative unbreakable materials like aluminium and stainless steel and method of cooking changing over from firewood to gas, the market for the kalchatty had slowly dwindled.

In 1983, CCI worked with Ramaswamy, who lived in a village near Salem and had learnt this craft from his father, producing the kalchatty in the traditional way—handmade, using simple tools and time-tested designs. He was donated a softstone lathe which had recently been introduced, by the legendary Prabha Shah (a great revivalist of printing in Gujarat), from the organisation, Sohan. With exposure to training on the lathe, Ramaswamy's tedious work became easier and faster and he could scale up his production.

CCI helped with the acquiring of raw material and also introduced innovative methods in the production, with thinner and lighter walls for the kalchatty. They also found alternate uses for the stone by creating oven to tableware products. The artisans were trained in using basic power tools as well, making them more productive and the product more economically attractive.

Usha Krishna, who played a major role in the revival of the kalchatty, mentions that a large export order was received from Japan. Since the products were hand-made, it was not possible to produce such a large quantity in a short period of time and hence the order was scrapped. It was felt at that time that with the aid of technology such an order could have been met. Considering the demand for the product, CCI focused on its revival with improved technology.

The Role of State Councils in the Revival of Craft

The State Councils have their own role to play in reviving crafts of their region and act as bridges between the regional artisans and the CCI. They identify endangered crafts and conduct surveys to document craft practices, tools, motifs, and techniques. They collect data on master craftspeople and traditional systems in craft. They also collaborate with designers and institutions to modernise the revived products without compromising authenticity. The Councils also work towards introducing new materials, colours, and product ranges that are attractive to contemporary market needs.

Kothuru Project (CCAP)

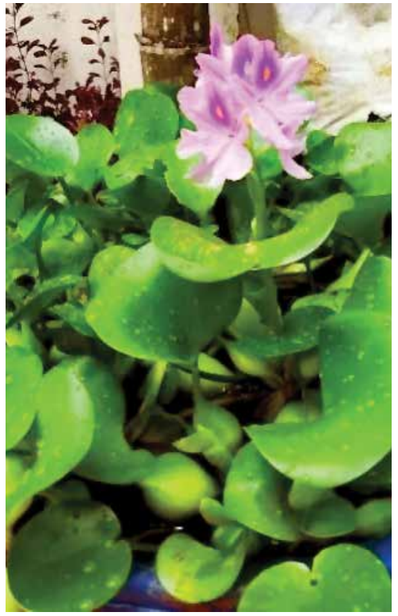
The Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh (CCAP) took up the Kothuru project in 2023. Kothuru and Tallapalli were ikat clusters that were left to fend for themselves during the partition of the state of Andhra Pradesh. The council members visited the villages and arranged a meeting in Kothuru with a group of enthusiastic weavers and dyers of varying ages, who were interested in having an identity of their own and to learn natural dyeing. This cluster has a history of Khadi weaving, but in due course shifted to silk and dupion silk weaving. After several conversations and meetings, CCAP along with resource persons Satish P Nagendra of Kora design and Jagada Rajappa, the doyen of natural dyes, came up with a plan to create a brand for Kothuru. Today, it is a flourishing craft entirely due to the interventions of the CCAP.

Ikat yarn on the loom

Water Hyacinth and Natural Dye (CCA)

The Crafts Council of Assam (CCA) is involved in the preservation of many crafts, but the extraction of natural fibre from water hyacinth and weaving it into products, has received much attention. Assam has an abundance of water hyacinth. With the help of The Crafts Council of India and the financial and

Natural dyeing process



Water hyacinth plant

logistics support of the North-East Development Financial Corp, this natural fibre was introduced to the crafts sector in the State. Various workshops were conducted with experts from outside the State and today this eco-friendly and natural fibre is being used to make commercially viable products of different kinds like basketry and table mats, etc. The Council believes that if the number of units increase and more artisans and entrepreneurs join this sector, it will result in the development of a sustainable craft. Cane is now becoming scarce and bamboo is moving into the industrial sector, hence an attempt is being made to move the artisans to other natural fibres.

Weaving is a part of the daily life of the women folk in most traditional homes, catering mainly to local and personal needs. Cotton is not available in Assam and the weavers source it from outside or from local markets. The Council saw an opportunity especially in this sector particularly from the natural dye perspective. The revival of old natural dyes with traditional colours and the introduction of new ones have been a boon to the handicraft industry. The Crafts Council of Assam also helped in extracting traditional designs which were languishing.

Chamba Rumal embroidery workshop

Chamba Rumal, Sanjhi and Chiks (DCC)

The Delhi Crafts Council (DCC) founded in 1967 has been very active in the preservation and revival of craft in the communities around it. DCC's website states, "DCC's activities include design and marketing development as the means for helping craft communities to achieve a quality of life through responding to changing market trends. The Council has made several path-breaking development contributions including those in stone and metal crafts, sanjhi paper-cut work, zardosi, terracotta, tilu grass, recycled paper and kathwa patchwork. These and other innovations are showcased at the Kamala outlet in

Chamba Rumal workshop and a sample of the work

New Delhi, established jointly by the Crafts Council of India and DCC." Their significant contributions to revival have been the Chamba rumal (an embroidery art form), sanjhi (stencil cutting on paper), and chiks (window blinds)

Chamba Rumal-Embroidered Paintings

The Chamba rumal, a narrative style of embroidery, is very striking and unusual. The origins of its name are from Chamba, a city in Himachal Pradesh, where this craft form was practised. It combines two highly developed artistic forms—miniature painting and embroidery. These embroidered pieces came to be termed as *rumals* or scarves, as they were mainly produced in a square format. The *rumals* were used to cover gifts and offerings. Chamba rumals were being made till the early part of the twentieth century but with the demise of the feudal system, this craft form began to languish.

In 1992, DCC took up the revival of the Chamba rumal. For more than three decades, DCC has continually striven through exhibitions and workshops to spread and enhance the level of awareness about this craft. In terms of innovation and design, DCC has had many interventions with the introduction of colours and textiles. In 2003, a training and production centre was set up to train the embroiderers to improve the quality of their work.

Through its intervention since 1996, DCC is proud to have demonstrated that this unique tradition can continue to flourish even under changed circumstances.

Today, it is successfully running a centre named Charu, which trains and guides the artisans in design, colour and quality. While keeping the intrinsic worth of

the art form intact, innovation and new developments by DCC have helped find a sustained market for the product. The Council has been successful in producing untwisted pure silk floss dyed in natural colours. Innovative framing ideas and packaging solutions have heightened the appeal of the product.

Sanjhi: Mathura's Exquisite Cut-out Rangolis

Sanjhi is a craft that originated around the temples of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. It combines the skills of stencil cutting and the drawing of rangolis. To revive this languishing craft, the DCC, embarked upon a project of intervention in 1996, by developing new prototypes of sanjhi bookmarks, cards, calendars, trays, coasters and boxes. The newly-developed products proved an instant hit at exhibitions all over India and at art shops and boutiques. The craft now has a national market and has spread from Mathura to other centres in India. Many new innovations in design have made it suitable for contemporary markets.

The traditional themes of stories from the life of Krishna and scenes from the local life of the region of Braj (Mathura and Vrindavan) and modern designs like the geometrical *jaali* or lattice designs from Mughal architecture are now a part of their repertoire of designs. The design themes have been chosen carefully to reflect and echo traditional sanjhi patterns of stylised trees and Mughal *jaalis*.

The Sanji Verma brothers

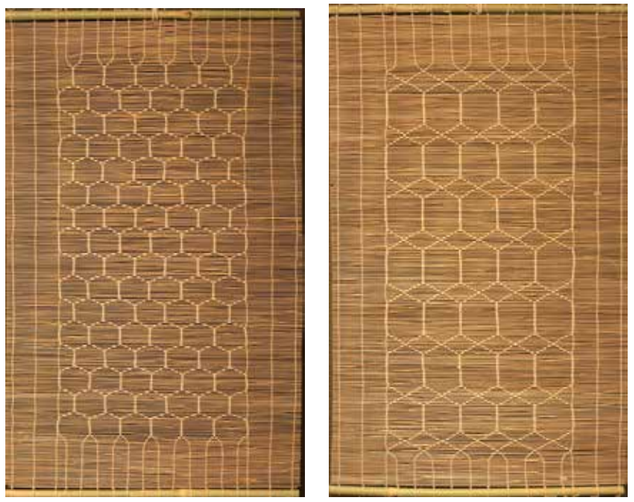
In an exciting experiment, sanjhi has been combined with hand painting in the Pichwai style. The translucent quality of the paper stencils lends itself to a variety of decorative and utilitarian products such as lamps, diaries, boxes, etc.

Chiks: Ethereal bamboo blinds of North India

Chik-making is a centuries old craft from North India, originating in the palaces and forts, to protect against the heat of the day. These natural bamboo blinds, made from *sarkanda* grass, handstitched with lattice designs, form an intricate and beautiful interior aesthetic.

They are woven either on temporary portable bamboo stands or on a loom for intricate patterns and door curtains.

This craft too saw a decline. DCC took up design intervention in chik craft in 1994, to assist a significant number of artisans. They introduced innovation into this functional and decorative product, and worked with six craftspeople initially, with quality and feasibility for mass production being the main focus of this intervention. The DCC has brought back to life the older, traditional ways of creating chiks. The design development programme was to document its materials, tools and processes.



Traditional chiks - (l) Choodi design and (r) Nagaur design

In Chennai, a chik-maker, known to the CCI as Tatti (chik in Tamil) Mohan met with a Delhi chik-maker Lakshman who had come to Chennai to demonstrate his craft at the British Council. After this meeting, Tatti Mohan got an opportunity to go to Delhi and learn this exclusive craft from the Delhi chik-maker.

Saudagiri (CCG)

The Crafts Council of Gujarat (CCG) has taken on the important task of reviving Saudagiri—a historic block-printed textile symbolic of Ahmedabad's vibrant trade and craftsmanship. Saudagiri prints are a traditional form of handblock printing, known for their intricate patterns and motifs. These prints are a significant part of Gujarat's textile heritage, with a history spanning nearly 300 years. The Crafts Council of Gujarat has been involved in revitalising and reviving this traditional craft. The prints are created using hand-carved wooden blocks, meticulously stamped on to fabric. The prints often feature repeated geometric designs, floral motifs, and depictions of animals like peacocks, parrots, and geese, inspired by nature. The Saudagiri block print has been awarded a prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag, recognising its unique heritage.

In the late 1800s, exporting these fabrics from Ahmedabad to Thailand, marked its global significance. However, by the 1950s–60s, the once-thriving block-printing tradition saw a steep decline, with only a few Chippa families continuing the practice.

Saudagiri exhibition by CCG

To bring Saudagiri back into the spotlight, CCG has launched a documentation and revival project in collaboration with a textile designer. The initiative includes the creation of a design reference bank and a wooden block library—resources made accessible to artisans, designers, students, and craft enthusiasts.

In addition, a curated collection of Saudagiri textiles, sarees, and Gamthi fabrics will be developed to demonstrate how this traditional craft can be revived

Saudagiri handblock prints on display

Kinhal woodcraft being produced

in a modern context—ensuring its relevance, continuity, and creative potential for future generations.

Kinhal Craft (CCK)

The Crafts Council of Karnataka (CCK) has been working on the revival of the traditional woodcraft called Kinhal. Kinhal craft represents a beautiful fusion of intricate craftsmanship and cultural heritage passed down through generations and is not only a form of artistic expression but also an essential part of Karnataka's cultural fabric. Kinhal is a small and remote village located in Koppal district, a culturally rich region of Karnataka.

The CCK has been actively involved in promoting and preserving Kinhal craft for over 30 years. Their work has included a variety of design development and training programmes, which have helped modernise the craft while staying true to its traditional roots. One notable achievement is the initiative to create one-foot-tall home decor products—based on the traditional eight-feet figures of Hanuman, Garuda and *grama devatas*. By scaling down the size, it made the craftsmanship more accessible and practical for homes. The success that was found in selling these smaller products is a testament to how adapting traditional art forms to modern tastes can be highly effective.

Kinhal doll

Kinhal craft-making in progress

Creating Kinhal craft is a time-intensive process that takes about four to five months. After the figures are carved and painted, the colours gradually tone down over time, giving them a rich, antique look. This natural ageing adds to their beauty, making each piece even more unique and charming as it matures.

Softstone, Golu Bommai, Lambani Embroidery, Panruti Gold Dolls (CCTN)

Over the years, the Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu (CCTN), has worked on various revival efforts and supported artisans to keep traditional crafts alive while appealing to modern markets and thus ensuring sustenance. Some of the ongoing efforts in which CCTN has been collaborating and empowering artisans are detailed in the following pages.

Softstone

CCTN's work with softstone has revived the production and use of softstone products. The stones collected from quarries in Namakkal, helped artisans

Clockwise from top left: Sofistone products; Lambani group; and Golu bommai

Kandasamy and Thirupathi to make beautiful handcrafted tableware, cookware and unique products for the home and garden. Furthermore, CCTN has enabled the purchase of a lathe for Kandasamy and the revival effort is ongoing, with design ideas for curated decor pieces with a contemporary look.

Golu Bommai

Handcrafted dolls have always played a huge role in Indian traditional households to represent festivals and in the art of storytelling. These dolls are made with papier mâché. Surya from Madhampatty is a third-generation artisan and makes dolls of deities using moulds with intricate detailing. CCTN has also

facilitated the procurement of these moulds or dies from Kanchipuram, for the artisan to improve, finesse and have a more diversified selection of dolls.

Lambani Embroidery

The Lambani cluster in Tiruvannamalai consists of twenty talented women specialising in traditional embroidery. Facing a shortage of consistent work, the women sought support to sustain their livelihoods. CCTN saw the need for publicity, marketing, and a steady source of income for them. Sarees and blouse materials were sourced and design inputs were given to them and the finished products were to be exhibited. With the help of social media promotions, the cluster along with the women in the neighbouring villages should have a long-term market for their products.

Panruti Gold Dolls

The Panruti gold dolls originate from a century ago. These tiny dolls are made of terracotta using the fertile soil of Panruti. They are sprayed with gold paint and have intricate detailing. The Brahmotsavam doll set which includes the six vehicles of Lord Vishnu, was recreated with the help of CCTN. They identified the family that was involved in making these dolls and revived a languishing craft.

Banjara craftsperson at Kish Island, Iran

Banjara Embroidery, Bidri and Silver Filigree (CCT)

The Craft Council of Telangana (CCT) had worked with a Banjara group of women just outside Hyderabad for several years. It has now undertaken the retraining of the women in their own heritage skills. A Council member visiting the village of Yellamathanda noticed the colourful dresses worn by the Lambadas and brought to the notice of the Council the embroidery skills

Banjara embroidery

of these women. On enquiry, fifteen women came forward to replicate the designs on order. Realising the potential of revival of the embroidery skills of these women, the Council conducted a training programme on Banjara stitches for one year, giving them a stipend of Rs 250 a month. The women till date had embroidered only for personal use. To get paid to do work orders was a new concept which they took up with keen interest since they became wage earners, contributing towards their children's education and needs. Today, the group has expanded to 350 trained women.

Silver Filigree

In 1989, the Council members found that the 400-year-old Tarakasi craft of silver filigree in Karimnagar was at a point of extinction. They started working with five artisans, providing working capital, design development and marketing. An exhibition and documentation was done in 1989-90. Today, over 500 artisans are actively involved in this craft. In 2007, silver filigree of Karimnagar received the GI tag and gained identity of 'One District One Product' for Karimnagar District.

Bidri art is a metal handicraft with intricate designs of silver or gold inlay on a blackened zinc-copper alloy

Bidri

Bidri art, is a distinctive metal handicraft with intricate designs of silver or gold inlay on a blackened zinc-copper alloy. It is used in luxury gifting awards and home décor.

With the Council's product intervention and innovation, it has been incorporated into modern lifestyle products.

Kantha Embroidery, Sholapith and Satgaon Quilt (CCWB)

The Crafts Council of West Bengal (CCWB) has played a significant role along with other organisations, in reviving and promoting kantha embroidery, a traditional craft of Bengal known for its rich cultural heritage and intricate handwork. It was the handiwork of rural women who used old cotton garments to create quilts and other textiles. They featured motifs from daily life, often narrating stories of the community. The craft began to face a decline due to economic factors and changing lifestyles.

Kantha embroidery

Ruby Palchoudhari who played a long and distinguished role in the early years of the CCWB, spared no effort to sustain and revive the craft form. In her own words, "My inspiration to revive kantha happened when I visited Bangladesh and witnessed how kantha embroidery has become a sustainable industry benefiting thousands of underprivileged women." She continues, "We had set up a centre in a small room in the suburb of Kolkata in 1990. Since I was greatly interested in this art form I visited the centre almost every day to supervise and spent a few hours happily watching the progress achieved by the trainees. A famous saying of Dr Kramrisch, "creating beauty out of chaos" had defined the skill of the women who with torn sarees and dhotis set up in layers, created beautiful imageries with kantha stitch. Our centre did not use torn material for the layers. We only used yardage of mulmuls and khadi materials."

Sholapith

The revival of the sholapith products was another of CCWB's successful revival stories. Sholapith craft is widely used for decoration on celebratory occasions especially in West Bengal. It is derived from a marshy plant that grows in

Kantha workshop in progress

waterlogged areas. Many products like colourful birds and flowers are made from sholapith.

Satgaon Quilts

Ruby Palchoudhuri focuses on the revival of the Satgaon quilt embroidery that flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Portuguese had come to Bengal and had settled in Hooghly for trading. Apart from trading in silk and cotton goods, they had trained a large group of young women who were proficient in stitching kantha embroidery, to make mainly colchas, which are large embroidered

Left: Sholapith carving
Right: A Satgaon quilt

king-sized layered bed covers. They introduced design motifs based on stories from the Bible and Graeco-Roman mythology. Hunting scenes by Portuguese soldiers were also a popular subject. The most important feature was the double eagle, (which was found in many cultures), as the central motif of colchas and other smaller pieces and large hangings. It was the fine chain stitch, with muga yarn on white cloth, which created the depiction of imageries. The products were a great item of export till the waning of Portuguese influence. Palchoudhary found these colchas in the V&A Museum and with additional help was able to get photographs of the stitches. When she returned to the Centre, she showed the girls the photographs of the stitches from which they were able to recreate the Satgaon quilt stitches

The journey of revival of lost crafts has several key dimensions. It is a collaborative effort involving artisans, designers, consumers and organisations like the CCI and the State Councils. These organisations require several resources to leverage survival and preservation of languishing handicrafts. By empowering artisans and integrating modern designs and promoting sustainability, they ensure that these products thrive in contemporary scenarios.

Ruby Palchoudhuri – 'Molto Bene'

Ruby Palchoudhuri, is a distinguished craft revivalist and prominent force in India's craft heritage renaissance. Now in her 90s, she is author and editor of several publications on crafts and has curated craft exhibitions in museums and other spaces around the world. Rita Bhimani in an article titled, *In Praise of Ruby Palchoudhuri, a Woman of Substance and Stature*, published in *The Telegraph* on 23rd December 2023, captures succinctly all that she stands for. "When Ruby Palchoudhuri sits with the weavers from Kalna, or the narrative scroll *patuas* from Midnapore, she communes in a down-to-earth fashion, speaking the *lingua franca* of revival of their skill, quality and design development. When she is in Paris, her language is fluent French, which sees her in sync with the cognoscenti of craft revitalisation. When she takes a break at her home in Gayabari, she is one with nature. And when she entertains in her Kolkata family house, rich in tradition, collectibles and rare books, where the crème de la crème descend, it is with the elegance of someone who has been a doyen of art and craft facilitation, an author of many significant publications on craft, curator of exhibitions across the globe, advisor and president emeritus of the Crafts Council of Bengal, and a vibrant presence in the renaissance of craft forms for many, many decades."

Her interest in the arts was triggered in her five years of study at the Government College of Arts and Crafts, where she was taught by eminent artists and led to her deep involvement in textile design. She set up her own block printing unit using traditional Indian designs for urban markets. Her claim to fame at that time was the designing and printing of the first Air India airhostess' sarees. She was also a part of a team of six designers who designed leatherware for India, taking it to Rome and gaining the appreciation of Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida who called it 'molto bene'.

Rita Bhimani goes on to describe her advent into the preservation and revival of Indian handicrafts. "The journey with the Crafts Council of West Bengal began in 1976, after the passing of Ruby's mother-in-law, the well-known parliamentarian and founder-member, Ila Palchoudhuri. She donated their family land to settle migrant weavers in Phulia and Shantipur. Another big influence was Prabhas Sen, visionary, sculptor and technologist, who contributed to the revival of craft and textiles of the Eastern and North-eastern regions. But it was Ruby whose thirst for firsthand knowledge of the crafts of Eastern India propelled her to travel to the rural areas to meet craftspeople in their homes and study their way of life to understand how they combined utility with aesthetics in their creative repertoire. There could, of course, have been no better mentor or inspirational force than Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, founder of the World Crafts Council, The Crafts Council of India and all the regional councils."

Over the years she was instrumental in the revival of many craft forms like kantha embroidery, sholapith and dhokra works. Her deep engagement with craft led to the revival of fine count muslin and introduction of new technology in Jamdani weaving in West Bengal. Her interest in Indian crafts took her to study collections in British museums and researching at Yale University. She was conferred with the Lifetime Achievement Award by CIMA Gallery in December 2023. Marking her as a woman of substance and stature, Bhimani concludes, "Who reiterates that it is not just expositions that impact, but also the idea of income generation, the uplifting of quality, the marketability of the crafts designed, upping skill sets and achieving the goal of excellence in the use of crafts in our daily lives as a measure of building a sustainable society."

CHAPTER 4

Tools and Technology: Transformative Techniques

4 Transformative Techniques: Tools and Technology

One of the many ways in which man's creativity found expression since antiquity, was craft-making, which was mostly utilitarian in nature and the techniques of the craft were dependent on the resources available in that period of time. With the advent of modern technology, craft-making skills have been enhanced through the use of tools and technology that are significantly transforming traditional craftsmanship, offering artisans innovative tools that enhance creativity, precision, and sustainability. These technological advancements not only elevate the capabilities of artisans but also guarantee the preservation and evolution of traditional crafts in the modern world. The CCI has been engaged in ensuring that modern technology reaches the artisan when the need arises, enabling them to preserve and sustain their craft. Gita Ram, Chairperson CCI, adds, "Very often innovations in tools that artisans use, do not come to their notice. Training them in using these tools has to be planned whether it is high-tech or indigenous forgotten techniques. CCI has engaged in disseminating this knowledge to artisan groups. A significant feature of advanced tools is their ability to reduce drudgery."

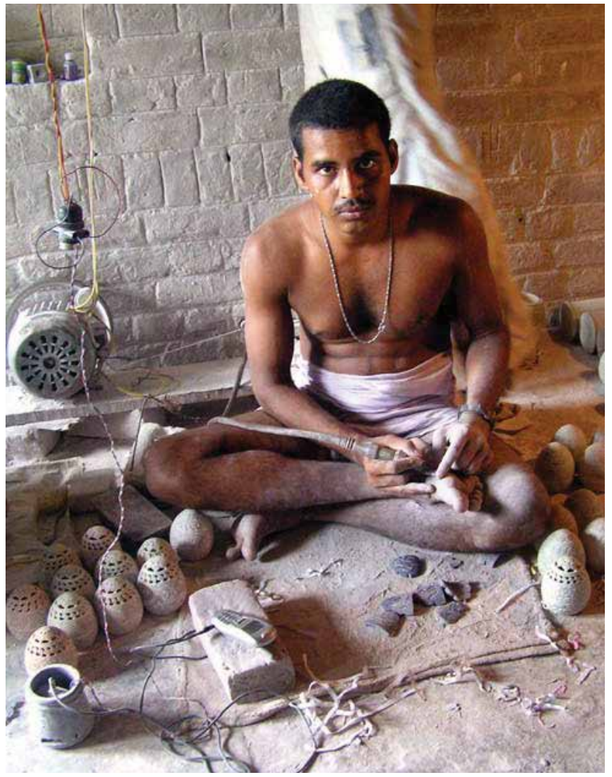
The Crafts Council of India

CCI has worked over the years to provide artisans with access to knowledge and technology that could enhance skills, product quality and market opportunity.

The CCI has devised a strategy to rejuvenate crafts by adapting it to produce new products with new designs to new markets, keeping in mind the traditional usage and sentiments of the craftsmen. It has introduced new tools and technology in stone cutting, wood finishing and dyeing. CCI's work with stone craftspeople has been the longest involvement in introducing them to new tools and technology.

Stone Technology

Alongside the revival of stone craft through timely intervention, CCI also commissioned a documentation of utility stone crafts of India in 1992. This was compiled and completed in 1994 by Neelam Chhiber, industrial designer and founder of Industree. It was printed in two volumes in 2003. CCI decided to take it a step further to upgrade stone carvers in different parts of the country in tools and technology. Hamish Horsely, widely known for his public stone works in London, provided the technical help in the series of workshops that were organised between 2004 and 2008.



Using mechanical tools in Agra

Power tools were introduced to make the initial breaking up of uneven and large stones into smaller and more manageable sizes. This made it easier and less physically demanding for the stone carver and hugely reduced the drudgery of the work. Although using the air hammer was complex, it was demonstrated as an effective way to cut large boulders. Most participants were enthusiastic and, with guidance from Hamish Horsley, quickly learned to use the tools proficiently.

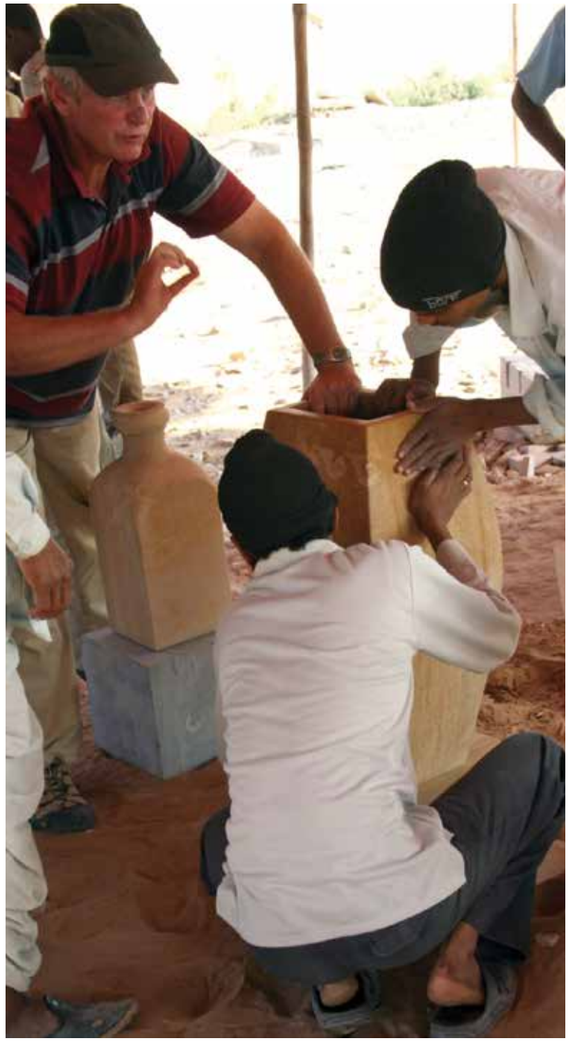
However, the carvers from Odisha were reluctant, fearing that the use of such tools

Participants at a workshop in Agra

Working in Bagru

Hamish Horsely explaining how the tool works

Turning stone



Workshops at Bagru and Chennai

Clockwise from top left: Using an air hammer to cut the stone; Chennai workshop; participants at the Bhubaneswar workshop; and a product from the Auroville workshop

Clockwise from top left: Auroville workshop participants; At the Puri workshop; A bench from the Bhubaneswar workshop; and granite pumpkins from Mamallapuram

Rajshekar was chosen as one from twelve Commonweath countries to make a gargoyle for the St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle

would dilute the authenticity of their craft. Interestingly, during a later visit to Raghurajpur, some of these carvers were seen using buffing machines, suggesting a gradual shift in attitudes.

Rajshekhar of Bangalore and Narendra Verma of Agra were two craftsmen who benefitted greatly from CCI's intervention. They attended the first StoneTech workshop in 2004 and were found to be highly skilled. CCI decided to mentor the young craftsmen and sponsored them for training at the City and Guilds of London Art School. They were sent for a six-week workshop with help from the British Council. From that point onwards, both have been very successful in their professions. Both are actively involved in all CCI stone workshops taking on many of the responsibilities as trainers and resource persons. Between 2004 and 2008, CCI conducted seven intensive workshops in different parts of India, training the craftsmen in the use of power tools, and organised two fairs.

