

## Our Past as our Future: Weaving Tomorrow at Chirala

*Ashoke Chatterjee*

Over 300 weavers gathered in Chirala (AP) in November for a 7-day meet on "Rethinking Indian Industrialization of Crafts", organized by REEDS (a Hyderabad-based NGO), Handloom Futures Trust, the National Federation for Handloom and Handicrafts, Maastricht University and the University of Leiden. Participants came from twelve states and Thailand, Taiwan, China and Laos. Some travelled four days and nights, all carrying looms and spinning wheels. A weavers' camp set up at a school drew the local community to a unique sharing of knowledge and hope. Indigo vats were installed by Indian and Thai dyers. A display by Registry of Sarees showcased 200 years of khadi experience. Curator Mayank brought 24 pieces of exquisite fabric gathered from across the country. Translators and scholars were on hand at workshops and discussions which reflected the capacity of artisans to absorb from one another across all barriers. An Andhra weaver learned intricate weaving techniques from Laos. Weavers from Kutch demonstrated the importance of wool within the handloom scenario, while another from Chhattisgarh resolved problems in dyeing Uttarakhand nettle yarn through exchanges with Jagada Rajappa (Hyderabad) and weaver Tang Wen Chun (Taiwan). A year of meticulous planning unfolded effortlessly along Chirala's magnificent shore, the sea a metaphor of timelessness.

### *Old as the 'new-new' and Other Findings*

Weaver interactions were a backdrop to two days of discussion, bringing together weavers and scholars from around the globe on issues of craft and pedagogy, law, labour, livelihood and future directions. The invitation included some head-spinners: explorations would take place "of 4-E cognition (embodied, embedded, extended, enacted) in the case of sciences, crafts and technologies". Comparisons from ancient Greece and Rome with India suggested ways of 'anchoring of innovation' in history, with the past integrated into the future. Prof Ineke Sluiter (University of Leiden) recalled Socrates using craft to demonstrate knowledge, "making craft always morally good". Prof Sluiter revealed that concepts of progress in the West are returning to the wisdom of antiquity -- "Old is the new-new", a lesson perhaps in our struggle with the 'sunset syndrome' that has devastated our sector, and a reminder that the slogan we have made familiar - "The future is handmade" -- originated in the European Union fifteen years ago!



Dye makers at work in Chirala

Prof Wieber Bijker (Maastricht University and Norwegian University of Science & Technology) contrasted experiences in China and India. Handcrafts and artisans were attacked as decadent during China's long history of upheaval and revolution. What was lost is now proving difficult to recover – a warning to India's neglect of its incomparable craft resources. Historian Miko Flohr (University of Leiden) underlined what makes scholarship so critical: "The humanities offer innovative thinking that can contribute to sustainable economic development through the importance of understanding the social and economic roles of crafts like handloom weaving in their ecological context, and how crucial it is that the delicate balance between such crafts and the environment is not disturbed. This, in fact, should give these traditional crafts quite a special place in our thinking about sustainable economic development". Dr. Valentina Fava (Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic) suggested fresh business models that support sustainability rather than mass production. For her, marketing strategies based on value propositions must transcend short-term profitability, a point supported by Prof James Leach (CNRS France) in his call for understanding livelihoods as much more than income. Significantly, Prof Leach called for a reciprocal relationship between scholars and practitioners (my emphasis) "so that we can be partners in an ecology of process, and not just about production". The importance of such partnerships was perhaps Chirala's most significant signal.

Prof Dorothy Ko (Columbia University) appealed to India to learn from China's bitter experience rather than to blindly mimic growth models that entail huge human and environmental costs. The world is looking at India for another path of caring, and for a new value system based on sustainability and humanity rather than on greed. Chinese artisans today are eager to learn from India and to partner in building market opportunities in both countries and to drastically reduce dependence on western markets. Her appeal for collaboration offered a startling contrast to our image of China as a ruthless competitor, exporting factory-made rip-offs.

### *Markets: Red Herrings or Sunrise Opportunities?*

Chirala's focus was on scholar / artisan relationships. Fair enough. Yet without market activists as key players, how can change be achieved in any new arrangement? Despite discussions around critical experiences such as Malkha cotton in Andhra and Kala cotton in Kutch, there was comparatively little space at Chirala for understanding Indian experience in craft development, or the current crisis of neglect. The centrality of users in the handloom discourse was left as an assumption rather than as a responsibility for creating a public willingness to pay for handmade quality, and to achieve this by responding to new needs and aspirations. Chirala highlighted a disturbing reality that for some scholars the way markets work (and therefore the way some of us work) reduces artisans to passive subjects, exploited as skilled labour rather than respected as keepers of wisdom. In its "Rethinking Industrialization of Crafts", the term 'industrialization' was understood primarily as machine-driven challenges. Yet handcraft is India's second largest industry, and the re-thinking that engages many of us is that of recognizing handcraft as a gigantic Indian industry, deserving attention, respect and investment in its own right and on its own terms – with the artisan at the centre. Exploitation is a familiar reality through appalling income-levels and working conditions that prevail. For change, market demand must finally deliver both respect and a quality of life to artisans through recognition of handmade value, away from prevailing mentalities of buying cheap. This change is what CCI and partners have fought to achieve.

For us empowerment comes not only from artisan pride in heritage but also from her capacity to negotiate and to influence what happens in the marketplace. In the words of Prof Leach “People choose things for many reasons, and price is one factor. Another is quality and also perceived quality ... Something that we might call aura or the intangible aspect of quality that includes reputation, knowledge, and the desire of the purchaser to identify with or be included in an image of themselves...” The mission of KAMALA emerged in Uzamma’s example of Malkha cotton (high quality at affordable prices) to interpret the marketplace as an arena where alternatives and options should demonstrate “markets that come after ideas in the head” and emerge as enabling, rather than as domineering spaces.

