

Ideas & Opportunities Designers' Forum

Integrated Design & Technical Development Projects with Craft Traditions of Rural India offer opportunity for exporters to source innovations

An initiative of the Office of DC (Handicrafts), implemented by EPCH

The Integrated Design and Technical Development Project is an initiative of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India, implemented by the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), New Delhi, by engaging designers from leading design institutes from India. Various crafts from all over India were identified for this project aimed at training artisans practicing traditional craft skills and upgrading as well as honing their skills to enabling them to bring out more marketable product variations with their existing craft skills. A total of 40 artisans, mostly women are trained in a project spanning 5 months that starts with survey & research to access the existing designs in a particular craft, the available materials, technical inputs, production process and marketability of the product. Subsequently the artisans are trained to interpret possibilities with their craft as well as their commercial viability. The latter part of the project includes product development and market testing. It concludes with a line of innovated products, technically termed design prototypes, using the artisans' existing materials and skills. Each individual project signs off with confidence building and to further explore, possibilities. The aim of this project is to engage new generation artisans who are drifting away from their family craft practices, to guide artisans towards bringing out products as per market demand and suitability as well as to revive languishing crafts.



Pramila Choudhary, Textile Designer from NID
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"I am working as a designer in a place called Jalore near Jodhpur and have 40 artisans working under me. Most of them are women while there are a few male artisans as well. These women practice an age old *Ari Tari* craft done to make products like *odhanis* and stoles. Their new generation is not engaged in this craft and is in fact drifting away from such artisanal work. While working with these artisans we take care to retain the originality of these crafts as well as their sustainability and character

attached to this craft. Rather, we endeavor to bring in new designs and more options. These artisans took inspiration from trees, leaves and patterns from their surroundings to make their crafts. It was time consuming at the beginning but eventually brought in clarity and artisans involved in the project saw design possibilities in their conventional products. For them it is like breaking a barrier and learning something that equips them for a competitive world. This craft, earlier confined to *odhanis* is also used to make textile products like cushions."

Sushil Moharana, Designer - Textile and Stone



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I am from Bhubaneshwar, Odisha, engaged in the work of stone. The integrated design & technical development project I've done is in stone carving craft of Bhubaneshwar in which I have trained 40 women artisan and developed 25

articles of plantation, candle stands, design pillars, etc. in serprntine, sand stone and granite. There is a good response from everyone and it is very encouraging. To reduce the weight of the product and to make it more contemporary, I'm experimenting with combination of stone with metal, stone with wood, etc. for a future line of products. The motto is to create more commercially viable, contemporary pieces of art.

Arvind Joshua, NIFT Hyderabad Graduate

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Since the past 13 years I have been working extensively with khadi, crochet, bamboo, brass & copper, hand embroidery and wooden toys. My motto is to bridge the gap between the skilled artisans of the villages of India and the trend conscious, quality demanding urban consumer. The integrated project I executed was in Narsapur, Andhra

Pradesh, known for the work of lace and hand crochet craft. This craft form has been around for the last 100 years and several women in Andhra Pradesh's Narsapur area have been practicing this craft in the confines of their homes. Our basic idea was to mobilise these people to turn into full time

entrepreneurs and explore their products' market potential so that they improve their livelihood as despite being highly skilled, these women earn very little. This intricate craft is gaining prominence in the international market and these artisans can rightfully claim a market presence through proper training. The inspirations for the collections in home furnishing, apparel and bags I have developed are Red Indian philosophy and Islamic architecture.

Neha, Textile Designer from NID

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The work I am engaged in is about loin loom weaving of Dimapur, Nagaland, where they have geometrical motifs and use this as their traditional garment. I was working with the Chakhasang tribe. The project was about developing the 40 skilled artisans to develop a new range of products for different markets.



Crafts that people practice there are mostly with either rich tribal or traditional background. They make products like tribal shawls and stoles as well as the famed 'Mekhla' which can be described as a drape that locals use to cover themselves. These products as of now have buyers in local markets and suited to this clientele's tastes, makers continued to use the traditional red, yellow and green in these products. As a designer I introduced some new ideas in form of different colour schemes without altering the products they were already making. We have tried to introduce different colour schemes, using which new patterns can be made. Owing to local demand, people are using synthetic material to make low cost options. We are coaxing them to stick to natural wools so that these products can be exported to European countries and other nations where they can cater the need of buyers who need woolen clothes. We are also working on introducing new designs in bags and stoles using the same craft technique.

