

INDIA'S CRAFTS TRADITIONS

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi's ideas about self-sufficiency and handicrafts were directly related to his views on industries and industrial society. Gandhiji believed the industrial societies were based on an endless production of commodities. This produced greed and resulted in competition. The end result of this was violence and war.

Even in the twentieth century, Gandhiji argued, it was possible to find large areas in India that were untouched by industries. The future of India and of its civilization lay in these villages which were governed by the simple norms of reciprocity and self-sufficiency. Gandhiji wanted to revive these villages, their craft economy and their practices and make them represent a system that was completely different from Western societies based on industry. His ideas about handicrafts were part of this vision.

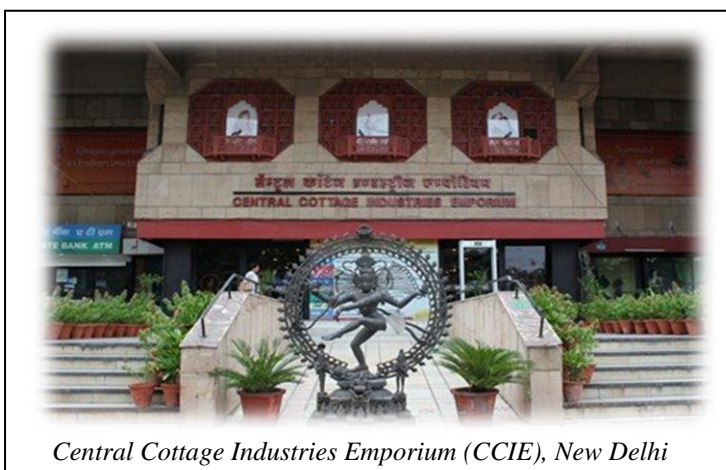
CRAFTS

Handloom and Handicrafts Revival

In post independence era, the All India Handicrafts Board was setup in 1952 to advise the Government on problems of handicrafts and to suggest measures for improvement and development. According to the Indian Constitution the development of handicrafts is a State subject.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903-1988) devoted her life to the preservation and development of handicrafts and the dignity and uplift of India's craftspeople. She wrote many books and articles and her book titled 'The Handicrafts of India' was the first detailed documentation of the major and minor crafts of India.

The Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India (HHEC) is a



Central Cottage Industries Emporium (CCIE), New Delhi

subsidiary of the State Trading Corporation of India, and came into existence in 1962. The Central Cottage Industries Corporation Private Limited, a registered society, runs the Central Cottage Industries Emporium (CCIE), New Delhi, the premier retail sales organization in Indian handicrafts. The CCIE has branches in Mumbai, Kolkata,

Chennai and Jaipur. To promote and encourage crafts sector, every state and union territories in India opened a chain of Emporia showcasing their handlooms and handicrafts.

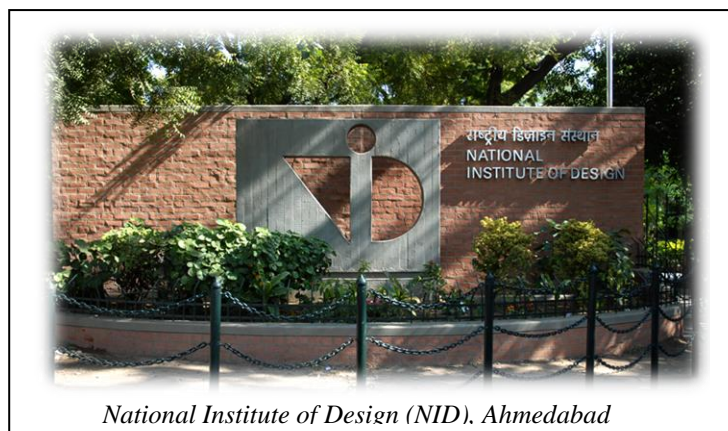
Promotion of Design

Soon after its establishment in 1952, the All India Handicrafts Board recognized that among other developmental measures that needed to be adopted, the problem of design development would be of key importance in rehabilitating the handicrafts industry. Craftsmen required assistance with new design ideas to suit the taste of consumers both in India and abroad. The all India Handicrafts Board established Regional Design Development Centres at Bangalore, Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi. The Weavers' Service Centres set up by the All India handloom Board provided design and technical guidance to the Handloom industry throughout the country.

The National Institute of Design (NID) at Ahmedabad was established as a result of the visionary advice of Charles Eames, who saw crafts as India's matchless resource of problem-solving experience.

The Indian Institute of Packaging in Mumbai with branches in Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata offers a certificate programme in packaging and package development service for free.

There are Postgraduate Diploma Courses and Distance Learning Programmes that are accredited by the Asian Packaging Foundation (APF).



National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad

Stone Craft



Kailasha Temple, Ellora

Even today the stone carvers of Tamil Nadu begin with a prayer that first begs forgiveness from Mother Earth for cutting the stone. The prayer ends with offerings of sweets and milk to the earth and a solemn promise never to misuse or waste stone.

Once the stone is selected the measurements

for rough hewing and cutting of the sculpture are taken. Carving is a difficult process, requiring skill, concentration and extreme caution. It is a process in which forms are cut away or subtracted from the original solid material.

At Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh, there are a number of rock shelters of the Stone Age period. Early inhabitants lived in



natural caves and created fine tools and flints of agate and other natural stones in the area.

The Kailash temple at Ellora of the ninth century is an entire temple that was carved out of the natural hill. Work in marble has been prevalent in north India since the medieval period and the best example of marble carving is Taj Mahal at Agra.

