

special feature inherited by the later Dravidians of the historical period. We also know many things of their habits, their dress, their burial rituals and their gods.

We have little information about the other races occupying regions north of Narmada at the time, but from stray references we find that there were large tribes which went by the generic name of Nagas.

At the time, U.P. and Bihar were occupied by a race, called Copper-heads by the

archaeologists from the copper weapons they used.

It is likely that the non-Aryan people of the region, the Nagas, the Nishads and the Asuras, whom we come across in the *Mahabharata*, belonged to this stock.

We have little information about the races which lived south of Narmada at this period, nor do we know of the races which opposed the Early Dravidians when they pushed to the South.

*From the Bhavan's President*

## Relevance of Handicrafts

R. Venkataraman



It is a remarkable fact that every part of India, every province, district and almost every single village has a cherished crafts tradition of its own.

Handicrafts are integral to our history and civilisation. One finds proof of their existence in the Mohenjo-daro and Harappan civilisations dating back to 3000 B.C.

It is a remarkable fact that every part of India, every province, district and almost every single village has a cherished crafts tradition of its own. Working on a variety of raw materials ranging from hard objects like stone and metal to soft ivory, sandalwood and clay, our craftspersons create objects

of great beauty. What is notable is that, these objects of beauty are also an integral part of the life-rhythms of our people.

Be they the great stone sculptures at Mamallapuram, Ellora or at Konarak, the world-famous bronzes of the South, the intricate wood and bamboo objects made in our North East, the beautiful fabrics woven in Varanasi, Assam or Kancheepuram, all of them represent the collective ethos of our civilisation. They bespeak the commitment to excellence and to a higher aesthetic sense

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&

Dr (Mrs.) Geeta Padmanabhan MBBS, DA (BEM) DA (CPS)  
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that has marked our artistic endeavours down the ages. And so when we honour our craftspersons, we honour those creative springs that have marked our self-renewing civilisation.

The glorious periods of Indian history, such as of the Mauryas, Guptas or Moghuls, were associated, each of them, with the development of crafts. Religion, royalty, as well as the common man's life-style, everything, quickened our crafts and craftsmen.

Whether it was building a fort, a temple or a palace, decorating its interior, or giving colour and beauty to the activities inside; whether it was a ritual for the royal coronation or a common man's marriage, the craftsman played an important role. He invested the objects he created with not just external beauty, but with a flavour of his understanding of Nature and Man's relationship with it. The objects he made also bore the underlying spirit of the social purposes they served.

But the relevance of handicrafts in today's India is not confined to their great romance with our history and our civilisation.

The fact that more than three million still practise the crafts and that millions of weavers are engaged in handlooms demonstrates the overwhelming importance of these sectors in our national economy.

With our agricultural sector already overburdened, and the scope for employment through capital intensive industries being limited, the role of handicrafts and handlooms for generating income and employment cannot be over emphasised.

The builders of this nation recognised the importance of khadi, handlooms and handicrafts much before Independence, and gave shape to their vision soon after achieving it. As a result we have today the All India Handicrafts and Handloom Board and the two apex bodies of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts)

and Development Commissioner (Handlooms) actively carrying out a number of programmes through their field organisations as well as through the State governments and State Corporations.

The programmes touch upon all aspects of development of handicrafts and handlooms, including training, design, technology, marketing programme and promotional efforts like publicity and exhibitions both inside and outside the country.

Our village arts have paradoxically suffered from popular neglect on the one hand and the attention of exploitative middlemen on the other. The makers of these objects of beauty have functioned in obscurity. And no one knows or asks who and what they have been.

Traditional crafts handed down from father to son for generations have languished in the far-off corners of our land, unseen and unheard. Nor have many of us possessed the

connoisseur's eye to see and appreciate the beauty and charm thereof.

It goes to the credit of individuals like the late Smt Rukmini Devi Arundale, Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, and Smt Pupul Jayakar, who have encouraged the village arts and handicrafts.

The continuing success of handicrafts and handlooms as an economic activity will, however, depend largely on marketing.

Our programmes aim, therefore, at establishing the products in the market, and at expanding that market.

The potential of our handicrafts and handlooms for earning foreign exchange for our country is now well established.

This is rightly so.

At the same time I would like to emphasise that the commercial and marketing support for our handicrafts should underscore the excellence of workmanship which gives to crafts their essential beauty.