### *Scholars, Scholarship and Us*

While collaboration between academics and artisans was suggested to make multiple values apparent, Chirala left questions for those -- neither scholars nor artisans -- who work in and through markets. Are we suffering an identity crisis that is making us invisible? Have we failed to emerge as ‘scholars’ of another kind, in our own right, by experience if not by qualification? Why is what we do not top-of-mind although founded on action research, testing and responding to the real needs of makers and users? Does our evidence lack rigour? Is our documentation inadequate? Do we fear discussions that can fly way above our heads? (I never did fathom what ‘explorations of 4-E cognition’ was all about!) Does this situation mirror the earlier absence of economists and managers as craft partners? What might all this mean in terms of building the capacity of craft teams, of resources needed for research and publication, of opportunities required to bring minds together for reflection and partnership? How can scholars join as peers and partners to help test assumptions and findings and to enrich outcomes?

The value of such teamwork has been established. Consider the seminal “Bamboo & Cane Crafts” of the northeast by the NID team led by M P Ranjan, our own projects and exhibitions (including Stone Crafts of India, Chamba Rumals, and the Hyderabad exploration of natural dyes) and those of others: Martand Singh’s Viswakarma, Dakshinachitra’s concept of re-creating craft environments, pastoral cultures demonstrated by Sahjeevan, Rajeev Sethi’s showcasing of Indian creativity at Mumbai’s new airport, and Judy Frater’s path-breaking experiments in Kutch. Inter-disciplinary scholarship has been the foundation for every one of these. CCI partners have included scholars of distinction: Lotika Varadarajan, Jasleen Dhamija and Jyotindra Jain are among them. Through the Craft Revival Trust, Ritu Sethi has regularly brought activists and scholars together around shared concerns and priorities. Sahapedia and IGNCA have offered other opportunities, while Uzamma (Malkha) and Annapurna Mamidipudi (Max Planch Institute for the History of Science) have helped transform our understanding of Chirala’s inspiration: the place of the weaver and her loom in a new millennium.

Today scholars and activists are uninvited to tables of decision-making -- one for residing in



Jagada Rajappa with natural dye experts

ivory towers and the other as purveyors of craft myths. Chirala made clear both the need as well as opportunities for change through fresh arguments and fresh evidence. Scholars are needed for both, and should surely be the first to understand what we do and why we do it. Consider three examples from our Newsletter: debates on intellectual property and on geographic indicators, and that infamous jacket displayed at the V&A which raised issues of ethics, technology and cultural sensitivity. What this suggests is the need for conscious nurturing of scholarship as a resource, integrated into work and advocacy, and for ensuring that knowledge from the ground and from the top is brought together in a common cause.

### *The Past as Future*

“Chirala demonstrated that we can unite academic knowledge and the knowledge of artisanal practitioners to recollect sustainable economies and products of great beauty ... adapted to modern lifestyles”. Our mission, wonderfully endorsed by Prof Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge University) who described Chirala as “one of the most inspiring conferences I have ever attended”. Significant opportunities emerged through Prof Wiebe Bijker’s summary of Chirala achievements: the centrality of India-China exchange, the technological sophistication of weavers and other artisans, their need for self-worth, the importance of a new politics to replace welfare approaches with fresh understanding of crafts as an engine of livelihood as well as a unique and powerful response to the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Chirala also recalled our Santiniketan gathering in 2016, and what we learned there of the beginnings of our movement a century ago through Rabindranath Tagore’s decision to position craft revival within a university, re-defined as a space for embracing universal wisdom and for demonstrating the contemporary relevance of humankind’s heritage. The past and the future seamlessly bound – Gurudev’s mission in 1919 and Chirala’s message today.

## Tagore & Craft: “Life in its Completeness”

*Ashoke Chatterjee*

April 2016 saw CCI membership arrive in Santiniketan for the year’s National Meet. Thirty years earlier, a CCI cohort had undertaken this pilgrimage to celebrate 20 years of the Crafts Council of India. This time it was the same inspiration yet in a different time and context. Globalization, liberalization and free-market economics were still far away in 1986. Now they define the environment within which artisans are striving to find their way through accelerated competition, transformed attitudes and tastes, market disruptions as well as fresh opportunities. The Council decided to return to roots, to the place where India’s contemporary craft renaissance was born, and to find inspiration and guidance in that setting for a road map relevant to a new millennium. The National Meet exploration of Rabindranath Tagore’s legacy of thought and action on artisans and crafts brought some 80 members from the CCI family together with a distinguished panel of invited speakers. Sessions over two days were rich in analysis of the Poet’s work, its impact on the Freedom movement and all that followed, of the craft experience since Independence as well as the issues we face all these years later. The proceedings of the 2016 seminar at Visva-Bharati have now been compiled as a monograph available to CCI and its partners, put together by a team led by Purnima Rai and Ashoke Chatterjee. The hope is that Life in its completeness

will stimulate interest in a dimension of Gurudev's life that remains little explored, and through such interest help to demonstrate how his vision and thought are so completely relevant to our country and our planet almost a century later.

## Ecology & Crafts

### The Greening of Craftscapes

*Pushpa Chari*

Today, as the alternative becomes mainstream and 'greening' in every sphere of life is no longer an option but an imperative, handicraft is moving back to its eco-sensitive origins and processes. We bring you a few thoughts on how green our crafts actually are today, alongwith some of the initiatives being taken by the CCI family in the greening of craftscapes.

