

Traditional Crafts and Craftsmen of India: Development post-Independence

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Abstract:

Craft is both a method of industrial production and a form of artistic activity. The craft examples produced by the craftsmen are basically utilitarian in which the effort has been made to introduce aesthetic appeal. In early times there was little distinction between "fine art" and craft. The sculptural and architectural remains of ancient India represent the work of artisans. Only in recent times the "fine arts" have become more clearly differentiated from the crafts, but the latter in the hands of an excellent craftsman are still works of art. After Independence in Democratic India craft and craftsmen got more facilities by the government and thus various handicrafts from all the states flourished.

Before the introduction of machinery every article of domestic use was produced by hand. If a craftsman did his job perfectly, he could easily acquire a patron who normally used to keep him in continuous employment. In a gradually extending world the craftsman became the keystone of a developing commerce. He organised guilds which absorbed his sons in his trade, for there is a strong tradition of continuity by inheritance in the history of craftsmanship. Particular techniques passed down in families for generations, and even apprenticeship was a quasi paternal relationship. Thus the craftsman increased gradually in individuality, security, scope and importance until the invention of machinery revolutionized industrial production, subsidies and financial help by the government.

Key words : Craftsmen, Industrial revolution, modern technology, Handicrafts, Globalization, Industry, Production, Manufacturing, Artisans.

Introduction:

In early times there was little distinction between "fine art" and "craft". The sculptural and architectural remains of ancient India represent the work of artisans. Only in recent times the "fine arts" have become more clearly differentiated from the crafts, but the latter in the hands of an excellent craftsman are still works of art.

Before the introduction of machinery every article of domestic use was produced by hand. If a craftsman did his job perfectly, he could easily acquire a patron who normally used to keep him in continuous employment. In a gradually extending world the craftsman became the keystone of a developing commerce. He organised guilds which absorbed his sons in his trade, for there is a strong tradition of continuity by inheritance in the history of craftsmanship. Particular techniques passed down in families for generations, and even apprenticeship was a quasiparton relationship. Thus, the craftsman increased gradually in individuality, security, scope and importance until the invention of machinery revolutionized industrial production.

With the introduction of machinery there has been a lot of change in the traditional craftsmanship, even then a worker who produces an article by handwork is still a craftsman in spite of his labour being facilitated by an electric motor, by machine spun yarns or by standard dyes made in big chemical plants. It cannot be denied that the technique of craft may change with the invention of new tools; its prevalence may decrease as industry becomes mechanised; the status of the craftsman may change as he becomes part of a larger industrial polity, but despite these apparently inimical developments craft remains an essential method of production in many lines of manufacture, not only because it is for some products artistically superior to machinery, but also because it is in many cases essential for well made goods.

The study of crafts is an essential key to the understanding of a people's culture. It cannot be denied that in man's struggle for existence, artifacts and resources are his greatest assets. In India, the crafts have an importance all their own. They express the great tradition and cultural heritage of our country. As long as the masses of India retain their taste for superb workmanship, as long as they continue to appreciate the value of skilled workmanship, as long as they continue to delight in the really beautiful, so long will the crafts of India survive and forever flourish. The reason for their preservation and development lies in the fact that they are the material symbols of India's unique cultural ethos.

According to the dictionary, the word craft denotes 'skill', 'art', 'trade', etc. In India, however, craft is always associated with art, and that is why a craft example is usually considered to be a specimen of folk-art or people's art. Moreover, in Indian craftsmanship traditional characteristics are very much predominant. A craftsman inherits his technical skill generally from his father or grandfather who may have inherited his technical skills from his forefathers. The process of transmission of hereditary skill from generation to generation is a very important factor in the history of Indian craftsmanship. Over thousands of years this multitude of processes perhaps evolved into perfection.

Craft is more concerned with the household art than with the small-scale or cottage industries. In the small-scale or cottage industries technical labour or skill is given more importance, whereas in the household art or craft artistic or aesthetic elements play an important role. It is not the craft, but the industrial art which can be put under the category of cottage or small-scale industries, Industrial arts relate to the large or small-scale production of articles primarily utilitarian in which a very little effort is made to introduce aesthetic appeal. They reach their widest significance when their production assumes the proportions of an industry. The field in general is that of the industries producing mechanised and sophisticated goods for personal and household use and decoration such as those concerned with clothing, textiles, jewellery, furniture, ceramics, glass, metal work and the printing industry, Craft as a method of making artistic goods has its chief significance when it exists in connection with naivety and simplicity of producing requisites of everyday utility for the simple masses of the vast country-side. The shapes and forms of the craft examples are mostly traditional, but within this tradition there is an individual fantasy. The traditional craftsman produces an object, which in its highest aesthetic form comes from the intimate and organic connection between hand and eye and brain, and the rhythmic movement of the soul. Our craft examples are, therefore, works of art, not merely of use.

