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Institute

Aaghaaz

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Newsletter

MAY
2016

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RELEVANCE OF ONLINE MARKETS IN HANDICRAFTS

Handicraft is a unique expression of art which represents a culture, tradition & heritage of a specific region. It beautifully keeps the age old culture alive & maintains the craft's exotic legacy & tradition. Every country has its own unique handicraft style bringing forth the diverse historical aspects in beautiful forms of handicrafts. Highlighted with distinct designs & finishes, the handicraft items speak loud & clear about the excellent artistic skills of craftsmen which make the pieces absolutely invaluable.

Kashmir's picture has always been synonymous with its arts and crafts. The handicrafts from valley are famous throughout the world because of their quality and design. This sector has great potential to generate gainful employment within and outside the state. It is a labour intensive sector and needs less capital investment. Being a labor intensive sector, handicrafts can be established both in rural and urban areas. As per J&K Handicrafts Department, there are an estimated 2.5 lac artisans in the state who support and feed their families by engaging themselves in different forms of craft, and there is still great potential for more employment to be generated in this sector if markets are expanded and demand is increased. Presently, our handicrafts provide Rs.1700 crores as foreign exchange every year.

Kashmir is very lucky in the sense that almost every region is identified by its ethnic art thus providing rich diversity of crafts. From the beautiful pashmina shawls to the mesmerizing wood carving, the khatamband and paper machie, carpets, kani shawl, sozni, tilla work, embroidery, the list is almost endless. Each of these crafts display craftsmanship that take months or even years of mastery. Historically, these crafts were symbols of pride and artisans and craftsmen were looked with great respect in society. Being indigenous arts, skills were passed down from generation to generation. For artisan, it was a matter of great pride and respect to pass on his expertise to his or her offspring. However, the picture has totally changed in modern times and most artisans today no longer want their children to follow their footsteps. Reasons being many including poor wages, inaccessibility to markets, competition from machine made goods, lack of exposure, social recognition etc.

Among the issues mentioned above, market is most critical. In spite of working under the deplorable conditions, yet craftsmen never get a fair price for their products. This harsh scenario is seeing countless artisans leaving their professions and searching for jobs that would pay better, thus posing a grave threat to crafts that till now were symbols of identity.

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Monica Gupta, the founder of Craftsvilla.com who has earlier worked with NGO's such as Kalaraksha and Sahaj says that the situation is serious and if quick measures aren't undertaken, our next generation may be bereft of such crafts. "The handicrafts industry is struggling to adapt with changing times. People today are increasingly opting for machine made goods, plus there is also a general lack of awareness about such crafts. Most artisans come from the rural parts of the country and thus lack the skills or even the resources to sell or promote their products. They are forced to leave their professions and today there are countless art forms that are at great risk of extinction."

Monica aims to change all of this and believes that with technology, it is very much possible. She along with her husband Manoj Gupta started Craftsvilla in 2011, a platform where craftsmen can connect directly to consumers without any kind of involvement of third parties. "We provide them web space and they get to decide the prices of the products. We act as their mouthpiece, helping them promote their creations and also provide access to a global audience, something that they would never achieve with a physical shop."

On probing if sellers were ready to come on board, she says, "Initially sellers were skeptical and understandably so because we were doing something that hadn't been replicated before in India. But with time, our trustworthiness has grown and so have the numbers. We currently have over 600 registered sellers from all over India and are continuing to grow. Consumer response too has been encouraging though Indian audiences are yet to lap up the e-commerce space fully."

E-commerce can be a wonderful tool for connections and ventures such as these can revive and bring a fresh spurt of life to the flagging crafts industry. Over the last five years, many web portals selling exclusively handicrafts have come up. Examples include Jaypore, Kashmir Box, iTokri, fabindia, Gaatha etc.

However, for crafts to grow and flourish in the state, it is imperative that a holistic and integrated approach needs to be devised.