### How Green are the Handicrafts made and sold by our Craftspersons?

*N. Shashidhara*

There is a perception among the buyers of handcrafted items that whatever they buy is eco-friendly and safe and not harmful to use. Yes, it was so in the past. But in the majority of the cases (crafts) it is not true today. In the past the contributions made by the artisans through the handicraft items made by them to the village community was considered as the best examples of sustainable activity for sustainable living in the villages. The artisans in the villages made use of the freely grown and naturally available materials as raw materials - like wood, mud, stone and also other discarded natural materials for making functional / utility items of everyday use like pots, spoons, ropes, grinding stones, etc, or decorative items like statues, idols, toys, clothes, furniture etc. And the underlying principle was to put the naturally and easily available materials to the best use and to encourage the artisans engaged in making such crafts. The village community used to take care of the livelihood of the artisans / craftspersons. Excess items made by the village artisans were bartered / sold to the neighbouring villages that needed them for a price. Over the years this led to the marketing of craft items. As the demand increased the pressure for the raw materials also increased which led to the exploitation of the available raw materials and sourcing for the raw materials in the surrounding villages. To meet the demand for the products and to supply within a shortest possible time led to competition among the artisans. The priority of the artisans who were dedicated to their craft in making quality items turned to making quantities with the available and alternative raw materials. This led to focus on quantity rather than quality of the items made by the artisans.

In this market driven, competitive world the majority of the craftspersons have become victims and are suffering, the reason being the lack of awareness about the raw materials, ingredients, tools and the processes they are adopting in making handicraft items. The lack of knowledge about good working practices among the craftspersons is not known to the majority of the craftspersons as handicrafts items are made in the unorganised sector of our society. A similar situation cannot be found in a small scale industry since there are certain rules and regulations and safety measures, which the workers have to adhere to. In the craft sector, there are no

agencies which help in creating such awareness and giving timely guidance to the craftspersons. So they remain totally unaware of the raw materials, ingredients like hazardous chemicals, paints which they are using, or while melting the metals in the fire for casting in a small enclosed place with lack of air and ventilation. The artisan's family members are also involved during festivals like Ganesha, Dussehra for making idols of Ganeshas and other gods and goddesses. This is done in a small place. They use toxic paints to make the idols colourful without being aware of the harmful effect of lead paints or the smoke which they have to inhale while handling melting metals for castings purposes or the microfibers while weaving cotton materials or melting glass etc. There is an urgent need to undertake a study of the working places of craftspersons which must include ergonomically designed work benches, tools, lighting, ventilation and the surroundings. There should be a mechanism to test and certify the raw materials and the processes used by the craftspersons to ensure that they are safe and eco-friendly.

To create awareness and implement good working practices in craft sectors the members who are actively involved in Crafts Councils and similar organisations must become active in driving home the message to the craftspersons.

Not to forget the welfare of the hands behind the crafts is of utmost importance to preserve the crafts and cultural heritage of our country.

## Going Green with Olai

*Jayashree Ravi*

CCTN has been working for more than 15 years with the olai crafts people of our region. Our interaction started in the year June 2002. The ubiquitous palm tree is an integral part of the landscape in Tamil Nadu and the 'olai' or palm leaf has figured in our culture from the time of the written word. It's ability to last for eons has made it a valuable medium of inscription of all our ancient scriptures. The lesser palm leaf fronds were used to make small offering cups, rattles for babies and buntings for decoration during festivals and celebration. Often the leaves are dyed and combined in attractive patterns. It is a declining craft and the Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu (CCTN) in recent years has been working with craftsmen from Zamin Uthukuzhi area to revive it. Like many traditional crafts, olai craftsmen have struggled to evolve with the times



Shanmugam with his creation

and their craft has been on a downward spiral. CCTN organised a two day workshop in October to bring together olai craftsmen from different regions. Techniques were shared and new design ideas were discussed and demonstrated.

Olai Aiyya, (Shri. Shanmugam) a nomad who wanders from temple to temple assisting in making temple decorations and an expert in olai craft was handpicked by CCTN to interact with olai craftsmen from two different clusters. During the two day workshop, many interesting

and beautiful designs were taught by Olai Aiyya to the other craftsmen present. It was a very interactive and productive workshop which was well appreciated by the craftsmen who learnt new designs to incorporate in their future endeavours.

CCTN aims to follow the progress of these craftsmen and equip them with more knowledge in order to elevate their craft to a higher form. We also intend to document traditional and contemporary designs in an effort to revive and help the olai craft flourish for future generations. Simultaneously, for the past 10 years, olai craft has been taught to more than 1000 school children, as part of traditional craft education. As this juncture, we would be failing in our duty if we did not mention the installation of olai parrots and flowers done by Mr. Krishnasamy of Uthukuli to adorn the central space of Phoenix Mall, in Chennai. This was facilitated by CCTN.



Olai Ayya teaching the craft

## Cardamom Fibre, a New Material for the Craft Sector

*Ashim Kumar Das*

*Reported by Nandini Dutta*

Natural fibre offers opportunities to create sustainable livelihoods in the rural areas of the north eastern region of India, especially in the craft sector. It is a green technology where existing skills of the artisans and weavers can be effectively used to create eco-friendly products suitable for the contemporary market. NEDFi Craft Incubation Centre (NCIC) at Khetri, Assam has been working on a variety of natural fibres. It had earlier developed appropriate technology for use of water hyacinth as a viable alternative raw material for craft, and disseminated the knowledge among the craftspersons. Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM), a Society promoted by Govt of Assam, has adopted the technology to promote water hyacinth craft clusters in 6 districts of Assam. ONGC has also utilized the expertise of NEDFi to promote its beneficiaries in Sibsagar district of Assam.

Water hyacinth is not available in the hill states of the region and therefore, NEDFi Craft Incubation Centre was working on identification of a new raw material. Identification of a new raw material in the natural fibre sector generates inquisitiveness among craft lovers and therefore has good market potential too. This led the team to work on large cardamom, which is grown in the hill states, and the development of prototypes for bags, basketry and mats. Initially the mats have been chosen for a product launch, as it will be easier for weavers to adopt and will have scalability in terms of production capacity.



Stems collected from the cardamom field (Source: NCIC)

Large cardamom is a spice cultivated in sub-Himalayan regions. It is a perennial cash crop, grown in the states of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland in NER. The matured stems are removed annually to pave way for the new shoots. Similarly, the diseased plants are also removed from the plantation areas. Since the plant may grow upto a height of 2.8 m, depending on its variety, such discarded stems can be processed for use in creative craft activities.