The Indian craftsman has been an organic element in national life. He is seen to have produced two types of craft examples such as rural and urban. In a developing economy the craftsman has to satisfy the needs of both the rural and the urban population. The rural folk are satisfied with the simple and less costly objects of daily use, while the urban people demand more costly and sophisticated craft specimens whether they are for decorative or utilitarian purposes. That is why in ancient India we find the simultaneous growth of rural and urban crafts. The same craftsman who produced simple articles for use by common people had to produce deluxe examples on demand from the sophisticated urbanites. In his review of the Indian craftsman Coomaraswamy has rightly observed, "Broadly speaking, he is associated with that life in one of three ways: as a member of a village community; as a member of a guild of merchant craftsmen in a great city; or as the feudal servant of the king, or chieftain of a temple". As a feudal servant he had to cater to the needs of the royal

family, while as a chieftain of a temple his duties were multifarious, especially including the maintenance of the temple as well as its accessories.

With a view to ensuring a balanced economy and providing employment opportunities to millions of people, the crafts should be revived and developed. Moreover, the development of crafts assumes special importance particularly in a country where the home is a abode of art and beauty. Further, where the crafts flourish, their prosperity dwells, waste is converted into wealth. Moral values are conserved in society and the out-pouring of the human soul on works of art woven into utility elevates the nation's culture to the highest altitude. Work becomes worship, and labour becomes capital and functions as the eternal wealth of the country. Labour and life by their confluence enrich the stream of national self-realization and self-competence.

Hence, on all counts, the crafts must be revived and developed in order for India to go ahead with the dynamics of the time. Most of the problems faced today by the crafts and the craftsmen have been discussed in the preceding chapter. Some of the more important problems highlighted therein call for revivification. Broadly speaking, these problems may be divided up into eleven headings', viz.,

- (i) Revival and reorientation of the craft traditions
- (ii) Combination of traditions with modern technology
- (iii) Raising the standard of living of the craftsmen
- (iv) Gearing the institutions and the schemes into quick responsible action for the benefit of the crafts and the craftsmen
- (v) Improvement of designs
- (vi) Avenue for better credit facilities
- (vii) Popularisation of craft products
- (viii) Promotion of exports and internal marketing
- (ix) Availability of raw-materials
- (x) Improvement of export publicity and tourist trade
- (xi) Concession for development of crafts.

(i) **Revival and reorientation of the craft traditions:** An independent nation like India is under an obligation to revive those craft traditions which in the past have brought honor to her from the rest of the world by reason of their great technical and aesthetic stature. The revival of these craft traditions should, however, be undertaken in the light of modern requirements and taste. With the impact of modern civilization, significant changes have taken place in the aesthetic values of the people. Patronage of the crafts is shifting from the aristocracy to a growing and highly art-conscious middle-class. Most of the people no longer want elaborately ornamented crafts. They require simple and well-designed objects of utility, inexpensive and handy ones yet having beauty of form. To satisfy the modern needs the traditional designs should be improved. These may or may not be embellished by decorative motifs, but if they are, they should be simple so that they amplify, but do not compete with the form which carries them. To achieve this end, the experts of the regional Design Development Centres should pay periodical visits to the crafts units for on the spot demonstration aimed at improving traditional designs and evolving new ones. Further, in order to check the deterioration in the general standard and quality of crafts, a quality marking scheme should be effectively implemented. Moreover, the Government should patronize and give recognition to the skilled craftsmen who have produced real works of art, just as they give it to painters, sculptors, dancers, poets and musicians. Such efforts would to great extent help in restoring the creative urge and imagination, freedom of initiative and above all a resurgence of the craftsmen's self-respect.

