

# Craft Traditions of India

Past, Present and Future

Textbook in Heritage Crafts  
for Class XII

विद्यया ऽ मृतमश्नुते



एन सी ई आर टी  
NCERT

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्  
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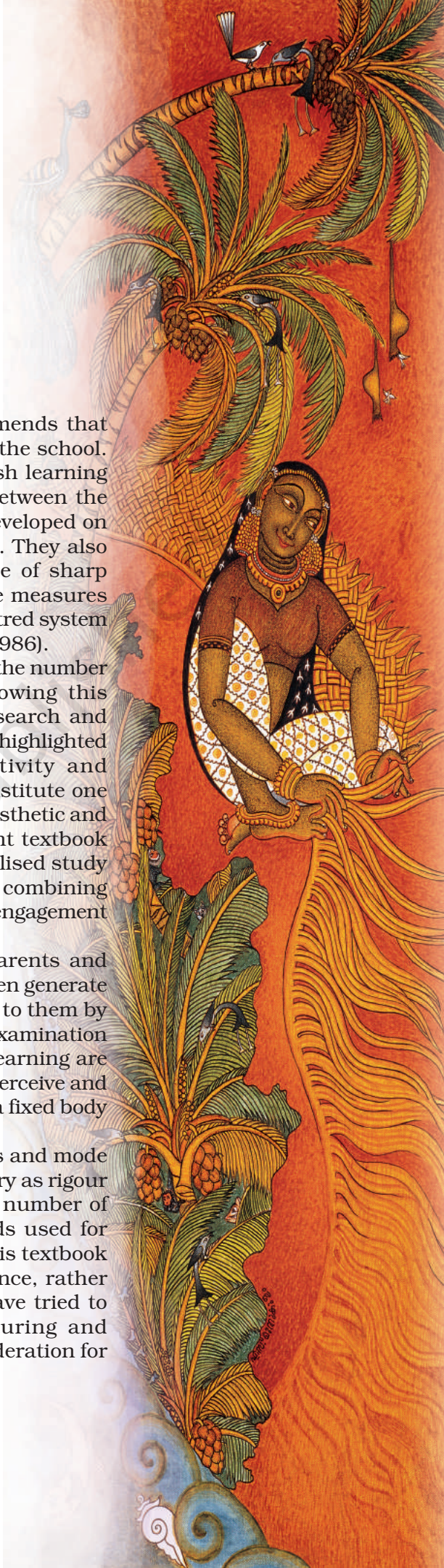
## FOREWORD

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy on Education (1986).

One of the key recommendations of the NCF is to increase the number of options available at the senior secondary level. Following this recommendation, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has decided to introduce certain new areas highlighted in the NCF for their potential for encouraging creativity and interdisciplinary understanding. India's heritage crafts constitute one such area which provides a unique space for the pursuit of aesthetic and productive learning in the context of crafts, and the present textbook attempts to provide a new pedagogic approach to the specialised study of India's living craft traditions. This approach focuses on combining background knowledge with field study and the experience of engagement with artisans and their crafts.

This initiative can succeed only if school principals, parents and teachers recognise that given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other resources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge.

These aims imply considerable change in school routines and mode of functioning. Flexibility in the daily time-table is as necessary as rigour in implementing the annual calendar so that the required number of teaching days is actually devoted to teaching. The methods used for teaching and evaluation will also determine how effective this textbook proves for making children's life at school a happy experience, rather than a source of stress or boredom. Syllabus designers have tried to address the problem of curricular burden by restructuring and reorienting knowledge at different stages with greater consideration for





child psychology and the time available for teaching. The textbook attempts to enhance this endeavour by giving higher priority and space to opportunities for contemplation and wondering, discussion in small groups, and activities requiring hands-on experience.

NCERT appreciates the hard work done by the syllabus and textbook development committees. The work of developing this interactive textbook for exploring and documenting of craft traditions for students of Class XII was challenging and the painstaking efforts of its Chief Advisor, Dr Shobita Punja, is praiseworthy. We are indebted to the institutions and organisations which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resources, materials and personnel. We are especially grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, under the Chairpersonship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G.P. Deshpande, for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinement.

