



As another quarter passes, it’s time for us to share some more stories with you!

This issue features field stories from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. It talks about critical aspects of value chain strengthening such as training on financial literacy, azo-free dyeing training to improve product quality and value, and importance of infrastructure and technology support. However, what remains the pillar of success is the motivation, proactiveness and readiness of the artisan communities themselves to respond to modern market and industry needs.

While we continue to reach out to all the readers of this newsletter and expand our readership everyday, we also hope that we are able to make this platform a more shared space for strengthening collaboration amongst varied stakeholders to spur enterprise-led growth in this sector and increase incomes of artisans.

Our trips to China and Mongolia in the last quarter have also led to new experiences, learning and partnerships!

We are very happy to have Ms. Shilpa Sharma, Co-Founder and Head of Jaypore as our Guest writer. Her article is extremely interesting and informative and shows the depth of engagement that Jaypore has with this sector in its effort to build the “The New Silk Road for Indian Handicrafts.”

Madhura Dutta  
Executive Director

Stories from the Field



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Highlights & Upcoming Events

### FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In June we travelled to Bajju (near Bikaner) in Rajasthan to conduct a three-day workshop on the basics of entrepreneurship and business development, at the Urmul Seemant Campus, with a group of 20-25 women master artisans of embroidery work. These artisans from the Thar desert area traditionally practiced intricate embroidery to create a variety of garments and home decor for their daughters' wedding dowry. With changing times, they now have the opportunity to use their traditional skills of embroidery to make varied marketable products and earn a livelihood from it. For them, orders are mostly facilitated by organisations such as Urmul and Rangсутra.

An important part of strengthening livelihood through traditional craftsmanship is the ability to develop new designs, manage production and inventory, and develop entrepreneurial capabilities including an understanding of how to deal with different market channels. This workshop aimed at introducing a selected group of young artisans to fundamental concepts like costing, pricing, savings, material procurement, understanding the market, marketing channels, design, quality control, and production execution. Developing aspirations of the women to work together in a collective and professionalize their skills for generating sustainable income for them was also an integral aim of this workshop. The more we interacted with these women participants, the more we realized that they already carry the dream in their hearts and are eager to come out of their homes and do something of their own.



The workshop was conducted using a variety of audio visual tools and hands-on activities, to help the artisans understand and experience the various aspects of running a business. In a learning sharing session, Mr. Awadhesh Kumar, a successful entrepreneur and block printing master craftsman shared his journey of becoming a successful entrepreneur and the challenges and opportunities. He spoke not only about his struggle when starting his hand-block printing business but also explained how various government schemes are immensely beneficial in enabling the artisans to work and improve their livelihood. He stressed on the importance of the artisan card and other associated government schemes and benefits which helped him get himself and his family insured, access business loans at nominal interest, and participate in domestic and international fairs facilitated by the government. Among the various exposure sessions was Anita Dongre's fashion show with desert artisans' embroidery where all the women rural artisans walked on the ramp with the designer after the show receiving accolades from the audience! It moved the young artisans of the group who felt proud to be from the same community!

As a part of the workshop, market expert and designer Sonal Chitranshi also interacted with the artisans to discuss the importance of design and quality control. Sonal spoke about taking inspiration from nature, the importance of colour selections and combinations suited to contemporary tastes, and exposed them to different types of embroideries from across the country. The women were excited and intensely engaged in imbibing this learning. They shared that they were bored with their current designs and having to do the same work for many years. From these sessions, they got fresh ideas to innovate on what they do and create their own designs.

What made this workshop very special for us is the feedback we received from the artisans at the end of the three days. Apart from the various learnings they took back from the modules that were conducted, they came back to say that they now look at entrepreneurship as something that is do-able not just dream-able!

## THE DREAM WORKPLACE

We travelled to Chanderi and Maheshwar mid-May this year, as a part of a workshop organized by GoCoop, to interact with weavers and introduce them to the importance of certification, Craftmark, and associated business development services. At Chanderi, we had the pleasure of meeting Chanderiyaan, an old Craftmark member which has revolutionized retail of Chanderi saris through their online platform [chanderiyaan.net](http://chanderiyaan.net). Chanderiyaan has digitized the Chanderi weaving process by training weavers in digital design making and establishing an online library of designs so that they can be replicated easily. The most fascinating part, however, was to see the organization set up - with its complete design centre, store and looms - housed in the Raja Rani Mahal in the Chanderi Fort. Many small rooms of the Mahal held workstations, printers and graphs while the half-exposed airy pillared yards housed the looms where the weavers weaved ceaselessly. A small store inside the Mahal held a varied collection of the latest designs created by the weavers. The experience here was undoubtedly a rare one. The excited staff had a lot to tell us. As the sun set behind the Mahal walls, we sipped on our glass of Sherbet and heard stories of how the royal Scindia family helped the organization strengthen and developed and empowered many weavers in Chanderi.