(ii) **Combination of tradition with modern technology:** Most of the artisans use traditional tools and appliances which not only involve exhausting and hazardous operations, but also have a low turn-over. As a result, they cannot have a steady market. So, production has to be made more even and regular, this can be achieved through better labour-saving techniques. It is, therefore, essential that ancient techniques should be replaced by modern techniques. Side by side, the working of improved tools and appliances should be

demonstrated for the benefit of the craftsmen and they should be given free training for the proper handling of these techniques and appliances. Arrangements should also be made to give the craftsmen financial assistance and hire-purchase facilities so that they can go in for the use of such time-saving and technically improved tools.

The All-India Handicrafts Board tries to improve tools and techniques through its Handicrafts Development Centre. To provide a wide coverage more developmental centres should be set up in different parts of the country. It is also suggested that a set of the tools developed at the Central Handicrafts Development Centre should be available at the design centres of the Board and the State Governments where the craftsmen could study their working. Study visits of the craftsmen to other crafts centres in the same crafts should also be arranged.

(iii) Raising the standard of living of the craftsmen: The level of living of most of the craftsmen is extremely low. Their earnings are not enough even to provide them with the bare requirements of their stomachs. They are mostly illiterate. They live in unhealthy places which are utterly devoid of basic sanitary facilities and other necessities of life.

In the free market, the craftsmen's employment conditions and terms of work are very erratic and they are at the mercy of both the dealers and exporters. Procurement of raw materials poses almost insurmountable problems. In the light of all these considerations, the most effective way to increase the income of the craftsmen is to ensure a steady and sufficient flow of work through the State Industries Emporia and the Central Cottage Industries Emporia and other government agencies; improve working conditions through state legislation and state aid and to provide raw materials at fair prices. The Directorate of Industries or the Handicraft and Handloom Export Corporation of India Ltd., might well take in hand the distribution of raw materials and arrange to guarantee the marketing of their products, both at home and abroad.

To ensure a better deal for the craftsmen, the whole structure of production as such needs to be reorganised so as to lessen the domination of dealers, exporters, financiers and middlemen. The craftsmen should also be encouraged to learn how to form and run their own associations, unions and cooperatives and thus reap the advantage of collective bargaining. Credit facilities, such as the Supervised Credit Scheme of the All-India Handicrafts Board on easy instalments without any security, but with technical advice and guidance should also be provided.

Regarding medical aid to the craftsmen, the Employees State Insurance Scheme, or some group health scheme, should be introduced on a compulsory basis.

An adult literacy drive, through social education centres, and audio-visual education through film shows and still documentaries must be launched. Arrangements for combining education with craft training for the craftsmen and their children should also be made.

(iv) Gearing the institutions and the schemes into quick responsible action for the benefit of the crafts and the craftsmen:

The contributions made by the various institutions connected with the development and promotion of the crafts, such as the All-India Handicrafts Board, the Handicraft and the Handloom Exports Corporation of India Ltd., the cooperative societies, and the State Industries Departments, etc., have so far been very feeble. The vast scope and area of operation of these institutions and shortage of funds and technical know-how no doubt stand in the way of implementation of various promotional schemes on a substantial basis. But the scarcity of finance and technical manpower can hardly block the way of the true devotees who have the determination, the spirit of service and strong will-power to work for a new resurgence of the crafts, and a new deal for the artisans who produce them. Thus, the future of the crafts largely depends upon the determination and the staunch spirits of those crusaders who are closely associated with, and concerned about, the functioning and development of crafts in different centres of India.

(v) **Improvement of designs:** The Indian craftsmen generally produce objects of traditional designs. But it is evident from experience in marketing in recent years that unless changes are affected in designs of our crafts objects, they cannot compete with machine-made products which are also comparatively cheap, beautiful and utilitarian. Our crafts can only compete with the machine-made products, if the designs are improved according to the changing taste of the modern day, But the improvement in designs should be made without sacrificing the traditional qualities and the artistic standards of the craft objects. The craftsmen should retain the old and blend it with new things of their own inventions.

The All-India Handicrafts Board's design centres may be playing an important role in improving the craft designs, but they should have more extensive services in the country. For popularising designs a craft magazine may be brought out by the Board with a section on designs which would show the latest designs produced. Arrangements should also be made to train craft designers at institutions like the National Designs Institute, Ahmedabad, provided suitable facilities are available; otherwise, the Board may set up an institute for training of craft designers. Encouragement should also be provided to freelance artists and designers and if possible, working facilities may be provided to them in the Board's design centres.