Metal Craft

At the time of Dussehra, Kullu valley comes alive with the arrival of many *mohras* (metal plaques of Durga) from different parts of Himachal Pradesh. These gold and silver masks were commissioned by the Kings in ancient times. Each village brings its *mohra* from its local temple to Kullu in a decorated *palki* (palanquin). The *mohras* are then moved into a huge wooden *rath* (chariot) that is pulled by hundreds of devotees.

Blacksmiths are the largest craft group in Himachal villages and, like all other artisans; they are largely employed as farm labor. They are also traders who sell their products. Like many crafts communities in India, in Himachal the blacksmiths usually work from their workshops located on the ground floor of their homes.

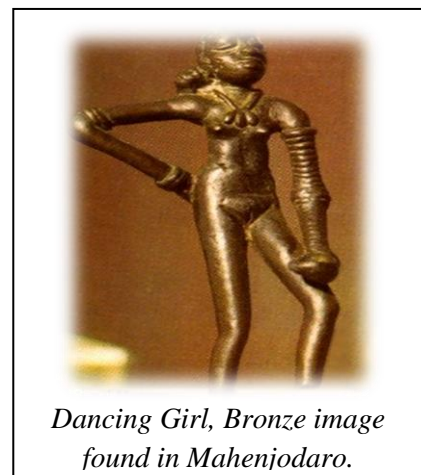
The patronage of the temple and royal court gave rise to highly accomplished craftsmen, one generation following another practicing the same skill for centuries. For 11,000 years human beings have been fashioning metal for their use. By 5000 BCE copper was used to make beads and pins. By 3000 BCE tin was added to copper to produce bronze, a harder metal. Iron, even harder than bronze, was widely produced by 500 BCE.

Bronze/ Silver and other metal crafts

The lost wax process is a specific technique used for making objects of metal. In our country it is found in Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal. In each region, a slightly different technique is used. The oldest bronze images in our country date back to Mohen-jo-daro (2500 BCE). In ritual items made of bronze the best is sculpture which represents the visible forms of the deity to be worshipped. For this the Shilpa Shastras elaborate treatise is faithfully followed. Tamil Nadu is one of the famous bronze or casting regions. Stylistically, the images belong to different periods like Pallava, Chola, Pandyan and Nayaka and the images that are now produced belong to one or the other of these styles. Different casting techniques are followed by metal crafts persons all over the country.



Mohras of Kullu valley



Dancing Girl, Bronze image found in Mahenjodaro.

Metal Crafts across India

In the Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh, the metal objects used for religious purposes are a unique synthesis of Hindu and Buddhist designs.



Uruli, Cooking vessels of Kerala

Teamwork is essential in the craft of metal-wok. In Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh for example, the production of an enamelled *hookah* base would involve several different specialized skills, each practiced by a different craftsperson.

Koftagari is the term for a type of silver and gold damascene work produced in Thiruvannthapuram, Kerala, Jaipur, Rajasthan, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh

and Punjab. Bidri, a technique named after its place of origin, Bidar, Karnataka, is the application of inlay (mainly silver) to objects cast in a relatively soft alloy of zinc, copper and lead. After the inlay work is completed, the ground is stained black using chemical, thus creating a splendid contrast to the silver decoration.

In Kerala to make the Uruli (wide-mouthed cooking vessel, with flat or curved rims) the lost wax process is used. Nachiarkoil in Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu is an important bell-metal centre.

Textile and folk painting:

Textiles are a part of India's history –it's past, present and future. Indian textiles were found even in the tombs of the Egyptian Pharaohs, they were a sought-after export to ancient Greece and Rome. Suppressing and replacing the Indian handloom cotton trade with mill-made alternatives was a key factor of the British Industrial revolution. That is the reason Gandhi made handspun *Khadi* a symbol of the Indian Independence movement. Even today, millions of craftspeople all over India produce extraordinary traditional textiles that appeal to the international market. In the weaving tradition of India, one came across terms like 'yarn', 'loom' and 'shuttle' 'warp' and 'weft' 'starching' and 'sizing', 'traders' and 'weavers'. Some of the fibres commonly used in textile weaving are: Cotton, Silk, Wool, Mixture of the three and Gold and Silver thread etc. The famous Block Printing is practiced all over Western and Central India. On the other hand Marco Polo opined on 'Embroidery' thus "...embroidery is here produced with more delicacy than anywhere in the world".



The subject of painting is, in fact, the painting. It can be the expression of mood, a reality as seen by the artist, a graphic interpretation of a philosophical idea, and

an invocation of blessings from the Gods, or just decoration as a part of a celebration. India has a rich tradition of different styles of folk painting too. *Rangoli*, *Alpana*, *Aipan*, *Kolam*, etc are created on the floor and at the entrance to the home. Coloured powder used in the *rangoli* on the ground without an adhesive or glue as the art work which is not meant to be permanent but done each day. *Kolam* is a kind of floor painting made by women at the entrance of their homes with white rice powder in Tamil Nadu. Artists in Chittosgarh, Rajasthan make wooden temples with doors that can be opened up to reveal elaborately painted stories of historical and religious importance. *Warli* tribals of Thane district of Maharashtra decorate their house walls with paintings depicting their lives. *Thanjore* Painting is an interesting combination of art and craft that grew in the region of Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu under Maratha influence. Mithila Paintings are popularly known as *Madhubani* from the district of the same name in Bihar. The *Jharanapata Chitra* of West Bengal is a long vertical paper scroll used to tell stories from religious epics. The *Patachitra* of Orissa depicts stories from the famous poem, the *Geet Govind*.