To work in a place of such ancient beauty was like a dream and surely added to the inspiration of the weavers every day. We were truly enthralled. The experience of visiting the Chanderiyaan establishment generated mixed feelings of nostalgia, heritage, art and modernity.



## CRAFT CLUSTER REVIVAL IN KOTA

AIACA began its intervention with the Kota Women Weavers Organisation (KWWO) in Kaithoon (Kota) in 2014.

Formed by local Muslim women weavers, KWWO was barely functioning then. It had a large Community Facilitation Center (CFC), equipped with looms, warping machines, sizing plants, ETP, dyeing unit, training hall and an office, but it was lying unused. The CFC was built in Kaithoon as part of the Mega Cluster Scheme by the Ministry of Textiles in 2013. Its purpose was to make small weaving units sustainable and facilitate the growth of independent business units. Though KWWO was given charge of the CFC, they were not trained either on use of all the available facilities neither was any handholding support provided for the management of the CFC. Adding to their plight was the floods of 2014 which caused equipment damage in the CFC. Over the last two years, the Rural Non-Farm Development Agency (RUDA) has invested to rectify these damages, and AIACA has also been able to organize the highly fragmented cluster so that collectively they take responsibility of the CFC and cater to larger and more diverse markets.

Through continuous mobilization by AIACA, the weavers have come together to form 35 fully functional SHGs in the region. Such collectivisation of the weavers has lent them a voice for demanding services from the government and also the confidence to jointly manage the facilities of the centre. They have also realized the potential of their own traditional crafts beyond the existing markets provided by traders. It is heartening to see their readiness and motivation to use the CFC facilities for effectively responding to market needs through design innovation and improved production efficiency. Although the process is slow and a long way lies ahead, the initiation of revival of the CFC after years of dysfunction is an important step for Kota to become a successful craft business Hub.





## NATURAL DYEING WORKSHOP FOR VARANASI DYERS

Ever since the Varanasi Weavers and Artisans Society was registered as a formal collective of the handloom weavers and artisans of UP, with the producers as members of this Body, a lot of interest has been generated among various designers and buyers to come and directly work with smaller rural and highly skilled master weavers.

In the process of responding to one such query, we realized that many dyeing units of the villages have neither the knowledge nor the technical skills to use azo-free dyes, and the demand has never been generated by the weavers because their requirements are usually fulfilled by the traders who cater to large national and export markets.

With the understanding that the Society should build its own internal capacity for azo-free dyeing to directly cater to market needs, a workshop was organised for the dyers linked to the Society, in partnership with Sasha and Sarba Shanti Ayog. The main objective was to educate them about the importance and need of azo-free dyeing and help them understand the dyeing process in detail to enable them to achieve quality, consistency, and colour fastness using these azo-free dyes. Dyers were introduced to hands-on training on pre-treatment, finishing chemicals which is a solution for spun yarn sizing, removing extra fibre, etc.

The first visit to Jaugram introduced the Varanasi dyers and the Sasha Block Printing unit members to basic concepts such as importance of using safe dyes and the correct methods of colour mixing. This was followed by a theory session with Mr. Saiket Saha from Zydex Industries and Mr. P Chakroborty from the Clarriott where the dyers learnt about the need for azo-free dyes, the treatment process and export norms.

SASHA also organized a visit to Phulia (a town in Nadia district), a place traditionally renowned for exquisite hand woven fabric and a dreamland for all those who engage with the weaving industry. This was a great experience for the dyers and for us. The dyers interacted with the dyers of Phulia and exchanged valuable practical tips about azo-free dyeing. Since it was a functional production unit, they also tried dyeing yarns and fabric that further helped them to internalize the learning.

## ENTERPRISE SUPPORT PROGRAM

AIACA's Enterprise Support Program (ESP) addresses challenges faced by craft enterprises, through business development and capacity building solutions thus promoting sustainable livelihoods for artisans.

