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BRIDGING INDIAN EDUCATIONAL WISDOM AND MODERN POLICY: REVITALIZING CLOTHING CRAFTS FOR VIKSIT BHARAT 2047

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ABSTRACT

India's textile and clothing crafts are a living embodiment of cultural heritage, of technical knowhow and of livelihoods. The modern economy however demands that our education system also develops creativity, practical ability and entrepreneurial skills. This is a conceptual paper, underpinned by an exploratory survey of 51 undergraduate students, looking at how the traditional Indian way of teaching and the NEP 2020 can be brought together to bring clothing crafts back to life. It looks at apprenticeship, craft based curricula, digital tools and entrepreneurship and identifies the challenges (limited practical exposure, poor interface between institutions and artisans). 76% of the students in the survey would consider a career in craft but only 51% had any understanding of costing and many of them cited lack of tools, lack of workshop space and lack of materials as the primary reason why they wouldn't go into the field. The paper proposes a four pronged approach (heritage, skills, innovation and enterprise) which would allow institutions to preserve the craft knowledge whilst also equipping the students with the skills needed to enter the job market. It is in this spirit that the paper is written with a view to supporting the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems; NEP 2020; textile heritage; clothing crafts; vocational education; skill development; entrepreneurship; Viksit Bharat 2047

1. INTRODUCTION

India has a very rich and varied textile tradition, developed over the years through the use of local materials, local techniques, local designs and the work of local communities. Handloom weaving, block printing, dyeing, embroidery and garment making have all been vital in maintaining both the traditions of clothing and the livelihoods of the communities that produce them (Liebl & Roy, 2003). The craft of Phulkari, Bandhani, Ajrakh, Kalamkari and Pashmina are all examples of the accumulated knowledge, design sensibility and cultural meaning that can be found in traditional crafts and all fall within the UNESCO (2003) definition of intangible cultural heritage.

Traditional learning in India took a number of forms: teacher led study, family transmission and apprenticeship. The Gurukul system is the one most often associated with the close teacher/learner relationship (Scharfe, 2002), though textile skills were also passed on through the family, the workshop and the community.

Modern formal education has certainly opened the door to literacy and to a range of professional qualifications. Vocational and craft learning have not always been in the same position however and there has long been a gap between the knowledge acquired in the classroom and the actual practical skills required. Crafts in particular are also being impacted by shifting consumer tastes, the low returns that artisans can expect and the difficulty of accessing markets. (Liebl & Roy, 2003)

The NEP 2020 provides a pertinent framework in that it places a strong emphasis on vocational exposure, experiential learning, multidisciplinary learning and Indian Knowledge Systems (Ministry of Education, 2020).

This paper looks at how the old wisdom of education can be brought into line with NEP 2020 to rejuvenate the craft of clothing and in so doing contribute to Viksit Bharat 2047 (the vision of a developed India by the time of the nation's centenary) (PMO, 2023). Objectives and methodology are in Sections 4 and 10. The background, survey results, challenges, framework and recommendations are in Sections 11 to 12. Relevance and conclusion are in Sections 11 and 12.

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2. OBJECTIVES

1. To look at the relevance of the traditional Indian mode of learning to craft based clothing education.
2. To look at the opportunities presented by the NEP 2020 for vocational, experiential and multidisciplinary textile education.
3. To identify the problems in terms of transmitting and reviving the traditional clothing crafts, via an exploratory student survey.
4. To put forward practical measures which link heritage, skills, innovation and entrepreneurship with Viksit Bharat 2047.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is essentially a conceptual and descriptive paper, drawing on secondary sources: the NEP 2020, official and institutional material on Indian textile and craft traditions and a selection of relevant and reliable academic literature. The selection of literature has been driven by relevance rather than by any systematic review. To anchor the discussion we have used the responses of 51 first, second and third year undergraduate fashion designing students from one college in Punjab (a convenience sample) to an anonymous, voluntary 14-item online questionnaire (7 of the items were on a 5 point agreement scale). The results are purely descriptive in terms of percentages and are indicative only given the small, single institution sample. The institutional examples are also illustrative.

4. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND: TRADITIONAL LEARNING AND CLOTHING CRAFTS

4.1 Practice-based learning and apprenticeship

Craft learning is much more than theory. The learner has to get their hands on the materials, get their hands on the tools, learn the sequence, the proportion, the quality and the hand-eye co-ordination. Situated learning theory is all about how novices acquire that level of competence through their gradual participation in the skilled work (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Anthropological research has also shown that craft knowledge is embodied (Marchand, 2010). All of this underpins the value of demonstration, observation, repetition of practice and correction in vocational education.

