

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Suggestions

“Today, an argument, an attitude faces crafts and artisans in India ... the argument of economics, of sustainability, of marketability, which is the argument of financial survival... (But) those who believe that crafts are only about beauty and aesthetics are in error, just as those ... (who) think that paying for itself is the sole justification, are wrong... in India, there will always be several hundred million people ... who cannot but live with and through the work of their hands... these people have talent in their hand, which the assembly-liners and the free-marketers do not quite concede. And that talent is the unexplored reservoir which needs to be used for their good”.

- (Gopalkrishna Gandhi, cited in Chatterjee, 2010)

14.1 The Prelude

The final objective, i.e objective 3 of the study was to offer suggestions for sustainable commercialization of traditional crafts. The methodology followed (refer to Chapter 5, Section 5.5.3) for this objective included tourist survey, FGDs among artisans, opinions of experts, sellers and intermediaries and individuals engaged in the commercialization of crafts the analysis of which is presented in Chapter 12. To offer suggestions for sustainable commercialization, major findings of the analysis of tourist survey, FGDs among artisans, opinions of experts, sellers and intermediaries and individuals engaged in the commercialization of crafts are considered. Other than this, findings of Objective 1 and 2, as presented in Chapter 12 are also taken into consideration for offering suggestions. Before offering suggestions, the concept of sustainability and sustainable commercialization is presented in section 14.2.

14.2 The Notion of Sustainability and Sustainable Commercialization of Crafts

Sustainable commercialization of craft, in this report, is viewed as ensuring economic sustainability through steady flow of income carried forward by balancing tradition and modernity in craft objects while capturing the ever changing customer requirement. It emphasizes ensuring that age old craft practice and indigenous components of designs, motifs, form, etc. garner regular market demand. The basic premise is that economic sustainability cannot be ensured unless traditional craft

objects are adapted according to market requirement. But at the same time, it is necessary to see that indigenoussness remains preserved.

‘Sustainability’, as a concept, was first used by environmentalists in 1970s to refer to systems in equilibrium which later was replaced by sustainable development in 1980s that argued on ways to sustain economic growth without any degradation of environment (The Sustainability Principle, University of Wollongong). Sustainability, as a concept, risks to be restricted by vagueness, multidimensionality and ubiquity (Gray, 2010; Dixon and Fallon, 1989). The concept is complex (Peterson, 2009), poorly understood and diversely defined due to interests of multiple stakeholders (Schut et al, 2015). It is linked to environmental (Drexhage and Murphy, 2010; Riddell, 1981), social (Andriof and McIntosh, 2001) and business (Braungart and McDonough 1998) discourses. As such, there is no universally agreed definition or concept on sustainability or sustainable commercialization of crafts. Usually, in the field of crafts, economic sustainability of artisans is considered as foremost for commercialization. But economic sustainability is just a part and not the entire means of sustainable commercialization of handicrafts. Considering commercialization of crafts as indispensable, some researchers, (Chudasri, et al. 2012; Holroyd, et al. 2015; Sahai, 2004; Tung, 2012), have tried to explain it in terms of preservation of traditional components and indigenous knowledge by balancing of tradition and modernity in craft design and forms. In Indian context, sustainability of crafts is used in relation to environmental, cultural and economic context (Wood, 2011).

Crafts get commoditized and transformed as artisans try to make living out of it. Commercialization often leads to modification in crafts but without markets crafts die. Hence, it is important to ensure that craft products get sustained market demand so that artisans benefit economically and continue with their hereditary occupation. The relation between tradition and economic dimensions need to be adequately managed when implementing sustainability in commercialization of crafts. In the face of modification, how to continue with tradition is important to be strategized. Economic sustainability requires that things that can make production economic be maintained or augmented (Harris, 2003) and tradition sustainability requires that indigenous components like designs and forms and traditional essence remains continued in the long run. Effective management may lead to increased efficiency and improved market situations (Ambec and Lanoie 2008; Miles and Covin 2000) for crafts market

and craft-makers. Craft for sustainable commercialization has to be combined with market orientation and strategy (Setyagung, et al. 2013). Taken together, sustainable commercialization thus needs to ensure economic sustainability to the artisans by way of tradition sustainability. For sustainable commercialization of crafts, innovation and differentiation (Jordan, et al. 2016) of craft objects is needed while addressing economic and cultural challenges of artisans and crafts respectively. Sustainable commercialization of crafts, hence, requires ensuring that indigenous techniques, designs, motifs and forms as well as the indigenous knowledge system are carried forward while creating regular market demand for crafts. This requires adapting the craft or indigenous designs and features in crafts to changing requirements of the different clientele. It should be done in responsible, synergistic, restorative, creative and holistic (Bhamra and Lofthouse, 2007) way to ensure the long run continuity of the traditional knowledge.