MOHAMAD SHAHKAR WANI
Faculty Member, CDI

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“We are usually too ready to accept the first solution as good enough. We need to believe that there is often a better or simpler solution in order to keep on thinking.”

EDWARD DE BONO

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KASHMIR CARPET

Kashmir Carpets are globally known for their designs and quality. Carpets from Kashmir are hand-knotted generally made in pure silk, silk cotton blends and pure cotton. Earlier, carpets were also made in Wool. However, woolen carpets are no longer being made.

The craft of carpet is generally practised in Srinagar and North Kashmir. The designs range from flora to fauna. Most famous designs include Hamdaan and Kashaan. Over the past one decade, the number of carpet artisans has drastically declined due to poor earnings.



(Photo Credits: Dilbag Singh)

The government has established Indian Institute of Carpet Technology (IICT) , Srinagar for development of regional carpet sector. The institute has been involved in development of new designs, skill up-gradation of artisans and distribution of free modern carpet looms. Though, these measures are seen as positive steps, however overall economic condition of artisans has not improved.

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THE MISERIES OF PAPER MACHIE ARTISANS

After visiting any paper machie artisan, one can easily assess the poor social and economic conditions he lives in. A blossoming tree of paper machie whose seedlings were sown by the then King of Kashmir, Sultan Zain-u-abideen, has stopped bearing fruits. The reasons being too many. A place where the horror of conflict still haunts like a sword of Damocles, hanging over the heads of handicraft artisans, the papier machie artisans are at cross roads, fighting the battle of poverty and social stigmas.

In the times of inflation, low wages given to artisans is a burning issue that every papier machie artisan faces. The lack of technological intervention in the various processes of papier-machie craft e.g., standardized moulds, drying furnaces, modern paper crushing machines etc., compels a person to think of papier machie as a pre-industrial craft ,which is crying for design and technical interventions.



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One's heart bleeds when a sacred craft like papier machie, which involves the tremendous hard work of the artisan is faked with cheap Plaster of Paris, products in the market. The buck stops with the government for policy flaws in establishing quality bench marking and also with the papier machie artisans who have been unable to form a union or a structured organization on community level ,to regulate and encourage the promotion of authentic paper machie products. Though, paper machie has been registered under Geographical Indication (GI) by CDI, Srinagar,however the benefits

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shall spread to the practitioners only after the GI is strictly enforced. Kashmir once famous for its rich culture, this land has today lost the sheen of its culture due to our failure to fulfill our responsibility towards the once queen of crafts—Paper mache. We have failed to allow the craft to ripen in the minds of young and fertile minds of the coming generations, due to lack of awareness at school, college, and university levels. The lack of authentic and professional craft enterprises led to a creation of vacuum in the sector. The traditional traders have been over-exploiting the artisans economically for years.

Lack of community mobilization and awareness on various schemes incorporated in handicraft policy e.g., artisan credit card, subsidies etc. has added to the miseries of the paper mache artisans. Due to political instability, lack of branding and technological intervention, professional in-expertise, the craft is facing silent death. Instead of an umbilical connection with craft, maximum artisans don't want to pass on the craft to the next generations due to collective failure of every Kashmiri to revive the craft.

MARIA WANI
Student
MCME Sem-II

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MAY EVENTS

CLUSTER VISITS

The institute organized a cluster visit for a group of young professionals and students from various parts of the country. The group consisted of designers, architects, urban planners from reputed institutions including NID, Ahmedabad.



NSDC MEETING

A delegation from National Skill Development Council (NSDC) headed by Dr. Sapna met Director, CDI Mr. Gazanfar Ali on 22nd May, 2016 to discuss possibilities of collaboration between NSDC and CDI. Later NSDC delegation also interacted with a group of master artisans.



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JURY

The jury for students of Master's in Craft Management & Entrepreneurship MCME, Batch (2015-16) Semester-I was conducted on 7th May,2016 and MCME, Batch (2014-15) Semester-II was conducted on 14th May,2016

Jury is an evaluation mechanism wherein students present their overall learning acquired during the whole semester.The Jury consists of external experts from industry and academics in addition to internal faculty members of CDI.