The Gurukul system should not be seen as the only historical source of textile training. Knowledge has also been passed down through artisan homes, via community networks and through craft lineages. In Kashmir for example, the transmission of handicraft skills has for a long time been through the family and through the system of apprenticeship. (Wani et al., 2024)

4.2 Indigenous textile knowledge

Indian textile practices provide a wealth of material for the study of fibre, yarn, fabric construction, colour, motifs and regional identity. The phulkari of Punjab provides a good example of the study of embroidery through the stitches, the patterns and the way it is used today. Bandhani, Ajrakh and Kalamkari are all excellent examples of resist dyeing, printing and dyeing respectively. Handloom weaving provides a good example of the way in which the structure of the yarn and the operation of the loom can determine the quality of the fabric.

4.3 Heritage as a resource for contemporary design

Preservation doesn't necessitate that the crafts remain exactly as they were. The craft can be adapted to clothing, accessories and home textiles etc. The key is that the collaboration respects the provenance of the design, recognises the contribution of the artisan and doesn't make false claims of authenticity.

5. NEP 2020 AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CRAFT-BASED EDUCATION

NEP 2020 promotes holistic and multidisciplinary learning, vocational education, experiential learning and Indian Knowledge Systems. It envisages vocational exposure in school with engagement with local vocational experts and a bagless period in Grades 6 to 8 (Ministry of Education, 2020). Implementation will be contingent upon institutional capacity, resources, state arrangements and curriculum planning and the provisions do not in any way require every institution to offer the same craft subject.

For fashion and textile education there are four options: craft modules in addition to the theory; cross disciplinary working; internships and artisan workshops to give students real experience; and student projects which involve the use of traditional techniques in conjunction with product development, costing and marketing.

At degree level craft can be embedded via electives, short courses, studio projects, exhibitions and internships.

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6. EXPLORATORY SURVEY FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the responses of 51 students (17 first years, 12 second years, 22 third years). The vast majority (92%) had done at least some craft in the course by way of hands-on practice and 63% had learned from a practising artisan. 37% of the students reported under 2 hours of craft practice per week in the course.

Table 1. Survey agreement by year of study (%)

Statement (% agreeing or strongly agreeing)	All (n=51)	Year 1 (n=17)	Year 2 (n=12)	Year 3 (n=22)
Course gives enough practical craft practice	65	53	92	59
Confident practising a craft technique alone	71	71	67	73
Understand how to cost a craft product	51	35	58	59
Craft work can provide a stable income	71	76	75	64
Would consider a craft career or business	76	82	83	68
Learning from artisans would improve my skills	73	82	83	59

Interest was very high: 76% would consider a craft career or business and 73% thought that learning from artisans would improve their skills. Only 51% knew how to cost a craft product (35% of first years). 65% felt their course provided sufficient practice, this dropped to 59% in the third year. The main barriers were lack of tools, workshop space or materials (45%), lack of income (39%) and lack of training (37%). The most requested forms of support were internships with artisans (45%), craft based projects (45%) and digital skills training (45%). (These are shares of respondents; no selection was capped at two.)

The findings are purely indicative. The sample is small, drawn from a single college and not evenly spread across years and the five respondents all gave the same answers to all seven statements. They do suggest that interest is not the primary constraint. The main constraints appear to be costing skills, tools and workshop access and artisan links.

7. CHALLENGES IN REVITALIZING ART AND CRAFT

Five issues need addressing; the survey (Section 6) and the study of Kashmir's handicrafts (Wani et al., 2024) both identify the same constraints.

7.1 Limited practical exposure

Classroom teaching may be very much focused on the written content and not on the workshop at all. Craft skills require time, tools, materials, expert instruction and a lot of practice. 37% of the students in the survey said they were practicing for under two hours a week.

7.2 Income and status concerns

Young people may find craft occupations unappealing in the face of an uncertain income. 76% of the students in the survey would go into a craft occupation but 39% felt that the uncertainty of income was the main reason against it. Education needs to link traditional skills with design careers, product development and entrepreneurship.

7.3 Weak institutional–artisan partnerships

Collaboration is frequently ad hoc in the absence of budgets, agreements, workshop space or arrangements for remuneration of the artisans (who should be recognised as knowledge holders and appropriately paid). Internships with artisans were one of the most frequently requested forms of support.

7.4 Market access and fair returns

Producers are up against competition, variable demand, imitation and the difficulty of getting your product to the consumer (Liebl & Roy, 2003). Just 51% of the students in the survey understood the concept of costing so training should cover costing, quality control, storytelling, customer research, IP and responsible marketing.

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7.5 Technology and continuity

Digital tools can in fact go some way to extending access to craft knowledge but they can't replace the value of the tactile experience. The documentation of craft should be seen as a means of complementing the hands on experience rather than as a replacement for it.