In the studied areas of Assam, through field survey (refer to chapter 12, section 12.2.3), it is observed that traditional handicrafts have good scope in the internal, intermediate and external customer segments. It is necessary to ensure that artisans produce craft objects keeping in view market demand in order to have steady income and profit. 38.9% of artisans responding that craft activity is profitable and 71.7% of artisans finding craft highly profitable belong to conventional genre and decorative craft group respectively (refer to Chapter 11, Table 11.35). Even without profit, 61.8% (refer to Chapter 11, Table 11.36) craftsmen would continue the craft in future as it is the main source of livelihood (for 74.3%, refer to Table 11.3). Hence, it is important to ensure that artisans find regular markets. Creation of demand and managing of demand of craft objects through balanced modification (that which ensures traditionality and modernity) and quality maintenance along with other mechanisms like promotion, pricing, training and procurement are very much essential to ensure sustainable commercialization of crafts. As such suggestions are offered on product development, training, pricing, promotion and branding and procurement of crafts.

14.3 Marketing Suggestions for Sustainable Commercialization of Traditional Crafts

Keeping in view the need for regular market provision for crafts, marketing suggestions that focus on product, price, promotion and place are forwarded below.

Other necessary suggestions that benefit artisans and ensure sustainability are also considered.

A) Product Development through Focus on the Tangible Aspects: Design and Form

i. To ensure availability of different customer segments, it is suggested that handicrafts are produced as conventional objects, functional objects and decorative items. Accordingly, aspects like aesthetics and original components are to be kept in mind. In conventional objects, indigenous aspects can be kept intact whereas for decorative and functional ones artisans need to incorporate both traditional features and modernity.

Tourist Survey result highlight that cultural significance is attributed the highest significance by local tourists, national tourist identify crafts as collectibles whereas international tourists give most importance to functional significance (refer to Table 12.7, 12.8, Chapter 12). Interviews with shopkeepers and intermediaries also highlighted that demand for craft objects differ according to type of customers and their use of the product. But local crafts are preferred for religious and social needs. The original form and cultural image of traditional craft objects, especially in metal objects, are highly revered by internal and intermediate customers, when products are used for personal and religious obligations. Hence, it is important to up keep the original baseline components of crafts like motifs, color and forms for such customers. It is found that in silk, smaller designs, nature induced motifs and geometrical patterns are considered traditional by external customers whereas larger designs and excessive ornamentation and fancy motifs with richer color combinations are largely liked by local customers. Customers, especially younger generations, give more importance to aesthetics, decoration and functionality.

ii. Souvenir markets offer tremendous scope. It is suggested that indigenous objects (not produced anymore now such as *tema-temi*, *owkhulia bota*, etc.) are brought into production as miniaturized objects for souvenirs.

Tourist survey findings suggest that there is good percentage of disposition of tourists toward souvenir objects (31.5% would always buy while 37.5% would sometimes consider buying; refer to Table 12.5, Chapter 12). Miniaturized craft products are

found to be in demand but there is dearth of high finished and quality traditional crafts.

iii. According to experts, incorporation of new themes within indigenous framework by including at least one or two motifs or patterns (chiseled, carved, embossed or woven), even in the most innovative craft items produced for other uses can help establish a connection between old and new. Original components can be intermixed with decorative elements, instead of complete rejection of the old forms to preserve tradition as well as fit customer taste. This will ensure market demand from customers seeking innovative products.

In major touristic places of the world, small handmade items like key-chains, monumental replicas, mugs, cards, etc. are in great demand. From field survey, it is found that customers have no issue buying innovative souvenir objects with traditional touch. Such items handcrafted in brass, bell, clay, bamboo and silk as well can be made by artisans. Items available in steel are often asked by customers to be produced in brass and bell metal. Touch of local flavor is always preferred by international customers while locals ask for innovative products.

iv. It is suggested that light weighted articles with fine finish are produced especially in metal and clay crafts for its sale as decorative products.

Sellers highlighted that external audiences usually avoid buying pottery and metal craft due to its weight. Pottery & terracotta and metal crafts (except for some Buddhist countries) are seldom exported. Items imported from West Bengal and other places are far superior. As a result, local Asharikandi products fail to grab market. Asharikandi pottery is in demand as garden planters and terracotta for decoration. However, the demand is still limited, even among the customers of the towns and cities.

v. Experts and academicians recommended that artisans use good quality raw materials which highly determine aesthetic dimensions of the craft and hence customer demand. Use of indigenous dyes against chemical ones and cheaper substitutes can help keep an edge over competitors.