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ARI EMBROIDERY (HOOK WORK)

(Photo Credits: CDI Resource Centre)

Ari Embroidery artisan using her skills on bed cover using hook. Ari embroidery is done mostly on garments especially on Kurtis. The word “Ari” means Hook and “Ari Kaem” the hook work. The craft is mostly practised in Noor Bagh area of Srinagar.

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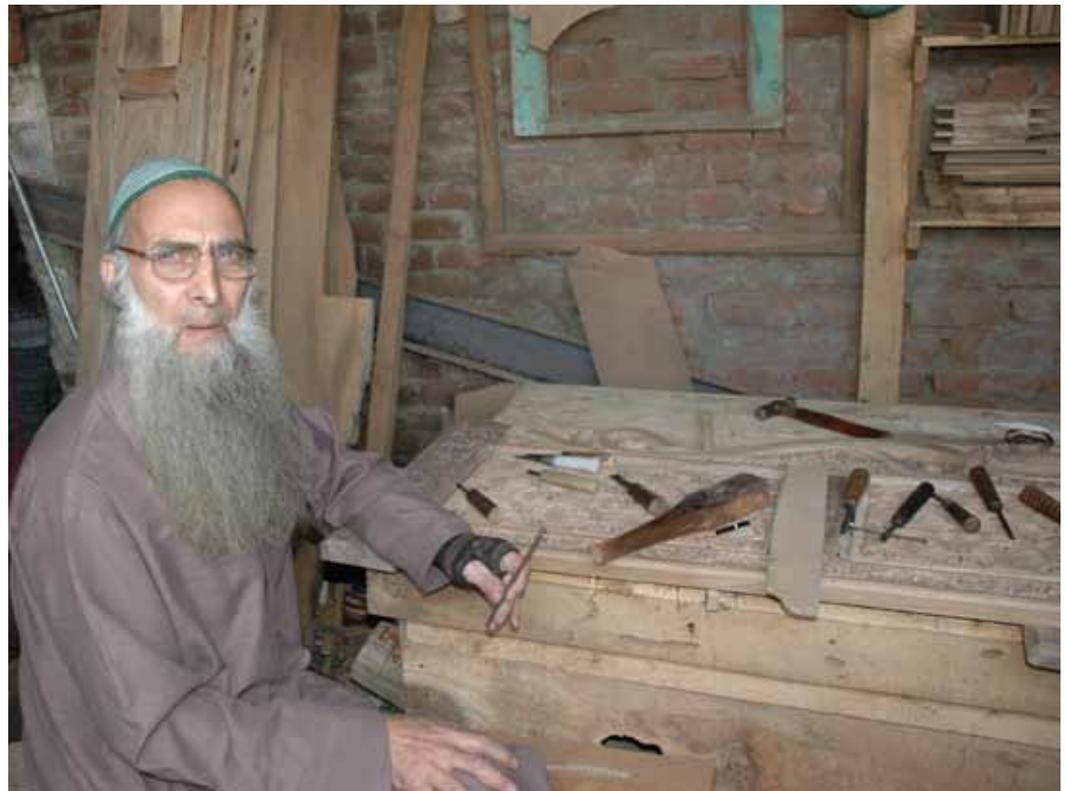
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GHULAM NABI DAR (WALNUT WOOD CARVER)

Meet our real hero Ghulam Nabi Dar, a 62 year old walnut wood carver from Safa Kadal area of Srinagar. He has been practising this craft for more than 45 years now. Very much contented with his profession, he has been able to provide every comfort of life to his family of six members. All his four children, including three daughters and a son are well educated.

This craft not only provided him economic benefits but also an opportunity to work in Iraq for about two years from 1979–81. Dar carved beautiful frames for Technical college of Baghdad in Iraq. He is very glad that his son Abid is following his foot steps. Abid learned Wood carving at a very young age and is fully skilled in the craft.



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