



Empowering Traditional Crafting

Volume I — Heritage, Identity and Material Traditions

Table of Contents

Page	Chapter
I	Volume Abstract <i>The Editorial Team</i>
I	Editorial Note <i>The Editorial Team</i>
Chapters	
1-16	Chapter 1. Contemporary Revitalization of Kalbelia Quilting Traditions: Documenting and Preserving the Craft of Gudri <i>Vishnu Choudhary, Dure Shehwar Mohibi</i>
17-31	Chapter 2. Review on Traditional Indian Garment Construction: It Is All About Details <i>Harshika Chopra, Sonika Soni Khar</i>
32-47	Chapter 3. Sustaining Heritage through Innovation: The Ajrakh Craft in a Changing World <i>Dure Shehwar Mohibi, Anjali Karolia</i>
48-60	Chapter 4. Parivartan: Crafting Tassels to Re-invent Garment Making <i>Sonika Soni Khar</i>
61-72	Chapter 5. Crafting Stories of Tradition and Culture in India: A Case Study on Chhau Masks <i>Shubranil Kundu, Pranita Ranade, Indresh Kumar Verma</i>





Page	Chapter
73-86	Chapter 6. Lippan Kaam in Transition: Documenting, Preserving, and Innovating the Mud Mirror Craft of Kutch <i>Sonu Chauhan</i>
87-93	Chapter 7. Livelihood Through Farming in Nagaland <i>Lamminlen Apollo Khongsai</i>
94-105	Chapter 8. Harmony in the Hands: The Role of Flow as a Creative Force in Craft <i>Subarna Ghosh, Kiran Singh, Sanghamitra Gautam</i>
106-118	Chapter 9. Documentation and Preservation of the Parsi Topi (Vaatko): A Study in Cultural Continuity and Craft Sustainability <i>Kanika Choudhary, Anjali Karolia</i>





Abstract

This Volume gathers nine chapters that document, in different registers, the living material culture of India's craft communities. The volume opens in the Thar Desert with the quilted gudris of the Kalbelia, a community whose association with snake-charming has long overshadowed a parallel tradition of pieced and embroidered textile, and closes in a university conservation studio with the careful stabilisation of a single Parsi ceremonial cap, the Vaatko — a deliberate span, from the open field to the museum bench, that frames the volume's central concern: how craft knowledge is documented, and by whom, before it is lost. Between these two poles sit case studies of considerable range. A review of traditional Indian garment construction recovers a shared technical vocabulary — gusset, gore, godet, sinjaf, magari — that underlies pattern-making traditions across the subcontinent, largely undocumented in design curricula. The resist-dyed geometry of Ajrakh block printing in Kutch is traced from its Sindhi origins through post-earthquake revival to contemporary collaborations that test how far a centuries-old craft grammar can be extended without breaking. A practice-based study in Delhi turns pre-consumer textile waste into tasselled, unstitched garment forms, arguing that upcycling can be a method of construction in its own right rather than a compromise. The ritual masks of Chhau dance are documented stage by stage in a single Purulia workshop, alongside the economic precarity of the handful of families who still make them. In Kutch, the mud-and-mirror relief work known as Lippan Kaam is traced from bhunga wall to gallery panel, its motifs catalogued for what may be the first time in one place. A study from Nagaland turns to agricultural rather than decorative craft, examining jhum, terrace, and horticultural livelihood as their own form of inherited technical knowledge. A more theoretical chapter considers flow — the psychological state of absorbed attention — as the common thread linking Kalamkari, Kantha, and batik practice across otherwise unconnected regions and materials. Read together, these chapters resist a single tidy conclusion, and are the better for it. What recurs, rather than what is concluded, is a set of pressures common to almost every community discussed: the thinning of intergenerational transmission as younger practitioners move toward more reliably paid work; the difficulty of translating deep technical skill into a fair market price; and the sheer fragility of craft knowledge that has never been written down, sketched, or photographed before the last practitioner who holds it is no longer available to ask. Documentation, in this volume, is not treated as a neutral academic exercise but as an act with consequences — for who is credited, what is preserved, and what, if anything, survives the next generation.





Editorial Note

Empowering Traditional Crafting brings together contributions from researchers, design practitioners, conservators, and postgraduate scholars working across India's craft landscape, from Rajasthan's desert communities to the hill workshops of Himachal Pradesh, the mask-makers of West Bengal, and the printing houses of Kutch. The chapters arrive from different disciplines and different traditions of scholarly writing — ethnography, museum conservation, textile history, design research, human resource studies, and policy analysis among them — and this diversity is, in the editors' view, a strength rather than an inconvenience: it is precisely because craft sits at the intersection of culture, economy, material science, and design that no single disciplinary lens could have done the subject justice.

Traditional craft, considered as an object of study, resists easy categorisation. A block-printed textile or a hand-built mask is, at once, a material system governed by measurable physical and chemical parameters — fibre structure, dye chemistry, thermal and mechanical property, the physics of pattern and repeat — and a repository of tacit, embodied knowledge transmitted through observation and practice rather than formal instruction, in the manner long described in the cognitive science of skill acquisition. It is simultaneously an economic unit embedded in specific labour, market, and livelihood structures, and a carrier of symbolic and cultural meaning that shapes identity, gender relation, and community cohesion. A rigorous account of any single craft therefore properly draws on materials science and conservation method to characterise what a craft object is made of and how it behaves over time; on ethnographic and psychological method to understand how skill and meaning are transmitted between practitioners and generations; and on economic and policy analysis to understand the conditions under which a craft practice persists, adapts, or disappears. The chapters collected here take up this challenge from various points of entry, and are best read as complementary partial accounts of a single, multidimensional phenomenon rather than as competing explanations of it.

The editors are grateful to every contributing author for their patience through this standardisation process, and, above all, to the artisans, craftspeople, and communities whose knowledge and labour are the actual subject of this book — most of whom will never read it, but all of whom it is written, in the end, to serve.

Dr. Pushan Kumar Dutta

Dr. Meeta Siddhu

Dr. Rajni Yadav

Dr. Anuj Kumar