Rajshekar working on his gargoyle for the chapel at Windsor Castle

Rajshekar was selected as part of the team from the Commonwealth countries, for the restoration work at the St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle. He also worked on an installation of a gargoyle in the Chapel roof. Back in India, he trains sculptors from London at his own workshop in the Indian style of carving. In 2006, he was invited by an NGO in Tiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu) on recommendation from the office of the DC (H), as the trainer for a similar workshop in their region. Narendra has set up a successful group of artisans in Agra which undertakes group production, working on orders and drawing design development. A total of about 300 stone carvers from Chennai, Agra, Bangalore, Bhubaneswar, Bagru, Puri and Auroville have been trained by CCI in the use of advanced technology for stone-cutting.

Clockwise from top: Wood carving in progress; Visalakshi Ramaswamy at a workshop; and a gilded product

Wood Finishes

Wood finishing technology plays a critical role in enhancing the appearance, durability, and value of wood handicrafts. It involves various techniques and products applied to the surface of wood items to protect them and bring out their natural beauty. Wood finishing contributes to the aesthetic appeal by enhancing grain, color, and texture. It increases durability and protects against moisture, pests, and wear. Well-finished products have higher market value and command higher prices and export appeal. It allows for creativity in design and personalisation. There are many modern technologies that are used in heritage handicrafts.

Some of them are sanding and polishing, shellac and French polish, use of natural oils, polyurethane coating, UV curable finishes, water-based finishes and powder coating. Many decorative and finishing techniques are used along with nanotechnology. Several eco-friendly and sustainable trends are also employed in wood finishing,

Having worked with wood carvers, CCI chose to focus on finishing techniques to bring them on par with international market standards. Wood carvers from Odisha and Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu have been trained by Bill McCombe, an international expert in finishing techniques (including gold and silver gilding methods). These workshops have been followed up with orders for exhibitions and for the Kamala outlet in Delhi.

Jagada Rajappa conducting a dye workshop

Dyes and Dyeing Techniques for Natural Fibres

Indian artisans have had a rich tradition of using a vast array of natural and synthetic dyes especially in textiles. There is a large variety in regional dyeing techniques too. Some of these methods are deeply rooted, often being passed down through generations of artisans. CCI undertook to disseminate knowledge on dyeing techniques to artisans, especially those working with palm leaf. In the early 1990s, palmyra palm leaf baskets were in great demand especially for export. However, in Tamil Nadu the high level of humidity would make the creamy white palm suddenly turn an unsightly yellow, making it difficult for artisans to work on larger orders. Some

of these artisans looked to CCI for assistance. CCI organised a few dye workshops for palm leaf basket-makers. With the use of the dye, Mallika, an artisan from Tiruvannamalai was very excited to see the palm leaf come to life with vibrant colours.

From individual sessions to networking between groups, to full-fledged workshops, CCI has been involved informally and formally in all forms and at every stage of the process of imparting knowledge on dyeing. CCI has held a series of dye workshops for basket makers using palm leaf and screw pine. The first one was held in collaboration with OXFAM India for the groups they were working with in 1989. Another workshop on dyeing techniques for natural fibres

Jagada Rajappa – Master Dyer

Jagada Rajappa is a key figure in preserving natural dye traditions in India and an expert consultant on natural dyes. Her interest in textiles and dyeing began in the 1960s when she held exhibiitons in Mumbai. She travelled across States and learnt weaving techniques and natural dye traditons and started conducting workshops and supporting artisans in marketing their products. She also built international connections and studied layering techniques in natural dyes. She has been dedicated to the art of traditional indigo dyeing since 1984.

She has been collaborating with weavers, printers and dyers from India, as well as internationally, emphasising the use of natural dyes along with imparting sustainable techniques for its use. Her extensive work done with craftspeople on the revival, resurgence and knowledge transfer of traditional indigo dyeing and its adaptations on various textile techniques, along with the ongoing training has helped bring indigo production continuously into mainstream life.

She can be regarded as a champion of sustainability, a mentor and educator, and a builder of bridges between cultures.

Kothuru project

conducted at Kalakshetra Chennai in 1996 was a highpoint, which was followed by another workshop in 2004. An international event, titled International Natural Dye Symposium, held in Hyderabad in 2006, organised in collaboration with the Government of India and UNESCO, attracted 700 participants from every continent. The aim of these workshops had been to widen the repertoire of the artisans in textiles like cotton, silk and wool by expanding their colour palette.

Kothuru Project – CCAP

This project was started in 2023 by organising a health camp with help from resource persons Jagada Rajappa and Satish P Nagendra. In 2024, initially the transfer of knowledge in natural dyeing and tie & dye techniques took place for a selected group of weavers and dyers in two phases with Jagada assisting them, after which, Satish took over. Getting them to weave cotton, took some convincing but they quickly adapted to it with Satish handholding them every step of the way.

Natural dyes

Five members are in the training process wherein Satish is finetuning their skill, giving them saree designs with various difficulty levels. Experts in ikat too are consulted in honing their skills. The results look very promising. This is a long-drawn out programme where they not only learn tie & dye skills, but will also be trained in design development, drawing inspiration from their surroundings.

Introduction of Natural Dyes – CCA

The CCI assisted with the introduction of natural dyes and encouraged artisans to get into this medium. The Crafts Council of Assam also helped in extracting traditional designs which

were languishing. Soon artisans started using natural dyes on Eri, cotton and Nooni silk. The natural dye sarees, mekhla chadar, shawls, etc, captured the attention of discerning buyers from all over the country. The Council has also worked closely with NEDFI (a government organisation) on popularising the use of water hyacinth.

Introduction and Manufacture of Natural Dyes - CCT

The Crafts Council of Telangana had encouraged the artisans of Kondapalli and Ettikopaka toys, and the leather puppeteers to make their own dyes. Natural dye workshops were conducted for craftspeople and weavers periodically. These craftspeople were successful in making their own dyes. The Council is also helping craftsmen in the villages of Nirmal and Cheriyal, which are located in Telangana. The Nirmal craftsmen who also make toys and plates, and the Cheriyal artisans who specialise in unique scroll paintings (holding GI tag status) depicting rural scenes, did not adapt to using natural dyes. This was due to the non-availability and

Left: Kondapalli toys Right: Leather puppet

Dhokra work

difficulties in procurement of the dyes. The Council is exploring the possibility of setting up natural dye units where the craftsmen can procure dyes and also use the facility for dyeing. They have already established a unit for dhurrie weavers in Warangal with Government assistance.

Introduction of Technology to Lost-Wax Metal Casting (Dhokra Metalcraft) – CCWB

Ruby Palchoudhuri, the doyen of craft revival, was asked if products could be made more appealing to contemporary markets with the introduction of technology. She cited a few instances where technology helped revive and preserve the craft.

She goes on to describe the process by which the lost art of wax metal casting was revived through the use of technology. Several dhokra workshops for design and development were organised, which provided technical development, quality control and introduction of various tools and kits. Using the right raw materials, new tools and a press filled with bees' wax which was held between the thighs, fine wax coils were extracted to cover the clay model. After firing, these products had a well-finished look. CCWB introduced the metal casters and their creations to domestic and foreign markets.

It is fitting to end with the words of Palchoudhuri, to encapsulate the enormous benefits gained by the craft sector to open itself to innovative technological methods in the production of the craft. "Contemporary development is the order of the day."

CHAPTER 5

Education and Training: Crafting Futures

5 Education and Training: Crafting Futures

The transmission of knowledge from the artisans to their children is a critical part of the preservation of the craft form. The family's skills must be preserved and retained and transferred to the next generation. With the advent of modern times, it has become imperative to expose the children to some form of mainstream education, to further language and literacy. Economic self-sufficiency beyond the scope of their hereditary trade ensures independent livelihoods, a better appreciation of their craft and the development of innovative ideas and marketing skills. The survival of the craft for future generations is a positive outcome of providing school education to the children of artisans. Ashoke Chatterjee emphasises that craft education is a challenge in the national context and in each sector. He states, "This important segment would need to embrace education at several levels including schools, higher education, artisan communities and intervention like Kala Raksha, Somaiya Kala Vidya, Handloom School, and IICD."

Gita Ram, Chairperson CCI, writing for the Golden Jubilee newsletter voices concern for the future of handicrafts. "We worry about the plight of the next generation of artisans. And will there be a next generation? Artisans do not want their children to face the same difficulties they have faced. The current generation of artisans and weavers have ensured that their children get a good education and

'Craft in School' programme

move away from the craft. There may not be a next generation of artisans." She goes on to add, "Our mandate is to ensure the right sort of education for GenZ as they have the Right to Education. This would entail inputs about the craft, raw materials, business practices, soft skills, like computers and working knowledge of English." In keeping with this ideology, the CCI has come up with innovative ideas to ensure that the children of artisans have access to schools and learning. Their 'Educate to Sustain' programme has benefitted large numbers of children of artisans.

Skill development and training are essential factors to advance knowledge and skill upgradation. Design workshops promote awareness and enhance existing skills. The blending of formal education with artisan craft training, with after-school programmes is bound to be greatly advantageous to the children of artisans. The CCI strives to blend formal schooling with artisan craft training for the children of craftsmen.

In the world of the artisan, skills being passed on from generation to generation, is a measure of survival for the family, as well as of the retention and propagation of craft skills. If a generation is skipped, and the skills are not practised and handed down, they are in danger of being lost. Children of artisans, vital to the perpetuation of craft heritage, are often forced to exit from the craft due to economic uncertainties. Giving these children the option of a fulfilling career within their tradition depends on a sustained demand for handmade products of quality. Promoting this demand is CCI's central purpose, within which the Council has initiated the 'Educate to Sustain' scheme.

Learn while you Earn – Ari Embroidery Schools at Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu

Ari embroidery school in Sriperumbudur

School buildings were funded by the Government of Japan

Ari embroidery is a craft tradition practised since the 1940s by 60 per cent of the villagers around Sriperumbudur near Chennai, as a basic means of livelihood. The embroiderers belong to marginalised socio-economic communities. After an initial survey in 1995, CCI found that many children were denied the basic right of education as they were employed in Ari worksheds literally as 'bonded' workers. Most of the children of the area had dropped out of school due to economic reasons. They worked either as agricultural labour or joined Ari units as apprentices where they earned meagre daily wages.

After a detailed study in 1996, the Council established thirteen non-formal education cum Ari embroidery training centres in villages around Sriperumbudur. Each school enrolled up to fifteen students. The school buildings were funded by assistance from the Government of Japan.

While the principal aim of CCI's programme was to equip the young students with basic education and specialised skills in Ari embroidery, a non-formal education syllabus was framed by the State Resource Centre of Tamil Nadu. The programme was structured for a period of three years catering to children

between the age groups of 7 to 14 who were paid a scholarship of Rs 100 to Rs 500 per month, based on age.

On completion of three years, the student was on par with a fifth-grade student of mainstream schools. Children from CCI's Child Literacy in Craft Centres were encouraged to join mainstream schools once they had left the portals of CCI schools.

By 2000, the schools had become a great success with both students and the local communities. However in 2000, the Government of Tamil Nadu made primary and elementary education compulsory to ensure better literacy rates. Children were forced to move to mainstream schools. Many refused or dropped out, and were back on the streets.

Between 2002 and 2005, CCI made every effort to use the space and buildings of the schools for other meaningful and useful community activities. In 2006, CCI handed over the buildings to the Tamil Nadu Government for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme.

Educate to Sustain (EtoS) – CCI Scholarship Programme

Wood workshop in progress

The purpose of CCI Scholarships/Stipends is to create opportunities for artisans and their children to build capacities relevant to their needs and those of a changing market through education, training and exposure. While clearly CCI seeks to encourage GenZ to prosper within the traditions of its forbears, the Council also works to provide the children of artisans with the same options of growth and opportunity which are, or should be, the right of all children. Through this approach, continuing with the traditions/profession of the family, can become a conscious choice for a young person rather than a compulsion of

caste or community and generate pride in their craftsmanship. CCI works in three clusters—West Bengal, Odisha and Tamil Nadu. Each cluster has approximately 70-80 children from Classes 6 -12.

Special attention has been paid to the girl child and the women artisans, as well as to children from other communities who have been exposed to the craft, and have a demonstrated aptitude for the craft while not belonging to hereditary families. The downside of the programme is the inability to keep track or trace the students, as the boys tend to take up mainstream jobs and the girls get married and move away. Only a small percentage of them have stayed with the craft. Over the years, CCI has been involved with the Ari embroidery craftspeople, the Pattamadai and the Veeranavaallur mat weavers and introduced the EtoS programme to these communiites.

Education and Training of Pattamadai Weavers

The Government of Tamil Nadu and The Crafts Council of India joined forces to impart training to the women mat weavers of Pattamadai at Tirunelveli. The 100 hours skilling programme designed by the Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation (TNSDC) under SANKALP (Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Programme), funded by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and World Bank, and implemented by CCI, involved training in financial literacy, digital literacy, design interventions, and tailoring. The training was given to a group of forty women from the Lebbai community who were already familiar with Pattamadai mat weaving. A film

Certified by the Handicrafts Office as competent weavers

Left: Class in full swing
Right: Learning to splice the grass

was made and it captures the essence of the workshop and showcases the products that were developed.

CCI also began the 'Educate to Sustain' programme for artisans' children at Pattamadai, besides working with the women weavers, for over ten years. The programme aims to ensure a value-added education for the children. Apart from the modest stipend they are paid for completing their schooling, weekend classes are held in their family craft to ensure they retain their traditional skills. The products developed by the children were displayed at the craft bazaars. In November 2019, CCI had conducted a week-long dye workshop to introduce a new colour palette. During the pandemic years, CCI managed to conduct a skill-building workshop at Pattamadai.

Education and Training of Veeravanallur Mat Weavers

CCI started an intensive training curriculum at Veeravanallur, a neighbouring village of Pattamadai. The training began with splicing and dyeing, and then progressed to weaving. Initially, simple weaving techniques were taught. CCI rented a space for them and put together 10 looms and constructed a toilet.

Training on the loom

Their children too wanted to learn weaving when they heard that GenZ of Pattamadai had become proficient in weaving. A focused contact programme was organised for 25 children of the weavers in May 2013. It was a four-week summer weaving camp on sample looms with simple designs created by a textile designer. A room was provided with three computers which CCI had received as a donation. The children had access to the room every weekend. Master weaver Khadija Bivi has been diligently teaching them.

An education fair called Nokkam was organised. Schools from the hinterland set up booths, providing guidance on the courses offered. Resource persons from Chennai updated them on potential career choices. In CCI's attempts to induce the next generation to stay with the craft, it has become clear that markets had

to be improved for the existing artisans, in order for the children to take pride in their parents' work.

Kamaladevi Puraskar – A Scheme of Scholarship Awards to Young Crafts-people – DCC

Kamaladevi Puraskar

Instituted in 1986 by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and now named Kamaladevi Puraskar, it is awarded to children between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one who are skilled in crafts. The aim is to encourage them to continue to practise their traditional craft form and eventually take it up as a means of livelihood. The award consists of a citation along with a monthly scholarship for a period of one and a half years.

Up till now, over 210 children have benefitted from these awards. The children, from mixed backgrounds, rural and urban, have in most cases continued learning their craft along with attending school regularly. Seven children have gone on to receive the National Master Craftsman Award for excellence in their craft.

'Eye for Craft' workshop in progress

Eye for Craft Workshops

One of Delhi Crafts Council's goals is to take crafts to the youth of the country and organise workshops and demonstrations for students. The purpose behind this initiative was to familiarise children with indigenous crafts, help them understand the effort, skill and time required to create products and inspire them to passionately support craftspeople and their craft. DCC started this programme in 2018 and have conducted workshops in over 20 schools.

Skilling – CCG

The Craft Council of Gujarat, in collaboration with the Weavers' Service Centre, is proud to share highlights from a series of recent initiatives aimed at reviving traditional handloom practices and also empowering artisans, particularly women, through skill development and knowledge sharing.

Training of weavers in Gujarat

Single ikat patola weaving

Single Ikat Patola weaving

Twenty-three women, enrolled in a training workshop for single ikat patola weaving. Their eagerness to reconnect with their cultural roots inspired this initiative. The programme emphasised the importance of traditional weaving as a means of livelihood, cultural preservation, and long-term community empowerment.

The participants were also introduced to key government schemes supporting handloom weavers, including the Weaver MUDRA Scheme, National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP), and other welfare initiatives offering financial aid, insurance, pensions, and recognition such as the Sant Kabir Award and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Award.

A second training programme under the Government of India's Samarth scheme was conducted in Ridrol, where 20 women completed a 45-day skill development

Inspiring Stories – Alfon Tudu

Alfon Tudu was one of the earliest beneficiaries of CCI's EtoS programme from West Bengal. At an early meeting with students at Kolkata, Alfon was observed to be preoccupied with something while the others were talking. By the end of the meeting, he produced a small basket which he had woven deftly while there! Alfon takes after his father Bidan Tudu who is a fine bamboo artisan. Alfon continued to be in the programme till he passed out of school. CCI met up with him in January 2023 in Kolkata. He had completed the Teachers Training Course and hopes to be able to go back to his own school to teach.

CCTN - education for artisans' children

workshop in handloom weaving. All participants successfully passed the training and will soon receive certification—marking a step toward self-sufficiency and rural empowerment.

Training by CCTN

Hands-on training enhances skills and product quality, with a special focus on empowering the artisans. CCTN has enabled the training of many artisans and economically weaker sections to sustain their livelihood. Some of the fields include garland-making and craft classes for schools. CCTN has held craft classes for girl children in Classes 6-9 for a corporation school at Peelamedu, Coimbatore.

They have also conducted classes at the school for the hearing-impaired at the Venkatalakshmi Matriculation Schools. They also organised collage classes for school children.

CCT has instituted scholarships called Lalitha Praveenyam for students who are willing to learn their ancestral craft and weaves. Naipunya Shikshana is a programme with demonstrations and learning schedules which are developed to create an awareness of crafts and weaves in the school curriculum.

Formal education aligned with knowledge of their hereditary trade can equip the children of artisans with broader career options, evolution of their craft for modern society, afford them social mobility and act as a springboard for a more sustainable future.

Inspiring Stories – Gourav Malarkar

Gourav Malarkar is an eighth-generation traditional sholapith artisan from the South Dinajpur district of West Bengal. Sholapith crafts are used widely in West Bengal as headgear in weddings and as ornate decorations during Durga Puja. Sholapith is a white, spongy plant material derived from the white portion of stems of 'shola' (Aeschynomene species) plants which grow in marshy areas during the monsoon season. It is also known as herbal ivory.

Through the CCI's EtoS programme, Gourav Malarkar completed his BA graduation. He also continues with his sholapith craft-making. His sholapith craft skills preserve a treasured craft and also deftly adapt to contemporary tastes, so that this ancient art form continues to attract future generations. His artistic vision and skill ensure the versatility and enduring beauty of sholapith handicrafts.

CHAPTER 6

Community Building: Weaving Stronger Threads

6 Community Building: Weaving Stronger Threads

Since ancient times, Indian artisans lived and worked in craft-specific groups in villages and towns. They were self-governing bodies and had collective power and managed all aspects of creating a craft form. They formed structured guilds and were able to shape the economic, social and political landscape. Over time with the onset of urbanisation and industrialisation, many of these well-managed clusters began to disintegrate, sometimes leading to the disappearance of the craft skills. Government organisations and NGOs had to step in and take measures to reverse the trend by building up the community and creating clusters of artisans. This required skill upgradation, self-reliance, market linkages and shared infrastructure. Government schemes supplemented by NGO expertise impacted local-level implementation. Empowering women's groups also led to the formation of strong cluster models across India.

In the 1980s, before words like 'cluster' development came to be used, community building became important. It was crucial and advantageous that artisans came together to work as a group rather than as individuals. Sensitising the artisan community became increasingly necessary. Some of the best practices for cluster development are to form collectives, to upgrade skill, design and technology, to offer common facilities and infrastructure, market access, branding, and sustainability. The other important features include facilitating raw material banks and logistics support.

CCI has been involved over the years in focusing on painstakingly resurrecting disappearing crafts. It believes in empowering dwindling communities of artisans so that they collectively work together to sustain their craft. The booklet *Crafts Council of India 1977-2007*, explicitly states the reason for the disappearance of the crafts skills of artisan communities. "The past few decades have seen a widening disconnect between the craftsperson and his work dictated by changing times and needs, blurring of caste-based professions, the pulls of modernity and above all by economic compulsions." Against this dismal scenario, the book, with a note of optimism goes on to enumerate the many success stories it has had due to empowering the artisan community as a whole. The Crafts Council of India's thrust in sustaining such crafts and empowering marginalised craft communities has led to committed meaningful interventions resulting in revival of many crafts. CCI has worked with empowering the communities of these revived crafts and they have benefitted enormously. There are many striking examples of communities prospering due to a revived craft.

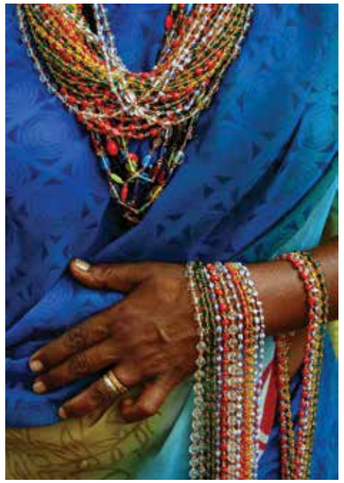
Narikuravas/Gypsies – Beadmakers

One of the earliest interventions by CCI was in 1984 with the Narikuravas—the nomadic gypsies who specialised in beadwork. A Crafts Bazaar was organised for little-known crafts of Tamil Nadu. CCI invited the gypsies who sold beads on pavements to participate in the bazaar and brought them together in the exhibition

Definition of a Craft

In keeping with the Government's Eighth Plan definition of a craft which was loosely based on CCI's recommendation, the following definition was arrived at.

"Handcraft/Handloom describes a craft or occupation requiring skilled use of hands. Handicrafts are items made by hand, often using simple tools. These items can be functional, artistic, and/or traditional in nature...Skill of worker and use of hand are two prerequisites for handicraft. It must be predominantly made by hand..."



Narikuravas

venue, to sell their products. They attracted large crowds and their beads were much sought after and were most sought after by customers wanting customised necklaces. Soon a Gypsy Bead Centre was formed. In subsequent years, many gypsies were trained and they were able to export their products, as mentioned by Gnanasundari, one of the leaders of the group.

Kalamkari Artisans

CCI meeting the artisans in Srikalahasti, 1988

As early as 1988, CCI intervened with the kalamkari artisans in Srikalahasti, Andhra Pradesh. On conducting a survey, it was found that the kalamkari artisans were a heterogenous group of craftspeople working in isolation and involved in erratic undercutting of prices. The quality of work had also dipped to such an extent that mythological characters began to resemble popular film stars! The intervention was carefully planned and implemented with another reputed NGO, Dastkar Andhra. A community-building exercise was taken up

Discussions with the artisans in Srikalahasti, 1988

jointly. Sponsored by the Andhra Pradesh Handicrafts Development Corporation, a Sangam was formed with 35 members. Pricing and quality control issues were taken up. Several Sangams came up and they were allowed to settle the community dynamics over time. Technical issues were addressed and several exhibitions were held in different cities to secure orders.

CCI's active involvement at the village level stopped in 1991. However, active assistance in marketing and guiding the craftspeople in the kind of products to be produced, continues till date. Some craftspeople have seen their role in the larger perspective of crafts as well. A federation of 300 artists has been formed with access to Andhra Pradesh Government funding.

Self-Help Groups

Mat weaving in Pattamadai was on the decline due to migration of artisans to more lucrative businesses. The Crafts Council of India decided to use a drought relief opportunity in Pattamadai to create sustainable livelihoods for the artisans and embarked upon a comprehensive, interactive programme of intervention to build a community of mat weavers. In 1987, after several years of severe drought in Tamil Nadu, the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) DC(H) decided to provide drought relief to artisans. A committee which included CCI members toured all the districts extensively and visited practically all the craftspeople, the Pattamadai Cooperative Society being one of them. CCI placed initial orders with the Society, which were later passed on to Peer Mohammed, the leading trader in Pattamadai.

Workshops were held to familiarise craftspeople with contemporary designs and marketing techniques. In recent times, in addition to the old cooperative society in the village and the traders, there are other small groups who are in direct touch with the markets. This gives the weavers more than one option of buyers, thereby giving them better bargaining power. The skill of making superfine mats may

Left: Dyed grass
Right: Kawa Beebi with a finished mat

have skipped a generation, but an entire industry around mat weaving, including raw material suppliers, splicers and weavers exists today due to bringing the community together.

In 2021, CCI organised a three-month financial literacy and digital empowerment programme for 40 women. It was a heterogenous group, all from the same village but who had never interacted with each other. CCI had appointed Latha Tirumal as a coordinator in Tirunelveli. Following the programme all the weavers logged into a zoom call and stated that they wanted to start a weaving business. They had formed four Self-help Groups and each group opened bank accounts, and came to an agreement on quality control, costing, etc.

Top left: A session in financial literacy and top right: Digital empowerment
Right: Completed products

They received orders from the Kamala store in Chennai, from other Craft Councils, and from iTokri, an online store. CCI helped with the bulk buying of raw material and gave them working capital loans which they paid back on a monthly basis. CCI continues to support them with sourcing of raw materials and

helping them improve the quality of their work. Thus, a community of weavers was resurrected and the craft of mat weaving preserved.

Kalchatty and Other Clusters (CCTN)

Kalchatty bowls

It was the Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu which turned its attention to this languishing craft and started handholding a cluster. CCTN also formed clusters in Avinashi and Uthukuli for the *olai* (palm leaf) crafts, in Thiru Murugan-poondi and Sathymangalam for stonecraft, and in Bhavani for *jamakalams* (dhurries)

With the help of the Salem DCH, the CCTN organised a suitable workplace for the Kurumbha community in Kalangal. They provided the *kambili* (blanket) weavers with better looms to refine their weaving methods. It had its drawbacks as they were a nomadic community. They were helped to reassign their blankets as dhurries for alternate markets.

Banjara Community of Women (CCAP/CCT)

Banjara cowrie shell-embedded embroidery done by the nomadic women of the Telengana region can be traced back to their Rajasthani origins. Needlework is an integral part of the community, a personal statement of identity and a cherished heritage to be passed on from mother to daughter. However, in the past few decades the women have moved away from embroidery traditions, due to illiteracy and extreme poverty and have sought work as daily labourers, resulting in a steady decline of their craft.

In 1991, CCAP chose Yellama Thanda, a Banjara village 70 km from Hyderabad to begin a training scheme with stipend included, for fifteen women. Better raw material and embroidery threads, coupled with design inputs within the traditional format to suit urban clients led to a sea change in the look of Banjara embroidery.

Working with the Banjara women at Yellama Thanda, 1991

When CCT was formed, they realised the need to revitalise the craft of Banjara embroidery with sustained training for the women, design and development efforts and aggressive marketing. The product range was diversified to include bags, blouse pieces, dupattas, Banjara skirts and blouses, gift items, etc. The women have an assured income and are eligible for loans to start small businesses. The village of Yellama Thanda shows visible signs of progress. The scheme has expanded to include more women and the clusters of Loyalpalli and Santham Thanda have also been developed. A Federation of Self-Help Groups has been formed, facilitated by CCT.

The Kantha Centre (CCWB)

Kantha embroidery of Bengal is a perfect blend of thrift and beauty, both functional and aesthetic. It was made out of well-worn sarees and dhotis and turned into useful artifacts like quilts and gifts. Often mothers and daughters worked on the same piece and handed it down to be worked on by the next generation. The kantha lost its importance and began to decline with the coming of the Industrial Revolution and a preference for woollen blankets and printed textiles.

In 1990, the Crafts Council of West Bengal started the Kamala Devi Kantha Centre where the women were trained in the tiny running stitches of kantha. The objectives of the Kantha Centre were to organise workshops in the museum premises to achieve the required results. Artists were engaged to draw designs to maintain standards of quality and precision and constant effort was made with

Above and the following page: At the Kantha Centre women are trained in the tiny running stitches of kantha

supervision at every step. Designers were employed to work with the craftswomen to diversify the products. Various exhibitions were held in India raising awareness of the kantha.

Entrepreneurship development programmes held at the grassroots level helped to develop quality and create employment. Dealers came to the Kantha Centre and it was apparent that the remuneration was very low so they were asked to form guilds in order to stand together and demand higher rates. Several women and their families also started doing business on their own in which all members were involved. The community of kantha workers thus benefitted greatly when they came together in a centre to further their craft form. A great deal of care is taken

in Crafts Council of West Bengal's Kantha Centre to ensure that only original kantha motifs and stitches are used in the new products and it is all handmade. Working together for the Kantha Centre has brought a visible change in the lives of many women.

Dhokra Craft, Dhariapur, West Bengal

A group of young artisans in Dhariapur approached CCI for design inputs. CCI held several workshops with Dhokra masters with guidance from a designer. The artisans were mentored in the elaborate art of making the product by creating a clay mould and pouring molten metal into it. Once it takes shape the clay covering is broken to reveal the metal craft inside. These craft pieces do not find a market outside of Bengal though community clusters improved the designs and the marketability.