During field survey, it is found that milder hues and natural dyes and organic attributes are mostly preferred by international customers and well to do customers of cities.

Other Suggestions on Product Development through Focus on Tangible Aspects:

Design and Form

i. To bring in standardization, guidelines regarding size, shape, form, color dimensions, etc. should be circulated and made available to the artisans. This can be done by Govt. through Directorate of H & T, NEHHDC, and agencies like ARTFED.

It is found that crafts produced by rural craftsmen are not uniform in size, dimension and other aspects. As a result, crafts are not standardized and hence found unsuitable for large scale sale.

ii. Consumers are increasingly becoming wary of packaging and handling of crafts. It is advisable that artisans produce crafts that are easy to dismantle and fix.

B) Product Development through Focus on Intangible Aspects: Identity of the Craft or Motif, Standards and Quality Aspects

i. As explained in section 14.2, sustainable commercialization need to ensure that indigenous attributes of crafts or designs should be kept intact. Academicians suggested that meaning embedded in the traditional motifs determined through its basic structural form, proportionate size and shape, and essential elements should not be violated or distorted while modifying it. Sacrosanct designs mandated only for certain crafts should not be produced on any craft just because it is liked by customers. It should only be produced on crafts of similar stature and use. For this, they suggest advising and training of budding artisans.

ii. Quality goes a long way to ensure steady customer demand. It is suggested that more number of artisans are brought under the registration of marks that define quality such as Handloom Mark, Silk Mark and Craft Mark. Provision should also be made to give Handloom Mark to those products which utilize pure silk and other natural fibers. Similarly, Geographical Indication (GI) (examples include Kanjivaram saris from Tamil Nadu) can also be ensured for some crafts based on its historical linkage to region.

It is found that village based rural craftsmen are yet to have proper idea about such authentication marks. At present, the license to use Silk Mark and Handloom Mark is provided to individuals or organizations that register and pay fees for getting these marks. The Silk Mark Organization of India (SMOI) has set up a silk testing

laboratory at Sualkuchi in 2015 where artisans can get their products tested. Some enterprising artisans use this Mark. It is necessary to see that other handicraft items produced in villages are also brought under the ambit of other trademark provisions promoted by government. Authenticity marks increases the likelihood of purchase among customers (refer to Chapter 12, Table 12.21).

iii. Products made by master artisans or renowned craftsmen can set the stage for inclusion under these marks. Items made by these artisans (and hence objects produced by apprentices working under them) are an assurance to good quality and standard. After thorough and required testing of the products, they must be given the permit to use such marks regulated and monitored by government agencies from time to time.

iv. One of the intangible assets of a craft or a motif is its identity. Hence it is important that each craft or motif has a name which will protect its integral appeal and identity. Such names may be made known to the customer so that they can make informed choices.

v. Artisans and experts suggest promotions of soft aspects of crafts like health benefits (in the case of brass and bell metal objects), skin friendly properties (in the case of silk) and organic and eco-friendly attributes (natural dyeing) to make customers inclined towards its purchase. Experts as well as artisans suggested that Govt. agencies should make efforts towards sensitization of customers about tradition which will in turn determine their choice. In order to make traditional handicrafts sector sustain itself, it is necessary to market the ethical, socio-cultural and environmental values of the crafts.

C) Training Needs & Provision of Tools and Equipment

Training of artisans, especially younger generation, is extremely essential to keep essential components of crafts alive. According to Statistical Handbook Assam 2014, the total number of Handloom Training Centers is 102 with 1097 trainees working under it. There are 41 Handloom Training Institutes and 20 Handloom Production Centres which engages 200 weavers. Various suggestions have come to light through interviews, FGDs and field surveys that are presented below.

i. Officials suggest decentralizing of training centers to rural locations and increasing the strength of trainees in the Govt. training centres and institutes that are

mostly established in major towns and cities. At present, training is limited to those applicants who approach agencies with training needs.

ii. Officials and experts suggest that lost techniques of production or techniques and designs on the verge of dying are immediately restored by engaging elderly and master artisans to train the younger generation for which they recommend aggressive Govt. interventions. They recommend formation of design team comprising of elderly artisans, and experts designers to ensure proper modification within traditional realms.

