

Handicrafts:

In Pakistan, handicrafts are rich and diverse. Every city/village has its own handicrafts specialty ranging from fabric, material, embroidery, to jewellery, carving, mirror work and other handicraft items. Each color, style, design and motif carries with it a unique symbol portraying the culture of that particular area and builds on people's indigenous skills.

Handicrafts are characterized as products depicting a cultural trait of a specific region/time, produced by hand. It can also be defined as *The product made with or without the use of tool, simple implements or implements operated directly by the craftsman, by hand or foot, having traditional or artistic features driven from the geographical cultural peculiarities of craftsman, and generally on a small or cottage industry and not on mass production basis.*

Handicrafts of Pakistan are famous for their uniqueness, assortment and quality standards and therefore have established a mark within and outside the country. In more recent history, crafts in Pakistan were influenced by the arrival of Islam. They accentuate designs and styles dating from 5000 B.C. There are about eighty different kinds of handicrafts produced in Pakistan, the main ones are: leather goods, brass, copperware and table ware, onyx and marble products, wood crafts, textile and block printing fabrics, embroideries, glass beads, traditional and contemporary jewellery, camel and snake skin products, pottery, hand knotted carpets and rugs, shell and bone products, costume dolls, etc. (Refer to annex C)

However, with the passage of time the quality of craftsmanship has been diminishing. The value chain has been infringed and the traditional sense of handicrafts has disappeared. This sector is in dire need of development and promotion in order to revive the culture and art of the Pakistani heritage. Especially as the promotion of handicrafts addresses several needs of the society: to preserve culture, act as a source of income, upgrade the social status of women and help eliminate child labor by the participation of women in the different productive sectors.

Pakistan exported about USD 14m of handicrafts in 2001-2002. An estimate of about USD 20m has been placed for the year 2002-2003. However Pakistan as compared to India lags behinds in the handicrafts industry. In India, the total value of goods produced in the handicrafts sector is about USD 58m. Such figures are hard to calculate for the Pakistani handicrafts.

In India, Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) has been established as a non-profit earning organization. It is an apex body of the Government for promotion of exports of Handicrafts from the country and projects India's image abroad as a reliable supplier of high quality of handicraft goods & services and ensures various measures keeping in view international standards and specifications. The Council has created necessary infrastructure as well as marketing and information facilities, which are availed both by the member exporters and importers. In Pakistan there is no such council or organization that looks after the affairs of the handicrafts development. This is one such example that Pakistan may follow in order to develop and promote its handicrafts.

Provincial Overview

Balochistan, NWFP, Punjab, Sindh and Azad Jammu and Kashmir have their own unique specialties in handicrafts and are famous for different crafts. The following is a brief overview of the provinces where the major handicrafts are practiced along with an overview of the handicrafts conditions for women in their respective areas.

Balochistan

Balochistan, is a terrain of rugged valleys, saline lakes and vast desert wasteland. It is blessed with mineral resources, mainly in iron, coal, and oil and gas explorations. The country's largest natural gas reservoir is located at Sui, discovered in 1952.

Balochistan is famous for its fruits. Many varieties of fresh and dry fruits are grown in Quetta and its surrounding areas.

Handicrafts of beautiful and intricate craftsmanship are produced in Balochistan; the most typical of the region are mirror work, embroidery, fine quality precious stones and marble work. The crafts of Balochistan are of good quality but are gradually dying due to the following drawbacks for women:

- Tribal system creates hindrance for women to develop their skills and seek opportunities available for their development,
- Lack of proper education,
- Unawareness of quality control,
- Lack of basic infrastructure in remote areas,
- Lack of working capital,
- Lack of design advisory service center,
- High production costs, as time consuming items are produced which are not feasible commercially,
- Lack of skill development and non-alignment of products with the latest trends, and
- Lack of government policies to provide a window of opportunity for the crafts to develop.

NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

NWFP stretches from the Himalayas in the north to the deserts in the south where it is bordered by the Balochistan and Punjab provinces. The historic Khyber Pass is accessed via Afghanistan through the mountains of the Sulaiman Range. The region of NWFP has distinctive features which make the area a "Tourist's Heaven".