Ikat Weaving Cluster (CCAP)

The Kothuru project was put in place to develop the ikat weaving cluster, where the weavers are eking out a living and unable to sustain themselves

The various steps in the Dhokra craft production

Tied yarn for ikat weaving

or their craft. CCAP is planning to build an ecosystem for this community where more people of this village could get involved in collaboration with other agencies to play a complementary role in forming a cluster. An eco-system has to be created that celebrates not only the ikat weavers, dyers and ancillary workers, but also their culture and environment.

S Ranjana, Chairperson CCAP, shares her plans for developing the community. "CCAP is committed to stand by them in strengthening the existing society or creating a new one keeping systems in place. Members of the society will be the owners with one or two outsiders for smooth conduct of business. A working shed, and place to stay is also in the pipeline. This is work in progress that will involve interns, experts, designers, documentation, marketing, outsourcing, workshops, excursions for students, guides, hospitality, tree plantation, natural dye hub and the list goes on…" A concerted effort as defined by CCAP would go a long way in conserving a beautiful craft form like ikat.

Physically-Challenged Community – CCA

CCA is attempting to teach simple crafts and weaving to the physically-challenged craftspeople of Dibrugarh district. Their efforts have resulted in the growth of bright young entrepreneurs guiding the weavers and artisans with modern, market-friendly products.

Kinhal Craft (CCK)

In Kinhal village where craft products are made, nearly every household is involved in this traditional craft. Historically, men have done the carving, while women have been responsible for the painting. However, in recent years, women have started working independently, creating and supplying their products directly to the Crafts Council of Karnataka.

This shift is empowering women in the community, allowing them to take on more entrepreneurial roles. From June 2025, the Crafts Council of Karnataka

Kinhal craft

has planned to host a design development programme, with particular focus on women participants, further nurturing their skills and providing opportunities for growth in the craft industry. This community intervention has resulted in the craft evolving and supporting local artisans, especially women, in becoming more independent and self-sustaining.

Community building has played a crucial role in sustaining traditional craft practices by building networks where there is a collective promotion of the craft. It is not dependent any more on individual skill but is a shared effort by a connected community that values and sustains the craft.

The Definition of an Artisan

"Handicrafts are products or goods provided by artisans, working primarily with their hands. The artisan very often uses traditional knowledge and his/her direct manual contribution forms a substantial or distinctive part of the end product. Usually there are minimal or limited inputs from machines. The distinctive nature of handicraft comes from the fact that these goods can be identified with certain traditions or geographies.

An artisan is a person with special hand skills, often handed down traditionally across generations, and often linked to a complex traditional knowledge system encompassing the material, technology and/or design aspects."

CHAPTER 7

Marketing: Enabling Craft Markets

7 Marketing: Enabling Craft Markets

Ruby Palchoudhuri, during an interview for this book, as mentioned earlier, shed light on early export marketing efforts by the Portuguese that played a key role in reviving the Satgaon quilt embroidery—an art form that flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries. This underscores the crucial role of marketing and design adaptation in ensuring the survival of traditional crafts. The colchas or large sized-quilts that were made for export went through many design changes making it a cross-cultural product and also highly marketable. Ruby Palchoudhuri adds, "The products were a great item of export. Each colcha was sold for £1000.The Portuguese had set up warehouses in Saptagram on the banks of the River Ganges. When the course of the river changed, Dutch influence prevailed, which drove the Portuguese away."

One of the biggest challenges an artisan faces is access to the market. CCI's main thrust is providing marketing opportunities for artisans and it has emerged as a major source of marketing expertise, rooted in a sensitive understanding of the past and the changing needs of consumers. CCI has devised structured market interventions in trying to take the artisan up the ladder of quality and design through a certain amount of handholding.

CCI's Strategies for Marketing

In 2004, CCI set clear goals with short-term and long-term plans to enable

effective marketing of artisanal products. One of the first steps was to create an identity for Indian stonecraft in the domestic and international markets by enabling the craftspeople to cope with the changing needs of the market and growing competition. The strategy had the following dimensions:

- Introduce new tools, technology and techniques
- Facilitate credit availability to artisans to invest in new tools
- Create a range of products for craftspeople depending on their individual skill level
- Make cost-effective and internationally competitive products
- Create a team of skilled craftspeople who can be a resource base for further spreading the newly-learnt techniques and technology throughout the country
- Promote the products in existing domestic and international channels
- Create sustainable new market channels (Indian and International)

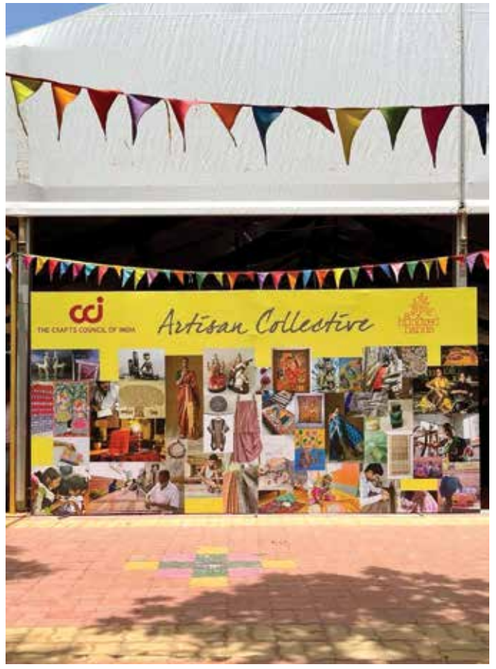
Kamala Chennai

These strategies connected the artisan to the Crafts Bazaars, then the thematic exhibitions, the overseas exhibitions, the UNESCO Award for Excellence, Sante Fe Folk Art Market and finally the Kamala outlets. The affiliated State Councils too have played an enormous role in assisting artisans by organising various exhibitions, bazaars, and haats, where the artisan is able to meet customers and interact with them. Marketing support is provided through training and demonstration of technology, design intervention, product development and diversification. Small format thematic exhibitions and large format craft bazaars are the hallmark of CCI's marketing intervention. One of the main thrusts of CCI was to have the artisans interact directly with the customers, so that they can judge the customers' preferences and also get paid directly by the customers. They also get to interact with other artisans, which gets them access to better basic raw material. Many of CCI's activities have led

to the emergence of the Kamala brand as a model of craft excellence and an effective platform for retailing artisanal work.

E Rajeshwari, Secretary CCI, recapitulates how they reached out to the artisans to enable them to market their products. “I always believed in celebrating and promoting the unique talents of our skilled artisans. In days gone by, the only way one could do that was through bazaars. It all started with small formats and grew to a 100-stall bazaar. But helping 100 odd artisans once a year was not what we were looking to do. Then the Kamala stores happened, where more artisans’ products could reach a wider customer base.”

Crafts Bazaars



Crafts bazaar

Craft bazaars which were started by CCI in 2004, consist of 100-150 artisan stalls showcasing the craft diversity of the country and providing exposure to smaller, unknown artisans. The footfall is large, and it is a much-awaited annual event in Chennai. For the artisans, it is a ‘no cost’ event except their travel and accommodation. Most times when a government grant is available, CCI does not charge a stall rent or a sales commission—just creates a platform and provides all the infrastructure. Some of the artisans are National or State Awardees. Extensive Press coverage in all leading dailies and TV stations is organised, which goes a long way in increasing footfall and sales. A satisfying experience for the artisans and CCI, is the craft demonstrations for school children and the general public.

CCI enumerates the advantages of one-on-one interactions between artisans and customers. Physical bazaars are a great format of marketing handicrafts and handlooms. Artisans’ markets offer a cultural experience that is not available in retail stores. One can talk to the artisans and learn about their craft, their inspiration, and their background.

Crafts bazaar

This interaction provides a deeper understanding between the customer and the artisan. Such markets are living classrooms where visitors can see artisans at work, learn about traditional techniques and even participate in workshops. Children in particular benefit from these experiences developing a respect for handmade goods and a curiosity about cultural traditions.

The bazaars were earlier sponsored by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. There are numerous difficulties in getting financial assistance to conduct the bazaars. Development Commissioner of Handicrafts (DCH), has always had great schemes for artisans. For a long time, CCI was one of the only organisations among its sister partners to avail DCH funding. A lot of paperwork and visits to the DCH office in Chennai and sometimes in Delhi enabled them access funds for the Annual Craft Bazaar. Though it was a scheme where the availing organisation had to put in 25 per cent of the total cost, it was a great scheme simply because everything was free for the artisan. They did not have to pay for their stall, nor stay and food.

But all this changed when applications became online. It became difficult to upload documents. The biggest disadvantage was that CCI was forced to charge a fee for the stalls to help pay for the infrastructure, though nominal, it left a lot of artisans out of the running—especially artisans from the North-East.

Crafts bazaar

Over 100 artisans participate in the Craft Bazaar. Choosing partici-pants for a bazaar was always difficult. All artisans are very talented yet very different. Artisans who have won awards like National and State awards expect to be part of the bazaar and rightfully so. Then there are artisans who are are not awardees but are marketing savvy and reach out. But most importantly, there are artisans who are neither recognised nor savvy. The awardees and marketing savvy artisans manage to participate in many bazaars. So, every year CCI would reserve 20 per cent of the stalls in its bazaar for those artisans who could not manage to participate in other bazaars. This strategy of CCI got a lot of goodwill from the artisans and helped them to access unknown markets.

The wholly volunteer effort at the Craft Bazaars creates an air of optimism and enthusiasm. Artisans' markets offer a cultural experience that is not found in traditional retail stores or Instagram. The artisans are encouraged by people showing interest in their work. What truly makes these bazaars special is the camaraderie among fellow artisans in a shared journey of creativity and determination.

Craftpreneur

Craftpreneur had its initial exhibition in 2014 and is an event that showcased for the first time contemporary arts, crafts and textiles of 20 of India's most promising designers. They were designers who collaborated with artisans,

integrating Indian handcrafted traditions and present them in a contemporary style. The exhibition served to highlight the relevance of craft in modern times. These artisan entrepreneurs, mostly in the younger age group, have a pulse on the market and the craft, and exhibit beautifully-crafted innovative and contemporary products. Some of the craftpreneurs are Aalo, Anantya, Aranya Earthcraft, Avani, Ek Kharkhana and Varam. Community participation, respect for traditional knowledge, conservation of natural resources and fair-trade practices sums up their work, along with adding a contemporary twist and clever designing to their products.

Kamala – The Craft Shop

In 2005, Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) and Delhi Tourism invited CCI to take one of the units in the newly-built Rajiv Gandhi Hastshilp Bhavan near Connaught Place in Delhi for a retail outlet. Thus the Kamala shop in Delhi came into being. For decades, CCI had been working with artisans, assisting them with new designs that would help them sell better. The shop would provide the artisan a yearlong platform to sell. The shop soon became a destination for buying authentic handicrafts and handlooms.

Products on display at a Craftpreneur exhibition

Kamala Kolkata was started a few years later. There were many challenges faced there.

During the pandemic sales took a hit and so in the two years following this, it was decided that it was no longer sustainable. It was then closed. A Kamala shop had been opened in Hyderabad and subsequently closed.

Craft on display at a Craftpreneur exhibition

Craftpreneurs

In 2017, Kamala in Chennai was started. The Chennai shop has been doing reasonably well.

The lesson learnt here is that though Delhi and Chennai shops have many of the same artisans producing for them, the cultural differences of the customers, had to be taken into account and therefore some products are unique to each shop. Together, the two Kamalas sell products regularly, from approximately 2,000 artisans and weavers.

Kamala products have been displayed in stores in Singapore and Tokyo. CCI members believe

that in a world of increasing uniformity, it has been their dream to weave the unique beauty of handcrafts back into everyday lives—to reaffirm the relevance and the viability of the handcrafted object.

Kamala Delhi

Kamala Chennai

Kamala Delhi

International Exhibitions

Sante Fe International Folk Art Market

Santa Fe is the largest international retail market and celebration of folk art in the world. Their mission is 'to create economic opportunities for and with folk artists worldwide who celebrate and preserve folk art traditions'.

It is a two-day event and attracts thousands of visitors and participation of over 150 artisans from over 60 countries. CCI started participating in this fair since 2006. In 2005, CCI as the National Entity of WCC AISBL started organising the UNESCO Award of Excellence (AoE) for Handicrafts in South Asia. Santa Fe Folk Art Market, now the International Folk Art Mart (IFAM), invited AoE-awarded products from WCCAPR to participate in this Market. CCI being the South Asia partner to UNESCO, manages the South Asia section representing work from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives.

Rajeshwari encapsulates the work of CCI in the international fairs, "CCI being a part of WCCAPR, started to take part in international fairs like the International Folk Art Market, in New Mexico, America.

At the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, New Mexico

By showcasing the products of artisans whose products were world class but had no means of showcasing it aboard, CCI made many an artisan entrepreneur, as they were invited by Santa Fe later to exhibit and sell on their own."

Ashoke Chatterjee, who served as Honorary President of CCI for many years, emphasises the importance of international exposure for the artisans, "IFAM-Sante Fe is unique, as it is the only market that gives artisans dignity, status and value."

India Folk Art Market, New York

CCI in association with India Abroad Inc and Indo-American Arts Council organises an annual three-day exhibition in collaboration with the Asia Society in New York.

UNESCO Award of Excellence

UNESCO Award of Excellence was established in 2002 as a Seal of Excellence for handicrafts in recognition of quality craft products that combine excellence of traditional skills, design innovation and aesthetics. The purpose was to raise the quality of work among crafts producers to make them more accessible to international markets. It was first piloted in South-East Asia in 2002-03, in co-operation with ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association (AHPADA). Subsequently it was expanded to other regions and countries. From 2014, the Award of Excellence became a flagship programme for WCC AISBL.

Direct Benefits of Marketing on Artisan Products

Jury for Award of Excellence

CCI's direct intervention in products have tremendously increased their marketability. The kalchatty, the Pattamadai mat and the Killimangalam mat have all commanded better prices and expanded their reach due to CCI's market strategies. Kamala and Fab India (not recently), stock Killimangalam mats and it received the UNESCO Seal of Excellence in 2004.

Craft Tourism

Craft Tourism is another important marketing strategy that is very likely to give a fillip to the awareness and sale of traditional artisanal products. Craft tours can be significant factors in the development and marketing of crafts.

Craft Tour to Chettinad – CCI

CCI organised a tour to Chettinad in February 2015, to include history, culture, crafts and cuisine. En route

they stopped at Auroville and visited a gold foiling and pressed flower unit and a kalamkari unit in Chikkanayakanpet. In Chettinad, the members visited M.Rm.Rm. Cultural Foundation's Kottan Basket Centre at Keelayapatti. This was followed by a visit to Attangudi tile-making units and a woodworking unit.

Attangudi tiles from Chettinad

The Delhi Crafts Council organises the Kairi exhibition, the Patram exhibition, the Navodit Shilpi exhibition, and the Sarees of India exhibition to increase the reach and marketability of their products. iTokri, an online sales portal for handcrafted products has widened the scope of sales for these products. The Crafts Council of Telangana has developed their network with Government emporia, designer groups, NGOs and boutiques for better access to their traditional products. CCTN has introduced marketing strategies for doll making of the *golu bommai*. Crafts Council of Gujarat provides import-export training to improve the marketability of the artisans' products. CCAP and CCK have regular exhibitions and sales every year.

Delhi Crafts Council's tokri *exhibition*

India Art Fair

Delhi Crafts Council was for the first time, invited to participate in the India Art Fair in 2017, with a view to taking the crafts to a contemporary art platform. DCC has brought out new contemporary designs in various crafts which it has exhibited at India Art Fair every year. In the last seven years, they have showcased many of the artisanal products they had revived and sustained.

Craft Tours to Ikat Villages – CCAP

The Crafts Council of Andhra Pradesh, with S Ranjana as Chairperson has plans to devise an ecosystem for the ikat weavers and dyers that will

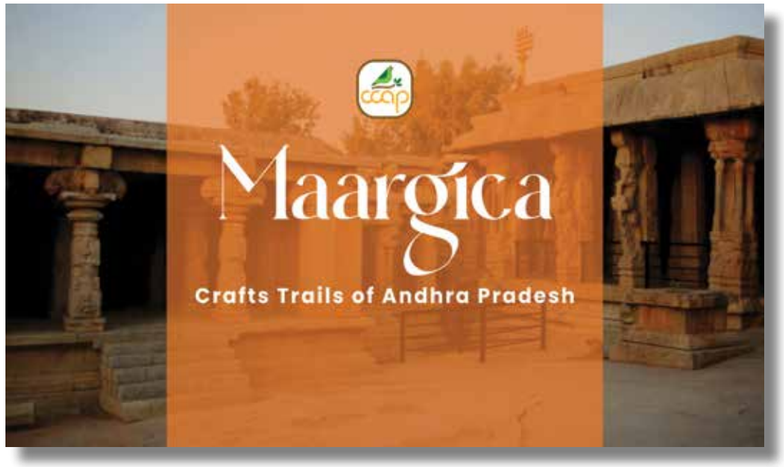
India Art Fair

highlight their culture, cuisine, environment, ancient temples, history and wildlife, which in turn, will attract tourists. Craft enthusiasts can visit the Nallamala forest, Nagarjunsagar dam, Ettipotala falls, take a boat ride to the Buddhist Museum, where the relics are housed, and also see an amphitheatre.

Craft Tour of Rayalaseema

CCAP has been organising five-day trips to the Rayalaseema region to experience its culture, crafts, weaves, places of worship, food, folk dance, theatre, music, history and its villages. Dharmavaram and Proddatur weaving centres and Allagada stone carvers were some of the places they visited. They also travelled to historical and religious sites like Lepakshi, Penukonda and Prashanti Nilayam.

CCT and Spaces



Craft tourism of Andhra Pradesh

Rajeshwari concludes by saying that online platforms are growth drivers for the handicraft industry. She adds, "The handicraft industry, needs to embrace modern design sensibilities. Collaborations between artisans and designers have led to the creation of unique and innovative handmade products.

Artisans who adapt to these trends and embrace innovation will be well-positioned to succeed in this dynamic and evolving industry. Another contributing factor is the rise of the gifting industry, where handicrafts have gained popularity as personalised, meaningful gifts, that reflect a personal connection to the recipient."

CHAPTER 8

RELIEF:
CRISIS TO RESILIENCE

8 Relief: Crisis to Resilience

Artisans are a vulnerable community that is often faced with uncertain and unpredictable conditions that threaten their livelihood and their ability to carry on with their craft-making. They lead precarious lives even in normal situations with no insurance or financial security nets. They are particularly impacted by natural disasters like floods, droughts, cyclones and earthquakes where even their homes and workplaces can be destroyed, along with raw materials and tools. The Covid-19 pandemic wiped out many artisan communities who did not have the resources to support themselves. The CCI, over the years has stepped in on several occasions to lend a helping hand to artisans to recoup and cut their losses. Measures are in place to see that the artisan and his craft do not suffer extensively due to these factors. The Secretary of CCI, Rajeshwari, explained how marketing could alleviate the situation. "Covid happened and it changed the way artisans sold their products. Marketing through WhatsApp catalogues, Instagram and Facebook were the order of the day. CCI helped create product catalogues and broadcast it through its WhatsApp groups. Once life returned to normal, we realised how much the artisans missed and depended on the physical bazaars."

To illustrate CCI's timely and prompt actions for providing relief to artisans, is the CCI Artisan Relief Fund, with the tagline – 'Support a Craftsperson Now. Save Craft Skills for the Future'. It was an appeal to the public and was

Relief measures in (Top) Agra and (Above) Tamil Nadu

established during the Covid-19 pandemic. The CCI website states, "The Coronavirus pandemic and the shutdown of the economy has had a devastating impact on the lives of the country's artisans and weavers. They are the backbone of the non-farm livelihood sector which is the largest provider of employment, second only to agriculture. Bereft of avenues of sales of their products due to the lockdown the artisans face large quantities of unsold stock and the harsh prospect of looming hunger. To tide over this grim crisis the artisanal community urgently needs financial help to manage everyday living, and to prepare for production when the lockdown is eased out or lifted." In keeping with this, about 10,000 artisans and weavers in different craft pockets in the country were sent groceries thanks to support from Goonj and Bhoomika Trust.

Drought Relief in Pattamadai

Well before the pandemic crisis, CCI had been providing relief to artisans and clusters. In 1987, after a few years of severe drought in Tamil Nadu, the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) DC(H) decided to provide drought relief to artisans. A committee which included CCI members toured all the districts extensively and visited

practically all craftspeople. The Pattamadai Cooperative Society was one of them. Poompuhar (the State Handicrafts Corporation) had given money for extensive procurement. CCI placed initial orders with the Society, which were later passed on to Peer Mohammed, the leading trader in Pattamadai. A regular stream of orders followed after that. This also gave an opportunity for the CCI to use the drought relief situation to create a sustainable livelihood for the artisans. Thus, CCI embarked upon a comprehensive, interactive programme of intervention for the Pattamadai weavers.

Disaster Relief for Aranmula Artisans

A craftsman doing a sandcast from a 3D printout

Aranmula in Kerala, famous for its metal mirror, is situated on the banks of the Pampa river in Pattanamthita. It is also well-known for hosting the famous boat race. In 2019, the river Pampa spilled well over its banks after the monsoon and flooded the surrounding areas. The artisans were evacuated as the flood water levels rose. The Handicrafts office based in Trissur requested CCI to help the artisans get back on their feet. When the CCI members reached Aranmula, the artisans had almost got the situation under control. A lot of their stock had mud caked on them. CCI with some CSR support came up with a plan to introduce some new designs while rendering relief assistance. Ayush Kasliwal a well-known designer accompanied the members on the next trip. He insisted that they meet the President and Secretary of the Society.

The plan was only to design the brass frame which encompassed each mirror, and leave the mirror untouched. They were happy with the plan and suggested that CCI work with each of the eight production units.

The third trip was a design workshop where each participant would draw their own designs. They had to wind up quickly as the river was rising again and move

Clockwise from top right: Sandcasting; A CCI member with the Society members at Aranmula; and the new design of Aranmula mirrors

into the National Disaster Relief centre. Ayush soon came up with some beautiful simple designs in 3D print and these were used to sandcast the new moulds. A great number of mirror frames were made, waiting to be launched.

In a couple of weeks, to CCI's utter surprise, they received a legal notice from the Society saying that they were not allowed to sell Aranmula mirrors as they had the GI tag.

After sending a legal reply, CCI decided that they would stop their intervention. Several months later, it came to their attention that the Society had set up their own online shop. There was clarity now about the reason for them sending the legal notice.

CCI had to explain to the donor the grounds for the legal notice and the need to end the project.

Covid Relief for the Kanchi Golu Dolls Makers

Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu has a large concentration of clay and papier mâché doll makers. There is a huge demand for these dolls during the annual festival of Navrathri. Some of these doll makers participated in the CCI's Craft Bazaars. The golu doll makers were in despair towards the end of the pandemic in 2022, when social distancing was still being enforced, and the Tamil Nadu Government forbade them to sell their products. The doll makers approached CCI to help them out.

A stall at the Crafts Bazaar

As early as May 2020, one of the artisans, Gurunathan reached out to CCI with problems of stockpiling, due to no sales and no income as a consequence. They

Golu dolls - before and after

received Government rations and Rs 1000 per family only for two months. Padmanaban, Secretary of the Kanchipuram Clay and Papier-mâché Dolls Workers Welfare Association, wrote to CCI, stating that this welfare association came into existence with the objective of bringing about unity among the community and enhancing access to government welfare schemes. They were registered under the Ministry of Textiles and all members were enrolled under the Central Government artisanal scheme and had membership cards. They also had Aadhaar and bank accounts.

With a CSR-funded project, CCI came to their aid and offered to design new moulds reviving old models, and help in making them more aesthetic. CCI offered to pay for the moulds, support the wages and buy what was made. An understanding was reached and with the help of an artist, the entire range was made and sold later that year in the CCI Crafts Bazaar. As the situation eased out,

Golu dolls on display

the doll makers were no longer interested in reproduction project. They had their customary wholesalers back with their trucks, buying the usual dolls and were no longer interested in using the new moulds. In the interim, CCI had asked Gurunathan to share his story with the CCI, to reach a wider audience and it was published in their inhouse newsletter.

Covid Relief Work and Fundraising – DCC

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the Delhi Crafts Council, wanted to help the overwhelming number of affected artisans spread across the country who had no means of livelihood and were bereft of the benefits of health, education, or housing. To understand the level of the adverse impact of the coronavirus

DCC relief work

outbreak and lockdown, DCC members started interacting with artisans individually. An 'Artisan Help Fund' was specially created to prepare for a situation that could turn critical in the coming months. As a result of the interaction, DCC found that the worst hit was probably the ancillary craft worker, who was at the bottom of the value chain. Concentrating on this segment, 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 Weave, and the Kala Swaraj Foundation. Similar relief was extended to women Kotpad dyers and Pilkhuwa artisans.

During Covid, relief was also extended to Pilkhuwa artisans (left) and women Kotpad dyers (right) by DCC

Chinnayachari and Etikopaka Wooden Toys - CCT

Chinnayachari of Etikopaka, Andhra Pradesh approached CCT for a loan of 10 lakhs to build a workshed where he could have 50-60 artisans working together under one roof. He proposed to train the women of Etikopaka in the craft of wooden toy-making. With CCT's help he was able to create a workplace, where he trained them to make and lacquer the wooden toys. This workforce allowed him to take on large orders and execute them.

During the Covid quarantine, CCT had started training craftsmen in the basics of photography and the use of the internet so that the marketing of their craft could continue during the pandemic. Photography, video skills and editing, responding to messages, and tone of voice were some of the skills taught.

Chinnayachari posted his story and was a recipient of many orders. He was able to fulfil these orders because these women were already trained and were able to work from their homes. He has repaid the loan amount in full and CCT's relief measures succeeded in keeping the craft alive.

Stone Artisans – CCTN

The stone artisans in Tamil Nadu were struggling to market their products during the lockdown. CCTN's initiative to promote online sales helped them to reach a larger market base and thus manage to make sales of their stock.

Flood Relief – CCT

The floods of 2009 devastated Alampur and Nagaladinne—home to 700 looms. The weavers in addition to their homes being inundated or washed away lost their livelihoods. CCAP members visited these areas walking through muddy streets and homes giving assurance to weavers that they would mobilise funds to replace their damaged looms. Alampur is known for its towel weaves and Nagaldinne for Gadwal weaves. Loom replacement was the need of the hour. CCT tried to set up the looms in CFC sheds but most of the artisans were under the control of master weavers who assured them the supply of yarn and readily agreed to take their finished products. So the weavers dismantled the looms and set them up in their repaired homes. CCT was able to distribute around 300 looms.

Nagaladinne loom distribution

Within six months of setting up their looms they were back to their original production schedules. CCT gave them marketing support at CCT exhibitions but their production was handled by master weavers and this nexus was difficult to breach.

Nagaladinne loom distribution

A well-learnt lesson from these experiences warrants the strengthening of the craft sector through a blend of economic support, timely relief and strategies that would safeguard them against situations that would endanger their craftwork. A resilient craft sector needs to be built and bulwarked, to support and protect it from the immediate impact of disasters, ensuring that the rich craft traditions of India continue to prosper and flourish.

A Pandemic Story by Gurunathan - A Clay and Papier Mâché Doll Maker

The story that unfolds below from the letter of appeal to CCI, illustrates the unmitigated suffering of artisans who are vulnerable to natural disasters and have poor resilience to anything that disturbs their everyday rhythm of life. Gurunathan's desperate plea for help echoes the plight of every artisan in India whose livelihood and craft were deeply affected by the pandemic. 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 support him, he said, was to help him sell his stock. Gurunathan's story is what will resonate throughout Chinna Kanchipuram which is home to the doll makers.

"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 shopkeepers with their merchandise, dolls depicting families, besides the usual deities. My wife and other family members, also work in my unit. Unfortunately, this year since March, due to the coronavirus I have had no sales at all and hence no income. My children have not gone to school.

The Government has been very active and local officials visited us frequently and enquired about the well-being of the family. I have received rations from the Government twice and Rs 1000 per month for two months. I am very thankful to them.

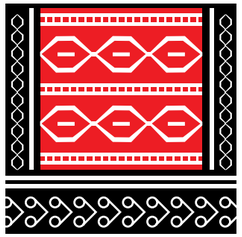
As I have had no sales, I have no money. So, I am not able to buy clay, cardboard, dyes, etc, for my work. I do not know any other work and hence have had no means of earning my livelihood. In August, I pledged my wife's jewels. I tried working for outside enterprises. They would give me dolls to paint. 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."

CHAPTER 9

Advocacy: Crafting Economic Justice

9 Advocacy: Crafting Economic Justice



Advocacy entails access to government schemes, subsidies and credit facilities which are imperative for the survival of the artisan and his craft in a fast-changing world that does not pause to take cognisance of the disappearance of many craft forms across India. In this scenario, the role of CCI and other like-minded organisations becomes critical, to advocate for artisan-friendly policies and the inclusion of craft in mainstream economic planning. Ashoke Chatterjee the doyen of craft preservation in India, perceptively declares, "What CCI has learnt over these years is that it is not enough for India to have an unequalled heritage of craft wisdom and artistry. The relevance of that legacy in 21st century terms demand new arguments backed by hard evidence, going beyond cultural and aesthetic expressions to evidence of the contribution artisans make to the national economy."