Weaving of mats in handloom (Source: NCIC)

The stiffness of cardamom fibre is more, when compared to softer materials like water hyacinth. However, it has its own advantage for its toughness and rigidity. For weaving of mats, the stems are dried and thereafter sticks of desired size are prepared which are then woven in looms with cotton yarn.

Cotton yarn is used on the warp of the loom while cardamom fibre is woven on the weft. In terms of thickness and appearance they are comparable with bamboo table mats, however the natural shades of pink make them more attractive.

As cardamom stem is available free of cost in cardamom growing areas, and weavers can easily prepare the mats after initial training, it is expected that the weavers of NER will now have a new material to work with and present to craft lovers across the globe. The other green initiative of NEDFi Craft Incubation Centre includes its work on the introduction of banana fibre in handloom, which too offers a huge potential for value addition. Because of the abundance of raw material, it is expected to emerge as another feasible craft for adoption by weavers, both in the hilly region as well as in the valleys of NER.



Table mats from cardamom fibre (Source : NCIC)

## Craft and Education

### CCI's Craft and Education Initiatives E to S Programme

*Purabi Roy*

The objective of The Craft Council of India's E to S programme is to grow and enrich our rich heritage of crafts and textiles. Handmade products and their makers are fast becoming a "sunset industry". It is really a cause for concern that the children of craftspeople seem disenchanted with their ancestral crafts, and are moving away to different sources of livelihood. With the help of

The Crafts Council of India (CCI), the Crafts Council of West Bengal (CCWB) has been organizing a camp for the E to S children of Bishnupur and Panchmura since 2016. Our goal is to help the children become more self-reliant through gaining some knowledge of designs and computers. This will help teach them to take pride in their heritage, foster enthusiasm for learning design skills, and eventually develop the confidence to deal directly with the patrons.

Bishnupur is famous for its Baluchari saris and Panchmura for its terracotta products, mainly horses which is the logo of the Cottage Industries. The children are a mixture of both girls and boys. They were selected on the basis of their academic performance and passion for their traditional crafts. The duration of training was for 24 classes - two classes every month. Sri Raj Gope, a designer teacher from NIFT has kindly agreed to conduct the workshops. Various aspects of basic designs like shapes, colours, features, balance and lines were taught in two venues.



Young 'E to S' craft trainees

One place of learning is the Krittibas High School in Bishnupur and the other is in Panchmura. The latter workshop is held at the house of a potter who is a national awardee himself. After the course is completed, the students are to be presented with a certificate. It was definitely not all work - they had their share of fun too. The Bishnupur children were taken to Kolkata to view the, "Baluchari" exhibition at Birla Academy. It was indeed a magical moment for us when they came face to face with the beautiful Balucharis, and they mused, "Will ours look just as good?" One little boy could even identify the motifs which he remembered seeing his grandfather weave.

The Panchmura children also had their day out last winter. When we found out that some of the children had never ventured out even to see the nearby Bishnupur temples, we decided to take them there on a field trip. In fact these children, more than anyone else, deserved to see the glorious heritage of ancient terracotta.

At the end of the workshops, it is natural for us to wonder how much has been achieved. According to Raj, through this programme the children have developed a more scientific approach to the designs they weave and make. They have learnt the basic grammar of design. This workshop has been interesting enough to make them motivated, and will perhaps help them to do a more detailed and serious study of design in the future. We have miles to go of course, but we feel our efforts have begun to have their desired effect.

## Taking Paramparik Craft 'Education' to new heights A Peek at Winners of Delhi Crafts Council's Kamaladevi Puraskar

In 1986, Kamaladevi started a scheme of giving a stipend to children from traditional craftsmen's family. She hoped to wean the children away from the desire to have other jobs

which offered more financial security. With this award and recognition the child was encouraged to take pride in his traditional calling. It gave him dignity and self-respect.

She also recognized that by starting early, a child is able to acquire deftness and skill in his craft and an instinctive understanding and aesthetic sensitivity which his environment gives him. In him she felt, lay the seed of the future master-craftsman.

Not only does this award aim to encourage the child, it also ensures that the rich heritage of our crafts is preserved.

Delhi Crafts Council has continued this scheme in the name of our founder and over a hundred and fifty children have already received the award. The children are in the ages of 14 and 20 and are drawn mostly from families of traditional craftspersons.

Stipends to around 6 craftspersons is given annually for a period of one and a half years. The money for this is wholly provided by private donors. For the award-giving function, the awardees come to Delhi, and are taken sight-seeing. From the feedback that we have got from them, it seems that the exposure to museums, etc. is an eye-opener for them and an education in itself.

We have held two major “camps” where all the awardees are invited together for several days. Various interactive programmes are arranged and a detailed feedback is taken. Some awardees are invited back for exhibitions and bazaars from time to time.

We are happy to say that 6 of the Kamaladevi Puraskar Awardees have done themselves proud by winning National Award for Handicrafts. All of them have done very well creatively and financially. Receiving the Kamaladevi Puraskar was a turning point in their lives and careers. The 6 National Awardees are:

The KDP scholarship winner Bhagwan Subuddhi, Orissa – Wood Carving, won KDP in 1986 and the National Award in 1987. Bhagwan Subuddhi who received the award from Kamaladevji herself, has also received the UNESCO Award and the Kamala Samman. He has nurtured many craftsmen, and considers Delhi Crafts Council as his “family”.

Gopal Joshi, Rajasthan – Phad Painting won KDP in 1990 and won the National Award in 2011. Gopal Joshi has also received the State Award and teaches other artists and conducts workshops.

Deepak Vishwakarma, Madhya Pradesh, Stone Carving won the KDP in 1992 and National Award in 2014. Deepak Vishwakarma has also received the State Award as well as the Vishwakarma State Award. Encouraged by the Indian government, he has had the opportunity to take part in International Handicrafts Exhibitions in Spain, Paris and Dubai.