(vi) **Avenues for better credit facilities:**

For the development of crafts, the manufacturing units or the individual craftsmen can avail of the facilities of liberalised credit given by a few banks such as the State Bank of India, the Bank of Baroda and the Punjab National Bank. Under this scheme, the craftsman has to be certified as a practising craftsman with the required talent and capacity to utilise the credit. The task of giving these certificates should be taken up by the All-India Handicrafts Board and the State Directorate of Industries so that more and more credits can be extended to the craftsmen. Moreover, other nationalised banks should also initiate similar schemes so as to cover a large number of craftsmen.

The Punjab National Bank advances loans to emporia for building up stocks, purchase of raw materials and for working capital requirements. It is suggested that similar facilities should also be extended by other nationalized banks.

(vii) **Popularisation of craft products:**

The future of Indian crafts is to a great extent dependent on the popularisation of craft products among the masses, both rural and urban. At present, our craft products mainly cater to the needs of the rich, and the general masses cannot afford to purchase them. With a view to popularising the craft products among the masses more utility articles should be produced at cheaper rates. Moreover, wider publicity through journals, cinema, radio and also through opening more show rooms and arranging exhibitions would go a long way in popularising our craft products among the masses. Unless masses form the bulk of purchasers, crafts cannot thrive. A stabler and wider home market among the masses can be created if the Central and the State Governments make suitable arrangements to sell craft products in the rural areas through mobile shops and exhibitions.

(viii) **Promotion of exports and internal marketing:**

There has been a boom in the export of craft products to various countries of the world. The rate of growth in the exports of craft products is reported to be very significant specially when compared to the total exports of our country. The share of exports of craft products in the total exports of our country has increased in the recent years and crafts have become one of the important export items along with jute manufacture, tea, iron ore, engineering goods and leather manufacture. As our craft goods have had a good reception in foreign markets, there are great possibilities of increasing the volume of trade. For the promotion of exports, the All-India Handicrafts Board should not only establish Information Posts abroad, but also sponsor a number of teams to all the regions of the world so as to get in touch with the commercial foreign tastes and trends. The existing offices of the Handicrafts and Handlooms Exports Corporation should be further mobilized towards giving this information for the general benefit of the exporters in this country.

For the promotion of exports, wider publicity of craft goods through special documentary films, illustrated brochures, exhibitions and fairs is also necessary. A central show-room should also be set up where craft goods can be displayed on a regular basis, and foreign buyers may be invited to have a view. It would be a better idea if a multi-storeyed building is constructed by the government in a central place where the exporters may be given space on hire to display their products. Side by side, the exporters and their associations should also increasingly take part in the developmental activities of product development, publicity, etc. It is also suggested that the exporters and the manufacturers should be exempted from payment of sales tax (central or state) for all raw materials purchased by them for production of handicrafts meant for exports. Moreover, there should be quality control in handicraft goods produced both for export and internal consumption.

In the field of internal marketing, there is considerable need and scope to provide more established marketing organisations, in cities having concentration of important crafts, associations of private dealers should be organised. A list of local manufacturers and dealers should also be prepared, and the same may be publicised among the internal buyers and the tourists through tourist department. Some of the states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu practise a method of procurement through co- operatives associated with the marketing organisations. Similar societies may be encouraged in other states to organise production as per requirements of marketing organisations.

It has been seen that the craftsmen mainly cater to the individual taste or to the luxury of tourist interest. The market is, therefore, limited. Products of more utilitarian value can gain them a wider and stabler market. Financial aid by way of loans and subsidies, exemption of craft products from taxes, supply of raw materials at concessional rates and opening training centres are steps which government and local authorities can take for better production and general improvement of the lot of the craftsmen.

It has also been observed that the internal publicity done by the emporia organisations as well as the All-India Handicrafts Board is not adequate. Since the state governments do not have enough funds for this, it is suggested that the All-India Handicrafts Board should organise this campaign to cover handicrafts of all states in active cooperation with the state marketing corporations.

(ix) **Availability of raw-materials:** Our crafts can flourish only if the raw materials used by the craftsmen are available at reasonable and concessional prices. It is observed that there is no clear assessed data of the raw material requirements of many of the crafts. It is suggested that an assessment should be first made to know the precise position of raw material situation. Solution of the problem should then be made by a coordinated effort of the All-India Handicrafts Board and the Industries Department in each state. So far as the distribution of raw materials is concerned, it is suggested that the distribution should be done through the state governments. The supply of special raw materials like sandalwood, ivory, etc. for crafts in the states where these raw materials do not exist, should be arranged through inter-state understanding. Sometimes some raw materials like rosewood, redwood, sandalwood, etc. run short on account of their heavy export. It is suggested that the concerned state governments should be requested to impose restrictions on the export of these materials.