Consequent to this, CCI has been active in raising pertinent issues which need to be heard with the relevant authorities. The rights of the artisans need to be recognised and formulated in a more structured manner. CCI's core work has been representing artisans—their work, their needs and their aspirations. The AGM Report of 2008-09 states, "Working with state councils, other craft activists, authorities, volunteers, like-minded institutions all over the country, CCI today

is respected as an advocate. However, the craft sector is in crisis, seriously affected by global and national economic uncertainties and accelerating competition. The data-base for the sector is very poor. Consequently, there is little understanding of the contributions artisans make to national production and welfare."

To counter this, the CCI began a pilot project in two phases—the first being to track the gaps in data and the second to obtain accurate data regarding the size and contribution of the craft sector. The Craft Economics and Impact Study (CEIS) conducted in 2010, funded by the Dorabji Tata Trust, showed lack of a detailed database for the handicraft sector. A meticulous methodology was followed with a questionnaire and work plan of the field study done in two clusters. The two clusters were the Kutch District in Gujarat, and Karur in Tamil Nadu. The submission of the report was completed in July 2011.

Meetings with ten NGOs in Delhi, the Planning Commission, the Office of the Development Commissioner Handicrafts and the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) ensued, leading to the consideration of a satellite account for handicrafts. The second phase was conducted, on request from the CSO, as reported in the AGM Report of 2011-12, and states, "The work required to be completed by CCI includes developing guidelines about craft for the enumerators, listing relevant National Industrial Codes for the different handicrafts and listing and mapping the crafts in different states and Union territories of India." This study was funded by the Jamshedji Tata Trust.

This comprehensive study which is referred to by Ashoke Chatterjee, as "a seminal CEIS investigation", and consequent lobbying for action resulted in a separate column for Handicrafts and Handlooms in the Government of India's Sixth Economic Census. CCI had also been asked to participate in the working group sessions for the Five-Year Plans which lead to getting the Government to pay attention to the lack of a robust data base for the handicrafts sector. The coming together of several NGOs in the sector with weavers from across the country to lobby against the possible change in definition of 'handlooms' by the Government worked well to show the importance of a cohesive group.

A satisfying outcome of the above efforts by CCI is documented in the AGM Report of 2014-15. “Right through the year the recurring crisis in the handlooms sector kept CCI on its toes, constantly trying to keep up with new moves by policy makers. The positive outcome of this was that civil society worked in unison to counter any regressive moves contemplated, that could ultimately harm the already susceptible weaver communities in our country. What surprised us pleasantly was that our combined voice was heard in the right circles and heeded too! This was gratifying!”

The Government of India has earmarked August 7 as National Handloom Day. CCI was included in stakeholder meetings and brainstorming sessions at the Ministry of Textiles. In spite of these contributions, the crucial go-ahead for the enhancement of basic data base for the craft sector is yet to materialise. CCI continues to have dialogues with Niti Aayog to establish a robust data base for the handicrafts sector. CCI has also been collaborating with the Institute of Human Development to provide a tool kit to the Government of India to enable it to fill the gaps in the handicrafts sector.

Rajeshwari, Secretary CCI emphasises how advocacy can strengthen the status of artisans, especially women artisans, and give them a voice that would further their craft. “For women artisans markets afford them new avenues to earn and gain social status. Many rural crafts are traditionally executed by women including embroidery and basket weaving.”

Unlike machine-made goods, handicrafts carry the unique story of the artisan, creating an emotional connection between the consumer and the product. This emotional appeal is becoming a significant factor in consumer decision-making, especially as younger generations—who prioritise authenticity and sustainability—become more influential in the marketplace

To address the challenges faced by artisans, including unfair pay and gender disparity, a multifaceted approach involving awareness of work rights, focus on sustainability, and the adoption of technology is essential.

Digital tools and platforms offer new avenues for artisans to learn, collaborate, and innovate, thereby elevating the craft and broadening its appeal. The convenience of online shopping, combined with the growing consumer interest in unique artisanal products, suggests that e-commerce will continue to be a crucial growth driver for the handicraft industry.

The handicraft industry, needs to embrace modern design sensibilities. Collaborations between artisans and designers have led to the creation of unique and innovative handmade products. Artisans who adapt to these trends and embrace innovation will be well-positioned to succeed in this dynamic and evolving industry.

‘Sarees of India’ conducted by Delhi Crafts Council

The Delhi Crafts Council and the State Council of Telangana have been involved in advocacy for their craft sectors. Since 1999, the DCC has been holding an exhibition titled, ‘Sarees of India’ to promote and advocate the beauty and variety of sarees woven in India. It has had a successful run of twenty-five years.

The DCC states, "Started in 1999, it was perhaps the first such exhibition in the country to feature just one product, the saree. The reason was twofold. One was to bring awareness about the enormous variety of sarees available in different parts of the country especially to the younger generation, and the second was to actively promote and popularise the garment. DCC is gratified that the primary objective of starting this exhibition has been largely fulfilled. The saree as a garment seems undiminished in its popularity and has in these twenty-five years incorporated many interesting innovations into its fold. DCC is also proud of its small but significant role in promoting this quintessential Indian garment which plays such a vital role in providing a sustainable livelihood to a very large number of weavers and artisans of our country."

CCT has always been associated with the Handloom & Handicraft Department in an advisory capacity.

Craft Cities

Craft Cities is a programme launched by the WCC during its Golden Jubilee celebrations. CCI had made an application for Mamallapuram and Jaipur to be included in the Craft Cities programme. Mamallapuram is the world's largest open-air museum with four types of sculptures—monolithic, bas relief, rock-cut and architectural, all in one place. A team from WCC came to evaluate Mamallapuram. They were supported by Poompuhar and backed by the Tamil Nadu State Government. Subsequently, Mamallapuram, Jaipur and Mysuru were certified as craft cities.

Mamallapuram - one of the selected Craft Cities

The assurance of economic well-being and recognition of the rights of the artisans will ensure sustainability and prosperity of the craft sector. Strong advocacy linkages and a market-driven craft economy, will support several million livelihoods. By blending tradition and innovation, a thriving artisan community would be empowered to make their craft economically viable and culturally rich.

Prasanna – Founder of Charaka - Advocacy and Activism

Prasanna is the founder of Charaka, a women's cooperative established in 1994, to provide employment to weavers, and promote the weaving of affordable and sustainable hand-loom textiles. He is a renowned theatre personality, activist and an advocate for the handloom sector.

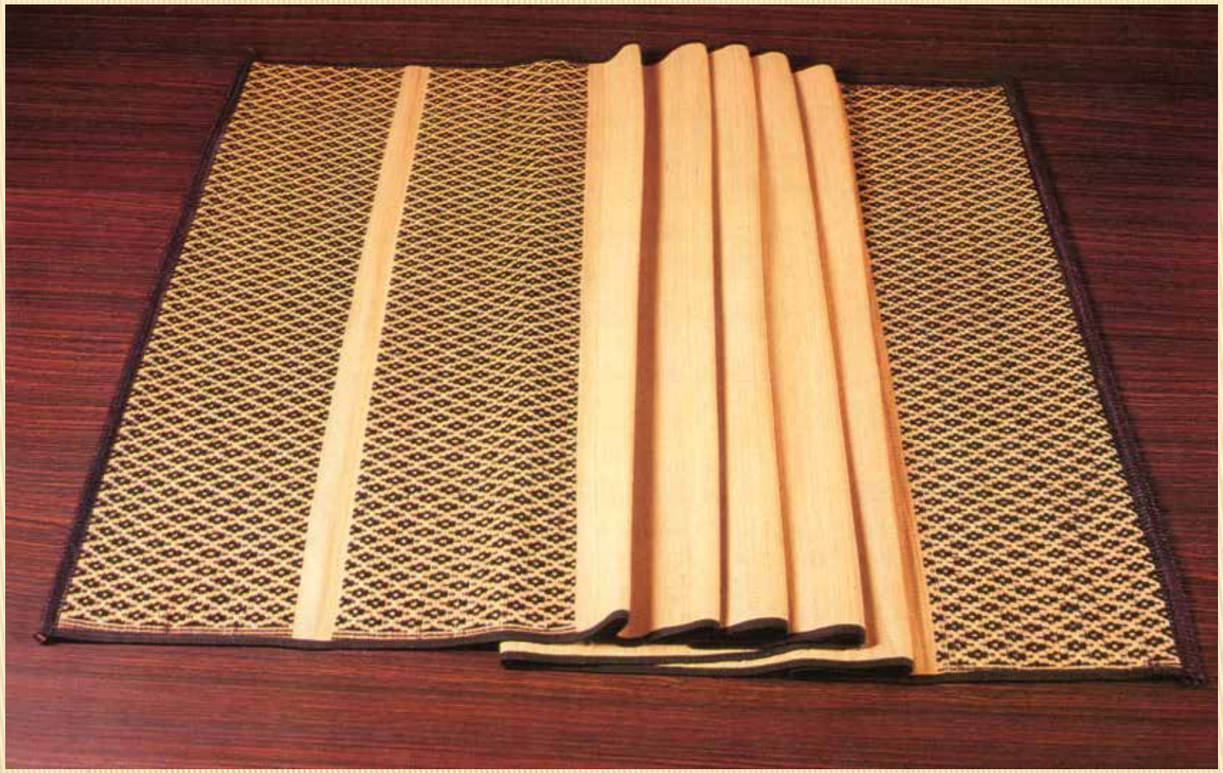
Prasanna has actively participated in movements like the Handloom Satyagraha to demand government implementation of the Handloom Reservation Act of 1985 and to raise awareness for sustainable living and safeguard weavers' livelihoods.

At one point, the Government wanted to introduce a 0.5 hp motor to the loom, to decrease the drudgery of the weavers, which was met with much opposition from the weavers. Prasanna's intervention in this matter, assuring the Government that the weavers felt no drudgery, and were willing to toil rigourously to produce intricate yards of cloth worked in favour of the weavers. The Government dropped this proposal and Prasanna's advocacy greatly benefitted the artisans.

Ibrahim Bibi - National Awardee

The Pattamadai mat, the production of which had dwindled, was revived by the efforts of CCI and its marketability strengthened. The introduction of a new and marketable range of lifestyle products included table mats, wall hangings, folders and handbags. The Council began marketing the new line of designer products at various exhibitions all over the country with dramatic success.

In 1992, backed by the CCI, master craftswoman Ibrahim Bibi received the National Award for Excellence for her superfine mat. This gave additional national attention to the mat and its makers. The enterprising traders within the community were quick to realise the potential of the new designs and soon became innovative in adapting and customising the new designs and techniques of natural dyes according to the buyers' needs in other markets. The average monthly earnings of a weaver had moved from Rs 700 in 1994 to Rs 1,000 in 1997 to Rs 4,000 in 2006. In addition, there are options of increased incomes within the same industry. For instance, when a person does not possess weaving skills, he/she may choose to do just the splicing for a few days. Today, the Pattamadai mats enjoy visibility and are in demand all across the country and can be accessed through iTokri.



CHAPTER 10

RECOGNITION: HONOURING HANDCRAFTED EXCELLENCE

10 Recognition: Honouring Handcrafted Excellence

India's handicraft heritage is rarely in the forefront of the country's critical issues, oftentimes artisans existing as unrecogised members of society. In due course, starting from 1965, the Government of India established the National Handicrafts Award in 1965 to sustain the legacy and tradition of artisanal skills over many centuries. Subsequently several other prestigious awards have been instituted like the Shilp Guru in 2002, which is the highest national award and the Sant Kabir Award for master weavers. Artisans go on to win the Nari Shakti Award and even the Padma Shri. The annual ceremonies are often held in Rashtrapati Bhavan and Vigyan Bhavan and are a formal acknowledgement of the valuable contributions of the craft sector.

This arc of excellence in their craft, reflects their upward mobility from the grassroots level to State recognition, to national honours and even to international acclaim. Awards are not mere decorations, they transform artisans' lives, they elevate livelihoods, help with funding and market access, encourage innovation, and foster dignity and cultural preservation. The master craftspersons who are awarded, are often mentors and direct conduits for the transmission of the craft to the next generation. This institutional and societal recognition celebrates the artisan and sustains his living heritage and empowers craft communities, providing them with an identity on the national and international stage.

CCI's constant endeavour to bring the artisans and their craft into the limelight bore fruit with the institution of the Kamala Awards in the year 2000. The CCI website states, "Recognition is a powerful incentive to protect traditional craft. CCI encourages artisans to continue their traditional craft by recognising excellence in work and their contribution to the community. The Kamala Awards were started in 2000 to honour artisans for excellence in craftsmanship, and for an artisan's contribution to the craft community."

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's name is synonymous with the resurgence of traditional crafts in the post-Independence era. In a fitting tribute to her memory, the awards were christened in her name and are conferred annually to recognise merit for the high level of proficiency and skill achieved in the craft and their contribution to the community. Gita Ram, Chairperson CCI, describes the process by which the Kamala Awards are conferred. "CCI felt the need to acknowledge the skill and talent of artisans and weavers. Recognition of work done goes a long way in instilling pride in one's work. Application forms are put up on the CCI website, stating the deadline, with all the compliances required, including letters of recommendation. More than a 100 or more applications are received. Product photos with work in progress are also required to be sent. A jury of 4-5 people meets to whet each application. After the final selections are made, letters to each applicant—those selected or otherwise are sent out."

TK Bharani from Chennai, one of the recipients of the Kamala Award for Excellence

Kamala Award for Excellence in Craftsmanship

The Kamala Award for Excellence in Craftsmanship recognises the high level of proficiency and skill achieved by a craftsperson as exhibited in a body of work done over the years. The award since its inception has been given to various craftspeople, some of the products being copper-coated bells, wooden puppets, leather puppetry, jute, bamboo and cane products, embroidery skills and wood and stone craft.

The Kamala Award for Contribution to Crafts

This award is given to craftspeople who have contributed to the handicraft sector through their work in the government service, to their community clusters, or for training and mentoring weavers, especially women. Artisans working with the communities involved in sholapith and metal craft, Puttapaka textile weaving, muga silk weaving, wooden block making, terracotta pottery, garland making, bronze icons and Bhuta masks, were recognised and conferred the award over the years.

Kamala Samman

Kamala Samman honours a senior person who is dedicated to the cause of craft over a period of time. The work of these awardees should have significantly benefitted the community of craftspeople and transformed their lives. They have helped in setting up handloom co-operative societies that have made vast improvements in the social and working conditions of craftspeople. Some of the illustrious awardees have been Ashoke Chatterjee, Judy Frater for her work with Rabari embroidery workers in Bhuj, Kutch, and Laila Tyabji.

Young Artisan Award

The Crafts Council of India and other organisations confer the 'Young Artisan Award' which recognises the excellence of craft of young artisans who represent the face of India's future. This award carries a cash prize, a medal, an *angavastram*, citation and a certificate.

Artisans have made a mark in the international arena too. In 2009-10, 12 Indian artisans participated in the World Earthenware Expo in South Korea and seven more were sent to the competition section of the same event. All entries received certificates and Veeramuthu Velar from Pudukottai won the Silver Prize.

Awards Ceremony

The Award ceremony usually has a noted dignitary giving out the awards which includes a cash award and a special medallion. A citation precedes this. Each awardee is asked to speak and translators are present to communicate to

Gopalakrishna Gandhi with the Kamala awardees

the audience. The Chief Guest at the Golden Anniversary Awards ceremony of CCI was Gopalakrishna Gandhi who conferred the awards. The book *Handmade in India* by Aditi Ranjan and Prof MP Ranjan was awarded on this occasion.

Delhi Crafts Council

The Delhi Crafts Council confers several awards to artisans, enabling them through financial support, design innovations, technological advances and scholarships, to hone their artisanal skills to higher levels of excellence. Arshad Kafeel, Late Sardar Hussain, Omprakash Galav and Late Bhagwan Subudhi are some of the artisans DCC supported with financial assistance, who went on to win many awards.

Kamaladevi Puraskar for Wood and Stone Carving - 1986

The late Bhagwan Subudhi was born into a traditional craftsperson's family. He was initiated into the craft at an early age through the *guru-shishya parampara*. He learnt to carve in both wood and stone directly under both his parents. After studying up to the fifth standard, he joined his father's carving workshop as an apprentice.

Bhagwan Subudhi was the first recipient of the Delhi Crafts Council's Kamaladevi Puraskar in1986, when he was fifteen years old. He was recognised for his carving skills on wood and stone and received the Puraskar from Kamaladevi Chattopadyay herself, at a ceremony held at the India International Centre. DCC was very proud to have recognised his work, as he went on to receive the National Award for Master Craftsperson.

His intrinsic skills and hard work helped raise his craft to a high level and gave him a great deal of confidence. He trained many younger craftspeople of his village and was the spokesperson at seminars on their behalf. He assisted The Crafts Council of India in organising both stone and wood carving workshops.

The late Bhagwan Subudhi was the proud recipient of several prestigious awards. These included the DCC Kamaladevi Award, the CCI Kamala Samman, Kalashree at Surajkund, and the UNESCO Seal of Excellence.

Sutrakar Samman

Sutrakar Samman is an award which honours a weaver for the excellence of his skills and to his commitment in continuing the rich tradition of handloom weaving of his region. It is the also the Council's tribute to the millions of unsung weavers who have through difficult times consistently ensured that this rich textile heritage continues to survive.

Vastra Shilpi Samman

DCC instituted the Vastra Shilpi Samman to mark its Golden Jubilee in 2017. Handmade textile production consists of a chain of different processes which often require many different kinds of skills at various levels in the production process. Most of these initial processes like dyeing, block making, hand spinning and other such 'pre' and 'post' loom activities are vital but remain unnoticed and the practitioners go unacknowledged. Through the Vastra Shilpi Samman, it is DCC's endeavour to honour these unseen artisans whose contribution to the creation of the final textile is critical and yet unrecognised. The Samman is given annually during the summer textiles exhibition, Kairi.

Kamaladevi Puraskar

Instituted in 1986 by Kamaladevi Chattopadhya, the Puraskar is an annual scholarship. The awards are given to encourage children between the age of

TK Bharani from Chennai, receiving an award from the US Consul General, 2018

fourteen and twenty who are skilled in crafts, to continue to practise their tradition and eventually take it up as a means of livelihood. Talented young craftsmen are awarded, to encourage them to carry on with their traditional craft. The award instills in them a sense of pride and achievement. Seven of DCC's awardees have gone on to be awarded the National Master Craftsman Award for excellence in their craft.

Navodit Scheme

The Navodit Shilpi exhibition project was introduced by the DCC, as a direct follow-up and onward link to the annual Kamaladevi Puraskar scheme. The aim is to introduce the Kamaladevi Puraskar awardees to mainstream markets to give them a better understanding of market preferences.

Crafts Council of Karnataka

The Crafts Council of Karnataka instituted in the year 1986, a prestigious award, titled Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Viswakarma Award. The award is given to a talented and promising craftsperson of Karnataka, below the age of 35 years for his/her excellence in the craft. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 10,000, an award plaque and a citation. So far, 38 craftspeople have been awarded with the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Viswakarma Award.

Crafts Council of Telangana

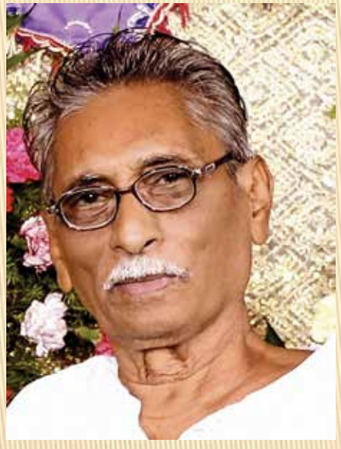
CCT is known for coordinating skill-based knowledge programmes, curation for market opportunities, and creating avenues for dialogue between mediums of craft and varying demographics of stakeholders. To encourage and appreciate weavers and artisans, CCT instituted the practice of acknowledging the contributions of the artisans and called it Sanman. Sanman integrates several categories—some of them being:

Sanmaan – CCT Lifetime Achievement, Sanmaan – For Excellence in Craft (National), Sanmaan – For Excellence in Craft (Telangana and AP), Sanman – For Excellence in Textiles (National), Sanmaan – For Excellence in Textiles (Telangana; AP), Sanmaan – Craftpreneur, Sanmaan – Young Artisan: Design Intervention in Traditional Crafts.

Craft Motivator

The various State Councils across the country are particularly conscious of recognising the contributions of the artisans and ensure that they are awarded, as a fitting tribute to their untiring efforts in keeping their craft alive and bringing it up to high standards of excellence. A thriving handicraft sector ensures the continuous evolution of handicrafts, the survival of the artisans and preservation of heritage. Recognition through awards are not mere symbols, it leads to transformation, sustaining livelihoods and building bridges between the traditional and the modern.

Gurappa Chetty



The 30-year CCI publication eloquently describes the untold stories of India's struggling artisans and some of whom through their striving and CCI's support found themselves on the national stage. One such is Gurappa Chetty who went on to receive the Padma Shri. "Very often, in remote corners of the country, in unrelated encounters one comes across stories of craftspeople often told by themselves of the change in their lives which their engagement with CCI has brought about. Here is a shining example of such transformations effected by CCI's involvement in caring for India's craftspeople..."

Gurappa Chetty (Andhra Pradesh) is one of earliest creators of the famous kalamkari cloth paintings of Srikalashasti. He is also a single strong voice for advocacy for the craftspeople. CCI has consistently provided a platform for him. He has been sent by CCI to participate in several exhibitions abroad. Gurappa was responsible in the 1980s, in bringing to CCI's notice several minor crafts in Andhra Pradesh, like the wooden oil comb. (CCI turned its attention to the oil comb which eventually led to Abdul Khader a humble comb-maker receiving a National Award). In 2003, CCI recommended the Shilp Guru for Gurappa Chetty. He is today, a much sought after kalamkari leader at workshops and crafts courses in Indian universities. He was conferred the prestigious Padma Shri award by the President of India in 2007.

Awardees and the Awards Committee at the CCI Kamala Awards, November 2024

Kamala Awards, 2018

Gauri Ramabhai Bhraman and Mutham Perumal

These two artisans won awards in the Golden Jubilee Year and are commemorated in the Golden Jubilee issue of the CCI Newsletter.

The Kamala Award for Contribution to Crafts 2014 went to **Gauriben Ramabhai Bhraman** from Bakutra village, Gujarat. She learnt the family craft of embroidery from the older women of the family and community. Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) opened new avenues of livelihood for her through the use of her embroidery skills on garments provided by SEWA. Smt Gauriben has trained, numerous women, besides imparting special training to master trainers in embroidery from other parts of India and from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

The Kamala Award for Excellence in Craftsmanship 2014 went to **Mutham Perumal** from Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. Mutham Perumal, a traditional garland-maker, has over 40 years of experience in crafting the exquisite 'Manikka Malai' which is made out of fresh 'nochi' leaves and oleander flowers. He learnt the craft from his father and other elders of the family who still practise the craft. Over the years, Perumal has trained others in

Mutham Perumal, a traditional garland-maker

this creative craft and has conducted many workshops nurturing its survival for future generations. His special garlands are made for the Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, Venkateshwara Temple, Tirumala and Suchindram Temple.

CHAPTER 11

VOLUNTEERISM: THREADS OF SERVICE

11 Volunteerism: Threads of Service

At numerous Craft Bazaars and CCI events, visitors often notice the seamless organisation and calm efficiency with which each event unfolds, marked by an absence of confusion or disorder. The CCI Members/ Volunteers go about their tasks with quiet dignity seeing to the needs of the artisans with kindness and concern. Volunteers are an understated and powerful force behind many social development initiatives. In particular, the spirit of volunteerism at CCI plays a pivotal role in the well-being and the comfort of the artisans who have come a long way to display their wares. The volunteers of CCI play many other roles behind the scenes, as craft lovers—participating in advocacy, promoting and empowering artisans, and building bridges between traditional crafts and contemporary markets.

Kamaladevi Chattopadyay's words resonate with the philosophy of the CCI volunteers "CCI must always be ready to take the credit for its achievements and remain anonymous in favour of the artisan. Those who work for the Council must remember that it is the artisan to whom we wish recognition to be directed. Those who serve the Council must accept their role as facilitators not patrons of the artisans. Humility is therefore as important as sensitivity, if CCI is to generate the national movement for which it is founded."

Donors and members

Gita Ram lighting the lamp

Volunteers are the backbone of The Crafts Council of India. They contribute in several aspects of an artisan's life—the survival and revival of his craft, in design collaborations, in skill development and training, in market access, documentation and research and advocacy and awareness. As outlined in the preceding pages, the volunteers offer a whole gamut of services pro bono to the artisans and their communities. Innovative designing, workshops, digital literacy, craft bazaars, international markets through exhibitions, e-commerce platforms, documentation of traditional techniques and motifs, and public engagement are the many ways in which the volunteers engage with the handicraft industry.

Gita Ram briefly describes the organisational structure of the volunteers at CCI. "Every project undertaken has a sub-committee of three to five members depending on their interest and their skill sets. The sub-committee reports to the executive Committee which meets twice a month."

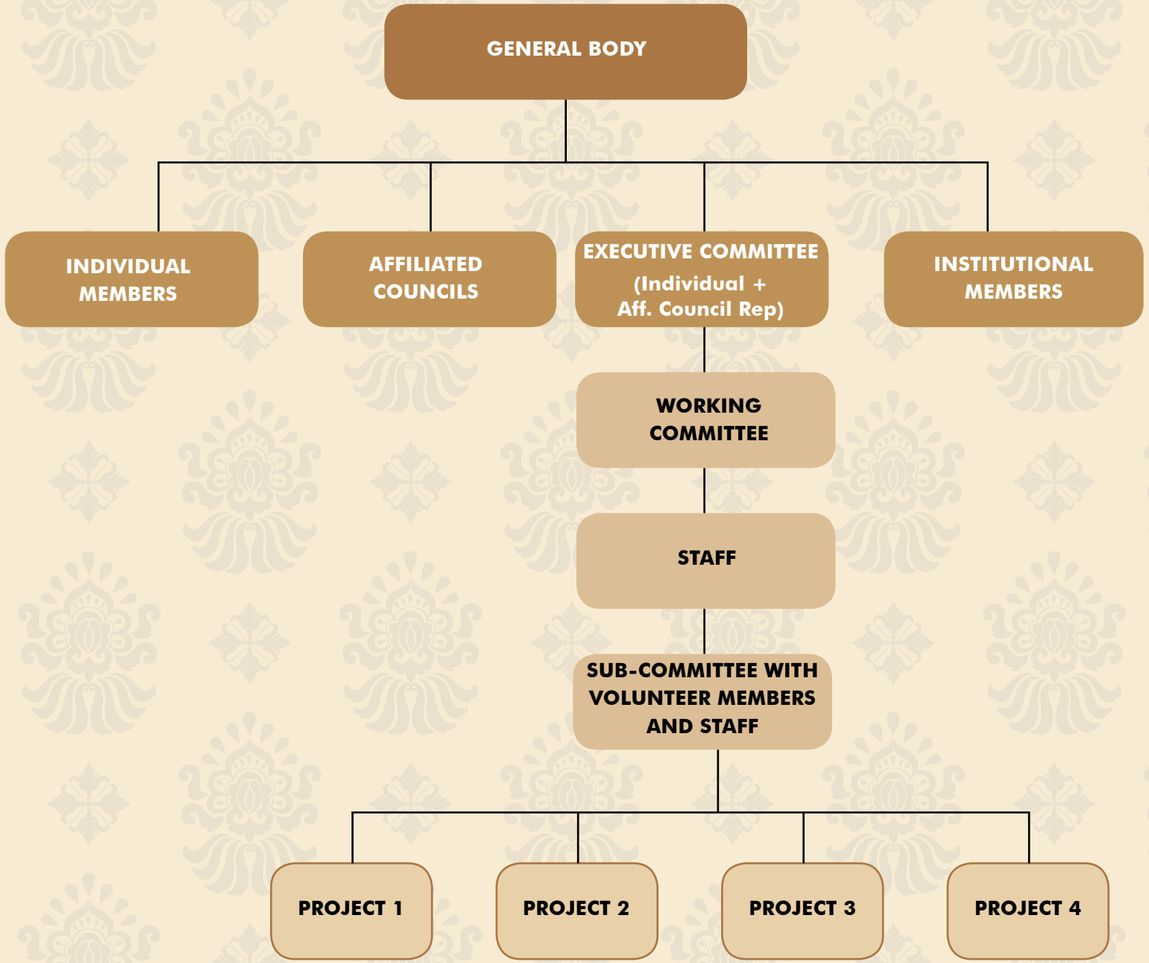
Volunteering efforts lead to enormous benefits for the artisans both directly and indirectly. Product designs are enhanced, skill upgradation and exposure to new tools and techniques, commitment to heritage that leads to cultural preservation, networking and most important of all, creating a sense of confidence and dignity to the artisan. Rajeshwari, Secretary CCI, summarises the role of the volunteers at CCI.