8. INTEGRATING HERITAGE, SKILLS, AND INNOVATION

The proposed framework is built on four interlocking pillars (see Figure 1): heritage provides the knowledge base; the hands on skills are developed through apprenticeship and craft based curricula; innovation is about the application of technology and design; and enterprise is about connecting the learning to livelihoods. Sustainability is embedded in all four.



Figure 1. Proposed four pillar framework for craft based fashion and textile education.

8.1 Reviving apprenticeship and mentorship

Schools and colleges can establish formal links with local artisans, craft co-ops, designers and textile businesses, with clearly defined learning outcomes, scheduled practice time, appropriate safety arrangements and appropriate payment to the tutors.

8.2 Introducing craft-based curriculum

At school level you can use the activities to introduce local craft histories, local materials and simple making techniques. At secondary level you can go on to look at textile processes, design development and repair. At HE level you can have modules in craft documentation, textile conservation, sustainable fashion and enterprise management.

8.3 Using technology thoughtfully

Digital platforms can record techniques, provide access to a wider range of learning resources and connect artisans with both learners and customers. AI can assist with the ideation process but again will require human judgement and respect for cultural ownership. VR in no way replaces the tangible experience of working with fabric, tools and dyes.

8.4 Supporting entrepreneurship

Craft incubation can be of huge benefit to students and artisans in terms of product development, testing demand, working out costs and exploring sales channels. It can also be a platform for providing clear product descriptions, fair payment and proper attribution to the communities who are at the heart of the traditional craft.

8.5 Connecting craft revival with sustainability

Repair, reuse, alteration and durable design are all part of craft education. Traditional techniques may well extend the life of a product in certain circumstances but sustainability is a matter of the whole lifecycle from fibre to disposal (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Students need to be able to assess the sustainability claims rather than just assume that a handmade product is in itself sustainable.

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9. ILLUSTRATIVE INSTITUTIONAL MODELS

Craft education and craft-based livelihood initiatives are examples of how heritage and contemporary design can be linked. Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya is involved in artisan led design education (Kala Raksha, n.d.); the National Institute of Fashion Technology has worked with Indian crafts through education, research and documentation (National Institute of Fashion Technology, n.d.); and the Self Employed Women's Association has a range of capacity building and livelihood initiatives for women workers including those in the craft sector (Self Employed Women's Association, n.d.). These are just a few examples and are not in any way a comparative assessment. The scope of each of these initiatives would need to be confirmed via current official documentation.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLICYMAKERS

The following measures can strengthen craft-based education:

1. Integrate craft learning: incorporate practical textile and clothing work into appropriate courses in line with the NEP 2020.
2. Build artisan partnerships: develop ongoing relationships with practitioners, paying them fairly and giving them due recognition.
3. Create regional craft projects: get the students to record local techniques, motifs and the way of life.
4. Link skills to employment: teach costing, quality control, entrepreneurship and digital marketing as well as the practical elements.
5. Support responsible innovation: promote adaptation that recognises the cultural origins and the contribution of the artisans.
6. Improve access to resources: provide the tools, materials, workshop space and funding.
7. Evaluate the learning outcomes: assess the practical competence and quality of the product, not just attendance.
8. Promote inclusion: value the women artisans, the rural practitioners and the other communities that are not quite so well known.
9. Encourage sustainable practice: repair, reuse and waste conscious design.
10. Strengthen the evidence: look at the impact of craft-based education on skills, careers, cultural knowledge and livelihoods.

11. RELEVANCE TO VIKSIT BHARAT 2047

Viksit Bharat 2047 aims to make India a developed nation by its centenary of independence (Prime Minister’s Office, 2023). CraIn Punjab the study and contemporary practice of Phulkari can be a vehicle for linking local identity with design education and design entrepreneurship. The objective is not to go in for some kind of romanticisation of the past but to bring the knowledge that's been passed down to the present in a way that is sustainable, with fair working conditions, appropriate technology and market relevance.ect local identityTraditional Indian textile and clothing crafts are a repository of cultural knowledge, creativity and practical know how. Their survival depends on both preservation and on the creation of opportunities for learning, innovation, decent livelihoods and involvement of the younger generation. Institutions can put NEP 2020 into practice by working with artisans, developing craft based projects, using digital tools appropriately and linking learning to entrepreneurship.n The survey has shown that students are keen on craft careers but are missing out on the essential costing skills as well as access to tools, workshop space and actual artisans. There needs to be some co-ordinated action from institutions, the government, craft organisations and industry to address this.teBridging traditional knowledge with modern policy doesn't mean going back to the past at all. It means adapting India's craft knowledge to the present day. The framework should be tested through larger multi-institutional surveys, interviews with artisans and evaluation of pilot projects.returning to the past; it means adapting India’s craft knowledge to contemporary needs. Larger multi-institution surveys, artisan interviews, and evaluation of pilot programmes should test the proposed framework.

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