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Craft Centric Learning: A Model Approach to Integrate IKS for Skill-Based Learning

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark reform in India's education system, aimed at making education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and aligned with the needs of the 21st century. NEP also emphasizes the revival of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) by integrating it into the curriculum from early schooling to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), with a focus on skill-based learning. Presently, the revival of IKS system emphasises on imparting linguistic and textual studies with its core objective of disseminating indigenous knowledge. However, IKS encompasses a much broader range of disciplines such as traditional arts and crafts, that have many practical applications and that contributes significantly to holistic learning, skill development and equips students with entrepreneurial and vocational skills. However, there's a risk that craft-based learning could become tokenistic if not properly embedded into the curriculum. While reviving traditional knowledge, there should also be a focus on how these skills and crafts are adapted and innovated for modern markets and not be



limited to extracurricular activities To understand and bridge gaps in reviving arts and crafts through lens of NEP 2020 and IKS, this study inquires into the design pedagogy of institution across India, with a special emphasis on craft centric teaching-learning methods for imparting traditional knowledge system for skill enhancement. The research culminates with recommendations that align with 2014's "Make in India" and 2024's "Design in India, design for world" initiatives for future preservation of arts and crafts.

Keywords: Make in India, sustainable crafts, Arts and Crafts of India, NEP 2020, IKS.

Introduction:

Chisel is mightier than Pen?

The Indian knowledge system of traditional arts and crafts encompass a rich tapestry of culture and practice. These arts and crafts were primarily used by people living in colonies to make utility items to meet their daily requirements (surbhi kamra, 2022). Primordially, these crafts were passed down through generations in artisan families, communities, or guilds. However, these crafts were later petered out due to colonization, industrialization and the import of cheaper foreign goods. This required a strong revival of traditional knowledge to preserve and promote Indian art and craft. The resurgence of interest in handmade, artisanal products in India was driven by global movements toward sustainability and cultural preservation during the 19th and 20th century.

(Naman Ahuja, 2022) The spirited view of the Arts and crafts movement, nationalist movement, and the quest for national identity led to the setting up of several art schools in the at Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, Jaipur and Lahore to revive the traditional craftsmanship and give back its identity. Primarily these institutes focused on producing designers and artists with an aesthetic approach of learning, whereby students initially learned drawing and only the most proficient was to be admitted to pursue craft knowledge ahead. Later, by the 19th Century, these art schools started to churn out artists trained in European academic tradition, which altered the concept of these art schools to revive Indian traditional knowledge (Naman Ahuja, 2022). These clashes between European art styles and indigenous crafts had a profound impact on Indian society and the traditional crafts. While European fine arts were upheld as the standard



of artistic excellence for the Indian elite which led to the marginalization of traditional indigenous crafts; The increasing demand for indigenous crafts by British industries continued to exploit local craftspeople's, perpetuating their impoverishment. It was not until the 20th century which saw debates around swadeshi movements, rise of Shantiniketan- Sriniketan or developing India's own industries to achieve the goal of preserving traditional arts whilst adopting modernism for a new post-colonial India.

Craft as a school subject faced new challenges as the array of learning objectives kept widening over time and the traditional distinctions between craft and art began to blur (Pöllänen, 2011). Coomaraswamy, E.B Havell, were few of the pioneers that advocated to focus on craft as the basis of education and include in the regular curriculum. It was only in the past few decades, Craftsmanship and formal design education have intertwined to preserve the country's rich tradition of arts and crafts (Hussain, 2024) (Naman Ahuja, 2022). National Institute of Design (NID)- Ahmedabad, established in 1961, and the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), established in 1986, played a crucial role in formalizing design education in the country post-independence. (Hussain, 2024) This was also emphasized with both the NEP of 1986 and 2020 to learn traditional skill as a part of the vocational education to transform our nation into a society of vibrant knowledge. However, the implementation of these policy has been still a huge challenge as the larger population of the students in India still choose the path of general education and a very small proportion chooses Vocational Education and Training (VET) (Ahmed, 2016). One of the reasons is that the proportion of schools offering VET courses are less in comparison to the schools that provide general education. Hence, this paper seeks to address the andragogy (Knowles, 1970) of design schools teaching craft centric learning in India and present way forward to align strategies to promote traditional Indian knowledge efficiently.