(x) **Improvement of export publicity and tourist trade:** For an effective export publicity, the three media of Radio-Press-TV should be used and adequate funds may be invested in this work. Films on handicrafts can be shown in foreign countries through embassies, while the German TV and other representatives of foreign TV can be approached for assistance in exhibiting not only the films, but also some features on Indian handicrafts. In foreign countries Indian handicrafts can also be popularized through show-rooms in Indian embassies. The All-India Handicrafts Board should also bring out publications with excellent presentations for which the advertisements can be inserted by the individual handicrafts' exporters. The Board can also contribute a few pages for general publicity of handicrafts. The various chambers of commerce in other countries may also be used for export publicity on a reciprocal basis with our own export chambers.

As regards tourist trade it may be pointed out that there is no adequate facility for sale of goods to tourists at places of tourist interests. It is suggested that special counters should be set up in emporia for keeping items of tourists' interest, and more tourist shops should be opened at places of interest to tourists. Moreover, in the brochures given to the tourists a list of emporia selling items of their interests should also be incorporated. It is also suggested that the craft units should develop special products which really interest tourists portraying cultural heritage of India. To attract the interest of tourists, some emporia may also arrange demonstrations of craftsmen-at-work during tourist seasons and give wide publicity.

(xi) **Concessions for development of crafts:** In the small-scale industries sector many concessions such as refund of toll-tax, refunds of octroi duty, electricity at cheap rate, subsidy on transport of raw material and finished goods, exemption of sales tax for five years, land on lease on very easy terms, construction of sheds on nominal rent or hire-purchase basis, etc. are allowed. In the field of handicrafts, if similar concessions are provided by the government, the handicrafts can also develop to a great extent. In the field of handicrafts, there are peculiar problems of different states, and as such it is suggested that the All-India Handicrafts Board may form a committee to go into these problems of different states crafts-wise and suggest specific measures or the concessions required in each state. This will help the Board to formulate a line of action.

Conclusion

By fostering the development of the crafts, we not only serve the purpose of creating additional employment, boosting internal production, augmenting foreign exchange, but also add stature to our national culture and through this to our nation's pride. The world of craft is as valuable as the world of science, philosophy or ethics. Crafts reflect the state of human society through the individual who has in him, in small or big proportion, what mankind as a whole possess. Crafts treasures give us a glimpse into the core of the collective mind and societies through the mirror of the individual mind that created them. As the crafts are the indigenous creation of ordinary people of villages and small towns, they reveal the innate artistic taste of the masses and their desire to combine utility with beauty. The people's instinct for the beautiful has been expressed by the craftsmen in an infinite variety of traditional forms which remain unchanged or unaffected over generations.

No matter how much a country is industrialized, it always needs its artisans. A skilled craftsman, conscious of his freedom, loves his craft, whereas a factory worker often comes to hate his work. The craftsman takes a personal interest in the quality of his handiwork, but the wage-earner does not. The factory worker cannot take the place of the artisan. In handicrafts the range and variety of form and design will always be much greater than in machine-made articles. In mass production one design must be used a thousand times. The craftsmen on the contrary can use a new design every day. Because of their variety and excellence, their artistic value and utility, Indian crafts appeal to the senses of buyers.

The modern man lives in a mechanized society. He is tired of this complex and busy world. He finds in the craft products a freshness and simplicity. The handiworks can give him abundantly spiritual refreshment and artistic recreation. It is due to this that very recently crafts have begun to enjoy popularity throughout the world.

Now in most of the places, crafts are in a stage of decay due to the machine production. It is, however, worth mentioning that people begin to appreciate these rural crafts at this crucial time. Only these humble craft work made by the rural people keep us company sharing since the beginning of time all the torment, longing and restlessness of our minds. A craft that is a happy blend of beauty and utility immortalizes the individual mind and spirit. Further, "where the crafts flourish, their prosperity dwells, unemployment vanishes, waste is converted into wealth, and brains and emotions cooperate under the restraining leadership of will. The sanctity of the home is preserved. Moral values are conserved in society and the outpouring of the human soul on works of art woven into utility elevates the nation's culture to the highest altitude. Work becomes worship and

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