New Delhi  
May 2010

*Director*  
National Council of Educational  
Research and Training







## INTRODUCTION

Handicrafts are still today a vibrant aspect of Indian culture and society. Crafts have been interwoven with the culture of the people in India from the beginning of human history. Crafts have been an integral part of daily life in villages, towns, courts and religious establishments. The variety of crafts and craft skills available in India and their continuous development throughout the centuries make India a unique country, unlike any other in the world. Ours is one of the few countries in the world where crafts are practised throughout the land and by many people.

The crafts sector provides livelihood to a large number of people and makes an enormous contribution to India's export and foreign exchange earnings. With the carpet industry, the gem and jewellery industry, handicrafts accounts for one-fifth of India's total exports. It is estimated that today there are over 12 million artisans and craftspersons working in the crafts sector. A recent data of the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts in 2005 shows an increase of 53 per cent in five years in the exports of metalware, woodcrafts, hand-printed textiles and scarves, shawls, jewellery and other crafts. However, India today only occupies two per cent of the world trade in handicrafts despite there being over 30 million artisans and weavers in this crafts sector which has a huge potential. With government support, today China has over 17 per cent of the world trade in the same sector.

Recognising the importance of the crafts sector the government policy in India has been to

- enhance opportunities for employment and income from crafts;
- sustain craft as an economic activity by enhancing its market, both domestic and international;
- preserve the traditional beauty and skills of crafts, threatened by extinction, and make them once again an integral part of daily life in India.

The biggest threat to the crafts sector in India are from industrial manufacturers, in India and abroad, who produce cheap products in large quantities and are quick to diversify to meet changing trends and fashions. Today globalisation and liberalisation of trade policies have meant that quality handmade products from all other countries can enter and compete with the existing crafts industry in India. Within the country the crafts industry has to compete with large multinationals and corporates as young people buy branded clothing and lifestyle products. Good marketing strategies and expensive advertising campaigns by these large corporates have put the Indian crafts community at an extreme



disadvantage. The lack of raw material, working capital, educational facilities and poor understanding of the changing markets have made the crafts community extremely vulnerable.

However, the future potential of the crafts sector is enormous in India. There are consistent and increasing demands from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Canada, Europe and the Middle East for handicrafts. We need to provide the crafts community with a global market perspective and expertise in design and development to meet these new demands. This is the reason why this subject has been offered at the senior secondary level in schools so that students can forge a career in a field with such enormous possibility and promise.

Today the entire world is debating climate change and looking towards products and activities that are sustainable, planet-sensitive and people-friendly. Handicrafts are, by definition, 'made by hand' using simple energy efficient tools, with minimum environmental impact and a low carbon footprint, using locally available natural raw material. Crafts are produced in a community-friendly manner and are of great artistic and functional value. The Indian crafts sector can enhance the promotion and development of crafts, and build a brand identity for Indian handicrafts that meets these global concerns. We need to create a brand identity for Indian handicrafts that distinguishes it from those available in other countries and one that is synonymous with sustainability, style, quality, artistic excellence, and authenticity.

There is a great need also to address the problems and concerns within the crafts community. Crafts have always been a significant source of employment and income in our villages and towns. Today we need to address problems of poverty, income generation and women's empowerment through this sector also.

We need to evolve a new and innovative educational programme for young people from the crafts community and other stake-holders, to draw them into this field that will generate wealth by the use of existing craft skills and intellect, design and development, and by understanding the rapidly evolving market potential in this sector. This course attempts to highlight the fine craftsmanship that India was famous for in the past with the skills of entrepreneurship needed to make this sector a new and creative industry.

The present book for Class XII is divided into three parts—the past, the present and the future—in order to examine the history and status of Indian crafts in different periods.

In each period the status of the crafts community was transformed with changing historical and economic situations. The way crafts were made and sold also changed significantly. In the past we talk of the barter system, types of trade—internal and external—what happened to trade during the colonial period. Today the challenges that lie in the proper marketing of crafts in a globalised economy are discussed. All the chapters are interconnected to create an overview of the social and economic aspects of crafts over different historical periods.





**Unit I**, an 'Overview of the Past', explains how craft skills developed over the centuries into highly specialised artistic forms, how it responded to economic and cultural changes up to the era prior to India's Independence.

