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**REVIVING THE MAGNIFICENT
SPELL OF INDIAN HANDICRAFTS:
THE DISTINCTIVE AND NOSTALGIC
SPIRIT OF THE LAND**

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Abstract:

Art is a means of self-expression and is free from any sort of boundaries, whether metaphorical or physical. The varied forms may be categorized as classical or folk, visual or performing, individualized or commercial but the very essence i.e. “Expression” is characteristic of all art forms. From the pre-historic times to the present day Handicrafts have been an integral part of human existence and have also evolved in accordance to man’s needs. Owing to the richness in natural resources India has a vast store of handicrafts too. The various art and craft forms enjoyed a respectable status in the past which somehow declined during medieval times because of different reasons. Handicraft sector is now trying to revitalize itself through all challenges and limitations and is sure to achieve a better and brighter future with an all-round strong support from all sections whether administrators or admirers and becoming more ‘global’ than ‘local’

Key words: Art, Handicraft, Diversity, Challenges, Revival, Globalization

Introduction:

Anything that is pure and beautiful is how Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore defined Art. It gives aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction to the on-looker and a sense of pride to the creator. Art is a means to express one-self and craft is an art that makes use of the various raw materials to give it a utilitarian or aesthetic purpose. Whatever be its purpose, the touch of the artist casts such a spell on the output that it leaves the onlooker in awe and that is the basic essence of handicrafts – Crafts created by hand. Traditional craft of our country represents the repository of expertise gained by crafts-persons, from generation to generation, and has mainly been a family oriented industry.¹

The simplest and probably the first form of handicraft was done by early man in creating his body adornments that included his dress made of leaves, jewelry made of bones and stones, his tools and weapons made of stone. As he progressed and evolved so did the handicrafts. The raw materials used then and now are the same i.e. natural like cane, bamboo, wood, stone, shells, jute etc. but the complexity in the designs and products is definitely quite high in the modern days.

“To write about Indian Handicrafts is almost like writing about the country itself. So vast, complex and colourful, and yet with a simplicity and charm, difficult to attain under comparable conditions....”²





India is especially a rich store-house of variety of regional handicrafts owing to the different raw materials available in those regions and has a very ancient origin and are of a very high quality. Each region has a specific handicraft to its name – the coastal regions are known for their shell craft and hilly regions for their wood craft. Cane, jute and bamboo craft of specific areas are also famous all over the world. Each state has its characteristic textiles, embroidery and jewelry as well. “The world of art and craft is as valuable as the world of science, philosophy or ethics. Like art, crafts reflect the state of human society through the individual. Craft treasures like arts give us a glimpse into the core and kernel of the collective mind and societies through the mirror of individual mind that created them.”³

Both handicrafts and the master craftsmen enjoyed a respectable place in the society in the past when the royals offered them patronage and rewarded their skills appropriately from time to time. The handicraft sector lost its vigor with the declining dynasties and the status of the artisans also came down. They were in complete disarray and were simply trying to survive in the challenging situations.

After India’s independence Nehru ji’s vision was to bring about the nation’s progress through modernization and use of technology in all sectors. This further aggravated the poor condition of the handicraft sector. Seeing the pitiable situation of the artisans and their art Smt. Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya came forward as a driving force behind the renaissance of Indian handicrafts, handlooms and theatre in independent India and for the upliftment of socio-economic standards of Indian women by pioneering the co-operation movement. Several institutions like Central Cottage Industries Emporium and The Crafts Council of India exist today because of her vision. She was also instrumental in the formation of the All India Handicrafts Board and creation of the National Awards for master craftsmen. Through her consistent and dedicated efforts she also ensured the survival of several dying art forms like Kalamkari by convincing its teachers to train more students.⁴

The awards comprise of a Certificate of Honour along with a cash amount. This does motivate the craftsmen but it is however not enough to sustain life and fulfill their responsibilities towards their family. What they want is a regular demand of their products in the market, easy access to the quality raw materials, facilitated storage and transportation that would make them financially stronger and secure a respectable position in society.

This is possible with the introduction of ‘globalization’ in the handicraft industry. A growth in the handicraft sector due to globalization will result in increased demand for ethnic and culture-specific goods with the growth in world tourism.⁵ A combined effort of people, government and civil society is needed to save and promote this unique cultural heritage and treasure of the great nation.



Conclusion:

We may progress and become technologically sound but the human touch, the characteristic of any form of handicrafts has its own significance and cannot be replaced by anything else. The machine made products may be cheaper and make our lives convenient and comfortable but, the man-made creations will always retain their charm. This will grow manifold if the handicrafts items are created keeping in mind the current trends and styles and choice of the consumers so that the products are a charming blend of ethnicity and modern features.

Whether it is intricately decorated metal craft or marvelous marble inlay work, superb paintings or spectacular wood works, Indian handicrafts have gained appreciation and recognition world-wide for their ethnic designs and flourishing textures. The Handicraft industry has been a means of earning substantial foreign revenue for the country. To support and to enable it to flourish further-on what we need is a little spark, a spark that will ignite renaissance in the field of handicrafts in India and herald a new era of beauty and creativity.

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(Footnotes)

- ¹ <http://164.100.47.5/book2/reports/commerce/78threport.htm>
- ² Upadhyaya, M.N.: Handicrafts of India. Swarajya Printing Works, Secunderabad, 1976
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