Special financial incentives and benefits should be made available to the master artisan. There is a special scheme of the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, called Guru-Shishya Parampara (Master to Pupil) scheme (started since 2003-04) under which such training is imparted. The master artisan as well pupil are provided monthly honorarium¹ (Rs. 5000/- per month) and incentive (Rs. 1000/-) respectively². However, it is important to expand its reach by bringing more master artisans under its fold. At present, only those artisans who are Padmashree/ Shilpaguru / National or State Awardees and other talented artisans are eligible to impart training to budding artisans (Press, Information Bureau, GoI, 8 Dec, 2016). According to North East Zone Cultural Centre under Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, only 4 master artisans from Assam in dance, drama and theatre are selected to train young artisans for the FY 2014-2015 (registration for FY 2016-2017 is under process). Master artisans in handicrafts and handlooms sector from craft villages or clusters should regularly feature in this list.

i. It is suggested that artisans, especially the young generation, are educated about the importance of particular color, ornamentation so that they do not engage in rampant intermixing. Artisans must be informed about the importance of purity in raw materials which can make traditional crafts gain respectable market share.

ii. As explained earlier, market demands both decorative and conventional crafts. 59.3% still produce crafts with little or no modification at all. Artisans sought training

¹ North Zone Cultural Centre, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, retrieved on 9 Nov, 2017 from <http://www.culturenorthindia.com/guru-shishya-parampara-master-to-pupil-tradition-scheme/>

² A proposal is in pipeline to increase the honorarium of Shilp gurus, who have National Level Awards/recognition, from Rs.20,000/- to Rs. 30,000/- per month. Source: National Handicraft Development Programme, Ministry of Textiles, GoI.

for this. It is hence suggested that Govt. provide training to artisans to produce decorative and innovative crafts.

It is found that producing a combination of decorative and conventional products render opportunities to artisans to earn more than sticking only to conventional craft making (refer to Section 11.7, Chapter 11). This can also help improve the craft portfolio of the artisan households if members engage in different craft forms.

iii. It is suggested that artisans are provided training on proper treatment of their products to ensure proper market demand.

Sellers of crafts mentioned that educated customers and mostly international customers avoid buying bamboo products as they worry about pests and insects. It is found that artisans of the villages are not able to produce quality products which emphasize aspects like pest control & treatment, its finishing, etc. As a result, their products (barring some few artisans) seldom find space in city shops.

iv. Against providing financial assistance for purchase of tools, experts and academicians suggest provision of simple power (or battery operated) based tools for jobs like chiseling, chipping, punching, smoothening, splitting, etc. which does not undermine manual labor but simply help fasten production as well as improve quality.

It is found from field survey that artisans under economic compulsion leave producing elaborate and intricate old patterns due to time constraints and hard labour. As a result, intricate old patterns and designs gradually might get out of production. Small tools that help artisans fasten production can be made available. It will also help artisans produce miniaturized items which is difficult to be made manually. National Centre for Design and Product Development organized tool kit distribution programme for artisans of several places in India in 2016. For pottery artisans, the tool kits comprised of motorized potter's wheel; for wood craft artisans, it comprised of simple equipment like carving chisel, power drill machine, sand stone, ruler, measuring tape, marking tool, etc. There are certain handheld bamboo splitting and slicing machines (NAS Report, 2012). Metal artisans in Moradabad use gas based welding blowpipes. Artisans in Hajo and Sarthebari still use the conventional hammering technique to join metal sheets. Small cutting torches and nozzles, carving

chisel set, etc. for metal craft are also available which are necessary to be made available to metal artisans. Similarly, for bamboo handicrafts, small hand operated as well as power operated tools like sander (for finishing), thickness and width-sizers, splitting machines, etc. developed by IDC (Industrial Designs Centre, IIT Bombay) can be made available to artisans.

Other Suggestions on Training Needs & Provision of Tools and Equipment

i. Linking training programs intended for artisans with Skill India Mission (of GoI) can help producing artisans of high caliber. It is suggested that artisans are given training under NSDC on standardization to compete in the export market segment.

The National Skill Development Mission with its Skill India program launched in 2014 aims to converge existing skill training initiatives to train 300 million skilled people by year 2022. SIRD under the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana of Ministry of Rural Development runs training centre at its premises for diversification of muga and eri products. Skill India for handicrafts can be coordinated through such state level agencies too for handicraft artisans practicing their business in rural areas under the purview of Skill India Mission.

ii. It is suggested that handicraft training institutes and centers for crafts like bamboo, pottery and metal are also established apart from usual handloom training institutes.

In Assam, there are 102 Handloom Training Centers, 4 Handloom Training Institutes, one product procurement centre, one power loom centre, 20 Handloom production centers, 98 Weavers' Extension Service units and one Handloom Research and Designing Centre (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Economic Survey, 2014-2015:126).

iii. It is suggested that more number of artisans are brought under government fold through government production units which will help artisans to have regular income opportunities. This will also help minimizing middlemen influence. Experts and Govt. officials believe that cutting down on middlemen channel will ensure artisans fair and legitimate income of their produce. They want Govt. to ensure that sufficient raw material is made available to artisans.