Chandra Bhushan Kumar, Bihar – Mithila Painting won KDP in 1995 and the National Award in 2003. Chandra Bhushan Kumar claims getting the award gave him wings to fly and his life opened up with many opportunities. His work is very innovative and prolific.

Khatri Abdul Rauf Abdul Razak, Gujarat – Ajrakh Handblock Print. Won KDP in 1999 and the National Award in 2009. Khatri Abdulrauf Abdulrazak currently has 15-20 persons working for him. After the Kamaladevi Puraskar Award, he received many orders, and was inducted into government programmes.

Khatri Aurangzeb Haji Abdulrazak, Gujarat - Ajrakh Handblock Print won the KDP in 2003 and became a National Awardee in 2011. Khatri Aurangzeb's work has acquired a new level of excellence. He has been encouraged to use natural dyes and now uses no chemicals or screen printing. He says that the Kamaladevi Puraskar gave him the recognition, and brought in a lot of work.

## Krishna Kamalam Praveeya Vikasam Craft Education in Schools

*S Ranjana*

Craft education in municipal schools was initiated in July 2018 by CCAP. This has been formulated as an ongoing program for schools that are willing to teach crafts to their students all over Andhra Pradesh. The teaching structure or curriculum varies depending on the craft being taught. It could be once a week as is the case with clay molding, our first craft workshop, or 10 days or just a demonstration of the craft.

CCAP has begun with three schools VMC High School and Middle school and ZPH Girls High School. Very soon we will be adding two more schools to this list. We have begun with one craft that is clay moulding. Lakshman who is a very talented artisan, not only enjoys teaching children but also weaves interesting stories and facts related to the objects they make.

This craft is taught to all age groups every Wednesday, from 9.30 am to 1 pm and 2 pm to 5 pm. The duration of each class is an hour.



Children with their craft creations



Class in progress

Mr Lakshman started with a basic course with simple forms that children can relate to. Each one gets a ball of clay to work with. He then demonstrates a form, which the students have to observe and replicate. There is no dearth of enthusiasm and their joy in creating their version can be seen in the pictures.

As the classes progressed the promising students were picked up for further advance training which is in progress. The advance training will continue till December.



Lakshman the artisan



Advance course samples



CCAP member Renuka Mullapudi has helped us in applying for Government grant to fund these workshops. Very soon we will be reaching out to more schools and adding different craft disciplines to our syllabus.

## Innovation in Crafts

### Craft Innovation: An Ongoing Journey

*Meena Appender*

#### *Chinthakindi Mallesham*

Mallesham's is a success story whose main theme is grit and perseverance and a vision to take the process of the craft of weaving Pochampalli ikat to a level of comfort for the weaver.

As a young boy he observed the drudgery and effort of his mother's work in preparing the yarn for the pre process part of the ikat loom. Determined to change her situation he spent many years experimenting unsuccessfully on mechanizing the process. Failure and ridicule led him to leave his village for Hyderabad. He finally made a successful prototype. Recognition and sponsorship and awards followed in a few short years. CCI also honoured him for his innovative invention. He also won the Padmashri award from the Govt. of India.



Malleshwam with his innovative machine

Now a few years later he has increased his production from 25 machines to about 100 machines a year. It is called the Lakshmi Aasu Machine in honour of his mother.

Chinthakindi Mallesham is now working on a prototype to replace another tedious process in the tie and dye weaving process.

His is a success story that has received wide recognition. There is even a biopic being made on his life. It is wonderful to focus on happy endings in the handloom story.

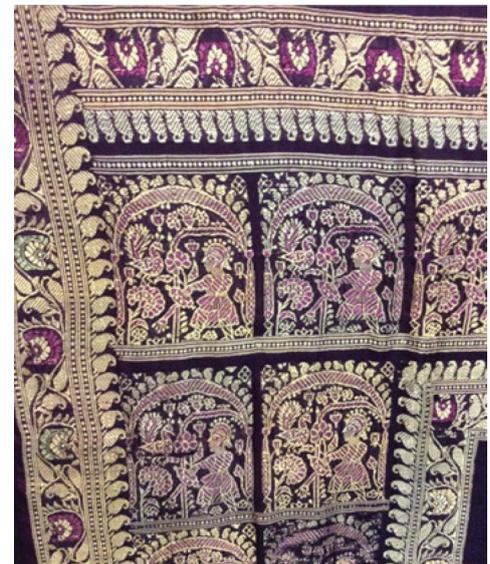
## Revival Stories Close Encounters of a Personal Kind

*Ruby Palchoudhuri*

(Ruby Palchoudhuri's abiding contribution to the revival of traditional Baluchari lies in her pioneering efforts to work with Kalu Hafiz of Benaras to create the technical infrastructure to revive the 'jala' weave. Her passion for revival was born and ignited by love of this unique and spectacular sari of Bengal which permeates the textile culture of the state and by the Baluchari saris she saw in the collections of iconic ladies such as Mme Krishna Riboud, the Thakurbari ladies of the Tagore family like Indira Devi Choudhurani and Jnananandini Devi, her mother Ila Pal Choudhury and many others. Her close encounters of a personal kind (with the Baluchari sari presented below) makes riveting reading).

I graduated from being a stunned admirer of the textile to an ardent supporter under the watchful eyes of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, who was my mentor. It was she who first sought to revive the Baluchari with help from Subho Tagore who showed me his magnificent collection - though we realized that this would be very difficult because the weave was complex, time-consuming and not cost effective.

Kamala Devi was, however, determined and took a sample of the Balucharito Ali Hassan (Kallu Hafiz) in Banaras in her effort to revive Baluchari weave, which was not possible in Bengal. Thus began my association with Kallu Hafiz; and one that that I enjoyed every minute because of the sheer joy of creativity that surrounded him. Regrettably, I have no images of Kallu Hafiz but what I have are some photographs of a revival piece by Pranavi Kapur, a maroon-beige Kallu Hafiz Baluchari with reversible palla featured in Women's by Jaypore, which the designer says is her tribute to the master.