Chapter 1 tries to interpret how craft in India became a specialised activity—so intricate and complex that it required entire communities to specialise in the production of a certain craft product. The last chapter in this book returns to this idea by stating that one of the most important challenges of the future is to find ways and means to preserve and nurture design specialisation, skill and artistry to ensure Indian craft regains its unique position in the world.

Chapter 2 describes the beauty and brilliance of Indian crafts and the wealth of raw material that attracted European traders to forge trading relations with India that eventually led to colonial rule. During the colonial period it was the European industrial revolution that threatened the handicrafts industry in India. It was this period that brought to focus the machine-versus-hand debate.

Chapter 3 outlines Gandhiji's unique philosophy of *swaraj*, by which villages became self-sufficient by meeting all village needs through crafts and handmade products rather than becoming dependent on industry and machines.

**Unit II**, 'Crafts Revival', looks at the Indian crafts sector since Independence and some of the challenges that they face.

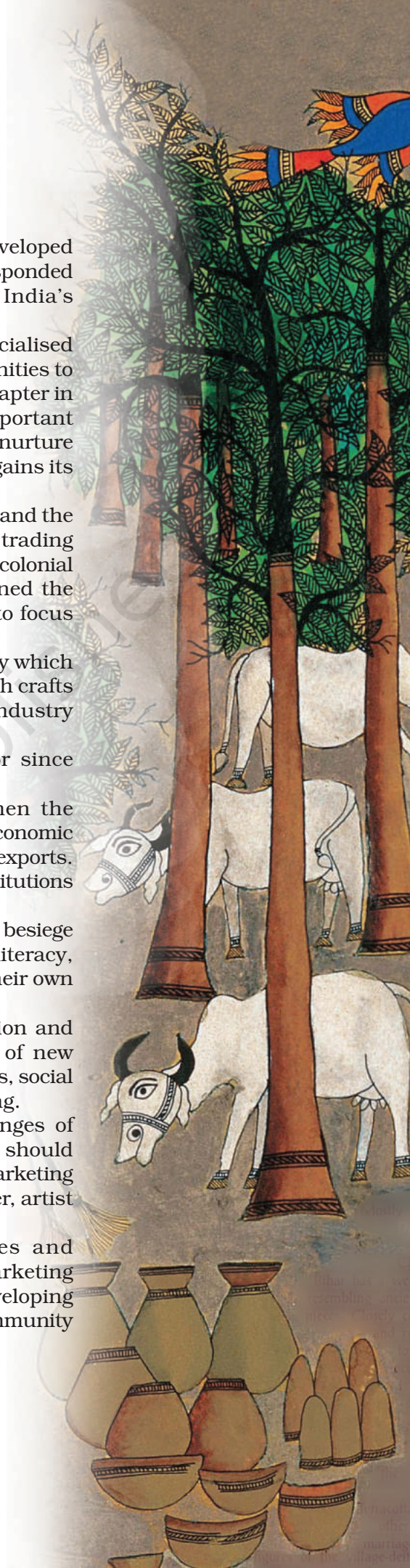
Chapter 4 begins with the post-Independence period when the Government realised the importance of crafts and the enormous economic contribution made by the crafts community in terms of trade and exports. The Government introduced schemes, programmes and set up institutions and systems to promote crafts in modern India.

Chapter 5 outlines some of the concerns and problems that still besiege the crafts community in India today—how gender inequalities, illiteracy, poverty are preventing the crafts community from coming into their own in a changing world.

Chapter 6 raises the debate between old and new production and marketing structures as a background for the development of new marketing strategies in a globalising world where age-old traditions, social structures and patronage patterns of crafts in India are changing.

**Unit III**, 'Strategies for the Future', addresses the challenges of tomorrow, so that students can begin to consider what their role should be in the crafts industry. What strategies could be developed for marketing crafts today that honour and respect the crafts person as designer, artist and independent seller of products?

Chapter 7 systematically investigates the advantages and disadvantages of the urban craft bazaars as a contemporary marketing strategy. We hope students will acquire analytical skills in developing new strategies for marketing that ensure that the skilled crafts community is the primary and ultimate beneficiary.