D) Marketing through Pricing of Crafts

Handmade products, especially handlooms, are increasingly getting attention both nationally and globally. During field survey, it was observed that items produced by artisan situated in village at lesser prices are sold in boutique shops of Guwahati at many times its actual production and procurement price. *Eri chadar* made by a village artisan at Duamari village for a day's labour (it takes 3 days for artisan to complete an ornamented *chadar*) of Rs. 100 is sold in the market for Rs. 3000 to Rs. 3500. Similarly, an *eri sari* produced at a mere cost of Rs. 3000 easily earns between Rs. 15000 to Rs. 20000 in some private boutique shops. On the other hand, there are some craft items which hardly get sold at profitable rates. Sellers of crafts stated that customized silk textiles of different price range and texture have huge scope in the market. Expensiveness of the crafts is an issue generally with the young tourist customer (refer to Table 12.14, Chapter 12). For decorative functions, customers seek less expensive, high finished and ornamental products.

i. As market dynamics require, and based on the suggestions of officials, experts and sellers, it is recommended that products in different price ranges are developed to ensure segment wise competitiveness.

ii. Articles developed in highest conformity with traditional aspects must be priced higher. Simple or complex tampering within the permitted cultural realms can be done in terms of addition, elimination and substitution of motifs to produce craft objects falling in the upper and lower price continuum.

iii. It is suggested that the concept of Maximum Retail Pricing is brought into force to provide structured pricing system for handicrafts. It can be exercised through government collection centers or registered community collection centers. Price tags are also suggested to be included on items for sale. Artisans suggested that prices are mentioned across items in catalogues displaying craft products.

Artisans during FGDs emphasized the need for a mechanism to affix MRP (Maximum Retail Price) on their products for justified pricing as intermediaries often offer lower prices to them but sell the products at higher prices in the markets. As far as pricing is concerned, handicrafts produced in villages are found hardly tagged with price

labels. Price tag and warranty are sought mostly by the international and national tourists without which they would rather avoid buying the craft. Bargaining opportunities are preferred by national tourists.

E) Marketing of Products through Promotion and Branding

i. Officials, artisans, expert and academicians suggest differentiating and branding crafts into two categories viz. pure traditional (crafts that should be crafted as it should be according to strict conventional norms and tradition) and locally handcrafted. In locally handcrafted category, novel handicrafts need to be promoted. They believe that it is essential to have both traditional and contemporary products since customer segments are different and with varying demand.

During FGDs with artisans, they suggested that their crafts be distinguished as traditional and handmade. They want that even novel crafts produced with manual dexterity are promoted as handmade. Sarthebari metal artisans want their products to be labeled (as from Sarthebari) under stricter rules so that imitators may not emboss the name of Sarthebari on machine made products. It is found that tagging metal crafts as items of Sarthebari and Hajo can increase its sale among internal and intermediate customers as these customers fancy the products from these places.

ii. Officials, artisans, expert and academicians also suggest emphasizing on the quality of being handmade with simple archaic tools.

iii. Based on the recommendations of experts, promotion of historical aspects of the crafts is suggested to create interest among customers. Along with it, the meaning and story behind a craft or a motif should also be promoted. A small tag containing artisan details with relevant history or story can ensure market among target segments like elderly age groups.

It is found from field survey that Craft items with information about its history and meaning are preferred the most by international tourists. In Cambodia, all crafts under the Cambodia Craft Cooperation, an association of craft producers are sold with small hand-tag providing information on its place of production and other related information (Inclusive Tourism...Markets:32). Such efforts can be enforced in Assam to maintain the indigenous value of the crafts and its geographical identification.

Other Suggestions on Marketing of Products through Promotion and Branding

i. Branding of important craft objects is equally important to give further identity to a handicraft item and increase its market demand. Tags like Brand Assam or Product of Assam in line with similar (in-use) tags like Assam Silk (under Handmade in India category) can be of help in giving identity to traditional handicraft products like *japi, bota, xorai*, etc.

From Tourist Survey, it is found that only (Only 41.92%; refer to Table 12.18, Chapter 12) tourists are aware about originality mark or logo on craft objects. But authentication of any kind through logo or mark by its outright display on the product is considered important.