Chandra Sankar at a camp

"The Craft Bazaars are highly illustrative of the volunteer effort of CCI members. All members who are part of organising the event work voluntarily—selection of craftspeople, communicating with them, stall allocation, venue decoration, arranging facilities at the venue, supervision of the days of the event and report writing. Volunteerism supports the event by creating a positive environment of enthusiasm and passion for the crafts. The atmosphere generates a sense of taking the craft and the craftsperson seriously, leading to better sales, practical design inputs, business tie-ups and orders for the future."

The CCI stands as a testament to how structured volunteerism can uplift entire artisan communities. By leveraging time, knowledge, and passion, volunteers help create a sustainable ecosystem where crafts can thrive and artisans can flourish.

ORGANISATION STRUCTURE



Rajam Subramaniam and Guna Venkataraman

AGM head table—some lighter moments

Prema Paranthaman

Standing: Jayasri, Samyukta, E Rajeshwari, Bela Khaleeli, Gita Ram, Lakshmi Vijayaraghavan. Seated Suchi Ebrahim, Radha Parthasarathy, Pushpa Chari and Vijaya R Standing Sudha Ravi

Sita Narayaaswamy,Ibha Kapur,Geetha Raja,Sangeet,with CCI staff in the background, at the AGM

Radha Parthasarathy, Dally, Asha and Radhika at the AGM

Seetha Krishnan and Sabita Radhakrishna

Rupa Sood

Ashoke Chatterjee

Sabita Shetty and Purnima Rai

Bela Khaleeli and Gita Ram, with Shanta Guhan

AGM with past President Kasturi

Invocation by Purnima Rai, Shanta Prasad and Vikram Phadke

Forefront - Nina Kothari, Uma Shankar and Pushpa Chari

Sharan Appa Rao

Another AGM, with Treasurer Usha Krishna

Asha Ravi and Radhika KM

Visalakshi Ramaswamy at a workshop

E Rajeshwari

Seetha Subbiah

Vikram and Malavika Phadke

Sudha Ravi, Gita Ram and Prema Paranthaman

CHAPTER 12

An Overview : The Indian Crafts Space

12 The Indian Crafts Space: An Overview

The landscape of Indian craft stretches across the vast expanse of the country, remaining vibrant and productive. Despite the challenges posed by modernisation, it continues to be a vital thread in the cultural and social fabric of the nation. The rich and enduring heritage of the handicraft industry provides livelihood to over 7 million artisans, predominantly from rural and semi-urban backgrounds. The CCI had commissioned a monograph, titled 'Enumeration of Crafts Persons in India' by Brinda Vishwanathan of the Madras School of Economics, to estimate the number of people involved with handicraft and handloom activities in India.

The monograph states, "The study has provided detailed tabulations of crafts population across sub-groups like gender, rural-urban residence, caste and religion for all India level and the states of India. The study shows that there is ample scope for arriving at estimates of population involved in craft activities on a periodic basis using large scale survey data sets from the National Sample Survey organisation or the census. However, the definitions of craft activities have to be either based on the industrial classification or the occupational classification.

The challenges faced by the artisans and the shrinking market for handmade goods have not dimmed the prospects of the handicraft industry. The future remains hopeful as can be seen from the growth in handicrafts exports and a

domestic market driven by demands for home décor, gifting and tourism. Cultural integrity, when paired with continuous innovation, will ensure that the handicraft industry not only survives but thrives in today's fast-paced world.

The following pages spotlight the work and insights of leading figures in the handicraft sector and in the national arena—individuals who have played a pivotal role in preserving and reviving endangered crafts and artisan skills. Their efforts have centered on building meaningful connections with artisans and supporting them through initiatives in design innovation, tools and technology development, education and training, community empowerment, marketing, advocacy, and volunteer engagement.

Revival and Design

Revival and design, are vital to the survival of any craft, they provide a contemporary relevance while preserving cultural heritage. Revival sustains tradition while design enables evolution, allowing artisans not only to survive, but to thrive. These two forces offer economic sustenance, creating empowerment and a strong sense of identity to craftspeople. In this section, three eminent craft activists, Laila Tyabji, Vishalakshi Ramaswami and Sivanand Bhol have shared their insights into the role of revival and design in sustaining crafts.

Laila Tyabji

Laila Tyabji *is an influential Indian craft revivalist and designer, and also an ardent social activist. The turning point in her career came when she was commissioned by the Gujarat State Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation to document and revive handicrafts in Kutch in the mid-1970s. She was the co-founder of Dastkar: A Society for Crafts and Craftspeople in 1981 and remains its Chairman till date. She wrote the article below for The Crafts Council of India, in May 2025.*

Crafting Design – 'Tradition should be a springboard not a cage'

Working in the field of traditional craft, are we designers or development people? The two are not always synonymous, though design can lead to development, and development should always be designed. Often there is a perception of organisations like the Crafts Councils and Dastkar as elitist ladies obsessed with design. This is taken as our inherent superficial inability to think in truly developmental issue-based terms. Just as craft itself is rejected as a viable economic activity by those marching to newer, more technological tunes. However, artisans still make up several hundred million of our working population; and to talk

about the craft sector as a means to sustainable employment, without talking of design is like talking about children without mentioning education.

There are conflicts: Whose creativity are you to express, your own or of the craftspeople? Who is your client? The consumer, who wants an unusual and exciting product at the most competitive price, or the craftsperson who needs a market but who is reluctant to try anything too radical. Your intervention should not need constant external design interventions, or conflict with the social, aesthetic and cultural roots from which the craft tradition has sprung.

Most importantly, the purpose of one's design interventions is to inspire craftspeople to do their own further innovation, not stun them into passive replication. They must be taught to use their own minds and imagination as well as their hands. Craftspeople must be involved in every aspect of design and production, and understand the usage of the product they are making. In turn, the designer must understand the craft, the process and the consumer they are trying to reach. Both the ideal end-price and the ideal end-product will change according to the market they want to enter.

Discussing design with the craftsperson

Crafts producers cannot be economically viable unless their product is marketable. The product can only be marketable if it is attractive to the consumer, i.e., if the traditional skill is adapted and designed to suit contemporary consumer tastes and needs. We should not be embarrassed or defensive about an emphasis on product design and marketing as the catalyst and entry point for development in the craft sector. Even craftspeople, slow to embrace change, recognise the need for new design. Without this they fail to find buyers, while craft development schemes similarly flounder for lack of a sustainable market. However, design does not mean making pretty patterns. It is matching a technique with a function.

Why do craftspeople with centuries of a skilled tradition need these external interventions at all? Craft is a market-led activity, and when lifestyles change, and consumer demands change, accordingly, the product must change with them.

Since most craftspeople are removed from their new customers and markets, it is the role of the designer/product developer to sensitively interpret these changes to them. This is our responsibility. Craft, if it is to be utility-based and economically viable, cannot remain static. It must respond to both fashion and usage. Tradition should be a springboard not a cage.

Many crafts have degenerated today from stunning ritual objects of worship to bric-a-brac that sells on the pavement for a pittance. The crafts that created the Taj Mahal are now producing little pill boxes with lids that don't fit. This is not just aesthetic disaster, but bad economics as well. A craftsperson does not have the confidence to say 'no'. He needs the order too much. The designer should be able to see the true potential, and persuade the craftsperson to accept the challenge. Bazaars and exhibitions help test-market new products, show both the craftsperson and designer what works, build confidence, and direct future innovation.

Thousands of women with high-level skills and earning power are reduced to breaking stones for a living, while the antique pieces their grandmothers made sell in vintage stores for a fortune. Rather than selling off old embroideries they should be the design inspiration for contemporary garments that could earn the craftswomen regular incomes.

So much so-called design is done without introspection or homework. A bored housewife clips an image from a calendar and turns it into a kantha saree *pallav*; an exporter (too dependent on air-conditioning to trek out to Saurashtra), gives a patchwork toran to be copied in Trans-Jumna—and adds a dash of Punjabi phulkari embroidery just for fun. Nor are good ideas and good intentions alone enough to guarantee the desired results.

The motifs and usages of a craft tradition cannot and should not remain unchanged. But changing them requires knowledge, sensitivity and care. Young designers, often slanged by the development world as being too rarefied and impractical, have achieved some significant successes in NGO projects for Jawaja, Rangsutra, Urmul, in the North-East and others, where their input has been long-term and sustained; and the NID student craft documentations are a invaluable

reference source. Many other design projects are handicapped by the lack of reference materials. An essential tool in craft development is that motifs, designs and techniques be documented and accessible. Time too is essential, to develop not only the product but the maker.

Working with crafts that traditionally made functional utilitarian products, the answer is not to make them into ornamental novelty items. Dastkar's recent project with women making palm leaf brooms in Madhya Pradesh—one of the poorest, most backward parts of India—was an example of changing the function and changing the design, but still using the traditional material and technique as the distinctive USP. Bottles and jars, jewellery, candle holders and decorative lights, were part of the new product range.

Laila at a design workshop

A craft designer, (whose ultimate objective is the coordinated development and self-sufficiency of the craftsperson rather than themselves), must keep in mind the existing skill levels and potential of the target group. Also, their motivation levels!

Some craftspeople are curmudgeonly and reluctant to change, others overly self-confident and thinking they know it all. The designer must not just work with one or two master craftspeople. The sample range will be wonderful but production a disaster. She/he must project her initial designs to available skill levels, and use successive workshops to gradually upgrade skills and design sensibilities.

In the Dastkar Ranthambhore project, working with almost unskilled women —their hands more used to wielding a

Laila at Banaskantha

scythe than a needle—the first patchwork range was made up of 6-inch squares and strips in very basic permutations. Vivid and unusual combinations of colours and prints disguised the crudity of stitchery and simplicity of design. They sold well, as do the much more complex designs of tiny triangles, hexagonals and stars in subtle colours, the women have gradually been trained to do in the intervening 35 years. New skills have been introduced gradually, almost imperceptibly. A two crore-plus annual turnover and over 300 women, running the project themselves and with more in training, testify to 'handmade' still being a very sellable label.

Creating a simple but effective design, using a small budget and limited resources, is an exciting test of a designer's skill. Seeing the growth and confidence of a newly-emerging crafts community successfully selling products they have made themselves for the first time, using skills they never knew they had, is even more exciting. There are two cardinal principles: One, the customer does not buy out of compassion. The product must be competitive in price, in aesthetic, in function, and two, the ultimate skill of the craft designer lies in making herself redundant.

Dastkar's intervention with SEWA Lucknow in the 1980s, is often cited as an NGO success story, using a traditional, then almost dying, skill (chikan embroidery), as a means to a several crore turnover and social and economic empowerment for thousands of women. But design in that intervention went far beyond the cut of a kurta or the application of a new embroidery buta. It included skill upgradation, the documentation and revival of traditional stitches, embroidery motifs and tailoring techniques, the introduction of new kinds of raw material (ranging from kota to tussar), sizing, costing, quality control and production planning—

and an alternative marketing and promotional strategy that would enable a small, broke NGO to compete effectively with the *dalals* in the Chowk.

The approach and philosophy were always:

- to provide ideas and stimuli for creativity and innovative product design in the craftswomen themselves.
- to explain the rationale behind items developed and guidelines laid down by us.
- to develop a product range that incorporated the different skill levels of all members of the group.
- to keep the product usage and price applicable to widest possible market and consumer.
- to harmoniously incorporate the motifs, techniques and shapes of traditional chikankari into completely new products.

Laila with the craftswomen

To our delight, we discovered that it was not the art of chikankari that was dead, nor the consumer's demand for it, but the aesthetics of the *dalals* who had previously produced and sold the market product. Four decades later, chikankari lives on—whether in the hands of international designers or craftswomen forming their own organisations, a once dying craft with most of its stitches, styling and motifs forgotten, is now vibrant again—the designs no longer Dastkar's or SEWA Lucknow's, or static, but part of an on-going stream that mingles tradition and innovation, constantly evolving.

Broom-making workshop

With India now a burgeoning industrial power, crafts, especially those made by rural or tribal people, are often dismissed as outdated, impractical mechanisms of production, with only an ornamental, short-term use. *Aajkal nahi chalega*. All too often, it is not really the look of the product that causes the customer to reject it in favour of the assembly-line, machine-made alternative, but the quality of the materials used—a factor beyond the craftsperson's control.

Colourfast threads, rust-proof hinges and buckles, seasoned leather, fabric that does not shrink or run colour, the handspun indigenous cotton that works best for handlooms, are not available in rural markets. Access to these is essential.

As Rabindranath Tagore reminded us, 'The mind is no less valuable than cotton thread'. Design and product development are an equally essential component in the survival and economic empowerment of craftspeople. Craftsmanship is a form of communication—a craftsperson's way of interpreting the needs of another and using his creativity and skill to fulfil that need. Good design will help them redesign the development, not just of their craft, but of their lives as well.

Vishalakshi Ramaswamy

Visalakshi Ramaswamy *is the founder of M.Rm.Rm. Cultural Foundation (2000) and a passionate advocate for Chettinad's craft, cultural, and architectural traditions, and its documentation, preservation and revival. She is the co-author and author of two books titled,* The Chettiar Heritage *and* The Kottan: The Palmyra Basket of Chettinad.

The revival of the kottan was one of her foundation's most impactful projects. Her other revival projects include the Athangudi handmade tiles, Chettinad lime-egg plaster techniques, stencil-based wall art and Kandanghi handwoven sarees in silk and cotton. When asked by CCI to describe her role in reviving and redesigning crafts inherent to Chettinad, what follows is recounting of her work as a revivalist.

The Kottan

The traditional palmyra basketry of Chettinad, kottans were once woven by the women or 'Aachis' of Chettiar families as a hobby craft and found a place in every Chettinad activity, from ritual and ceremony to daily use. Over the passing of time, the kottans, which were sometimes decorated with beadwork and crochet work, slowly faded from the region. The women of the community who took care of the home and hearth in Chettinad, started leaving their hometown and

either started travelling with their husbands or moved to the metros to settle or relocated abroad.

As a result, the kottan craft slowly started disappearing by the 1950s. During the course of my work on the book *The Chettiar Heritage* in the early 90s, I noticed that the crafts and traditions of the region had almost completely vanished, and felt the urgent need to try and save it. With this in mind, I started the M.Rm.Rm. Cultural Foundation in the year 2000 to research, document and revive the crafts and traditions of my hometown Chettinad.

The first craft that I wanted to revive was the craft of kottan basketry. I found that although baskets were still available in the antique shops, I was unable to find anyone who was still practising the craft and was willing to teach it, until I met Kannamai Achi, who was then already in her eighties and who knew the craft of kottan weaving. She was willing to teach the craft and not wanting to miss this opportunity for more women to learn the craft, I started looking around for a group to train. Nirmala, a social worker, helped me with the first group of five reluctant women from Keelayapatti village who were disillusioned by previous training programmes that had left them high and dry. This group initially met in the front verandah of the homes of one of the women, and I arranged for Kannamai Achi to be taken there every day to teach the women.

They received training for one year before starting on customer orders to ground them in all the techniques and make certain that they maintain high quality, something that I ensure even today. During this period, they received a stipend. I was excited for them to learn the craft but I have to admit that my naivety led me to believe that once the craft was revived, it would stay alive. It was only as the project progressed that I understood that design, marketing and sourcing were still drawbacks that the women continually needed support with.

Twenty-five years down the line and I am still running the project. Now, the kottan project has evolved from a craft revival initiative into a sustainable livelihood programme with a wide positive impact on the women and their village community.

Today, through my Foundation, I also run centres in Sravayal Pudhur, Nachiapuram, Vairavanpatti, Koratti, Kanadukathan and Kambanur, and the number of craftswomen engaged in basketry has increased from 5 women in the first group to more than 100 women in the six centres. It is a point to note that almost all the women from the initial training group are still weaving with us today. I believe in the self-sufficiency of a project in order for it to be independent and successful. The kottan project began with a small returnable loan from an organisation called Aid to Artisans that helped in the initial days of training and also made us all work with a purpose to return the principal within a year.

Here and the following pages: Kottan baskets being woven and nesting baskets

I still remember the initial days when I realised that in order to keep the craft alive, I needed to make it relevant to the contemporary market and began to experiment with packaging solutions like sweet boxes and open baskets for gifting. I am always grateful to Ms Preetha Reddy of Apollo Hospitals who way back in the early 2000s gave us our first corporate order of 400 sweet boxes and helped us get the project off the ground. This kick-started a trickle of early orders and gave the women the confidence and belief that the project was here to stay.

The aim of the project is to provide a dependable and sustainable source of income through craft. As palm is a locally available natural raw material, the women can work within the comfort of their village once they complete the training workshop. Where they were traditionally using a handheld cutting tool, a mechanical splicer was introduced to the women to speed up the production process and maintain uniformity in splicing. Sourcing raw material, finding urban markets and arranging for the transport of raw material and finished products are some of the activities to which my Foundation is committed.

The design innovations undertaken by me have found these baskets gaining great popularity both as packaging for gifts as well as in a range of contemporary home accessories. We have worked with two designers during our 25-year journey. Claudia Von Hansemann, introduced to us through Jaya Jaitly visited the villages and worked closely with the women in the year 2008. One of her innovations was to teach the women a beautiful and yet simple flower using palm leaf and beads that is still being made today and referred to by the craftswomen as the 'Claudia flower'. Sangeetha Sen was another designer who in the year 2009 worked in the centres with the craftswomen and helped diversify our colour palette by introducing more colours and tones.

Kottan baskets were always traditionally woven in chemical colours and were almost always locally sourced. In the year 2005, I invited natural dye expert Jagada Rajappa to conduct a workshop in Chettinad to experiment in using natural dye on palm leaf. This resulted in a whole new range of subtle earthy shades that were exquisite and eco-friendly.

We hold yearly workshops to come up with new designs and colourways for the festive season well in advance to ensure that our products stay distinctive and relevant. This helps us keep our existing customer base while reaching out to newer markets, ensuring that our women have steady work through the year. I have found that although the Kottan baskets are fairly lightweight, their voluminous nature makes it difficult to contain them in small boxes while shipping. One solution that I have worked on is to design the products in a nesting format thereby saving on transport costs but this still poses a problem while shipping internationally as shipping drives up the landing cost of the baskets. We have found that the domestic packaging and gifting market in India is huge and our demand matches

and sometimes outstrips our supply thereby keeping us busy. We do not actively seek out international orders and focus primarily on the pan Indian market that has always been robust. Sales are primarily through our Chennai-based craft store, Manjal that has on display our entire range of products and regularly showcases our new collections.

The Covid-19 pandemic tested the basket project in many ways. Due to the ban on gatherings and events, orders dried up, especially following the lockdown in 2020. While our head office in Chennai was affected by the lockdown, the villages were thankfully spared and did not have any Covid cases, and were able to continue work. However, due to lack of sales and orders, it was very difficult to sustain giving work to our women. What helped us to remain steady was the organisation of our supply chain that had been strengthened over the many years of running the project. We have always embraced technology and where previously physical samples had to be sent to the villages, orders were now placed and processed via mobile phones and all the women were connected to us virtually. The craftswomen always enjoyed the freedom of working at the facility centres or the option of working from their homes, therefore the all-India lockdown did not disrupt their work life.

Once the country opened up again in mid-2020, we opted to sell accrued stock by offering discounts for bulk sales to our regular resellers. This enabled us to liquidate accumulated stock and also gave us cash flow to pay wages and salaries. The real challenge was with the movement of finished goods and raw materials as our well-oiled transportation machinery took a hit. We managed to race against time to process and dispatch orders to meet deadlines, which ensured enough sales. This also helped to make the annual renewal of medical insurance for all the craftswomen that was of great importance during those difficult times.

Even with the dip in regular sales, the Foundation continued to handhold the craftswomen during the Covid crisis. The pandemic situation also made us strengthen our online presence on social media platforms. It also led to the creation of our online store, which has now grown into a valuable sales avenue and has helped increase the reach of our products far and wide.

The participation in various exhibitions has been a great source of confidence to the women. Where initially they were overawed at the prospect of stepping outside the confines of their hometown, they now travel with self-assurance to international exhibitions, manage their stall, make sales, hold accounts and attend workshops. They have learnt to calculate the price for their products including the overheads and hidden costs and they fix their own wages accordingly. This exercise has also helped them ascertain that while small and intricately woven baskets look beautiful, they are more expensive, due to the time and labour involved. Therefore, some of the unviable smaller products have been dropped from the product catalogue.

Through attending collaborative workshops and exhibitions, the kottan craftswomen have been able to interact with craftspeople from other states and nationalities, and this has enabled them to gain a world view on handicrafts. The fact that they have received the UNESCO Seal of Excellence Award for handicrafts products in South Asia in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2014 and 2018, has been a further source of pride and self-confidence. As a culmination of the revival process, the women were also trained this year (2025) in crochet and bead work on the palmyra basket.

Village sanitation and levels of education have increased significantly, and less and less students are dropping out of school, with more of them pursuing higher education. An important point is that there has been a significant growth in the number of girl students, a previously infrequent occurrence. Those that have completed their education have found jobs in cities, enabling them and their families to look forward to a better future.

Today, the original group has grown older and slower, and with most of the children moving out into other fields, there are not many willing to learn kottan weaving. The younger women have many more options today and with kottan-making requiring patience, skill and hard work, many are opting to work at local shops and eateries, or at government schemes where the work is easier and more lucrative. However, we have recently started another group with younger women to carry on the craft, and we hope it will sustain for another generation.

The kottan-making process has been extensively documented, and a design catalogue of existing designs and techniques has been put together in my book, *The Kottan, The Palmyra Basket of Chettinad*. It is my hope that the book serves as an aid for future revival even if the craft happens to fade from practice.

Athangudi Tiles

The village of Athangudi is home to one of the most exclusive handmade flooring tiles, and its luminous colours and bold design give them an unmatched charm. These tiles have the advantage of being very long lasting; they retain their polish with minimal effort, and neither do the colours dim with the passing of time. The uniqueness of these tiles lies in the fact that they used lime plaster and cement for the tile and the tile was in turn sun-dried and not kiln-baked as was customary with flooring tiles.

Each tile is handmade using a mould that was made by an independent mould-maker and then covered with a pane of glass and allowed to soak in water to cure. The tiles were further made unique by being laid by a specialised team of layers from the region who would go personally and lay the tiles. This was the tradition that was followed with respect to the Athangudi tiles.

Extensively used in the homes of the Chettiar community, these tiles, many of them laid more than a hundred years ago, still remain intact and retain their

Athangudi tiles

glow and timeless quality. The tiles are maintained with regular mopping using plain water with a few drops of coconut oil. By the early 90s, Athangudi tiles had slowly gone out of fashion and faced competition from modern tiles. As a result, many of the units in the region started shutting down.

It was around this time that I met the tilemaker who had done the flooring at our home in the late 1940s. He was not at all receptive to working on a revival and was not keen on any input to boost production or sales. At this point, I met the two brothers Ramu and Natrajan who had started out as daily wage labourers and had set up a small unit of their own in a thatched hut. I encouraged them and worked with them to build up their business. Their principal problem was that they did not understand how to create a business plan and factor in hidden costs. They did not know how to provide a proper cost estimate for their orders, and had been losing clients due to this. I helped them understand how to work in this area, and supported them with marketing assistance for some years, until they were able to hone their business model and improve their communication skills. Today, they have become completely independent and do not require any assistance to function.

To improve sales, I came up with new designs and introduced new colours—shades of blue and green that have become very popular now. I also worked with the mould-makers to develop new designs apart from the existing repertoire of designs that all the tile-makers in the region had. With interest being sparked off on these tiles, many new units have come up in the village, and they are all flourishing. Collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, has led to a research project wherein the quality and durability of the tile may be improved, and the laying process simplified.

Sibanand Bhol

Sibanand Bhol *is an architect and craft activist, and founder of Collective Craft, a co-working studio, to empower Odisha's traditional /rural artisans and bring them together with designers and architects. He has helped introduce contemporary relevance to traditional crafts, integrating them with modern design and architecture. His most notable work is the* Krushi Bhawan*, in Bhubaneswar, a public architecture building that featured over 100 Odisha artisans. Below is a transcription of an interview conducted by CCI with him. Sibanand Bhol describes the processes involved in setting up a craft installation on the road leading to IIT Bhilai. He talks of the setting-up process, the challenges, the stories to be told and the future that awaits.*

It might not be the most immediate association—a spanking new public engineering college (IIT Bhilai) as the setting for a one-kilometre-long corridor of bright blue metal panels narrating ancient folk tales, tribal myths and narratives from the local Gondi Ramayana. These sheet metal panels feature intricately designed patterns of hand-pounded holes that allows sunlight to pour through them throughout the day, bringing these stories to life in an ever changing dance of sunlight and shadow.

This craft installation is a mix of complex juxtapositions—using traditional manual skills among the modern machine equipment used in building the rest of the campus; bringing mythological narratives centred around nature within a place focused on science and technology; being from outside the formal education system and creating in an elite institute of higher education; communicating local Gond belief systems to an audience of students from other parts of the country. These contrasts, though seemingly incongruous, result in a profound human connection at multiple levels.

When does craft enter the architectural lexicon? Sibanand Bhol, says that when the building meets with its physical surroundings sometimes a layer of connection between the two is missing—a layer that connects the land or the people to the building. Craft is what bridges that missing link. One of the ideas was using the local Gond craft traditions from the neighbouring Bastar villages.

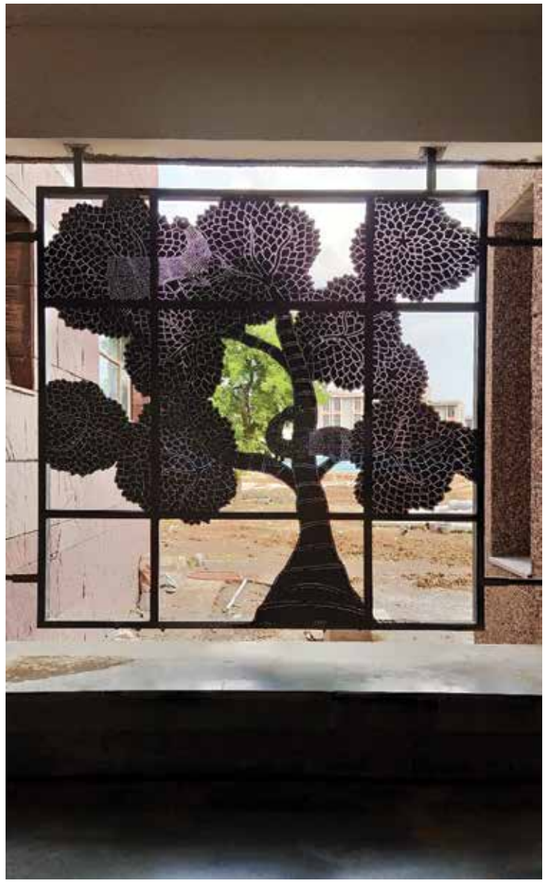
The next challenge was to identify the artisans who could translate the vision into reality. Initially, Collective Crafts thought they would work with younger craftspeople but they soon found that many younger Gond artists have moved on to do things in their own, more contemporary, style. Their subjects had also expanded and gone beyond tribal life and nature and becoming a more individualised works of art rather than the traditional craft of the Gond community.

When looking for someone older who was familiar with the collective ancestral memory of the Gonds, they found Ram Singh Urveti whose knowledge of the tribal stories and drawings could be brought to life through the metal panels.

The IIT Director also had inputs on the story selection. Since there was an emphasis on contextualising this to a regional content, he felt one must include something from the Ramayana because this was the land of Dandakaranya. So, stories from the local Gondi Ramayana were included as an authentic representation of the craft persons' ancestral belief system.

With so many different episodes informing the entire walkway, Collective Crafts decided that the overarching theme of the corridor would be a year in the Gond's life. The vision was that you might enter any time of the year and leave at any time

of the tribal year, depending on which department/block you were heading from and where you were going. And so the student would see different panels when walking different lengths of it and experience the dynamic and magical play of light through the holes in the metal sheets, depending on the time of the day.



Here and the following pages: Krushi Bhawan *in Bhubaneswar, a public architecture building that featured over 100 Odisha artisans*

The artisans were full-time farmers who would make farming tools like axes and ploughs during the lean season and sell it at village fairs. Many of these tools are now machine-made further cutting into their income but they were skilled in working with metal.

For Bhol, this roping in the tribal artisans to work on the installation was an opportunity to bring people who lived beyond the walls of IIT to have a cultural presence on the campus through these craft panels and through the stories. And for the students from all over the country to be brought in contact with an ancestral memory and a cultural context rooted in the soil of their campus.

They had to demonstrate that craft does not mean poor quality or shoddy finish or poor long-term sustainability. Even some of the metal installations at airports start showing signs of rust after a few years. People then don't trust handcrafted products anymore, citing the problem with quality. In Bhol's words, "We didn't want that association. We wanted whatever we did to last a good enough time.