### CRAFTMARK JURY- MAY 2016

A Craftmark Jury was organized at the India Habitat Center, New Delhi on 23rd May. As a part of the Jury, Craftmark member organisations, who have recently become members or renewed membership, are given an opportunity present their latest product range to a panel of senior handicraft experts who provide critical feedback on design, quality, export readiness and various market-related parameters.

Eleven Craftmark members attended the jury, including Rangrage, Shilpi Handicraft, Eco Tasar Silk, Islam Silk & Sarees, Viveka (Shroff Foundation), Samaj Utthan Society, Viraasat by Vijay Joshi, Society to Uplift Rural Economy (SURE), Navrang- Colours of India, Classic Furnishers and Beer Singh. Their work was reviewed by the Jury panellists: Anuradha Kumra (Creative Head, FabIndia), Saleem Beg (Member of National Monument Authority, Ministry of Culture, Government of India), Purnima Rai (President, Delhi Crafts Council) and Prof. Sudha Dhingra (Chairperson, Department of F&T - TD, NIFT).

The panellists were amazed to see the creativity and diversity displayed by the members in their products. The unique hand-painted utility products of Rangrage were highly appreciated with inputs for diverse market opportunities. SURE, with their perfect hand applique home textiles and Beer Singh with his interesting bamboo wind chimes were recognized for their excellence and creativity. Immediate opportunities were given by connecting them to Home section of Fabindia. Brij from Shilpi Handicraft, known to all the panellists, used the opportunity to present his new range of 100% naturally dyed indigo stoles. The panellists were mesmerized by Vijay Joshi's Phad paintings, especially the Hanuman Chalisa carrying both the Hindi and the English scripts. He was given valuable feedback on how he could further diversify his products and paintings and which markets would be ideal for him. A young weaver, Islam, from Varanasi, immediately got an appointment with the FabIndia apparel team. Other participants such as Navrang and Viveka were given guidance on how to position their products in the market and which products or crafts to focus on in order to create a brand identity.

The participants benefited greatly from the event. Each person went back with a different perspective of their work, and ideas about many possibilities that lay ahead of them.



ESTABLISHING VARANASI WEAVERS AND ARTISANS SOCIETY

With an outreach of 5080 weavers, AIACA’s intervention in Varanasi is now moving into its second phase of implementation, i.e., supporting the growth of ‘The Varanasi Weavers and Artisan Society’ (VWAS).

Established in December 2015, VWAS is a membership based enterprise working towards taking forward the cause of revival, protection and continuation of Varanasi weavers’ and artisans’ heritage in the contemporary world through various initiatives of skill and design development, product diversification, promotion, direct market linkage, and match-making between artisans and service providers to support business and enterprise development. It

is providing the weavers and artisans technical assistance and access to government schemes. Bringing together dispersed craftworkers, it is growing into a collective forum for the handloom weavers to influence policy and government programmes so that maximum benefits reach them.

Through the extensive support provided to the weavers, VWAS will eventually lead to an increase in bargaining power of the weavers and artisans and improve their access to social welfare. It will ensure buyer access to genuine, high quality handloom and handicrafts of this region as well as ensure fair prices and trade to the actual producers who are mostly exploited and marginalized. Through basic business facilitation services, it will help the smaller weavers manage direct orders from designers and buyers in an efficient manner and run sustainable businesses, thus making the current trade environment more professional and ethical.



AIACA’S VISIT TO THE UNESCO CATEGORY II CENTRE, CRIHAP IN CHINA

AIACA was invited to participate and present its work at the International Workshop on Capacity Building for Transmission and Sustainable Development of Traditional Craftsmanship organized by the UNESCO Category II Centre, CRIHAP, in Shenzhen, China during 12 -16 May 2016. AIACA presented the case study of Mubarakpur Weaves as a success story of rural weaver-led enterprise development which was highly appreciated at the workshop as a story of socio economic empowerment achieved through traditional skills of brocade weaving.

The workshop was a three day event where participants from China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, Samoa, Japan, Kazakhstan, and Korea presented diverse case studies. It was an excellent opportunity for AIACA to exchange its work, ideas and sectoral issues at this international platform. It was very interesting to note that there are so many issues which are common across borders when it comes to entrepreneurship development or investment in creative industry models in a highly unorganized and fragmented but skilled sector such as crafts.