F) Information Mechanism and Institutional Selling Mechanism

Handicrafts of Assam lack proper promotion and marketing. The dilemma of traditional handicrafts is that it faces the problem of being lost in markets flooded with imported handicrafts and machine produced craft items. The latter in fact turns out to be more known as traditional handicrafts (mostly due to customer's inability to differentiate) of the place whereas the original handcrafted ones fail to attract customer attention (due to its rustic finish and quality). The conducted tourist survey (refer to Chapter 12, Section 12.2.1) for this research highlighted that national tourists are least knowledgeable about the different crafts available in the state but have good disposition towards buying craft objects as souvenirs. They wish to have first hand information about the available crafts. Findings show that customers have inclination for traditional designs and products. Lack of knowledge among customers and unavailability of crafts often leads to buying of machine made replicas.

i. It is suggested that handicraft marketing and developing authorities make it necessary for craft sellers to mention the type of the design on which changes are made.

ii. It is prerequisite to inform customers about main aspects of any handmade crafts so that customers can differentiate between handmade and machine made. Here comes the importance of logos like Handloom Mark (for handmade handlooms) and Craft Mark (for handmade handicrafts). Items procured from rural artisans must

essentially be affixed with such logos and displayed outright. Consumers should be informed about originality marks and logos through information and broadcasting on televisions, websites, brochures, etc.

iii. Providing certification and license to craft shops will increase outreach to more number of customers. Simultaneously, shops procuring their craft merchandise will also be bound to ensure fair practices to maintain quality standards which shall, in time, benefit rural artisans.

iv. Officials suggest cataloguing old designs and crafts in Govt. records for future reckoning and utilization.

v. It is suggested that Government bodies produce booklets describing the original products and designs so that customers have idea about the old and the new and they can decide accordingly. These can be promoted and distributed through booking and tourist information counters at airports, railway and bus stations, Govt. shops and emporiums and other such establishments. Booklets can be a readily available and easier mode of access to information.

vi. Tourist guide books and brochures presenting craft and culture can be promoted at tourist sites, hotels, government lodges, etc.

vii. It is suggested that Assam government comes up with dedicated websites for selling the procured crafts through online platforms to larger customer base or collaborate with established internet based selling platforms.

There are examples of successful online marketing like Tripurabamboo.com (site for sale of bamboo handicrafts from Tripura, India), which is a website owned by government of Tripura through which Products from craft clusters are sold online. Office of the DC (Handlooms) has in 2015 engaged three private entities namely Craftsvilla Handicrafts Pvt. Ltd, Mumbai, Gocoop Solution & Services Pvt. Ltd, Bangalore and Pegarse Technologies Pvt. Ltd, Bangalore for e-marketing of handloom products. Such compulsory schemes may also be promoted in Assam to enlarge the scale of promotion for silk and other craft products from Assam.

viii. It is suggested that educated artisans are trained to operate common online sales platform for the products of their place. *Kahibati.com* is an initiative of this sort in this regard by the young artisans from Sarthebari.

ix. It is suggested that the state agencies like Directorate of Handloom and Textiles and NEHHDC identify a list of artisans who are eligible for the Handloom Mark and Craft Mark. These agencies should list these artisans on respective websites so that external buyers can easily have easy access to them instead of approaching the intermediaries.

Other Suggestions on Information and Selling Mechanism

i. As a first necessity, there is a need to have a decentralized mechanism for communicating with producers. It is seen that training centers and extension units set up to serve artisans are primarily located in main cities or towns. Village level artisans do not approach these helping agencies and maintain the status quo production process. Hence, it is important to spread the reach of government networks and its reach at artisan clusters.

ii. There should be directory of all craft products, languishing or new, listed on government websites as well as sites engaging tourist traffic. NEHHDC keeps directory and catalogues of craft products which are innovative ones. As a government organization, it is advisable that cataloguing of traditional products is done. Doing this shall help artisans do reckoning of the old products of their place.

iii. It is suggested that government agencies produce design catalogues in local languages and circulate them among village level artisans. This will help village level artisans realize customer demand regarding color, design, size, etc. It is found that government agencies like NEHHDC and Directorate of Handlooms & Textiles produce product and design catalogues. However, only NGOs and individual entrepreneurs approach agencies for craft catalogues. Government websites also inform artisans about the type of colors preferred by the customers in different regions of the country and internationally during different seasons. The National Centre for Textile Design under Office of the DC (Handlooms), provide such information on its websites. However, such directives are not accessible to all village artisans. A village level artisan have limited or no knowledge about such provisions by government. Hence, design catalogues or information brochures in local languages are required to be circulated to artisans.

iv. It is suggested that duty free handicrafts shops are established inside airports to increase sale of crafts.