And so their whole idea was that it had to live up to that challenge of making a quality installation. Otherwise, so much effort put in with no idea if it would last two years. They didn't want that to happen since it would

be a defeat at many different levels for the craft and for future projects like these."

He goes on to add, "The future of this craft is unclear… some in the younger generation carry on the tradition while others feel there is more financial security in farming. Others have seen the interest in Gond art among urban customers and have pivoted to painting – moving away from craft to art. Even being a painter/artist, it is a difficult and unpredictable life and one needs grit and resilience in addition to talent. Understandably, many younger Gonds prefer the relative reliability of earning a living from farming.

The challenge now is to find answers to the questions from young artisans - 'When everybody is rejecting this traditional craft, where do we fit in?' they ask. The challenge is to take them along and demonstrate that their work can also be contemporary, meaningful and vastly different from what they've understood it to be.[1]

Bhol also says there needs to be more workshops on the craft traditions which can create a distinctive identity that finds appreciation in the public mind. Craft will always be a personal expression of a continuing tradition but in its current state, the individualism is tilting into a severely fractured community with no particular singularity that appeals to people from other parts of the country. He feels there needs to be a coalescing of the craft in order to bring about some kind of design synergy in the contemporary context.

Another challenge is the lack of standards that take into account the different challenges that craftspeople face when carrying out a project. There are fewer public buildings that incorporate craft because of the sheer speed of construction. When racing against short deadlines, time-intense crafts work suffers against machine work. Bhol suggests that the government could develop a framework or a SOP for engaging with craftspeople, "with terms and conditions that reflect the true on-ground realities".

On the positive side, Bhol sees much potential for craft in public spaces on a large scale. Already, 10 per cent of the budget of government buildings are to be set aside for art and craft that is linked to the local context and local resources. He points to the possibility of replacing standard FRP murals with stone work at railway stations across the country. "Somewhere, there is a lapse in understanding in the people involved," says Bhol.[2]

In the midst of discussion around the need for government support for craft installations in public buildings, creating standards for craft inputs, incorporating traditional craft awareness in the design curriculum, incentivising the younger generation of craftspeople—some things don't change at a profound level. The civilisational pull of India's ancient craft traditions still holds strong. As Bhol says, "It's very simple… we don't necessarily have to be tribal or Gond or Indian or whatever, these panels speak to you at a very elemental level."

1 - https://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/building-with-indian-craftsmen-architecture-museum-of-meenakari-heritage-krushi bhawan-iit-bhilai/article68152753.ece

2 - https://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/building-with-indian-craftsmen-architecture-museum-of-meenakari-heritage-krushi bhawan-iit-bhilai/article68152753.ece

Education and Training

Academic institutions and vocational training have ably assisted the Indian crafts-persons in capacity building, mentorship, design education and development of business skills. Government-run institutes across India offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes focused on design, dyeing, weaving, printing, and finishing. The Ministry of Textiles and the State-run institutes oversee the running of these institutes. The Government has various certified skill development programmes that aim to cover millions of artisans under recognised structures and frameworks. Several NGOs and Civil Society initiatives work to empower artisans, especially women in the rural areas and in the North-East regions.

The Government's policy-making and grassroots intervention bring guest artisans into school classrooms to introduce craft appreciation and nurture entrepreneurial skills in young people. The Somaiya Kala Vidya, the Indian Institute of Craft and Design, the Handloom School and the National Institute of Design are some of the highly reputed institutes that handhold the artisans and assist them on their journey to become skilled contemporary artisans with sound business skills. Education and training have been spearheaded by passionate individuals who believe in the preservation of cultural heritage in combination with design innovation and have been the backbone of many of these institutions.

Judy Frater

Judy Frater *is an American who specialised in South-Asian studies, and spent 25 years living and working among the nomadic Rabari tribe and other artisans of the Kutch region of India.*

In 1993, Frater founded the Kala Raksha Trust in Bhuj, Kutch, with local artisans. This initiative evolved into the Kala Raksha Textile Museum and eventually Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya, India's first design school for traditional artisans, aimed at empowering craftspeople to serve as designers rather than mere workers. Eventually the Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya course was incorporated into the Somaiya Kala Vidya, set up with the help of the KJ Somaiya Trust. She was honoured with The Crafts Council of India Kamala Award in 2010. Below is her narrative of the setting up of her evolving educational programmes for artisans.

On Education for Artisans

Over more than 30 years researching craft traditions, and then co-founding and advising Kala Raksha, I became concerned that commercialisation was changing the fundamental identity of craft. Artisans were becoming workers in their own traditions, and they and their work were losing value. Artisans were leaving their traditions.

I understood that the personal factor was intrinsic to the value of craft, and I believed that the reason for attrition of artisans was that from their perspective, craft no longer generated enough recognition, nor enough income for the effort that it requires. I believed that education could turn that around. Assessing the contemporary arena, I felt that skill would no longer be enough to easily establish recognition, but that focus on the traditional aspect of craft and creativity in innovation could activate recognition and revive value.

In 2003, I received an Ashoka Fellowship to develop a programme of design education for traditional artisans. With further support from UNESCO and the Development Commissioner Handicrafts, I launched the course in 2005 as Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya (KRV), in Tunda Vandh, Kutch. The intention of the education programme was to enable artisans to regain creative agency and to operate successful businesses. The year-long course teaches traditional artisans to recognise and value their cultural heritage and to innovate within its parameters as they define them, to reach contemporary markets. The concept is to take traditional knowledge as a pre-requisite and provide what is understood as higher or specialised education directly to artisans. By learning to innovate within traditions, artisans can ensure integrity in their cultural heritage. By connecting to contemporary markets, they can gain recognition as well as income.

Judy Frater with the craftswomen

After eight years of directing KRV, I felt that the programme had reached its limit in that venue. The campus had been surrounded by Asia's largest coal-fed thermal power plant. The parent Trust did not have the financial resources to sustain the existing programme, while I felt a need to expand. To build the programme into an institute, I joined forces with the KJ Somaiya Gujarat Trust to begin Somaiya Kala Vidya, its next avatar.

Somaiya Kala Vidya (SKV)

Somaiya Kala Vidya, Anjar, Kutch, was founded in 2014, to educate traditional artisans of Kutch. It offers design and business education for artisans of Kutch and the requisite for admission is knowledge of traditional craft. The institution takes into consideration the lifestyles of the artisans and adapts its language of instruction and curricula to suit them.

Nishit Sangomala is currently the Director of Somaiya Kala Vidyalaya. CCI posed several questions to him regarding the organisation, and his responses are transcribed below.

The Director was asked about the course structure, curriculum, schedule and language of instruction. His responses indicated that the curriculum was tailored and the academic calendar was always aligned to the seasonal cycles with a pause in weaving during the monsoons due to challenges in drying, starching and printing. The course is concluded well before the festivals of Dusshera and Diwali to enable students to prepare for the annual exhibitions and get access to lucrative markets. The schedule involves staying on campus for 13 consecutive days and returning home to apply their theoretical learning in a traditional craft setting. This allows for the completion of the course in a year.

A fashion show at Somaiya Kala Vidya

Literacy is not mandatory, the only prerequisite for admission being mastery in their own craft. In many instances those who could not read or write in their own language became artisan-designers. The medium of instruction is in Gujarati or Hindi, depending on the faculty. In Bagalkote, Kannada is the language of instruction and if Kannada-speaking faculty is not available, they are instructed in design with the use of an in-house translator. With the combination of design and business education, many notable success stories amongst the alumni have been chronicled.

Scenes from Somaiya Kala Vidya

Inspiring Stories of Alumni of SKV

The journeys of these standout artisans reflect the impact of the education they have received at SKV.

Adil Khatri completed the Design course in 2013 and the Business Management course in 2014. He has many achievements to his credit. He founded his own enterprise with an initial capital of Rs 3 lakh from his father and built it into a business generating Rs11 lakh. He has showcased his collection at the International Folk Art Market – Santa Fe, expanding to global exposure. He currently employs 30 women artisans.

Mukhtar Khatri graduated from SKV in 2017, building several positive outcomes. He has effectively segmented markets, earning at least Rs 5 lakh in earnings per exhibition. He participates in 4 exhibitions annually, maximising profit and sales opportunities. He employs 15–20 dyers and around 200 women artisans, paying them Rs300/day and provides work around the year. He has achieved three times the growth in assets, including workshop infrastructure. He now serves as a permanent faculty member at SKV, giving back to the institution that nurtured him.

Pachan Siju did his postgraduation from SKV in 2015. He launched Three Threads, his own brand symbolising both the extra weft technique and sibling bonds between the three brothers. He transitioned from job work to self employment and expanded from 3 to 10 looms. He doubled his income, with steady growth and shifted to niche, high-end markets, pricing products 3–4 times higher.

Prakash Siju graduated from SKV in 2008. He was previously engaged in job work but after SKV, had many achievements to his credit. He introduced design into his craft, enabling a 10 times increase in product pricing. He doubled both his income and the number of operational looms and established his own brand and enterprise. He offers fair, equal employment to other artisans and now makes approximately Rs 4–5 lakh annually.

The Handloom School, Maheshwar

The Handloom School (THS), an initiative of the WomenWeave Charitable Trust founded in 2013, in Maheshwar, is dedicated to preserving Indian handlooms as a sustainable craft form and global industry. As a thought leader in the handloom space, THS is committed to building a better future for India's handloom weavers through innovation, thought leadership, and the introduction of best-in-class practices tailored to the needs of rural artisans. Their vision is to create economically viable and socially innovative handloom communities while fostering dignity and respect for weaving work. THS integrates traditional knowledge with modern practices to empower young weavers as artisan-entrepreneurs.

***Hemendra Sharma** is a social entrepreneur and CEO of THS. With his involvement in community development through WomenWeave and Rehwa Society, and academic training in rural management, he designed and scaled a transformative educational model for artisan-weavers. The Handloom School under Hemendra Sharma's leadership is transforming the lives of young weavers and marginalised women by blending heritage skills with business acumen, fostering entrepreneurship, and creating a sustainable ecosystem for India's handloom sector. Sharma also co-founded Kala Swaraj Foundation to sustain lesser +known handloom communities through self-reliant and scalable initiatives. He was interviewed by CCI and his responses are transcribed in the following pages.*

Hemendra Sharma, described the three flagship programmes of the institution. They are the CDEM course (Certificate in Design and Enterprise Management), with a duration of 6 months that taught advanced weaving, design, business management, and digital marketing. There were 177 graduates from 21 clusters across 13 states with 74 per cent remaining in the handloom sector; 30 per cent having started businesses with Rs 33 lakh average annual sales.

The second course is the CSTU course (Certificate in Skilling the Unskilled), a five-month programme for marginalised women that provides basic weaving skills and access to income. The graduates have increased household income by over 40 per cent, earning around Rs 66,000 annually.

The third course is the AIM course (Alumni Incubation Module), which is an ongoing support for CDEM graduates. It offers two additional years of mentorship, market access, and compliance training.

The Handloom School, Maheshwar

Classes in progress at the Handloom School

The impact of these courses is widely felt, with CDEM entrepreneurs generating jobs, paying Rs 12.9 lakh annually in wages. THS combines traditional craft preservation with modern entrepreneurial training.

Some of the key highlights of the interview were the initial challenges faced by the THS of attracting students from beyond Maheshwar. THS used partnerships with NGOs and outreach trips to explain the value of their programmes. Alumni engagement is very effective with past students playing a crucial role in promoting THS in their communities and remain closely connected to the school. Each student receives one year of structured support, including training and buyer-seller meets. The AIM module extends this support by two years for alumni. THS promotes creative exploration with natural fibres, yarns, and multi-shaft weaving to broaden students' design perspectives. THS maintains strong relationships with alumni, involving them in workshops, exhibitions, and business consultations.

By combining thought leadership with practical innovation, THS not only preserves the heritage of handloom but also equips weavers with the tools to thrive in modern markets. Through these efforts, THS is driving systemic change and building a sustainable, dignified future for India's handloom artisans.

Indian Institute of Crafts and Design (IICD)

भारतीय शिल्प संस्थान
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF CRAFTS & DESIGN, JAIPUR

IICD was first registered as Institute of Crafts, Jaipur on 20th April, 1995, by the Registrar of Societies, Rajasthan, Jaipur, under the Rajasthan Societies Registration Act 1958. On 27th April, 1998, its name was changed to Indian Institute of Crafts and Design, Rajasthan, Jaipur under section 12 of the said Act. The first batch of postgraduate students was started in 1999 along with a Girls' Hostel at Jawahar Nagar, Jaipur.

Toolika Gupta is the current Director of IICD, Jaipur since April 2017. A postgraduate of Lady Irwin College, she took up teaching in NIFT, Delhi, and then went on to a PhD from the University of Glasgow, UK. According to her, "My research interests include fashion and textile history, revival of Indian handicrafts and culture, craft cluster initiatives, and craft business incubation." Here is the transcription of her interview with CCI.

IICD's Training Programmes for Artisans

The Indian Institute of Craft and Design (IICD) has been offering tailor-made short and medium-term courses for artisans since its inception in 1995. Systematic documentation began after 2017, with reports available on their website. Courses are customised based on community needs and often conducted at local venues for accessibility. A typical batch includes 20–30 artisans, with a final 2–3 days visit to IICD.

Training workshops in progress

The most popular courses are for textile crafts, which attract several participants. A course on aesthetics, functionality, and design basics has been piloted with stone workers in Dausa but needs more promotion. A communication and content writing course is proposed but not yet implemented (currently part of the full-time Craft Communication degree).

Feedback about the training workshops are regularly received, including via videos created by NGOs. For example, a training for women funded by SBI Cap Securities CSR was provided free of cost. Business-oriented initiatives are conducted through IICD's Craft Business Accelerator Programme to support artisan entrepreneurs and small craft-based businesses.

Digital Literacy & Technology are emphasised, with support from Creative Dignity (CD) and Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF). A workshop was hosted at IICD with Axis Bank sponsorship. Technological upgrades are also encouraged in the following areas:

1. Tools
2. Digital literacy
3. Communication and design
4. Marketing and outreach
5. Access to loans and investors

IICD believes the future of craft is technology-driven and aims to build artisan confidence and capacity through targeted training.

Rathi Jha

Rathi Vinay Jha

Rathi Vinay Jha is on the Governing Body of IICD. She has held many positions relating to the craft sector. She is one of the founders of NIFT and served as its Executive Director from 1987-93. She was the Managing Director, Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation and CMD, Co-optex from 1985-87. Rathi Jha is also in the Governing Body of the Madras Craft Foundation. She has contributed this article about IICD for the CCI book.

Indian Institute of Craft & Design was set up by the Government of Rajasthan in 1995. Rajasthan being a craft-rich State realised the importance of craft to the economy and also the potential to offer design education and skill training to develop and promote crafts. And the recent establishment of NIFT which was offering courses in Accessory Design, as also interacting with craft and creators from all the States, could have spurred on the decision. In 2007, the management of IICD was handed over to the Ambuja Educational Institute on a PPP model. Since 2017, IICD offered degrees in collaboration with the Central University of Rajasthan and later wef 2019, from the Vishwakarma Skill University. These degrees at B Des and M Des levels are recognised by UGC.

Craftspeople are invited to impart skills to the students at IICD

The education and training imparted, supports the craft sector and its products, that are offered both in the domestic as well as the export markets. Skilled designers have impacted the craft products with design interventions that are relevant to fast emerging fashion trends. This is of particular impact as the craft sector is the second largest employment provider in rural India (second only to agriculture), and India has a rich tradition of crafts in all its States.

Over the years, IICD evolved into a vibrant centre of experiment and innovation. While nurturing craft traditions, there is also a vision for sensitively evolving products that are relevant to the consumer and a contemporary market.

Apart from imparting craft education, IICD also works with craft clusters, and encourages children of craftspeople to study at the Institute by offering scholarships. Craftspeople are invited to impart skills to the students and such interaction makes students respect and value these craft teachers. Industry internships with exporters and student exchange programmes offer exposure of minds to foreign markets. IICD has also collaborated with IIMs at Ahmedabad and Udaipur on business programmes for the craft industry.

In short, IICD has been active in not just imparting education and training but in bringing craftspeople onto participation in areas of design and marketing. In its programmes, it has managed to synergise traditional knowledge and skills with contemporary needs and trends.

National Institute of Design (NID)

The National Institute of Design (NID), which was established in 1961 in Ahmedabad, is India's premier institute for design education, research, and to promote design as a tool for social and economic development.

NID is globally recognised and respected for its interdisciplinary, human-centered design approach and has partnerships with leading design institutions and organisations worldwide. It promotes innovation, yet is rooted in culture, sustainability, and inclusive development.

Vinay Jha was the Executive Director, National Institute of Design (NID) from 1985–1989. In his tenure, he forged links with Indian industry through CII, boosted global connections, established its first computer lab and brought about positive administrative changes and faculty empowerment. CCI approached him to obtain his views on the importance of design education for artisans. What follows are his words verbatim.

The justification for NID was not just industrial design. Design for craft which is a more important sector in India for the rural and semi-urban employment it provides, was always a core concern for NID. As part of the foundation course, all students must travel to a village, live there for 2 months and document its crafts. The report that the student is required to submit forms an essential and important part of design training which is graded for the course.

The craft in the village could be either textile-based (weaving/printing) or a variety of rural crafts. CCI both at the national level and in some States (which are more active than others) have in the past used many of these reports for exploring non-traditional expressions of design to suit the market place, develop a product range more suited to practical home use, based on the design idiom.

The faculty and students have from time to time taken up assignments to provide design for a product range of specific areas. Sarees of a particular region is one example. Such assignments were commissioned by the State handloom organisations like Co-optex. The offices of the Development Commissioner of Handlooms and Handicrafts in the Ministry of Textiles, commissioned design projects from time to time. Very often these project proposals came from NID, arising out of faculty/student interest.

I would like to draw your attention to the Jawaja story. This was a unique initiative undertaken by a collaboration between NID and IIM Ahmedabad. The idea originated from Ravi Mathai, who had just stepped down from the Director's position at that time. I think it was in the early 80s. The core charter of this project

Fashion Design at NID

was to take a community of traditional craftspeople in a village and provide them with an education in both management and design. NID was the obvious design partner in this experiment. Jawaja, a village near Beawer in Rajasthan was selected for this pioneering work. The village had a small number of leather workers whose traditional role was flaying of dead animals, processing the leather after a fashion and crafting footwear. You can guess that these people were from the lowest social strata in the village. Just a notch higher were the weavers who used coarse yarn to weave bedsheets. The market for both these products was local.

NID provided design for a wide range of products both for textile and leather. Design faculty from the textile design department and the product design departments led the design initiative. The product range expanded way beyond the local to the urban markets in Bombay and Delhi to start with. Simultaneously some of the villagers in the group were trained in basic management, with pricing and accounting, and inventory management, being the more important subjects.

Classes at the National Institute of Design

This task was undertaken by faculty members from IIM. This so-called experiment was successful in empowering a community to manage their own business, expand it and diversify it. It has been very well documented in a book titled 'The Rural University'. I think it is out of print but it must be in the NID library. I would like to think that the later 'URMUL' initiative in Lunkaransar, in Bikaner district of Rajasthan undertaken by a group of young people (some from the Indian Institute of Rural Management) drew its inspiration from Jawaja.

I think the role of NID and the later Institutes of Design, even if they are pale shadows of the original, have had a catalysing effect on the entire craft sector in the country. This awareness movement has been carried forward by hundreds of designers who have graduated from NID and other institutes and who now practise design for their livelihood!

Gender and Community Building

The majority artisan workforce in India comprises more women than men, with the handloom sector employing 77 per cent of women. Traditional crafts have been passed down through generations, which have been a vital source of income for women and also a mark of cultural expression. Gender disparities though, have long existed with women receiving poor wages, limited access to markets, low visibility and lack of leadership opportunities, hampering their potential. In recent times, Self-Help Groups, NGO involvement, digital empowerment and market access have mitigated their earlier discriminated status and improved their standing in the handloom sector.

Neelam Chhiber

Neelam Chhiber *is an industrial designer and social entrepreneur, from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, and an ardent champion of gender equity among artisans. Industree Foundation, which Neelam Chhiber co-founded with Gita Ram in 2000, incubates women-led producer companies and sustainable value chains, and has impacted more than 5 lakh lives. Their partners include global brands and Government agencies. Neelam Chhiber believes in 'collective leadership' and 'distributed ownership' and largely encourages rural women artisans to develop entrepreneurial strength through collectives. She was approached by CCI to contribute an article for their 60th Anniversary book.*

Historically, creative production or artisanal work has been a family occupation. Women have worked side by side with men across most processes of the vocation, unless it was an extremely hard material vocation, such as stone or metal, where they predominantly helped in finishing. In vocations such as handloom weaving, women anchored spinning, reeling, and many pre-weaving and finishing activities. The same was with terracotta where we saw women engaged in all pre-processing and firing support tasks, except maybe, the actual wheel work. Today, we are seeing a sea change in this traditional scenario, which has been developing for

multiple reasons at a national scale, and also due to global influence, over the last 20 years.

Industree's experience succinctly exemplifies how changes in government policy and the overarching national and global discourse on women's emancipation, has influenced the transition towards true recognition of women producer participation in the sector and the great impact it has on society as a whole.

During Industree's 25 years of work, its journey of working with multiple crafts, started mostly with men initially, but today as a leading voice and actor in creative production, it almost solely works with women producers. Its latest bamboo programme envisages working with a million women over the next 5-7 years. Over the years, it has worked with 65,000-70,000 artisans of which easily the majority would be women.

Baskets made from banana rope

This journey has been completely organic in nature. When Industree started its first store in mid-1995, designing and creating market access for artisan entrepreneurs, societies and small co-operatives, the natural fibre products in screw pine, palm leaf, palm *naar*, river grass, sisal, palm stem fibre, banana, all came from government-supported societies mostly in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and some from Andhra Pradesh. These were operated by and interacted mostly with women producers, some being skills managed by local convents. Papier mâché from Kashmir, was even then hand-painted by women, as was all the embroidery from North India, but the wood inlay from Karnataka and UP, the block printing from Rajasthan and the cutwork handloom from UP, was mostly from male producers.

Industree Crafts (an earlier avatar) moved into export markets from 1998 onwards, and it became

clear that for those markets, natural fibres of India were totally untapped, except for jute from West Bengal and coir from Kerala. And thus began its journey with one of India's most women-centric vocations after embroidery. Just a data point here for interest, India's largest exports in the 90s and early 2000s was hand embroidery!

The reason dawned on us pretty fast. All that was needed in terms of rural infrastructure was the same pair of women's hands (that worked at much below minimum wage), needle and thread! The entrepreneurs supplied the fabric, the design, drop/pick up and the final conversion took place at their urban units. Of course, global machine embroidery was not as intelligent as it is now! Thus, India's largest export in handicrafts for a decade or more was built on 'under minimum wage' labour of its rural women.

Other than design and building market access for natural fibre creative producers, Industree also started working extensively with Government programmes of the Office of DC Handicrafts. Ministry of Textiles, to strengthen the supply side for larger volume export orders, and found these programmes to be built extensively on India's burgeoning Self-Help Group movement, which was a 100 per cent focused on women. These SHG groups of 15-20 each were encouraged later to aggregate into societies, federations, co-ops or producer companies. They could then avail of infrastructure facilities that the department would provide for and which needed to cater to increasing social and environmental norms that export markets demanded.

Today, under the Ministry of Rural Development, at the National Rural Livelihoods Mission, close to 10 million SHGs are registered, which would cover about 200 million women. National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) takes a sub-sector view and when one million women are impacted, they form a sub-sector, with strong state-level operational and implementation strategy development. Industree is working towards providing sub-sector status to creative production, encompassing handicrafts and handlooms, after a few years. In the meanwhile, it is learning from its experience, enabling the building of bamboo as a sub-sector for the nation with NRLM.

Industree Foundation anchored creative production over the years and worked on the regenerative economic transformation of India's most vulnerable women. It has been unleashing their abilities to build, and scale small-holder farmer collectives and self-owned creative enterprises.

These then enable them to leverage economies of scale. Our focus is on India's 260 million strong farm and creative production population that resides in its villages.

It is building an ecosystem that holistically tackles the root causes of poverty by accelerating the economic sustainability of women's collectives via value addition at the source, of their locally available raw material resources and biodiversity. Initiatives are conceived with women producers leading to quadruple bottom line impact for communities:

1. Economic impact that deeply focuses on regular work, increased income, and financial stability for the family.
2. Social impact which emphasises improved agency and voice for women at home and in their communities along with improved educational opportunities for the next generation.
3. Environmental impact focusing on natural materials, circular economy, biodiversity increase, carbon sequestering raw material growth, localised consumption value chains thus building regenerative economies that lead to positive climate outcomes.
4. Cultural impact that entails preservation of traditional knowledge and intellectual property gains for communities.

Since our inception in 2000, we have impacted over 600,000 lives and ensured cumulative market access of over $59.5 million (USD), with a clear focus on Equity, Climate and Gender, (ECG). Through our work, we ensure that rural women in communities have access to sustainable livelihoods, rooted in artisanal production, become part of the organised workforce, close to their homes, in climate-positive value chains with clients such as IKEA Worldwide, H&M Home, as well as local, regional and national markets.

Dried saal leaves

India has now surpassed China to become the world's most populous country with 1.4 billion people and is one of the fastest-expanding economies in the world. However, this growth story does not translate into jobs for its job-seeking population. The unevenness in India's growth story became even starker post-pandemic, with 230 million being pushed into poverty. As per the World Inequality Report 2022, India is among the most unequal countries in the world, with rising poverty. Lack of jobs continues to be a serious problem with the unemployment rate touching 8.11 per cent in April 2023, according to the Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy (CMIE), with women's labour force participation steadily declining.

Within this overall landscape of poverty, unemployment, and current/forthcoming climate crisis, women in rural areas continue to be affected by a range of interrelated cultural, socio-economic, and institutional factors. This emphasises gender disparity, constraining and limiting their access to and control over productive economic resources, and overall well-rounded development of families and communities. Lack of ownership over assets has further aggravated the minority role of women, who have unequal decision-making power within the household. This risk around insecure access and ownership rights to assets such as land and other nature-based assets in rural India exacerbates in the face of climate change, as it is the women from vulnerable communities who are disproportionately impacted.

Industree

On the other hand, it is a proven fact that when some income and savings are in the hands of women, with the tools of negotiation and peer support provided to her, there is an increase in nutritional, health and educational outcomes for the family. Thus, we see national government policy promote investment in women's economic development within the SHG framework, and increased global development funds and philanthropic support for the same, over the years. This has translated into Indian CSR deploying their 2% very effectively into this domain too.

The need therefore is to create economic opportunities that can absorb rural populations, especially rural women who are at varying education levels, and

provide a source of income that affirms their right to decent work, that is environmentally sustainable.

Industree – Theory of Change

Whilst focusing on gender with women artisans, the wealth of insight Industree gained, can be useful for the sector as a whole, as we see rapid increase in women in the creative production workforce. With increasing education and the emphasis on skilling and migration to urban centres, men migrate easier, leaving the women behind to look after traditional vocations, be it farming or creative production. Industree's work on ensuring women have decent work in locations close to their home, ensures no exploitation, no forced labour, above minimum wage income per hour and flexibility in work hours, enabling them to manage children and elder care. Design, creative production, process control, quality control, finishing, all tasks are conducted under leadership of women. The Artha program that Industree has designed, builds capability of women leaders from the production community to take on roles of accounting, human resource processes, merchandising, marketing, administrative tasks for the hubs, that also anchor due diligence from export customers.

Its focus is as follows:

- Women micro-entrepreneurs, or creative makers—gender equality at the work-place and home, create a positive, safe, fair and equal working environment with voices heard at the workplace and home. Women community professional management and leaders—a cadre of community women leaders and para professionals to enable growth of the enterprise.
- Digital and financial literacy for women- all income is transferred to women through bank accounts, Women need to access their bank accounts and need to manage their incomes.
- They are trained to use their phones effectively for work and all this leads to climbing the ladder of leadership, decision-making and self-reliance.

Working deeply on gender even with one of India's most progressive States,

Here and alongside: Saal leaf making, Odisha

revealed the severe limitations women artisans face and have faced over generations. Women shared their inability to handle their own cash, as they did not know how to operate ATMs. Some women had never eaten a hot meal in their lives, or cooked food of their choice always serving their families and others' tastes first. They had been discrimination amongst their male and female children and they realised the indignity in that.

Women showed remarkable ability in planning their workday around necessary family chores that their families depended on them for. Most of them invested their earnings on improving their homes in terms of appliances, vehicles, books and education materials for their children and unequivocally they all expressed the need for regular work as they could then plan their household expenses better with their husbands. Many shared that coming to a common workspace interspersed with work at home, is an ideal combination as they have no other platform to interact with their peers in the village. In matters of domestic strife, each peer advises the other and stands by each other, providing much-needed solidarity of spirit.

The deep connection between improved economic ability and women's much-needed dignity in society has been established and the transition the sector is going to be seeing of women becoming flagbearers of the creative economy, side by side with the men, is a trend, which if embraced will enable a truly progressive nation.