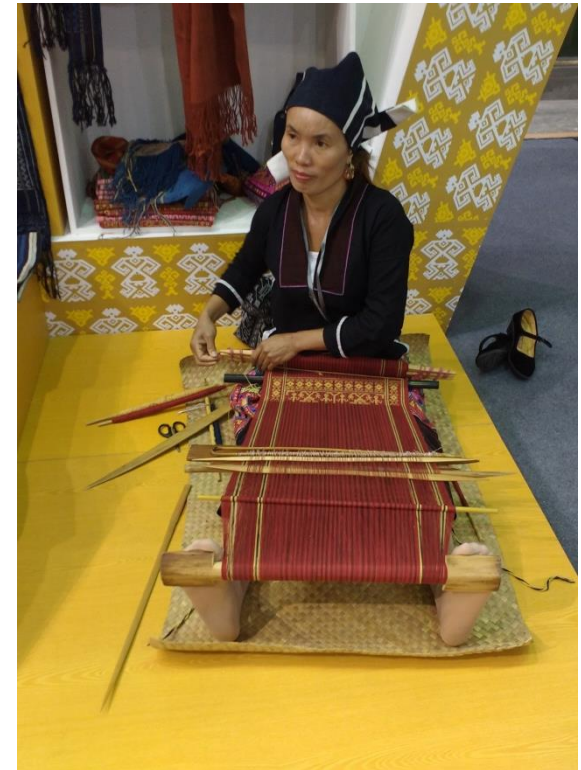


AIACA's work was recognized as one of the successful models that have the potential for replication. Among the key dignitaries who engaged intensively in our presentation and discussions on craft based enterprise development models were Mr. Mounir Bouchenaki (Director, Arab Regional Office for World Heritage under UNESCO, Special Advisor to the Assistant Director- General of UNESCO), Ms. Noriko Aikawa (UNESCO facilitator for safeguarding ICH and Former Director of Unit of ICH, UNESCO), and Ms. Himalchuli Gurung (Programme Specialist for Culture, UNESCO Beijing).

Our visit to Shenzhen and the International workshop was timed during the International Cultural Industries Fair, currently in its 12th year, which is a fantastic platform showcasing the cultural heritage and crafts from across the world. Over 90 countries participate in this fair having a turnover of approximately 39 Billion USD. It organizes 9 specialized exhibition halls in the main mega venue including Cultural Industries Hall and an Arts and Crafts Hall. At these spaces we met artisans demonstrating their crafts, and were exposed to fascinating craftsmanship in pottery, textiles, painting, embroidery, bamboo, wood, stone, etc., which were no less than awe-inspiring!

This international workshop has led to further openings for us in terms of cultural exchange opportunities with Central Asia which will be our next key initiative!

## GLIMPSES OF THE CRAFTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL INDUSTRIES FAIR



### E-RETAIL: THE NEW SILK ROAD FOR INDIAN HANDICRAFTS

India's engagement with handicrafts and handloom products is rooted in her history and culture. Some products were born of a need to fulfil daily necessities like clothing and utensils and some arose purely as artistic expression. Artisans were prized for their skills and traditional techniques were fiercely guarded. Design and style benefitted from give and take between cultures and products found new markets with traders and visitors.

But this easy rhythm, this economy rooted in the earth and the seasons and people, took a beating with the advent of industrialization - wooden looms gave way to power and jacquard looms and the *kairi* became the Paisley; hand-painted textiles that used laboriously produced, beautiful natural dyes could now be printed by machines in a fraction of that time and effort and markets were filled with cheaper fabric coloured with chemicals. Steel pushed hand-crafted brass and silver pots and pans aside, a growing number of alternatives for entertainment took away the job of the *Patuas* and *Tholu Bommalata* quickly became obsolete.

These and many more were the crafts and arts that defined India's diverse, eclectic, chaotic and beautiful culture; this is what made us who we are. India's identity was firmly rooted in her traditions and that is why these arts and crafts are worth saving and giving a fillip to. Not only that, handicrafts have a huge economic potential, right from increasing non-agriculture based rural employment and income to foreign exchange earnings. But for an artisan, dwindling market sizes may well mean the end of their craft. Government policies, support and interventions by important craft organizations and growing awareness of the different kinds of traditional crafts from India helps to a large extent. Taking these efforts further is the rapidly growing e-commerce retail sector in India. Other than expanding markets for local artisan groups in India and abroad, online retail also helps mitigate India's image as a producer of grungy, sub-standard craft – an image created largely by industrially manufactured products and one that is very far away from the exquisite, beautiful handcrafted products from various regions.