Deepshikha, NIFT Hyderabad Graduate

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My project took place in Nagal, Saharangpur, UP, where 40 artisans were trained for 3 months in hand embroidery using stitches like running stitch, chain stitch, blanket stitch, back stitch, laisy daisy, etc. to create products like bags, cushion covers, table runners, place mats, etc. which are market viable



and trendy for the season. The artisans used to make pillow covers and bed sheets using only chain stitch. I trained them in the other stitches and helped them create more

visually appealing products. The artisans now have more variety to offer to the customers now which would help them to have better wages. As there is no market for these artisans, they make blankets and pillows for domestic use.

Sanathoi Singha, NIFT Shillong Graduate

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My integrated design and technical development project was on bamboo and cane products in Lengpui, Mizoram. Basically this craft is about weaving and basket making using

locally available material and used by the local populace for carrying water and other use in regular household activities. Through research, training and innovation, we have introduced different sizes in these products so that they can be used as home décor items as well. Products like flower vases, food baskets and pen stands are being introduced. The entire working process was quite interesting and helped me attain detailed knowledge and experience in this sector. The only thing which requires attention is lack of communication and transportation, as most artisans live in villages and interior parts of the state.

Sunil Kumar, NIFT Bhopal Graduate



My project also involves crafts of cane and bamboo but in Himachal Pradesh. The artisans in my project were fully as well as semi-skilled. They make products like place-mats, office dustbins, lights and few products for decorative purposes. They also make jewellery using bamboo. The prevalence of these

products is majorly in the domestic market. To tune them for a wider buyer base, proper design orientation was needed. Also, infrastructure and machine are needed to support the process. People in this region of Himachal are also engaged in making the famous Chamba rumaal that uses needlework so intricate that the work appears on both sides of the fabric. This particular craft is languishing as it is time consuming, arduous and doesn't fetch a justified price in the local market. We are trying to revive it. Another product is the geometrically bordered Kullu shawl. These are also handmade and they use basic colour schemes like red, yellow and green. We are trying to bring in new interpretations in this.

Sudhish Kumar, BFA Graduate from Kerala

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I have worked with crafts of bamboo, reed, coconut derivatives, palm leaves, etc., in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Through the project of DC (Handicrafts), I have been engaged in the craft of coir products in Kerala. These are made of coconut derivatives. There are around 40 artisans under me and I have been doing

this work for last five years. We use coconuts shells to make products like candle stands, jewellery boxes, lamp stands, pen stands, small decorative ponds, etc. Through the project we have developed 25 kinds of products. This fair has been a great platform to showcase this craft. The local market is not so promising for these artisans and they need to be guided to introduce their products in the international market.

Piku Shah, Empanelled Designer, Ministry of Textiles

I am engaged in a craft jewellery making of West Bengal that uses materials like seetalpatti (a natural material), leather, copper, horn, jute, cane and bamboo. This jewellery craft is quite well known both in and outside Bengal. It has the possibility of being altered and enhanced for a wider market presence in India and overseas.



EPCH conducts Match-Making Exercise between designers and exporters

19th February, 2017: In course of the IHGF Delhi Fair-Spring 2017, EPCH conducted a match making exercise between designers commissioned in its Integrated & Technical Development Projects and established exporters. The endeavour was to bring forth learnings from the projects involving individual crafts from distinct regions as well as to seek international market linkage for the innovated lines and product variations, made with rural and regional craft traditions.



A team of nine designers and leading EPCH member exporters participated in this interaction that was presided by Mr. R K Verma, Director, EPCH; Ms. Jesmina Zeliang, eminent exporter from the North East Region and COA Member-EPCH; and Mr. Najmul Islam, leading exporter from the Moradabad region. Ms. Zeliang shared her experience of buyer inclination towards products that embodied craft skills or traditions, a trend that is here to stay for products manufactured in India.

The designers shared their experiences, journey in researching as well as working with artisans in their locales and bringing out product lines with enhanced commercial viability. They also shared the response to their mentored lines displayed at the IHGF Delhi Fair. Some of them shared the concern that the new generation

wishes to break away from family craft traditions to pursue other sources of livelihood. Mr. R K Verma assured the designers that EPCH would work on building a linkage between designers and exporters so that they can produce assortments with the researched craft techniques on a larger scale which will eventually help these crafts to revive again.

Crafts from the remote areas of India need attention to be kept alive and who could be better than a designer to bring out the best and complete potential of the craft.

Languishing crafts can be revived if crafts persons involved are sought out and encouraged with training and learning. To further connect them with the international market, a linkage - 'match making' between designers and exporters is needed. This will also lead to the production of these crafts on a larger scale that will eventually help their revival and sustenance.

R K Verma, Director, EPCH