Marketing

Indian handicrafts have a strong appeal both in India and abroad due to the uniqueness and authenticity of handmade products, and the rich variety of crafts, aligned with a vibrant cultural heritage. In recent times, there is a growing demand for ethical and sustainable handmade products, and with higher disposable income amongst urban consumers, home décor and gifting items contribute towards the need for higher production and market access. Many channels and platforms are available for sourcing the products, apart from local and regional markets, exhibitions and Government handicraft emporiums. Online sales and ecommerce sites do brisk sales and export markets form a large component of the marketing platform. Despite these positive factors, there are many challenges facing the marketability of handmade products. Artisans in remote villages lack connectivity to large markets and frequently middlemen stepping in is a detriment to the artisan. Over time, market linkages have been favourably supported by NGOs and Government programmes, resulting in the Indian handicraft market growing rapidly.

Jaya Jaitly

***Jaya Jaitly**, craft activist and curator, has consistently worked towards giving market access to artisans and to promote sustainable, ethical, environmentally-friendly practices in crafts, while keeping their regional identities intact. She has been the author of several books on craft some of them being* Craft Traditions of India, Crafting Nature, *etc. Her* Crafts Atlas of India, *minutely maps and documents State-wise, the crafts of India. In 1986, she founded Dastkari Haat Samiti, an organisation focused on sustaining traditional craft of Indian artisans, linking them more directly to markets. She set up the Dilli Haat, Delhi, in 1994, a permanent space, which acts as an open-air market and crafts bazaar, for handmade crafts and handlooms. One of the highlights of the new Parliament building inaugurated in 2023, is the Shilp Gallery, a space dedicated to the Indian craftspeople and executed by the Dastkari Haat Samiti. CCI approached her for an interview and her in-depth responses are included below.*

The Crafts Landscape We Observe

The views related to nation building of stalwarts like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, JC Kumarappa, his friend and partner in development economics, activists like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and her band of colleagues in social

work and many others, laid the foundation for plans that gave space to rural industries and crafts. This was crucial against the forceful and indeed important thrust towards industrialisation and self-reliance that defined the approach of the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. There were allocations in the Five-Year Plan process for khadi and village industries, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay fought many battles for funds to be allocated to build institutions for the revival and development of crafts and handlooms. In the first two decades after India's Independence, attention towards the revival of craft practices and traditions lay entirely with government bodies. Pre-Independence manufacturers who produced for export were not very visible. From the shattered landscape left by the British colonial empire it was an operation that meant lifting rural industries up from scratch and into the world of national and international commerce. It was only ritual ceremonial or heritage crafts that still existed below the radar as they were in no way related to commerce nor had they clashed with British industrial interests.

The politics of the latter part of the 1970s, gave rise to what were then called 'Voluntary Organisations', guided by Gandhi's work of seva, or service. It was only the fairly well-to-do who could afford to work for free, so with the needs of idealistic young people looking for new forms of employment, new bodies needed funds to survive. This led to what became Non-Government Organisations or Non-Profit Organisations. Alongside, the nation set up Central and State showrooms to sell crafts, like the Central Cottage Industries Corporation and State emporia.

Today, there are a plethora of NGOs with imitative names and offerings, who hold crafts bazaars with craftspeople poached from the projects and bazaars of others, even imitating announcements on social media. While it may be annoying from the point of view of innovative organisations who have done solid groundwork for decades like The Crafts Council of India, Dastkar and us, the Dastkari Haat Samiti, it indicates a huge rise in the marketability of crafts amongst our domestic population, making it lucrative for business people rather than seva-minded organisers/entrepreneurs. Things have come a long way from our early days!

The Dastkari Haat Samiti, which I founded in 1986, was slotted into the NGO format. We were to register with the Registrar of Societies, which then completely

forgot we existed. Our association was always intended to be self-funded, so I approached our funding like a trade union enterprise, but oddly, without an employer! As relics of the seva or service mindset, some among us take no salary or financial benefits. We arranged crafts bazaars, with very small grants from the Ministry of Textiles, but costs soon outweighed the minimal grant amount and we began to self-fund the administrative costs through the contribution of craftspeople participating in the bazaars we organised. In our institution. we are neither patrons or bosses—the craftspeople are the true controllers of the Samiti. Their contributions pay the salaries and administrative expenses and it is my (non-paid) job and the salaried staff that organise a variety of events, organise workshops with foreign countries alongside their counterparts in India, provide new designs throughout the year by phone, sketched images sent on WhatsApp, short sessions at our office, and training in a multitude of ways for the craftspeople to enhance their skills and earnings. Annual plans are formed after consultation with them and annual accounts are shared publicly with them when they gather for our big events. All our fairly visionary special projects are essentially created according to their expressed aspirations, problems and suggestions.

Dilli Haat

Many NGOs provide similar services by obtaining funds through different methods and formats that range from foreign funds to corporate sponsorships and government grants. They even form companies to conduct sales, while the NGO gets the grants. Strangely, we are all taxed more heavily than if we were private limited companies. We are now considered service-giving bodies that have

to pay high rates of Goods and Services Tax simply because we help others to earn a living. It is hard to believe that NGOs pay 33 per cent tax on their profits, while companies only pay 25 per cent. The strange logic being that NGOs must not make profits since they are not set up for business. This is a very strange conundrum of the market economy having moved away from the welfare approach.

The second resurgence of crafts, in my view, began when the new economic policy led India to join the World Trade Organisation and open up our markets to foreign goods. Many thought these goods would swamp the craft sector and flood it out of existence. Interestingly, the opposite happened. There were many reasons for this. For the Dastkari Haat Samiti, the early 90s were momentous. As a counter to the malls opening up for foreign products, I pushed persistently for the establishment of Dilli Haat to give rural craftspeople their own honoured and exclusive space. As malls opened everywhere there was a thrill in going to air-conditioned buildings to have a Coke, listen to piped music and feel rich. However, every mall had the very same, very expensive branded goods. Every mall visit was like a déja vu. We believed that supermarkets would wipe away the corner vegetable seller and that foreign fashions would annihilate our handloom industry but a popular weekly magazine celebrating its 12th Anniversary had a story on twelve additions to the Delhi landscape.

One of them was Dilli Haat, which it described as giving malls a run for their money. Every stall was different, and products and people changed every fortnight. This showed the vast variety of handcrafted goods both to new generations of Indians and the world. The 'marketplace' became a 'cool' place to visit even without air-conditioning! This became a major contribution to the lives of craftspeople and the landscape of the capital city of India. Its very success has spoiled its purity after three decades, with an overwhelming number of traders being allowed by the Delhi Administration to set up almost permanent shops inside. It is still a popular destination for crafts shoppers from all over the world. We are proud to say we claim no authority over the place and ask for no special privileges except for a slot to hold our own bazaar there once a year. It was always intended to benefit all genuine craftspeople coming through any legitimate agency. There was

Dilli Haat

no intermediary and a lot of learning by both customer and maker/seller. Craft sales at our bazaars have ranged from Rs 5-8 crores in a fortnight. A bazaar at Pune reached a turnover of Rs 5 crore in late 2024. Such bazaars, if equitably and imaginatively presented, can be self-funded and yet bring good profits to the participants.

At a wider level of institutional attention to the crafts world of skills, design institutes like NID and NIFT turned their attention to crafts. apart from industrial design. I often did some friendly bullying of young Indian fashion designers to use Indian weaves, prints and embroideries in their garments to stand out on foreign runways. Many private design institutes also came up, particularly in the northern part of India which, apart from industrial and product design for big companies, began to associate more closely with artisans and weavers themselves. All these were more effective in providing a non-repetitive, varied and unique range of products

Textile maps of Andhra Pradesh (left) and Bihar (Right)

in the market, increasing exports as well. The Ministry of Textiles funded many design development projects that brought modern and contemporary thinking to the craftspeoples' doorstep, especially in the North-East regions. It really was post 1990 that crafts got their true second wind. For craftspeople, more visibility and more attention led to greater earnings

When I look back at the work our Samiti has done, I can see two quite unplanned paths or patterns of work. One route has carried on continuously, which is to organise three or four craft bazaars a year in different cities. It gave the participating hundred-odd craftspeople a sense of changing preferences of customers depending on climate, cultures and local practices. They could build up a personal clientele of their own, since our craft bazaars have served as an open platform for any sort of buyer to establish a connection with the makers and their skills. One hundred or so artists in all crafts are selected from our pool of about 400 members, depending on fair rotational opportunities, evenly selected crafts from as many geographical locations and varieties of techniques as possible. They have built up a sound community among themselves, bringing new friends on board and working like friends and family, with each helping out the other and treating the Samiti as their family elders. Family achievements, weddings and illnesses, awards and aspirations are all shared among us which gives a wonderful sense of community. The most heartening part is these personal and group relationships among the craftspeople supersede crafts skill, religion, region and language.

The separate and more creative path we took was to create major innovative projects that gave new life and input to craftspeople and awareness to the general public. Our 14-year project of creating artistic craft and textile maps of each state led to a major book called *Crafts Atlas of India* that was selected among 400 others from across the world to be purchased by 25,000 libraries across universities and colleges in the United States. The maps led to exhibitions at Dilli Haat where it was inaugurated by the then President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. I was invited by the Government of India to Frankfurt to present it at the World Book Fair, then London at Trafalgar Square at the suggestion of the then Prince, now King Charles, and at Kalakshetra, Chennai. Today enlarged versions of the maps are displayed on the walls of Ashoka University and at the Lok Kalyan Marg Metro Station in New Delhi.

An innovative project of which I am very proud is *Akshara - Crafting Indian Scripts*, in which we created 150 exhibition/museum quality pieces in 21 different crafts from 16 states and 14 scripts of India. The creative exercise was to combine craft and calligraphy. The exhibition was very successful in Delhi, after which it went to Cairo, the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, Singapore, Mumbai and Pune. Craftspeople reconnected with their own regional scripts, converting them into design motifs. Typographers are working on creating universal fonts derived from Indian alphabet forms and calligraphers are collectively stepping into the limelight, with our associated craftspeople, proudly showing their own crafted works embellished with calligraphy. Young design students became excited about bringing Indian scripts into design and craftspeople have realised the value of valuing literacy to enrich their art and craft works.

We have done many other unique projects that have brought out the creative imagination of craftspeople themselves, with minimal design guidance. The eight installations themed, *Samrasta, Astha, Yatra, Prakriti, Parv, Swawlamban, Ullas* and *Gyan* combined a large number of skills involving over 300 craftspeople for the Shilp Gallery of the new Parliament building. It was a huge opportunity to bring prestige to the skills of our craftspeople and even those who were not participants expressed their gratitude for being represented in the 'democratic

temple of India' as one of them termed it. One need only set their thoughts going with a little spark of a theme or an idea for them to flourish with many more ideas of their own. This has made me very proud as they are being unboxed from the restrictions of tradition while still using their heritage skills, processes and value systems, adhering to organic materials, storytelling and now working with major contemporary artists, architects and interior designers to expand their professional landscape.

Our most recent project called *Gamchha: The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*, was not about textile as fashion but as a part of the cultural history of our labouring classes. Its message was a call to notice the wearer of the gamchha and give them respect as much as to see the beauty of an ordinary textile. It was remarkable for the response and was far more successful than we had ever imagined it to be. The exhibition had a collection of around 250 gamchhas from 14 states of India and added to the history of unknown textiles. Its presentation was wholly handcrafted and remarked upon as a fine example of contemporary exhibition design. All such projects have had accompanying crafted or graphically designed and printed accessories which give it a longer life, such as specially composed music, a film on yoga, dance and calligraphy, artistic journals, notebooks, art books and miniature dolls.

The 'Gamchha' exhibition

For positive outcomes in the future of crafts, I strongly believe that it is the responsibility of not just the Indian Government. International groupings like the G20 and Climate Change Conferences that address sustainability and United Nations organisations like UNESCO and UNDP must make livelihoods, culture, hand skills, language, sustainable growth, the SDGs, women's participation in a nation's growth and all such

The 'Gamchha' display

international concerns move beyond bureaucratic edicts and the publication of glossy reports, to taking serious steps to sustain craft livelihoods through funding down the line.

Unified actions between development bodies and cultural ones can enrich both the geography and the economy of culture-rich areas of the country which are not easily reachable. At present, everyone pontificates regarding policies but funding is never forthcoming in a meaningful way. Grants are either wrapped in too many conditionalities and CSR funds get diverted within the donor's kingdom. Government grants are straitjacketed and do not allow for innovation and creative flexibility which is a sine qua non of craft design and development. Most craft livelihood development is being left to major corporations who eventually think of Profit before People. That is why, as best as possible, the Samiti works on self-reliant funding and one-off grants from kindly single donors. One needs FCRA certifications for foreign funds which are both a nightmare to get and personally, other than from UN organisations, I have never believed in the idea of asking for foreign funding for money to develop our rural industries.

I believe our own large population, and the rising and expanding middle classes are a huge potentially expanding market, if we study the best formats of marketing that suit them. We also need to remember that crafts cannot only be focused on the elite but on the lower levels of an aspirational society as well. Support and professional assistance can focus on small clusters of boutique style shops, localised museums can set up in and by craft communities, apart from other smaller, infrastructure development efforts linked to tourism. Our major project for Google Arts & Culture of documenting visual stories of 52 crafts of India became a major theme for the Tourism Ministry which said "Travel here and take back a craft".

Today, Indian traditional motifs and skills in contemporary fashion styles, attractive products for aspirational home decorators, crafts bazaars at many locations in smaller cities and towns, can all help both educate and propagate the sales of crafts. By discouraging situations that allow customer bullying through

bargaining, we need to accord both revenue and respect for craftspeople. One without the other is a half-baked exercise.

There is still a vast gap between the earnings of the maker and the designer entrepreneur, exporter or foreign buyer. Young people and even big-name designers working in crafts need to adopt some feeling of service towards the skilled propagator of our nation's craft skills and not only think of themselves and their personal fame. Co-collaboration is a new word that still needs heft. We need to remember that a craftsperson's universe is not one of selfishness. Organisations working in this area could create opportunities for sharing best practices transparently. Craftspeople often just need a fresh new impetus through new themes and ideas to burst forth with many ideas of their own, so that they feel the freedom of becoming their own masters. Most of all, to gain credibility one must gain the affection and trust of the people with whom we work. India's crafts are certainly on the path of a third resurgence based on a strong sense of pride in India and better recognition on the world stage. Constant creativity and interaction within the wonderful world of craftsmanship will enable it to find its rightful place in the universe.

Advocacy and Craft Economics

Advocacy and craft economics have to work in tandem in the Indian handicrafts sector in order to protect and sustain the livelihoods of millions of artisans. This is a vital cog in the wheel to ensure that the handicrafts sector has a long-term viability and presence in the globalised economy. There are many factors that affect the economics at play. Cost of materials vs the selling price, the role of middlemen and the seasonal demand for these products, impact the prices that are obtained by the artisan.

The role of advocacy can be significant in many of these cases, by raising awareness about the rights of the artisans, campaigning for policy changes and promoting ethical consumption. There are many forms of advocacy through NGO intervention, fair trade networks, collaboration with designers and influencers, Government schemes like Handloom Mark and Geographical Indicators (GI). These actions have a strong impact, with improved wages and working conditions for artisans, recognition and visibility, exposure to international exhibitions and enabling of artisan-led co-operatives and Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The contribution of the handicraft sector is often neglected in formal economic indicators and advocacy can bring into focus the economic role played by the handicraft sector.

Ashoke Chatterjee

Ashoke Chatterjee's *work, thoughts and writing, revolve around the economics, advocacy and policy of the Indian handicrafts industry. He is a design educator and an ardent advocate for artisans. He was formerly the Executive Director of the National Institute of Design (NID), Hon President of CCI and continues to be their Honorary Advisor. He is deeply involved with NGOs and Government bodies, and his academic writing and advocacy cover craft policy, sustainable development and globalisation. Ashoke Chatterjee believes that good policy cannot be made without good data and encouraged CCI to undertake a large-scale study and survey to determine the numbers, incomes, supply chains and value additions of artisans, to enable a realistic picture of the situation to be presented to the Government.*

One of his best-known hands-on work, is the Jawaja Project, which was started in 1975, in a drought-prone area of Rajasthan. NID collaborated with the rural communities, involved in leather work and weaving, and helped them become self-reliant, training them in design processes and creating new product lines. They bypassed local power structures and some artisans became trainers themselves. Ashoke Chatterjee had graciously accepted to write an article on Craft Economics for the CCI 60th Anniversary book.

The Greater Good: Handcraft Economics as a CCI Quest

The economics of the handcraft sector constitute an extraordinary experience in CCI's journey over six decades. What CCI has learnt over these years is that it is not enough for India to have an unequalled heritage of craft wisdom and artistry. The relevance of that legacy in 21st century terms demand new arguments backed by hard evidence, going beyond cultural and aesthetic expressions to evidence of the contribution artisans make to the national economy. This challenge was one for which CCI had little preparation. It emerged suddenly as a capacity essential to the future in changing times. This piece tells the story of how CCI and its partners were jolted into a new reality when changes in policy and attitudes began to transform India in a globalised setting, and how that wake-up call is developing tools that sector managers can use toward sustaining the nation's craft heritage. At the moment of writing, months of field research have come to an end. Data from five states has moved into analysis. Sharing and advocacy can soon begin with the ultimate goal of fresh policies that finally reflect the importance of crafts by integrating artisans and their contribution into national systems of accounting, handcraft taking its place with other major industries.

From Speculation to Evidence

At the time of CCI's founding, the ethos of handcraft was palpable. Through the charkha, handcraft had helped drive the Freedom struggle as well as India's early years of planned growth. Decades later that ethos would be challenged by shifts in national and global policies. New values challenged old ones. The artisanal sector found itself struggling to get the attention and investment needed to flourish in stringently competitive times. The Council and its partners were faced with demands for evidence that the sector deserved priority—evidence that only hard data could provide. Such data did not exist, despite decades of centralised planning. Without it, the handmade sector began to be referred to as a 'sunset industry' that should be left to fade away. CCI became aware that until credible evidence was gathered, the contributions and potential which India's craft heritage represents —not just economic but equally social, cultural, environmental, political and even spiritual—could continue as victims of neglect and misunderstanding.

It would take CCI some 15 years of effort to move from speculation to founding the economics of 'handmade in India' on organised research and hard facts.

The Beginning

When Mahatma Gandhi moved the charkha into the centre of the Freedom struggle, handcrafts and those who made them helped define us as Indians. A landmark vision was contained in Jawaharlal Nehru's *A Discovery of India* where he argued in 1946 that the evolved and cultured nation that India had been before colonialism constituted a resource that could be directly accessed by planned development under a free national government. Mahatma Gandhi understood this with remarkable clarity. For him, development was about the well-being of humanity, and in that understanding, artisans and their wisdom could play a crucial role. Gandhi described this national resource as wealth interpreted as life, while for Rabindranath Tagore craft activity was "life in its completeness".[1]That ethos moved into India's First Five-Year Plan. It celebrated craft as an economic force, stating that village industries, small-scale industries and handicraft had "importance for the economy as a whole (that) can scarcely be exaggerated".[2] Rediscovering that truth has been the essence of the CCI experience is recounted on these pages.

Signals in a Planned Economy

From the First Five-Year Plan, a range of handcraft institutions came into being that took the craft movement across the country, many of them innovated under the leadership of CCI's founder, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Rooted in the values of the Freedom movement, these turned toward multiple challenges of nation-building. Among them being, human resettlement after the disaster of Partition, building rural employment, and earning foreign exchange to support the building of new industries. Independent India became the first country to move artisans and their crafts into centralised planning. India in the 20th century would give the world significant demonstrations of craft heritage as a living modernity.

As years went by, artisans and their crafts appeared secure in both the economic and cultural landscape of a free India, even as pressures of competition, poverty and

deprivation were severe. The constant hope was that conditions would improve, bolstered by repeated acknowledgment that the handmade sector represented India's second largest source of livelihood after agriculture. Craft was also the face of a new nation, showcased through emporia in India and overseas and the path-breaking Festivals of India envisioned by pioneer Pupul Jayakar. There were other encouraging signs. The World Bank in 2000 had introduced the emerging concept of creative and cultural industries to help define legacies of heritage that could assist economies on the brink of globalisation. This concept was refined in India in 2005 through a UN/World Bank initiative leading to the *Jodhpur Consensus on Cultural Industries*. This Consensus stated that these industries are "a source of capital assets for economic, social and cultural development", as well as "a vital resource for the cultural identities of communities and individuals which lead to further creativity and human development... What cultural industries have in common is that they create content, use, creativity, skill and in some cases intellectual property, to produce goods and services with social and cultural meaning".[3] The *Jodhpur Consensus* pointed out that the creative and cultural sector was perhaps the largest industry in the world, outstripping petroleum and constituting some 3 per cent of world GDP estimated in 2005 at $2,250B. The Consensus identified craft as the largest component of India's creative and cultural industries.

The Sunset Syndrome

A decade into a new century, with new economic policies emerging from liberalisation and globalisation in the nineties, the Crafts Council encountered an extraordinary barrier. At the highest levels of decision-making, the handmade sector was identified with a somewhat primitive past, out of step with new aspirations of national and global influence and power. Artisans and their skills, CCI began to hear, had no future outside museums and cultural celebrations of past glory. Handcraft was a 'sunset sector' and the energies of the Council and other craft activists should be directed toward encouraging artisans to turn to new professions. For a start, IT was suggested. The shock was profound. Lulled into complacency, the sector and its millions had remained outside the nation's

economic priorities. A dismal reality had been lurking in the wings: there was little reliable data to back claims of craft importance. Often stated to be second only to agriculture in terms of livelihoods, there was no data to support the sector's assertion. Estimates of sector employment varied enormously, from between 12M and 13M artisans (official) to well over 200M depending on definition. A crisis of unawareness could only be rectified by reliable data, generated by research.

Gathering data on this industry, universally acknowledged to be huge even without verifiable data, was surely a task for official authorities. But which one? Some thirty Ministries and Departments had responsibilities impinging on artisans. None appeared responsible for the data-gathering task. This was the context when the `sunset industry' wake-up call was received by CCI and its partners. Activists with direct experience of India's craft renaissance had conviction of what was really at stake if this resource, the largest of its kind in the world, were to be discarded. There was evidence, from Japan to Scandinavia, of the power of this sector not just as a cultural resource but as a seedbed of creativity essential in competitive global markets. *Jodhpur 2005* had underlined this fact, yet in New Delhi no one appeared to be listening.

Moving to Action

CCI paced the corridors of power to identify an authority willing to accept the responsibility for defining the economics of what was acknowledged as the largest sector of its kind in the world. CCI found no takers. Deaf ears made it clear that an independent demonstration would be needed, so CCI decided to strike out on its own. Following discussion with economists, development agencies and academics, the Council approached the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust for a small grant to conduct a study in two stages: to first investigate existing sources of information relating to the sector as well as to the challenges of definition, and a second stage of a limited cluster study in two craft-rich districts: Karur (Tamil Nadu) and Kutch (Gujarat).

CCI's *Craft Economics & Impact Study* (CEIS)[4] commenced in June 2009 and concluded a year later. The importance of crafts to social and political stability

emerged strongly. A large proportion of artisans were found located in disadvantaged social groups, their situation compounded by low literacy and educational levels and the narrow portability of traditional skills into the new economy. Women emerged as significant players, representing almost 50 per cent of the sector including participation at higher skill levels. In both locations, craft practitioners went back several generations and traditional practices dominated. The dynamism inherent in the sector was reflected in evidence of changing technology, materials and markets.

Craft Economics & Impact Study (CEIS)

Through the CEIS, a modest start had been made toward developing methodologies to study a sector of such complexity, diversity and spread. The task now was to get the outcome reviewed and tested at appropriate levels. CEIS was first shared at a peer-review seminar in Kolkata, involving participants from the social sciences, architecture, design, media, engineering and crafts. A key recommendation was to endeavour toward a national perspective plan that could address issues of economic, technical and social infrastructure and speed artisans' access to entrepreneurship and to markets.

CCI and its partners then took CEIS output to the Planning Commission. There the largest group of sector stakeholders ever brought together at the Commission reviewed CEIS findings under the direction of Dr Syeda Hameed.[5] Its approach was endorsed, as well as the need to move toward a more detailed national exercise. CEIS findings were forwarded to the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation. (MoSPI), then about to launch India's Sixth Economic Census. Procedural delays provided an immediate window of opportunity. Chief Statistician TCA Anant and his colleagues explained to CCI, the constraints of a Census focused on 'economic establishments': i.e., the self-employed, who take products direct to the market, spending a minimum of 180 days annually on craft activity. Time was limited. The Census could focus on only those crafts under the Ministry of Textiles, leaving out all other crafts: those not defined in terms of National Industrial Classification (NIC) codes, those artisans associated with

certain times of the agricultural cycle, those who produce for self-consumption, for festivities, for informal sale or for barter. The Census would thus count a particular selection while excluding millions of other craftspeople. Even with this limitation, the EC could provide important indicators and encourage further investigation. CCI and its partners were advised to understand the Sixth Economic Census as a first essential investigation. They were invited to join EC 2013 field teams, helping to train enumerators in every State, in every major language, to help identify what is a craft and who is an artisan.

Sixth Economic Census 2013: A Breakthrough

The Sixth Economic Census 2013[6] included artisans for the very first time since Independence. It proved a watershed achievement, identifying almost 2M craft manufacturing establishments and giving the sector a new and empowering language: no longer just 2M craft establishments but 2M *artisan entrepreneurs*. Using its cross-cutting estimate for all sectors of 2 persons directly employed per establishment, an EC estimate of direct employment of some 4M now emerged in these establishments, representing over 3 per cent of the population and contributing almost 2 per cent of the Indian economy. Taking into account CCI's own knowledge that in the craft sector between 6-8 persons are employed per 'establishment', a CCI guesstimate of 'establishment' employment rose to somewhere between 12M and 16M or over 9 per cent of the population and over 6 per cent of the economy. (All this, while, other estimates of sector employment continued to hover between 11M and over 200M!). MoSPI in its Census report recommended the need to undertake further surveys so as to develop a methodology and design for a proposed Satellite Account[7] specific to 'handmade in India'.

Satellite Account Directions: A Need for Field Surveys

So, who would undertake the task of comparing EC 2013 data with other troves of data such as those with the NSSO and with the National Classification of Occupations? Who would conduct the essential field surveys and support the MoSPI with a methodological foundation for a Satellite Account? As in 2012

at the Planning Commission, now once again it was suggested that CCI and its partners consult with other experts to assess what such fieldwork might entail, what teams would need to be assembled, and what resources might be needed for the task.

Volunteers who had come together to support CEIS and then to help facilitate the Sixth Economic Census once again fanned out for consultations across the country to better understand what data policy-makers needed to manage such a vast sector. All existing troves of data would need examination. Several areas of Census 2013 data would require identification, selection and clarification. The designing of separate sample-survey strategies for handicrafts and handlooms might be needed, taking into account surveys already undertaken or underway. Drafting of questionnaires for field use would have to carefully select craft characteristics. Local partners would be required for field tasks. Every task would need adequate finance, and proposals would have to be prepared by those experienced in economic research. The search for such a partner brought CCI to the door of Prof Alakh Sharma at the Institute for Human Development (IHD, New Delhi).[8] Established in 1998, IHD was not only experienced in development, labour and employment studies. Its founding had been inspired by the approach to human capabilities articulated by economists Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, enabling IHD to respond immediately to the challenge brought to it by CCI. This important partnership was further reinforced by the presence at IHD of Dr GC Manna, former Director General of the Central Statistics Office and National Sample Survey Office (Government of India). Dr Manna was closely aware of issues faced by CCI and its associates in the handmade sector, having helped steer the crucial decision of the Sixth Economic Census 2013 to include artisans for the very first time.

Financing Research

A field research proposal of required dimension was estimated to cost anywhere between Rs 75 lakhs and Rs 1 crore—not a large sum in the task context but a huge challenge for a small NGO like CCI. NITI Aayog's research grant facility was recommended as a first window toward fund-raising, with the hope that

a NITI Aayog grant might provide credibility that could catalyse other donor support. With IHD's expertise, research proposals were submitted to NITI Aayog in October 2018, following its Request for Proposals (RFP) on research "to arrive at the policy prescription on the sector" which "is seen to have huge potential for employment generation and exports. The data would be used to develop satellite account specific to 'handmade in India' so as to assess the actual contribution of this important sector to the national economy…".[9] What NITI Aayog needed was a Ministry to give a green signal. With sector responsibilities spread across a variety of authorities, that signal never came. Meanwhile, greater urgency was demanded as millions of artisans were devastated by policy moves that revealed little understanding of the size of the sector or of the scale of suffering ill-conceived measures can create. The havoc of demonetisation in 2016 followed by GST in 2017 gave way to the impact of an economic slowdown, the damage that a J&K lockdown visited upon one of India's greatest concentrations of craft activity, and unrest in the North-east where craft activity is dominated by women. Each crisis hit artisan communities at times that normally should be peak seasons for earning and market contact. Other industrial lobbies were rushing to New Delhi to mobilise support. India's artisans had neither lobbies nor data that could bring their need to attention. Meanwhile CCI was carrying research proposals and budgets from pillar to post. Another disaster would soon need to be managed: the Covid pandemic.

