



#Opinion

Indian Entrepreneurs Must Celebrate Their Handcraft History and Why!

DAISY TANWANI | September 1, 2021



Daisy Tanwani: Almost a decade back I found myself marvelling at a piece of tapestry at a big home décor retailer in the United States. As I turned the label to know more, the fine copy read, *Handmade in India*. It was a moment of pride and disappointment.

Pride for this was my heritage ~ exquisite, detailed, and rare. Disappointment for such things were not easily available to Indians in India. This is just one of many incidents over the years where I witnessed Indian handcrafts finding reverence world over but not so much in India.

Indian crafts have been a source of inspiration for many global brands. Our varied crafts and designs have often been used to adorn homes and wardrobes worldwide.

But, Indian brands have traditionally shied away from embracing them, until recently. The changing consumer preference of the modern Indian has given Indian handcrafts a new lease of life. Gone are the days, made elsewhere, was more credible than Made in India. The sentiment of the present is unapologetically Indian. Not surprisingly, global brands too are setting up base and operations in India to cater to this growing demand and consumer preference.

Nation Building

Handcrafts sector in India is vastly unorganised and figures of artisans employed in the sector varies from 10 million right up to 140 million. In many instances, entire families, and even villages, are involved in the handcraft sector. With a pool that enormous, it's only wise to use local talent and resources to attain more sustainable and economical solutions.

Over 50% of artisans involved in various crafts are women, and like they, a **financially independent woman** can be the backbone of a stronger family and a solid nation. The nature of crafts allows for work to travel to women, and in many cases like loom weaving, quilting, embroidery, entire families or communities can be engaged in the craft, making employment easier for women even in socio-economic backward areas.

That said, many handcrafts are inching towards extinction because the younger generation does not want to get involved. There are seemingly better and more lucrative options elsewhere. The primary reason of this exodus of sorts is the lopsided effort-to-pay ratio, which can change if designers and entrepreneurs make handcrafts more relevant. The key lies in imbibing modern sensibilities in traditional craft forms to make them more desirable and relevant to the needs and tastes of the modern Indian. The Indian handcraft industry has traditionally been slow in reengineering their products to new-age demands. For the sector to succeed, new-age entrepreneurs need to revisit traditional crafts in new light with a thought-out approach to design and quality that matches the new lifestyle needs.

Source of Soft Power

Similar to food, art and architecture, handcrafts are the cultural identity of our country. An asset in a world where mechanisation and technology are taking over quickly. In wake of that, handmade is luxury, with global consumers recognising and willing to pay a premium for handcrafted products. India is a developing nation and can do with as much brand building to strengthen our global identity; our unique designs and handcrafts reinvented correctly to suit the modern-day needs, can do just that. Much like the fashion and diamond industry in Italy and Israel. I would go as far as saying

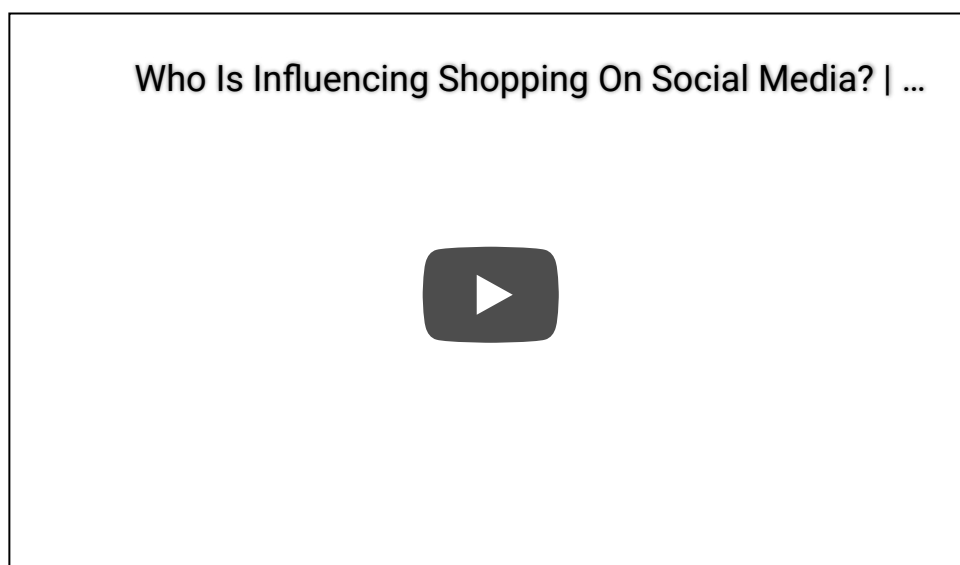
handcrafts if promoted correctly can be a source of soft power in global commerce and trade for India. What's more, bringing handcrafts to the forefront can not just boost India's image on the world map, but also drive domestic consumption and recognition of crafts across different regions within India.

Designed and Manufactured in India

Indian designers, retail, and fashion entrepreneurs are reaching new heights like never before. Designed in India is being recognised and the burgeoning creative powerhouse is well placed to promote India from just being a behind the curtain manufacturer to the centre stage of design and innovation. It will be a pity if Indian designers and entrepreneurs cannot take their own homegrown talent and mould it to dominate the craft sector globally.

Finally, sustainability, slow living, mindfulness are the buzz words of today's evolved living; however, they have always been here in our handicrafts where master artisans meticulously handcraft and create each piece by being fully present and involved in the process, from design to final production. This places **Indian handicrafts** in the unique position to capitalise on this trend and create its own brand and standing in global commerce. By embracing our own heritage, Indian entrepreneurs can not just help revive Indian handicrafts and bring them to the forefront, but also create a profitable avenue that is socially-inclusive.

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Handcraft

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