With designers using traditional techniques to create modern interpretations, there is market-led innovation in design, infusing the art with new flavours, giving it renewed purpose. One example that springs to mind is the contemporary use of *Ajrakh* in apparel and home textiles. Another brilliant example is the case of *charma chitrakari*, associated with Tholu Bommalata from Andhra that is now finding expression as wall art. Block prints like *Dabu* and hand-painted textile embellishments like *Kalamkari* speak a global language when used on contemporary apparel that appeals to the modern consumer.

The online space gives every kind of craft a place to stand and showcase its nuances, whether it is a globally popular technique like *Ikat* or a barely known craft like *Rogan* painting. There are also huge cost benefits here when compared to putting up a product in an exhibition or a brick and mortar retail outlet. You cannot have a beautiful handcrafted product at a low cost without taking away from the maker's margin. With online retail, the high price of artisanal produce, the reasons for its inherent imperfections and the myriad stories behind it can also be communicated to the audience, engaging them further.

With the benefits accruing to the artisan through online retail, the producer is not only able to recover their cost but also make a decent profit, making it worth their while to continue practicing the craft and carry it forward by training the next generation.

-Shilpa Sharma

Co Founder & Head: Product Curation & Communication at Jaypore

**ACCESS TO SCHEMES INITIATIVE BY AIACA**

Government of India channelizes organized developmental support to rural marginalized communities of India through various well designed schemes focusing on overall improvement in livelihood. Unfortunately, a huge gap lies in information dissemination on these schemes and effective access to benefits for the actual beneficiaries. Owing to remoteness, lack of literacy and severe marginalization, the target beneficiaries are neither aware of these entitlements nor have the confidence and trust to approach the right stakeholders for processing of their applications. Hence the uptake of these schemes has been low over the years.

AIACA having its outreach to various rural clusters of India through its cluster development approach felt that a sustained mobilization, awareness generation and facilitation for actual application can greatly benefit the artisans and weavers.

The process started through detailed research and collation of all possible schemes across ministries and partnering with local governments either to organize camps or to provide door to door services for filling up of applications. With our proactive support in bridging the gap between government departments and the rural community members, the government also facilitated a speedy processing of all the applications.

Today, in the handloom clusters of Varanasi, Churu and Udaipur, a total of 4800 artisans/weavers have accessed various schemes and benefits. 2232 artisans have successfully received important government identity cards such as the Aadhar card, artisan card, Bhamashah card, Weaver ID card and the Ration card. 1474 artisans have been linked with banks to facilitate financial assistance. 159 artisans have accessed insurance schemes such as the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna. AIACA has also facilitated access to several other schemes such the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (500 artisans) for housing, Handloom mark (111 weavers) for market development, Weaver credit card, training for Community Facilitation Centres, etc.

We have collated 75+ national schemes relevant for artisans across ministries such as Ministry of Textiles, Women and Child Development, Rural Development, MSME, Minority Affairs, etc. These have further been simplified into an easy to understand format with key benefits and application information spelt out. Written in English and Hindi, these formats are being made publicly available on the Craftmark Website as well. In addition to this, Craftmark members and artisans linked to AIACA receive monthly SMSes informing them about different schemes.

**PARTICIPATING IN THE EU 'SWITCH- ASIA REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE AND NETWORKING EVENT'**

AIACA participated in EU 'SWITCH-Asia Regional Roundtable and Networking Event: The role of Non State Actors in SWITCH-Asia', in Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) from 2nd to 3rd June 2016.

This event was an enriching forum for different EU project implementation partners to discuss their motivations, expectations, objectives, roles and experiences as non-state actors in designing, proposing and implementing development cooperation projects in the SWITCH-Asia framework and beyond.

**PARTNERSHIP WITH DC (HANDLOOMS)**

AIACA is working in close coordination with DC (Handlooms) and Weavers Service Centre to promote and facilitate application of India Handloom Brand in Varanasi.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

- International OIMO festival in Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek) from 29<sup>th</sup> July to 7<sup>th</sup> August.
- Craftmark store event at 'Either Or' (Pune) from 8<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> August.
- Craftmark 10 years exhibition at Kamala Store (New Delhi) from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> September.
- Craftmark 10 years exhibition at 'Artisans' (Mumbai) from 29<sup>th</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> October.