A Lifeline of Understanding

All this while, an angel had been silently watching CCI persevere. Tarun Das, past President of the Confederation of Indian Industry had become aware of its challenge through his friend, Delhi Craft Council's Manjari Nirula. Like others, handcraft had been part of his life, taken for granted within India's landscape. Working at the scale of corporate giants in the so-called organised sector, Tarun Das was intrigued by Manjari's arguments in favour of another understanding of scale and power. He took CCI's case to Mr N K Singh, then Chair of the Fifteenth Finance Commission. Mr Singh recognised its merit and offered to raise resources

at the State level, from authorities in closer touch with ground realities. CCI was encouraged to work with IHD to develop research proposals practical for State-level fieldwork, and to focus on a cohort of States that could deliver the scale essential for robust research in a sector still unfamiliar to most decision-makers. Proposals were drafted and CCI's angel then flew off on a mission of advocacy with potential donors. Just as his mission began, Covid struck and CCI seemed back at square one.

When the pandemic eased, CCI came back to its critical partnerships with the Institute for Human Development. More than ever, the CCI/IHD collaboration would need accelerated movement toward that larger Satellite Account goal, harnessing domain knowledge with statistical expertise for the development of a methodological tool-kit which planners, managers and development workers could use to understand, build and strengthen India's huge artisanal advantage. Fresh research proposals were drafted that could attract the support needed to finally get to work.

Field Surveys Begin

By early 2024, donor support garnered through Mr Das' tireless advocacy enabled work to begin. First in three States, expanded eventually to five States selected on the basis of Economic Census 2013 findings: Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Research teams were led by Dr GC Manna at IHD and CCI Chairperson Gita Ram, assisted by partners and resource persons. This phase of tool-kit development would take a year to complete, with CCI assisting the training of enumerators in each State to accurately recognise artisans and crafts.

Primary surveys had two broad objectives. These were to offer an independent estimate of number of units and persons engaged separately in handloom and handicrafts sector and to assess the contribution of these activities in value added. In each State, 3 districts were selected i.e., the one having maximum concentration of sector units on the basis of EC 2013 data and the remaining two districts randomly selected. Thus, altogether 15 districts were selected for survey purposes

by taking 3 districts from each of the 5 States. In each district a random sample of 20 villages in rural areas and 20 census enumeration blocks (CEBs) in urban areas were identified for fieldwork.

Learning from the Field

As this piece is being written, research results are under process toward a report that can be shared with stakeholders within and outside CCI: activists, policymakers, business leaders, institutions of craft learning and other partners within India and in other regions with a craft heritage, offering a toolkit that could take craft awareness to new levels. CCI is committed to arrange opportunities to share research findings, and to explore ways to take these beyond a few States to national application.

What the findings reveal is a sector comprising a huge share of India's manufacturing workforce. Traditional knowledge systems are established as a major strength in the sector, demanding greater respect and support for the masters who hold this advantage for the future. Other findings include important patterns of self-employment, home-based activity and of ownership, the significance of gender and the extent of female participation, the high dependence of most artisans on local markets and local contractors for taking products to market, and severe raw material and financial constraints that reveal reliance on local supports and low levels of access to official schemes. Handcrafts emerge as a buffer in times of distress, a critical advantage demonstrated through the pandemic and significant in an era of uncertainty fuelled by climate change and global upheavals. The critical need for entrepreneurial capacities is reflected in low levels of such management basics as bookkeeping. E-commerce penetration is still low, and most artisans appear untouched by export demand, managed apparently by middle functionaries.

Why Craft Economics Matter

These developments have drawn attention to the so-called 'informal' sector within which the majority of Indian livelihood opportunities are located. Well over 80 per cent (ILO) of the workforce is said to function within this 'informal economy' of which the handmade sector may constitute the largest component.

Recent experiences, both national and global, underline the importance of this sector to collective well-being. These include the impact of climate change, learning from the Covid pandemic, the urgent need for non-farm rural livelihoods, for empowerment of women and others still at the margins of society, for reducing forced migration, as well as to accelerate the global movement toward sustainability. Artisans and their crafts directly address 11 of 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, a scale of contribution probably unmatched by any 'organised' industry. This reality will hopefully enable CCI/IHD findings to encourage policies for real change that can finally ensure that artisans are integrated into national systems of accounting and their contributions to India's well-being—economic, social, environmental, political and cultural stability—into serious understanding and respect that 'handmade in India' has awaited through all these decades.

A Greater Good

The challenge of economics in the handmade sector is not new. Over a century ago, Mahatma Gandhi drew attention to it, pointing out that authorities on economics "have found it impossible to realise the connection between art and industry and to appreciate the value of quality or of a high standard of workmanship. That is so because they have never attempted to interpret national wealth in terms of life.[10]" Decades later his grandson Gopalkrishna Gandhi would address a Kolkata seminar on CCI's seminal CEIS investigation with these words: "The hard argument, the real argument, which overrides all others, is not exclusively about sentiment or reason—but about common sense. And that common sense tells that whatever we do in terms of economic planning and development in India, there will always be several hundred million people in this country, the figure being unverified, who cannot but live with and through the work of their hands. Now it is a great compensation of nature that these hundreds and millions of people have talent in their hands, which the assembly-liners and the free-marketers do not quite concede. And that talent is the unexplored reservoir which needs to be used for their good which means the greater good of the great number of the people of India."[11]

1 - *"Life In Its Completeness": Rabindranath Tagore's legacy of thought and action on artisans and crafts*. Crafts Council of India, Chennai, 2018

2 - *First Five-Year Plan*, Planning Commission, Government of India, 1951

3 - UNESCO. Asia-Pacific Creative Communities: A Strategy for the 21st Century, Senior Experts Symposium, 22-26 February 2005, Jodhpur, India

4 - *Craft Economics and Impact Study* April 2011, Craft Council of India, Chennai

5 - Member, Planning Commission, Government of India, 2004-2014

6 - All India Report on Sixth Economic Census, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, Central Statistics Office, New Delhi. March 2016.

7 - A satellite account is a term developed by the United Nations to measure the size of economic sectors that are not defined as industries in national accounts

8 - www.ihdindia.org

9 - Public notice on the NITI Aayog website quoted in the Economic Times, October 16, 2018: *Handicraft industry data on artisans, units soon*, Yogima Seth Sharma

10 - Mahatma Gandhi in *Young India*, May 1919

11 - *Craft Economics & Impact Study*, Crafts Council of India, Chennai. April 2011

Volunteerism

The time, skills and energy that volunteers contribute to the Indian handicraft sector, have had a far-reaching impact on the preservation of traditional handicrafts, empowerment of artisans and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, especially in rural and marginalised communities. Volunteerism can take the form of on-ground contributions like creating craft clusters, teacher training in design or business and community organisation. Remote volunteering is useful for website or e-commerce support and was especially popular during the Covid-19 pandemic. Volunteering efforts have served to revive dying crafts, increase income for crafts families, create artisan-led enterprises and obtain global recognition for artisans.

Meera Goradia

***Meera Goradia**, an alumna of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), has been working with the handicrafts sectors across India since 1989, and has more than three decades of experience working with artisan clusters. She was the Director of Kachchh Heritage, Art, Music, Information & Resources (KHAMIR) in 2005, in Kutch, Gujarat, as an institution of craft and heritage conservation. She has helped in forging linkages with new markets, building teams, networking and fundraising. In 2020, a network of designers of which Meera Goradia was a major player, formed the artisan ecosystem called Creative Dignity. As its Director, she enabled artisan empowerment, especially women, and supports livelihoods, in order for the artisans to gain dignity. She worked towards preservation of craft culture, by documenting histories, craft techniques, and recording the stories of artisans, to safeguard traditional knowledge. On request from the CCI, Meera Goradia has contributed an article on the significance of volunteerism in the conservation of the handicrafts sector.*

The Creative Dignity Experiment

It is said that humanity evolved due to our ability to co-operate. This gave our species an edge over the other animals. And this characteristic is amply seen during

Artisans at work during Covid

disasters and crises. The Craft Councils emerged as a voluntary movement in 1964, in response to the crisis of employment and recognition faced by millions of rural artisans in India post-independence and have thrived for 60 long years. A new volunteerism emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The handmade sector has been beautifully diverse and plural in techniques, regions, practices, raw materials, products, etc., and this has been both its weakness and its strength.

Unlike the agricultural sector, the hand-made or non-farm sector has been unable to come together as a unified body for visibility or policy. It is these movements of volunteerism that have become the bridges to addressing the needs and challenges of the sector. Creative Dignity (CD) has emerged as an ecosystem- enabling network that played an important role during the pandemic and strives to collectively address the ongoing crises of the sector.

CD came into being spontaneously through a WhatsApp group where many people involved with the sector were discussing the effects of the pandemic, both for their businesses and the artisans they worked with. The long queues of migrants walking back home made us realise that artisans who had always worked from home were now even more invisible. Nobody really knew how the collapsed economy was affecting them and their businesses. The need for action was led by Neelam Chhiber of Industree Foundation and a small group of interested people who quickly swung into action.

The diversity of this group reflected the very sector itself—there was Smita Mankad of Fabindia, Ayush Kasliwal of AKFD Studio, Nitin Pamnani of

iTokri, Pooja Ratnakar of Potli Arts, Meenakshi Singh of IICD, Sujay Suresh of Zwende, Meena Appnender of Crafts Council of Telangana, Vishpala Hundekari of Ekibeki, Priya Krishnamurthy of 200 Million Artisans, Nilesh Priyadarshi of Karigar Clinic, Meera Goradia ex-KHAMIR, and many others who kept joining as CD's work began.

Chandana Srinath, an artisan entrepreneur Creative Dignity has worked with

The first thing was an online research activity to understand the ground situation. This survey expanded CD's reach to 26 States of India where craft organisations and local networks helped to fill in data. Based on data filled by 520 people who were in touch with 188,092 artisans, the diagnostic survey revealed Rs 46.7 crores worth of unsold stock and Rs 13 crore worth of raw materials lying unused. There were also signs of acute distress among some of the artisans. All the other major craft organisations were also in the midst of helping their members and it made sense for everyone to co-ordinate and combine our efforts.

CD engaged the management strategy firm Kearney, who agreed to work pro bono to develop a framework and system for effective functioning. They came up with a clear strategy of Relief, Rehabilitation, and Rejuvenation with defined pathways for each. Relief became the first priority where members expanded State-wise networks to reach the remotest regions. Soon State-wise anchors and teams were put into place through whom relief efforts were channelled from a centrally managed team at Industree. Multiple funding drives were initiated at all levels such as Vishpala Hundekari's daughter, who organised a campaign at her school to collect almost Rs 60 lakhs, while Priya Krishnamuthy organised an auction that brought in almost Rs 22 lakhs. Industree became the voluntary Secretariat to manage and disburse the funds.

During the pandemic, CD managed to reach out to 16 States and support 13,075 artisan families with food, essential supplies and medicines. Members created connections everywhere and brought in numerous contacts and resources to

help, be it their children, neighbours and other professionals, everyone joined in to manage the helplines and outreach. The years 2020–2021 were truly a coming together of almost all the stakeholders with a spirit of goodwill and cooperation everywhere.

Rohida Handlooms an enterprise mentored by Creative Dignity

CD coordinated with all the craft networks like the Craft Councils, Dastkari Haat Samiti, Dastkar, etc., as well as local networks and organisations like the Rashtriya Karigar Panchayat. Relief also included organising sales of the unsold stock which had to be done digitally. It was a new world for the artisans and CD organised students from IICD, NIFT and other design institutes to make digital catalogues for the artisans. 374 digital catalogues were created for artisans across 19 States. As everything was closed, it became a great engagement for the students who also began online training of digital skills with the younger generation of artisans. This generated an involvement of the artisan youth who may not have otherwise shown an interest in their traditional occupations.

State teams began online digital training and soon online campaigns with a number of e-commerce marketplaces were organised, called the Artisan Direct Campaigns, where the marketplaces created special pages for the artisans' stocks, with reduced margins for themselves. Within 8 months, almost Rs 6 crores worth of stocks were sold through these campaigns and other buyer linkages. For many artisans, it was the entry into the world of digital marketing. During this time, other networks like Hand for Handmade, India Handmade Collective, 200 Million Artisans also began their work. Relief was coordinated with the CD State teams and a spirit of collaboration and volunteering was nurtured with all.

By 2022, around 333 volunteers and 250+ student interns contributed over 5,400 hours of support across relief, digital training, outreach, and connections. Post 2022, CD had to decide about its continuance. And it was felt that having a network that brings together all the stakeholders while keeping the artisan at the centre, was needed as the sector was in a long-term crisis. So, with Industree as its voluntary Secretariat, CD became an unregistered network with a small operations team led by Meera Goradia for building relevant initiatives that could benefit the sector. CD's Steering Committee remains voluntary with members giving their time to build the initiatives and safeguard the spirit of the network. Some of the guiding principles are: collaboration not competition, trust and partnership, amplifying the efforts of members and not replication, incubation for the sector rather than implementation.

Based on these principles, CD has been developing:

- an incubator and accelerator for artisan enterprises, now being institutionalised through partners
- a collaborative effort to position the handmade sector as sustainable and climate-responsive
- a good public hybrid platform (Craft Commons) for visibility, transparency, access, and inclusion

CD has also organically built forums for key sectoral issues such as Craft IP and GI rights, understanding changing markets, the imperative policy need for a national Craft Census, among others. Through its programmes, CD has worked with 450 artisan enterprises, touching the lives of 11,231 makers. CD's network continues to grow, now comprising 646 active members across India and beyond, representing the breadth and depth of the handmade ecosystem.

Impact Investment

There is a strong case for financing the handicraft sector, as a large number of artisans depend on this sector as a means of livelihood. Most of them self-finance from their meagre resources or are subject to exploitation by unscrupulous lenders/ investors. Women especially, lack awareness of formal financing options. There is a large financing gap as handmade or craft MSMEs struggle to access working capital. The benefits that accrue from filling this gap have a sustainable impact on growth, quality, design enhancement and market access. Impact assessment studies have shown positive and measurable social upliftment, alongside financial gains.

Priya Krishnamoorthy

&

Huda Jaffer

Priya Krishnamoorthy *is a journalist turned impact strategist for the handicraft sector. She founded* 200 Million Artisans *in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, when many artisans were floundering and in a crisis situation. Initial help came through fundraising, communications and storytelling. Subsequently, the organisation combined research with ecosystem building, networking and better finance schemes for the craft-led MSMEs.* Business of Handmade *conducts research projects using the lens of craft, and many of the projects have received critical acclaim. Arising from* 200 Million Artisans*, the first edition of Kula Conclave was organised in 2023 and in Priya's own words, the forum, "would include investors, funders, or any kind of a capital provider, a foundation, or a debt or equity investor, or incubator giving money to folks interested in wanting to support the craft sector and its enterprises". Priya has contributed her already-published article, co-authored with Huda Jaffer, for the 60th Anniversary book.*

Huda Jaffer, *a systems product service designer, is the Director of SELCO India, an organisation that helps underserved communities, creating sustainable livelihoods, clean energy and building financial models, including for those in the handicraft sector.*

Thinking in Systems for Closing the Innovation–Capital Gap for Craft-Led Enterprises

Top: Investor's Workshop at Kula Conclave 2024

Above: Speakers at Kula Conclave 2024

What If the Future of Innovation is Handmade? Craft and climate. Innovation and informality. Creativity and capital. These terms rarely sit side by side in entrepreneurial discourse, let alone in startup or impact investing circles. Yet across India—and increasingly, the Global South—a quiet revolution anchored in creativity, culture, craft and community, is brewing. It's not unicorns or soonicorns leading this charge, but an ambitious cohort of purpose-driven enterprises, mostly women-led, redefining how we create, consume, and connect. They are innovating despite limited infrastructure, and often because of it.

As collaborators in Kula Conclave 2024 and Kula Innovate 2024, we've witnessed first-hand a new cohort of craft-led, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) building climate-smart, community-focused solutions within India's Creative Manufacturing and Handmade (CMH) sector—a massive subset of the nation's $2 trillion cultural economy.

The work of these enterprises challenges deep assumptions about what innovation looks like—and more importantly, who it should serve. Yet, they remain largely invisible to traditional capital ecosystems and by default to the mainstream economic, policy, and investment narratives. If we are to harness their full potential for climate, gender, and inclusive growth goals, it is time we rethink how we articulate, finance and support innovation-led craft futures.

A Sector That Is Decentralized by Design, Not Deficit

India's Creative Manufacturing and Handmade ecosystem is a largely untapped engine for climate-positive solutions, spanning fashion, textiles, home décor, e-commerce, craft-tech, luxury and design, value-added agri-products, and more. These craft-led MSMEs preserve traditional knowledge, empower women, sustain over 200 million livelihoods, and build climate-resilient futures, often in the country's most vulnerable regions.

Unlike tech startups that often scale through centralised servers and code, these enterprises thrive in culturally rooted, family-centred, and distributed production networks. Their 'New Formal' models are inherently decentralised—not as a liability, but as an adaptive advantage. In such settings, access to ergonomic tools, bamboo or loom machinery, and digital design platforms can vastly improve productivity, health outcomes, and storytelling potential—especially when supported by local innovation infrastructure.

Take Xuta, a yarn bank initiative on Assam's Majuli island, where over 150 women artisans balance farming, caregiving, and seasonal weaving. Xuta brings work home to them, providing formal inclusion via finance, loom maintenance, and training, even as the region lacks basic infrastructure like electricity, digital tools, and reliable logistics. As Xuta's co-founder Rishi Sarmah notes, "A person in Delhi can export cheaply because the airport is right there. We send it from the village to Imphal, then Guwahati, then Delhi."

Rishi Sarmah of Xuta wins the Kula Innovate Award

Enterprises like Xuta are innovating despite these challenges and are eager to scale. But their seasonal production cycles, community-based operations, and

non-linear growth trajectories don't fit typical startup or investment models. Their biggest need is access to the right capital and financial instruments tailored to their regional realities.

The Innovation-Capital Gap Is a Systems Failure

Data from *Business of Handmade - 2nd Edition* reveals that while 92 per cent of craft-led enterprises see catalytic capital as a great fit for their needs, only 1 in 10 report easy access to finance. Why? Because, craft-led enterprises need multiple forms of capital — startup funds for new collectives, working capital to bridge production cycles, growth capital for scaling innovation, and long-term R&D capital to reimagine processes and materials. Few capital providers offer this spectrum. The diversity of models—from cooperatives to social enterprises to for-profit hybrids—demands flexible, tailored capital pathways. Yet, current systems treat them as anomalies, not archetypes.

Image Credit: Business of Handmade - 2nd Edition | Financing a Handmade Revolution (2023) by 200 Million Artisans; HCMs refer to Handmade and Craft-led MSMEs

The diversity of models demands diversity in capital access.

- Resham Sutra needs innovation capital to scale its 'farm to fabric' model that uses clean-tech machines for silk producers that boost productivity by 400 per cent and enhance energy efficiency by 90 per cent.
- Golden Feathers needs low-interest working capital to fulfill the rising demand for eco-friendly textiles and paper made by upcycling 57,000 kg of butchery waste annually and reducing carbon emissions by 7.76 billion kgs.
- Studio Coppre, a social enterprise specialising in metalcraft needs a blend of grants and collateral free loans to create safe, ergonomic workspaces for next-gen artisans.
- EcoKaari needs growth capital to scale its circular model that turns plastic waste into handwoven products to create fair livelihood opportunities.

Entrepreneurs like those behind Ecokaari, Studio Coppre, Golden Feathers, Xuta, and Resham Sutra—winners at Kula Innovate 2024 Challenge—are among the many pioneering solutions across craft-based value chains. Yet, 80 per cent of craft-led MSMEs in India continue to face an innovation capital gap; they often bootstrap their innovations using working capital rather than dedicated R&D funds which most formal, recognised sectors account for. This is a failure of fit and of intention, not the lack of ambition.

This misfit is not just financial. It is also cultural, temporal, and infrastructural. The innovation needs of Resham Sutra or Golden Feathers differ vastly from those of Xuta. Yet capital systems continue to apply 'one-size-fits-all' expectations of scale, exits, and pitch-decks to a culturally diverse, multilingual, and decentralised ecosystem.

Reimagining What a Systems Approach for Innovation Support Looks Like

Closing the innovation-capital gap for craft-led enterprises requires us to think—and act—in systems.

The demand for capital is not the problem. We lack the supply of 'creative' fit-for-purpose capital that not only accepts disproportionate risk, generates positive

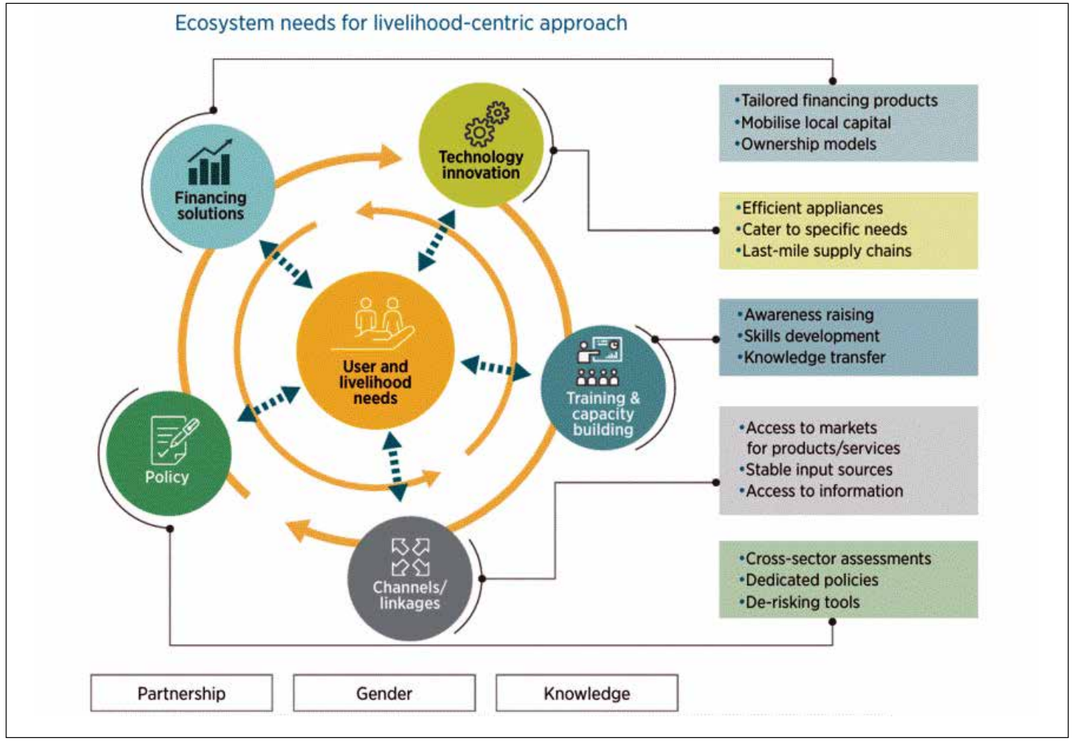


Image Credit: SELCO Foundation - Ecosystem approach, IRENA, 2022

impact, but also acts as a bridge for mainstream, third-party investment to jump in. **We see catalytic capital as the key that can unlock the potential of nascent but growing sectors like the Creative Manufacturing and Handmade.**

At Kula Innovate 2024, we tested new models with promising results. Innovation Award winners received not just innovation grants, but patient debt, gap financing, and clean energy assets. SELCO Foundation offered more than checks—they engaged in design, mentorship, and strategic matchmaking. As did other partners like Artha Impact (Rianta Capital, Zurich) and Catalyst AIC, an India-based accelerator.

Here's what we're learning:

- **Capital must flex:** From seed to working capital, to R&D and storytelling funds—craft-led enterprises need a mix. Blended finance, revenue-based financing, and catalytic grants remain under-explored. Approaches that prioritise capital preservation can aid the creation of fit-for-purpose financial instruments, even meet the growing demand for under 10 per cent, collateral free debt among enterprises.
- **Metrics must evolve:** Impact must be measured not only in profits and scale, but in preservation of natural and cultural ecosystems from a futuristic (long term) and generational lens. Tools must evolve to include qualitative narratives, contextual KPIs, and distributed data models.
- Institutional Capacity Building Matters: Future-ready backward linkages accelerate enterprise growth. Thus, investment in capacity building — such as strengthening craft-based SHGs, cooperatives, and rural producer companies by integrating creative entrepreneurship—design, digital literacy, product strategy and marketing—into local education and skill development programs — is critical for holistic development of the ecosystem.
- **Delivering Beyond Capital**: Persistent bottlenecks like energy access, logistics, digital infrastructure point to the need of an enabling environment—one that includes access to local prototyping and repair services; digitisation of traditional skills; rural creative hubs with warehousing and co-working; as well as market systems that support storytelling, collective branding, and fair-pricing rooted in cultural identity. Thus, access to capital can no longer stop at capital; it also needs to ease the roadblocks for growth and further investment.
- **A Creative Economy Lens is Overdue**: A creative economy lens also calls for state-level policies beyond tourism, aligned with MSME, tribal, and women-led enterprise schemes, and prioritisation of social procurement. Engaging investors and funders, philanthropic and CSR actors that want to support arts, culture, and crafts on an ongoing basis via structured knowledge exchange is much needed to find a middle ground with enterprises on scale, growth, ROI and impact.

Investing in Craft Futures Is Investing in Climate, Inclusion, and Systems Change

Innovation-led, craft futures can no longer be termed niche, charity-driven or unscalable. Craft-led enterprises are already building global brands, integrating technologies, and delivering returns. Platforms like Kula Conclave and Kula Innovate are not just conveners—they are translators between the language of investment and the lived realities of craft-led enterprises.

Now is the time to invest in scalable, co-created infrastructure—financial, physical, and digital—that meets the many creative, cultural, and craft-led enterprises where they are and grows with them. To build the scaffolding for an enabling environment for creative manufacturing, organisations need to become systems integrators—weaving together finance, technology, training, storytelling, infrastructure, and fair-market ecosystems in ways that suit local contexts. For example, the SELCO Foundation is deploying "common good infrastructure" —such as solar-powered production centers—to finance the conditions of innovation, not just the innovators.

The next leap in climate innovation may not be written in code, but woven in yarn, powered by the sun, and shaped by women from far-flung lands. The stories from Kula Innovate and the broader research is clear: innovation is happening. The real question is whether capital systems will catch up—or get left behind.

For more insights and to join the conversation, visit www.kulaconclave.com.

**Kula, in different local Indian languages has many meanings: community, kinship, family, like-mindedness.*

Check out Kula Innovate, an sector-first innovation challenge designed to close the R&D gaps across craft-value chains.

Epilogue

This book has traced the journey of Indian crafts from ancient times through the period of Independence and into the present day. We have reflected on the revival of traditional practices, the role of design in making crafts relevant today. There have been several initiatives by NGOs including the Crafts Councils as well as private initiatives taking the entrepreneurial route. Social media has helped promoting these initiatives. It is heartening to note that several artisans have made use of social media to promote their work.

Growing emphasis on education that enables artisans to become self-reliant has been our goal in the last few years This includes new developments such as financial literacy, entrepreneurial training, and the effective use of social media.

We have highlighted the 60 years of work carried out by CCI across its various verticals, along with the work of the affiliated State Councils. Each Council has worked within the State reaching out to the grassroots. Taken together, the Crafts Council network presents a wide and diverse picture of craft activity across India.

The work has taken us through difficult times like drought, floods, cyclones and the pandemic. During the pandemic when craftspeople couldn't get raw materials they needed, there were no physical markets, and stocks piled up, a lot of initiatives were started which helped. At times like this our ability to raise the resources needed to tackle these situations has been quite remarkable.

It was also during the pandemic when there was a realisation that artisans needed training to conduct their own businesses to be able to move ahead. Curricula are being worked out to train artisans in entrepreneurship

We continue to face new challenges particularly of the unverified number of producers in this handmade sector, and are therefore unable to catch the attention of policy makers in vital matters such as GST. CCI's own initiative to develop a tool kit for a methodology to catch important data and the pilot study conducted in five States the report of which will be released shortly we hope will catch the attention of policy makers

Having talked about the past and the present, we need to look at the future. We at CCI acknowledge that the future of the sector still needs to be envisioned. A Symposium dedicated to this conversation will be held on February 1, 2026. Among the themes to be explored are:

- Designing curricula for Gen Z
- Building an open online portal of data on artisans and weavers, designers and service providers
- Addressing the impact of climate change on craft traditions

With the current momentum from the Government of India in supporting the craft sector, we hope that by 2047 a robust framework will be in place—one where the next generation of artisans sees value and pride in carrying forward their heritage, without feeling compelled to move away from it.

THE CRAFTS COUNCIL OF INDIA