Chapter 8 provides another case study for students to enable them to learn how to analyse market potentials. The tourism industry is described as an example of a new market and how to find creative solutions to enhance the lives of crafts communities and constantly improve the quality of crafts is discussed.

Chapter 9 is the final chapter and returns to the original idea that crafts require specialised skills, tools and marketing opportunities. To constantly improve the quality of crafts and ensure fine craftsmanship in the twenty-first century, focus is directed towards design, research and development to meet contemporary challenges.

The contents of this book may be made more interesting by using local examples and assigning students such projects and tasks that will enrich the experience of this subject.





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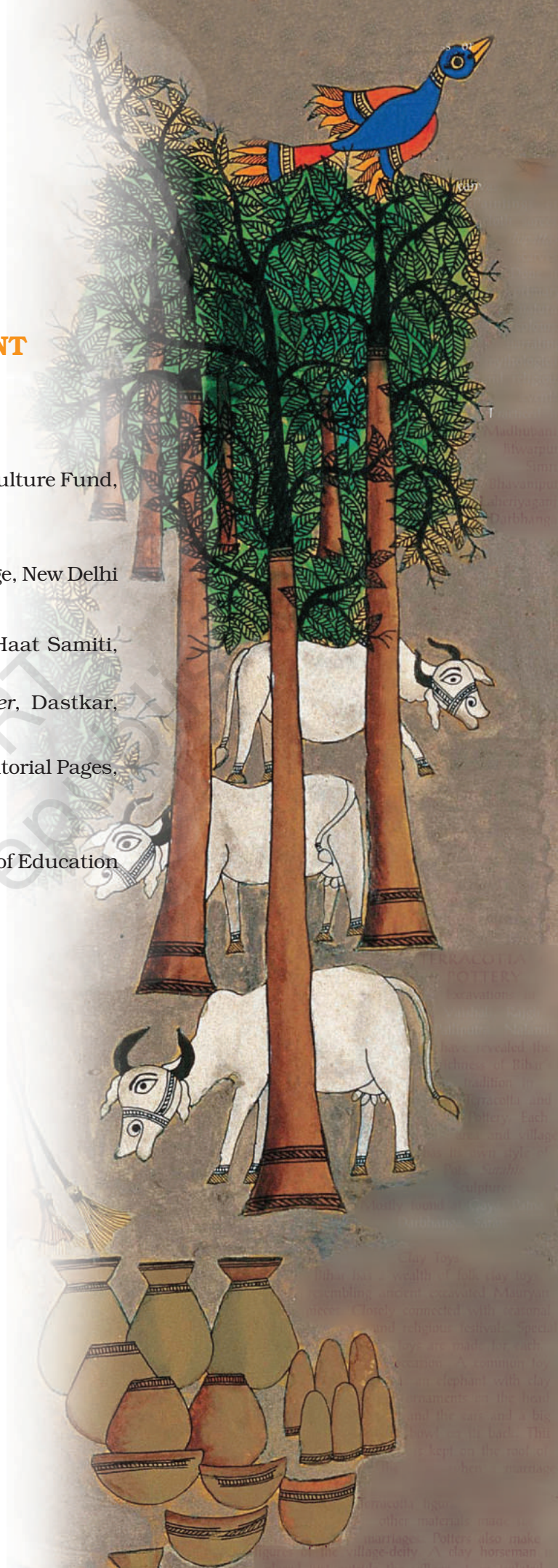
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We are also grateful to the Director, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal, and the Director, National Handicrafts and Handloom Museum, New Delhi for giving us permission to use photographs of the museums and the crafts displayed. Also, we thank Shobita Punja, Chief Executive Officer, National Culture Fund, for giving us permission to use photographs from her book, *Museums of India*.

In this book passages have been quoted from different sources including newspapers and magazines— *The Times of India*, *Down to Earth*, *India Magazine* and *Young INTACH*—where contemporary issues have been discussed. To reinforce knowledge relevant extracts from various books have also been given. These include *The Earthen Drum* by Pupul Jayakar; *The Making of New Indian Art* by Tapati Guha-Thakurta; *Marco Polo: the Traveller* by Roland Latham; *Threads and Voices* by Judy Frater; and *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* by Louis Fischer.

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