The splendor of Baluchari Weave

We must have made some noise of success with the Kallu Hafiz Project because I was soon commissioned to produce a 16x12 feet Baluchari wall hanging by ITC; a project that took two and a half years, won thunderous accolades and gave me a lifetime of satisfaction.

Never in the history of Benaras had such a large piece been woven. A room was constructed to house the large jala. I went to meet Kallu in his workshop I showed him the technical drawing prepared under the supervision of the famous artist, Sunil Das, then head of Weavers Service Centre, Kolkata. Kalluji took a look at the drawing and all he said to me "Ho jaiga". My life was made!

Kallu Hafiz's ancestors came from Bokhara, Uzbekistan. So inspiring was my association with him that I visited the grave of Kallu's great grand-father when in Uzbekistan. The family was famous for the Nakshabandi technique, which was later brought to India by the Mughals.

The drawing that Sunil Das had prepared was both magnificent and complex. The illustrations were prepared by my assistant at Kabari, Ashok, and me. There were several rows of borders in

between rows of horses, elephants, and typical Baluchari of kolkays (paisleys). The central area had women figures planting tobacco for this was to go up at the BAT headquarters in London.

The base colours were pistachio green with pink, purple and cream. Each motif was outlined by gold threads, as was asked for by the client. The reverse was all gold like a kingkhab. It took six months to prepare the frame to harness the yarn, which is what Nakshibandi does. There were three weavers who sat at the pit loom while two sat on the machaan above, to handle the yarns from the harness.

Over two years, they worked on the masterpiece that was unfortunately lost to India, because it was taken to the UK and my efforts to track the piece since then have failed. This is what we have lost.

Over time, the Benarasi sari became an item of high-fashion even in Bengal, ladies were caught in a bind: Baluchari or Benarasi as the wedding sari. For a long time, the Baluchari prevailed.

It feels good that some remarkable work is getting on to accessories.

It delights me that the Crafts Council of West Bengal was asked to develop Balucharis for uniforms for its ladies and I had one of my originals copied. The girls look both glamorous and graceful.

It also pleases me no end to see a Kallu Hafiz revival Baluchari command a Rs.10 lakh price tag. That is when I see a bit of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's enduring contribution to the heritage craft and perhaps a bit of myself as well.

The regret is that we lost Kallu Hafiz's original revival piece that should have been preserved in Bengal as a part of the state's great Baluchari heritage and not lying in some unnoticed corridors of a corporate giant without anyone having a clue about its great cultural significance.

## ACTIVITIES

### The Crafts Council of India



Craftepreneur products on display

- **Textile Show (5 - 6 October):** The annual pre-festive Textile Show brought the best of designer creativity and contemporary formats to the narrative of saris and fabric, ancient weaves and motifs. Beautiful designer Benarasis, Maheshwaris, Chanderis, Kanjivarams, Tanghails, chikankari, ikat, khadi and mull unfolded a wondrous confluence of designer, embellisher and artisanal genius. Saris literally flew off the racks and into the wardrobes of Chennai's discerning clientele.
- **Craftepreneur (26 - 28 October):** Craftepreneur, a word coined by CCI is when entrepreneurs use India's wealth of handcraft skills to create contemporary expressions in décor, fabric and lifestyle products. This year's 'Craftepreneur exhibition' had brilliant products which were a collaboration of the country's craft and entrepreneurial talent.

### Kamala Shop:

- Palash (6 – 9 June): 'Palash' presented the magic of vintage Odisha saris revisited and revived by the state's renowned masterweavers and living legends like Bhagaban and Kalabaten Meher, Chetramohan Meher and Netrapal Bhai. On display were Kotpad saris, 'dui-moi' double pallu saris, revived Vishwakarma, Bomkai as well as Dongariya and khadi saris unfolding the wonder of Odisha's textile heritage.
- Handloom Day (7 August): To celebrate India's 5000 years of the handloom tradition in continuum, CCI observed 'Handloom Day' with an exhibition of exquisite Phulia, Jamdaani, Maheshwari, Kota indigo, Bengal cotton and Benaras saris.
- Disha (September): Disha works in the area of empowering the socially and economically marginalised women of the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan. Nearly five hundred women are being trained in the textile art of tie and dye under the aegis of Disha. Their saris and dupatta creations were showcased at an exhibition at 'Kamala'.
- Paatram (September): A fascinating exhibition of from-the-kitchen-to-the-table 'paatrams' and serving dishes drew the craft and food lovers of Chennai to the 'Paatram' exhibition in large numbers. In both traditional and contemporary formats, the paatrams featured kalchutties, kansa and bell metal vessels, 'eeyam' tableware, terracotta and ceramic dinner sets.

### Delhi Crafts Council

- Handloom Day talk on Khadi by Rta Kapur Chishti (August 2018): To celebrate Handloom day on August 7, DCC invited textile Scholar, Rta Kapur Chishti, to talk about her journey with khadi. It was an enriching and intimate talk supported by a wonderful presentation and numerous intimate anecdotes about the spinners and weavers with whom she had worked. DCC also put up short write-ups on social media to create awareness about handlooms.
- 'Eye for Craft'-School Education programme (August 2018): In August 2018, Delhi Crafts Council launched its School Education programme - Eye For Craft. This programme, was being instituted again after a gap of almost two decades. The main aim of this programme is to familiarize the youth of our country with crafts. By organising workshops and demonstrations for school students DCC hopes to familiarize them with artisans as well as the difficult processes involved in making many of the craft objects. This will raise awareness amongst young students about the value of our rich cultural heritage and also teach them to respect our skilled craftspersons who pursue their art against many odds and often with very little financial gain. DCC conducted the workshops in schools (private as well as Government and NGO schools) across Delhi / NCR. The response from the students as well as the schools has been overwhelming.
- Saris of India 2018 - Innovating Tradition (October 2018): Delhi Crafts Council organised a three-day Saris Exhibition at Aga Khan Hall. Through this annual exhibition, dedicated to the Sari, DCC has been successful in encouraging the younger generation of sari weavers. This year, collections of twenty-two participants working with different Indian weaves and printing techniques in saris was presented.