As found from survey, tourists usually prefer to buy crafts from Govt. recognized shops, shops near tourist sites and duty free shops (refer to Table 12.5 & 12.17, Chapter 12). Tourist information guidebooks are preferred information sources other than internet.

v. It is suggested that frequent number of craft bazaars, fairs and exhibitions are promoted in various places of the state and elsewhere to provide large selling platforms to artisans of handicrafts. Agencies at district level, apart from state and Central Govts. Need to come up with theme based exhibitions for local handicraft artisans.

In year 2016-17, Gandhi Shilp Bazaars with duration of 7-10 days are being scheduled to be held at 3 places, 2 Craft Bazaars and 3 Exhibitions will also be organized in Assam under the Directive of DC (Handicrafts) (Annual Domestic Plan 2016-17). State agencies like SIRD connect SHGs through marketing agency called AASTHA and provide opportunities to artisans to participate in exhibitions and fairs.

vi. It is important to see that new participants are given the opportunity to register for such exhibitions than the same band of registered artisan societies and individuals.

During FGDs, it has been found that artisans complain regarding lack of opportunity to participate in state level fairs since the chances are generally garbed by well known artisans and organizations and those having proper connection with authorities.

vii. It is necessary to promote traditional craft objects beyond the traditional marketing platforms vis. Govt. Tourism Websites. The state government should collaborate with private ticketing and tour websites (like Make My Trip.com) as well as hotels for online promotion of traditional craft items. Private companies can be advised to advertise or dedicate web page for such promotions.

G) Procurement of Handicrafts and Raw Materials Supply

As found from FGDs, artisans confront major problems related to continuous supply of quality raw materials. Government programs like National Mission in Bamboo Application (NBMA), initiated since 2004 for promoting entrepreneurship in bamboo industry in North East India, has been criticized very recently in the Assam Assembly

for its failure to bring tangible benefits (Kashyap, 2016; 'Huge Funds Sunk...State', Sentinel Assam, 8 Feb, 2017). Its aim was also to help bamboo farmers spread bamboo cultivation for abundant availability of raw material. On similar lines, metal artisans are also suffering for unavailability of sufficient raw materials with limited metal pressing units in place. It was envisaged in 2013-14 that each district in Assam would be provided with a Yarn Bank (Govt. of Assam). 27 Yarn Banks were approved altogether. So far, 11 Yarn Banks have been set up in 11 districts of Assam³ (Govt. of Assam). Artisans are generally at the mercy of middlemen for raw materials. The raw material requirements of clay artisans often get unnoticed but are also at the mercy of local soil suppliers.

i. Based on the suggestions of artisans, it is recommended that relevant agency of the state government sets up raw material depots in and around major craft clusters for easy availability of the materials at fair prices and to ensure that artificial shortage created by middlemen is restricted. Uninterrupted supply of raw materials at fair prices will also keep check on high price of final product.

One of the greatest problems in the handicrafts sector, as presented by the Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India, 12th Five Year Plan (2012-2017) for handicrafts (p.30), is that handicraft artisans do not have a collective formal structure. Through this research also, it is found that more than 60% (refer to section, Chapter 11) of the artisans in villages still depend on intermediary help for sale of their products. Even majority of the government procurement agencies generally buy through these middlemen and from select artisans of the village. A report in Asomiya Khabar in 2014 stated that Nalbari sells around 70000 japi in a year. However, not a single japi selling centre is there till date. Assam Government Marketing Corporation Limited (AGMCL) was set up in the year 1969 to provide marketing facility to artisans. They have sales emporium through which they sell the products. Under ARTFED, its purchase committee procures products from artisans who are under its fold but it does not consider the unorganized artisans. Set up in 1977, NEHHDC's objective is to promote marketing of handicrafts through its emporiums called Purbashree. However, in majority of the cases, it is found that products are sourced into these agencies through select middlemen and select artisans only (refer to Chapter 12, Section 12.2.2).

³ Information obtained from Govt. of Assam website, <http://hts.assam.gov.in/frontimpotentdata/yarn-bank-for-weavers-0> as on 1 November, 2017.

ii. Artisans suggested for a fair buying mechanism. They recommend that Govt. sets up decentralized collection centers or depots for the crafts at cluster levels, especially at rural areas in Assam to directly procure the products from them rather than through intermediaries or few select artisans.