NWFP has large potential for hydroelectric power generation as it has many rivers and streams. The province is also rich in mineral resources. These include Emerald, Barites, China Clay, Chromite, Clay Shale, Coal, Dolomite, Feldspar, Gypsum, Limestone, Marble, Magnesite, Phosphate, Silica Sand, Soap Stone, and Slate Stone.

In NWFP due to the availability of raw materials the crafts of leather, wood and metal as well as wax painting and printing have been highly developed. However, the development of crafts has been affected by a number of factors especially for women:

- Lack of credit lending support and subsidized mark-up rates from DFIs,
- Stiff competition from mass-produced goods,
- Lack of information on crafts and statistics are not available on the quantity of handicrafts produced and the number of persons involved,
- Lack of tax relief for retailers,
- Lack of marketing and product designing. Few women are imparted with training, and
- Lack of government support in promotion of handicrafts for local sales and exports.

SINDH

Sindh, a terrain stretching from the coastline of the Arabian Sea to the great Thar and Kohistan desert and small and fertile belts along the River Indus. Karachi, the only port city of Pakistan, serves as a gateway to Pakistan. Almost all-external trade is facilitated through the two major operating ports viz Karachi Port and Port Qasim. It is the largest city of Pakistan with a population of 11.5 million. It has emerged as the industrial, financial and commercial hub of the country.

Nature has blessed Sindh Province with ideal climate suitable for growing a wide range of crops, fruits and abundant supplies of seafood, minerals and manpower resources.

Sindh is a region, which has been and still is very rich in handicrafts. The textiles are very famous especially block printing and tie-and-dye. It also enjoys a reputation for reputation for textiles, pottery, clay, curved furniture, leatherwork and carpets. The craftsmanship of the people of Sindh began during the period of Moenjodaro civilization and has won praise overseas.

However, there is severe shortage of craftswomen in the development of this sector:

- Not aligned with the changing trend of the global markets,
- Lack in planning and management, and
- Women in rural areas are hardly involved in this sector, therefore their skills are fading away.

PUNJAB

Punjab is the most populous province of Pakistan. It contains several major cities of the country: Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan and Gujranwala. It is the land of 5-rivers and once known as the granary of east and is the lifeline of Pakistan. All the major rivers of

the country namely: Indus, Jhelum, Chanab, Ravi, & Sutlaj flow through this province. They originate from the Himalayas and pass from northwest to southwest.

The province is playing a leading role in agricultural production, although industry makes a substantial contribution. Punjab has also more than 48 thousand industrial units. The small and cottage industries are in abundance. There are 39,033 small and cottage industrial units.

The crafts in the Punjab are of two types: the crafts produced in the rural areas and the royal crafts, which flourished in the urban centers particularly in Lahore. The former include cotton textiles, basketry, embroidery etc. while the latter are tile and woodwork skills, ivory, silver and gold work, naqqashi and architectural crafts.

Problems that are infringing the development of handicrafts for women in Punjab are:

- Lack of marketing facilities and government support in articulating the handicrafts work being carried out on different levels,
- Lack of adapting products with the changing lifestyles,
- Lack of awareness of facilities available,
- Lack of credit and soft loan facilities, and
- Lack of appropriate facilities for skill development and training.

AZAD JAMMU & KASHMIR

Azad Kashmir is mainly a hilly and mountainous area. It is bounded in the north by Northern areas, in the east by Indian occupied state of Jammu and Kashmir, in the south by Punjab and in west by NWFP. Its total area is 13,297 sq.km.

Azad Kashmir is very famous for its handicrafts especially in the carpet weaving, basketry, candles, walnut furniture, embroidery, papier mache sectors produced in Muzafarabad and Rawal kot. To make significant contribution to the socio-economic development of the women the following concerns need to be addressed:

- Lack of government institutions,
- Severe shortage of funds and credit facilities/loan schemes provided by the government,
- Lack of technical facilities and latest technology therefore high production costs,
- Lack of marketing facilities, and
- Lack of qualified and skilled workers.