Smriti Rekha Chakma, winner of Sutrakar Samman

The Sutrakar Samman was awarded to Smt. Smriti Rekha Chakma, a weaver from Agartala. Traditional weaving skills were passed down to her from her family. Today she has reached a high degree of skill in her craft. It is fitting to honour somebody from the North East region, where a large percentage of people are in the weaving profession.

This was the fourteenth year that we presented the Sutrakar Samman – an award for excellence in weaving from a particular region. Through this award, DCC seeks to celebrate India's rich textile heritage and honor excellence in traditional

weaving skills while encouraging a commitment towards the continuity of the craft.

- **Kamaladevi Puraskar 2018, India International Centre (24 November, 2018):** Delhi Crafts Council (DCC) instituted the Kamaladevi Puraskar in 1986 in memory of its Patron Founder, the late Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. It is given annually to recognize the skills of talented young craftspersons between the age of fourteen and twenty, to encourage them to continue their practice and to take it up eventually as a means of livelihood.

Supported entirely through private donations, the Puraskar has so far been awarded to more than 170 young craftspersons from various regions who are practising a multitude of crafts like pottery, embroidery, mat weaving, kalamkari, paper toys, stone and wood carving, palm leaf engraving, tie & dye etc. Seven amongst them have gone on to receive the Master Craftsperson Award from the Government of India.

This year DCC awarded six young artisans who are practising craft. The awardees are Jeenu Panika from Kotpad, Odisha, (age 19 years) for Natural Dyeing, Soumyajit Jana from West Midnapore, West Bengal, (age 15 years) for Masland Mat weaving, Guda Shubhadainee from Nalgonda, Telangana, (age 15 years), for Ikat weaving, Mithun Kumar from Malakot, Chhattisgarh, (age 18 years), for Iron craft, Sanji Pdhakasiej from Mawsynram, Meghalaya, (age 18 years) for Cane and Bamboo craft, Deepali Bhatt from New Delhi, (age 17 years), for String Puppet Making and Khoyala Sanjay Ram from Kutch, Gujarat, (age 14 years), for Leather craft.



Winners of Kamaladevi Puraskar 2018

- Natural Dye Workshop for Dyeing Silk Yarn in Natural Colours, Sanskriti Kendra, New Delhi (3 - 8 December, 2018): The knowledge of making colours from natural materials for use in dyeing and patterning cloth existed in India since ancient times. These very skills made Indian textiles famous beyond her shores. Natural dyes are eco-friendly and yield an extraordinary palette of colours. Rediscovering natural dyes in textiles is becoming necessary with an increased awareness and need for becoming environment friendly.

With this in mind, the Delhi Crafts Council (DCC) conducted a workshop on the dyeing of silk yarn in natural colours. As an exercise



Jagada Rajappa demonstrating the dyeing process



Natural dye workshop in progress

for capacity building for artisans, it was an opportunity for weavers and practitioners active in this field. It is DCC's hope that those who have learnt this skill will subsequently share and help their own community or cluster to take the skill further and help ensure its continuity.

Mrs. Jagada Rajappa conducted this workshop. A careful selection of artisans from different regions was made. Fifteen dyers from Meghalaya, Assam, Bengal, Odisha, Chanderi, Maheshwar, Varanasi, Chhattisgarh, and Gujarat participated in the workshop.

## Crafts Council of Karnataka

- Kuteera (Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Bengaluru 4-10 August): Crafts Council of Karnataka conducted the "Kuteera" exhibition and sale of handicrafts, handlooms and home accessories. Thirty four craft units from across the country participated in the exhibition with their quality products.



- Eco-Ganesha: Crafts Council of Karnataka continued the awareness programme of Eco-Ganesha movement. Eco-Ganeshas are marketed through CCK's outlet "Kamalini".
- Vastrabharana - 2018 (Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Bengaluru, 28 September - 2 October): Crafts Council of Karnataka organised its annual flagship event "Vastrabharana", a well curated exhibition showcasing various handcrafted textiles of our country. Fifty six weavers participated. Vastrabharana has become a favourite browsing and shopping destination with the craft connoisseurs of Bengaluru.

## Crafts Council of Tamil Nadu

- **Sanjhi Workshop (July):** CCTN brought to Coimbatore the ancient traditional art of paper cutting Sanjhi which was practised in Mathura, Vrindavan. The workshop for members and the public was conducted by mastercraftsman Ram Soni. He and his family have practised this art form for a few hundred years. The workshop was well attended by members and public.
- **Educate the Artisan (July):** A talk and presentation with interactive sessions on marketing, training and techniques of display for artisans was organised by CCTN in association with DJ Academy of Design. Two eminent faculties of design with experience in NID, Ahmedabad, conducted the workshop. More than 100 artisans from the length and breadth of our country attended the workshop. The informative presentation covered the nuances of window display, marketing skills, communication and techniques.
- **Craft Bazaar (July):** More than hundred artisans participated in this week long mega Crafts Bazaar. On display was an array of handcrafted wares from the country. A Craft Bazaar was also organised in Erode at Tex Valley Mall for 3 days this year giving the craftsmen exposure to a new market. Their understanding of newer markets will help them plan strategies of marketing and reinvent products based on specific market demand.
- **Developing Olai Craftsmen Cluster (August):** CCTN has identified two olai craftsmen who are involved with this dying craft form. In order to facilitate interaction mooted by CCTN, our craftsman Krishnasamy from Uthukuli met up with the nomadic artisan Shanmugam, and Panamarayerigal artisans.



Sanjhi workshop in progress



Opening new windows of learning to artisans



Olai craft taught in schools

This facilitated exchange of ideas, products and colours. The olai craftsman took this craft to local schools.

