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Lending crafts of state a modern touch

Schemes Like One District, One Product And Hastakala Setu Help Revive Traditional Crafts & Support Artisans

PRESERVING THEIR SKILLS



SURAT | Sadeli woodwork

Three generations of Rakesh Petigar have been associated with the craft. It got its share in the limelight when PM Narendra Modi gifted a Sadeli box to Ivanka Trump during her visit to India in 2017. The intricately carved boxes and other woodworks have the hallmark of craftsmanship as it takes months to make each piece. "The craft is believed have been brought to India by Parsis who then trained local craftsmen. Thus, it is focused on south Gujarat – especially Surat district – today. The exhibitions and haats have surely helped us gain attention, but much is needed to be done in terms of popularizing and conserving it as only a few artisans remain now," said Petigar who is writing a book on the craft and is also in the process of getting a GI tag for it.

BANASKANTHA | Soof embroidery

Kushal Puvar is among the few master artisans engaged in soof embroidery. "It is believed to have roots in south Rajasthan. Initially only the Vankar community was engaged in it, but today they account for 50-60% of the artisans. Women from other communities around Tharad are also engaged in the craft. Earlier, the embroidered cloth would be large and have limited takers. But in the past few years, there have been conscious attempts to make tablecloths, rugs, mobile phone covers and stoles with soof embroidery.

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In the past five years, PM Narendra Modi has given thoughtful gifts, symbolic of shared history and culture, to world leaders — Sadeli box to Ivanka Trump, Mata ni Pachedi to UK PM Rishi Sunak, Patola stole to Italy PM Georgia Meloni and an agate bowl to French president Emmanuel Macron. What connects these presents is that they are all crafts of Gujarat and covered under the central government's 'one district, one product' (ODOP) scheme.

While Sadeli is a woodcraft from Surat, Mata ni Pachedi is from Ahmedabad, Patola from Patan, and agate from Khambhat. The artisans are also covered under the Hastakala Setu Yojana of the state government which promotes these crafts and provides training to the people involved.

Sunil Shukla, director general of Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII), said that it is working closely with the state government to train artisans in entrepreneurship.

ODOP is an effective way to accelerate local economic development and bolster growth.

LIST OF OTHER ODOP DISTRICTS AND CRAFTS

District	Craft
Bharuch	Sujani weaving
Surendranagar	Tangaliya, Bandhej
Rajkot	Single-Ikkat Patola, Bandhani
Valsad	Bamboo work
Anand	Agate
Mehsana	Handloom weaving
Gandhinagar	Ashavali sari, Block-making
Vadodara	Patchwork
Porbandar	Woolen blanket
Amreli	Embroidery
Botad	Clay jewellery
Sabarkantha	Terracotta
Narmada	Bamboo products
Bhavnagar	Bead work
Devbhoomi Dwarka	Handwoven shawl
Gir Somnath	Seashell products
Dahod	Bamboo work, Bead work
Kheda	Woolen toys
Morbi	Terracotta

"Gujarat, with 33 districts, is home to distinguished crafts that can be suitably and relevantly upgraded and marketed for better presence," Shukla said.

"As part of the Hastakala Setu Yojana, we work with the commissionerate of cottage and rural industries to strengthen the ecosystem and train artisans in understanding and accessing the market."

Experts associated with the sector said some of the

major issues include lack of interest among the next generation of artisans, lack of standardization in some crafts, identity issues, lack of digital payment and online sales knowledge, and lack of knowledge pertaining to changing trends and market demands.

"There are several crafts that have fewer than 50 artisans associated with them today and they will be the last if timely steps are not taken.

Organizations such as National Institute of Design (NID) and National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) are often roped in to teach them the basics of branching out to new product categories, understanding international demands, and product photography and packaging," said a crafts chronicler working closely with clusters in Kutch and

north Gujarat.

"But these initiatives must be sustainable. Just giving them stalls at a few places or identifying a cluster might not be enough. Training the artisans, creating awareness and boosting their brands with geographical indication (GI) tags or trademarks should be the way forward."

Appealing to a wider range of modern customers by making ties out of bandhani or patola material and mobile phone covers with soof embroidery is what is needed, they suggest.