This can help eliminate lower price rates offered by the intermediaries. Crafts can be collected in these depots on specific criteria like quality for which trained staff should be kept in place. Under the National Handicraft Development Programme (guide book 2016 released by Office of the DC (Handicrafts), GoI, it is proposed to set up sourcing hubs in urban areas and around major craft clusters.

iii. Instead of buying through middlemen, it is advisable that craft selling establishments buy crafts directly from rural artisans registered under Pehchan (a scheme to provide identity cards to artisans launched in 2016; artisans from Assam should be brought under this scheme).

iv. Experts as well as artisans suggest that government organizations procure handcrafted products for regular use in their offices to increase consumption of crafts and encourage common public to use and wear handmade crafts. Establishments need to make it mandatory for furnishing office requirements only with local craft products to the extent possible. In countries like Jordan, it is compulsory to procure only local handicrafts for official gifts (AlaaQattan, 2009).

v. It is also suggested by officials and academicians that government organizations, and private organizations as well, dedicate some compulsory days for use or wear of handloom and handicraft items in organizational set-up.

August 7, since the year 2014 has been marked as National Handloom Day in India with an emphasis on wearing handloom for the day. Assam Govt. has also proposed wearing of khadi to work place in Govt. establishments at least once a month from April 2018 for which it will distribute khadi clothes to its employees.

vi. Under the Public Procurement Policy of MSME, since 1st April, 2015, 20% of total annual value of goods and services are to be procured from MSME. However, only registered MSMEs with DICC or KVIB or other such boards are allowed to

supply the products. It is necessary that the ambit is furthered to include SHGs and individual level artisans also.

Other Suggestions on Procurement of Handicrafts and Raw Materials Supply

i. Other than government managed collection centers, artisan members of a craft producing community can also be mobilized to form entity that collects crafts produced by artisans and later sale it to various organizations and shops.

ii. It is suggested that organizations are directed to purchase only handmade crafts reflecting traditional and cultural components of Assam. Maintaining traditional standards in procurement will automatically compel artisans in producing crafts with local aesthetics and thereby help in preserving traditional features in craft.

iii. Intermediary networks like middlemen, societies and NGOs are also essential for fostering commerce of handicrafts in geographically far areas. In such cases, it is essential to register these intermediaries and bring them under the monitoring agencies of government. Only registered intermediaries having record of paying fair prices to artisans should be permitted to do wholesaling and retailing. Intermediaries must show receipts from the artisans to the buying houses to get their payments against the goods supplied.

H) Suggestions Apart from the Above Recommendations

i. Establishment of Museums and Repositories: Setting up of museums to preserve old products can itself become a tourist attraction beside preservation of antique products. Artisans can benefit by reflecting back on the old glory.

The Ministry of Textile in its objectives has enlisted establishing Handicraft Museums to preserve works of art. However, it is suggested that such craft museums should preserve the old as well new products. It is seen during field survey that decades old and even centuries old metal craft products are turned into scrap and re-pressed into metal sheets for providing raw materials to artisans at Sarthebari. Such actions only lead to destruction of the past works and tradition. All such items should be earmarked, collected and stored in museums for future reckoning.

ii. Emphasis on Mobilization of Artisans into Groups: It is suggested that artisans are organized into collective groups which will ensure that they possess

bargaining power over their products. It will further help ensure that quality and standardization is maintained when produced in a group.

Under the Dastkar Shashktikaran Yojana, artisans are mobilized to form Self Help Groups/Societies. A brand be promoted based on special item produced in a village or a cluster. In Thailand, One Tambon⁴ One Product (OTOP) is promoted for marketing of local handicrafts. In 2006, APJ Abdul Kalam on his visit to Sualkuchi had suggested to have specific localities in a craft cluster each producing one specific item. This, he believed, would ensure work for every artisan.

iii. Focus on Motivating Artisans: Apart from all other initiatives and action, it is highly advisable that artisans are motivated regularly through awards and incentives. This will ensure that younger artisans are motivated to join crafting occupation of their fathers and forefathers.

The Govt. of India, in order to encourage handicraft artisans, institutes several awards for master craftsmen. Besides National Awards and State Awards, in 2002 it constituted Shilpa Guru Award for those artisans who keep craft skills alive. The UNESCO-Seal of Excellence award is also conferred since 2004 to crafts of highest quality and standard.

14.4 Wrapping up the Chapter

This chapter provided suggestions for the successful marketing and commercialization of traditional crafts based on product, pricing and promotional aspects. Suggestions were presented keeping in view the findings of Chapter 1 & 2 (refer to Chapter 13) as well as analysis of the FGDs among artisans, Interviews and Expert Opinions (refer to Chapter 12). Policies of the government were also referred for having an understanding of the needs of the handicraft artisans and the sector based upon which suggestions are made.

⁴ Tambon in Thai language means a local governmental unit in Thailand. It is usually translated as township or sub-district.