- **Shristi (September):** Shristi showcased about 80 stalls with designers from all over India. It was a huge success and continues to remain a much awaited exhibition in Coimbatore.
- **Facilitating Craft Studies (September):** CCTN visited DJ Academy and had a meeting with the faculty of design. The students showed keen interest in crafts of other states. We looked into the possibility of working long term with DJ academy in facilitating and assisting students in their study in a few select areas of craft. An MOU has been exchanged by CCTN and the design school. The Council will guide the students by providing information about a particular craft and connect them with the resource person in the area. Continuous coordination and follow up will be done.
- **Mural Mahabharata Art Show (3 – 6 October):** The 'Chuvar Chitra Kala' or Kerala Mural paintings on Mahabharatam is a visual treat of the great Epic Mahabharatam brought alive in 112 paintings by 35 women students of the renowned artist Prince Thonnakkal. The exhibition of paintings on one theme exclusively by women is the first of its kind in India.

Prince Thonnakkal has around 30 years of experience in this art, having graduated from the Institute of Mural painting in Mamiyoor in Guruvayur. He has trained over 100 students from all over India and conducts training programmes and workshops in Mural painting with natural



Kerala Mural Art by Prince Thonnakkal

dyes and acrylic media on canvas. His unique style of painting, the facial expressions and colours have won great fame and his paintings adorn several temples including the famous Padmanabaswamy temple, several hotels, corporate buildings and homes. The exhibitions held at Trivandrum and Chennai were a great success with thousands of children from various schools and the general public being exposed to our great Epic and the temple art. The exhibition organised in Coimbatore was visited by thousands of school children and art lovers of Coimbatore.

- **Revival and Promotion of Dying Craft (10 – 11 October):** Our artisan Olai Ayya conducted a workshop for the local flower artisans of Coimbatore. A number of garland making artisans from the local flower market attended the workshop learning how to make olai flowers and designs in new geometric shapes and patterns.



Garland making workshop



**Thai Floral Workshop by World Renowned artist Mr. Phubast Chesdemethee (November):** Mr. Phubast Chesdemethee, an International Floral Artist from Thailand was invited for a two-day event to Coimbatore. He is the head floral designer to the Royal family of Brunei and Bahrain and has been working with many projects in over thirty countries. He is the Vice President of the World Floral Council and the recipient of the Nobel prize of WFC. The two day workshop was held for the public on Thai traditional floral designing. The first day was a presentation and a talk by Mr.Poo, the second day had two sessions of hands-on workshop on floral art. The Council made sure that local artisans also attended and were trained in the learning sessions so that they will be able to incorporate these techniques in their profession.



Phubast chesdemethee with his floral Creation

## Crafts Council of Telangana

- Crafts Council of Telangana visited a Devdi in the heart of Hyderabad where worship has been happening uninterrupted for the past 400 years. It was a lovely house with priceless craft pieces maintained by the entire family. Another curated visit was arranged to the Salar Jung Museum.
- Aakruthi Vastra (July and January): As always this event sparked great interest and enthusiasm among the public.
- CCT has appointed a designer to work with the leather puppeteers of Nimmalakunta. The project is nearing completion. The purpose was to help the artisans create a new range of products that sell easily in the exhibitions they take part in.
- Sanmaan 2019(8 January): The Handloom weavers we honoured were from the field of Khadi both in the state and in the country. The craftsmen were chosen from the specific category of leather puppeteers.
- Shri. CV Raju was awarded with Crafts Council of Telangana's Life time Achievement Award. Shri Nagender Poludas Satish was given the Narne Prabhakar Craftpreneur Award. For Excellence in Craft, Dalavai Chinna Ramana was honoured with the Smt Pingle Kamala Reddy Award, Rajeev Pulaver was given the Shri Jasti Ramiah Award. For Excellence in Handlooms, Smt Mavuru Aivelu was the proud winner of Smt Lalitha Prasad Award, Shri Velumani won the Kalanjali Award which was given to an outstanding student in Lalitha Praveeniam Scholarship Fund and Shri Mogalaju Venugopal was the recipient of Gaurav S Kilaru Award.

## Crafts Council of West Bengal

- 'Eye of the Needle-Kantha, the Quilt Embroidery of Bengal' (25 April–13 May): 'Eye of Needle' exhibition presented rare Kantha pieces created from late 19th century to today. The collection was sourced from private collections, Union Ministry of Culture, IGNC, Kolkata families, revivalists and kantha entrepreneurs. Along with the veritable feast of exhibits the kantha event also featured talks by eminent kantha experts and workshops held by master craftspersons.
- CCWB's Seminar on Forgotten Weaves - Revival Stories, Jadunath Bhawan, Kolkata and Artisana (6 – 7 July): Forgotten weaves and revival saris were the focus of the Seminar. Saris revived by Hemlatha Jain and Rohit Phalgaonkar were exhibited.
- Deepavali Exhibition (30 October - 5 November): Terracotta, textiles and handicraft items were on display at the exhibition which had brisk festive sales.
- Patua Workshop (3 November): A Patua workshop in collaboration with NIFT was organized by CCWB. Seven Patua Chitrakaars from villages in Midnapore district participated in this learning experience.

- “Bengal’s Pat of Gold”, Gallery, Kolkata Centre for Creativity, (2 - 23 December): This mesmerizing exhibition celebrated the best of Pattachitra art down the ages. The event featured a series of lectures and demonstrations by master artisans in the field.
- Artisan Fair, Kalyan Mandapam, Kolkata (4 – 5 December): An attractive range of crafts was on display at the Artisan Fair. These included pottery, cane, bamboo, shell, coconut, palm leaf toys, wooden dolls, sholapith, dhokra, handloom items, masland mat, etc.
- ‘Burradin’ Christmas Fair at Artisana (17 – 24 December): The Burra Din X’mas Fair sparkled with colours and creativity. A carefully picked choice of crafts and textiles were on display.
- ‘Artisan Speak’, Restored Heritage Old Currency Building, (7 -10 January): Artisan Speak was organized by Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. CCWB participated with beautiful handloom products.

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