Traditional arts & crafts of India and its relevance in present times:

The arts and crafts forms in India have significantly transformed throughout the ages, mirroring the progression of Indian society. From the intricate paintings found on ancient cave walls to the refined artistry displayed on smooth canvas fabrics, Indian arts and crafts have undergone a remarkable evolution. This evolution of Indian Arts and crafts (such as Pattachitra, Kalamkari, Warli painting, Madhubani, Pottery, Metalwork, Wood carving, Textiles, and many more) can be traced through various historical periods, each contributing to its development and enrichment (Deepti Munda, 2024).

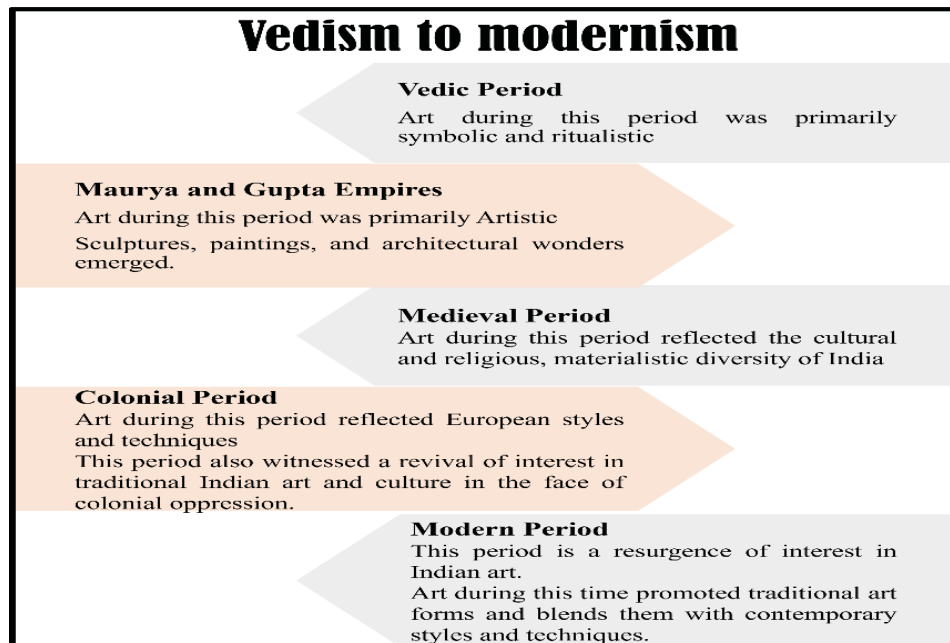
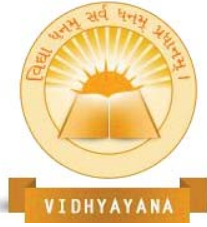


Figure 1: Vedism to Modernism in Art and Crafts of India, Source: Author

In present times, all these arts and crafts hold significant relevance not only as a source of livelihood for artisans but also as a symbol of artistic expressions. However, the current landscape of art and culture has seen a tremendous shift in how it is perceived. The Indian knowledge system of Art & Crafts have redefined their meaning and is no longer confined to decorative displays in museums or tied exclusively to traditional festivities and stories, they have evolved into a form of functional art that enhances everyday life. (Shorn J. Molokwane,



2022) The concept of functional art developed from craft to the field of design in modern period and became a part and parcel of “modern culture”, that address the concept of ‘Good Living’. This concept of ‘Good Living’ where “Aesthetics sense and Utilitarian needs are prime” (Rami Desai, 2019) have attracted many individuals to explore the world of art, giving spike to craft centric learning in India.

Craftsmanship and Design education in India: History

The Foundation Year is the First Year of Higher Education provided to all departments of Design Course for Undergraduate studies. Formal design education started in India around 1961, before that design education programs in India adopted their andragogy as well as their thinking from the Bauhaus and Ulm school traditions. The first few institutes that emerged in India that provided formal design education were NID Ahmedabad (1961), IDC in 1969 which also introduced the first master’s degree program in Industrial design (1980) and Visual design (1984) at IIT Bombay, IIT Guhwati in 1995 introduced the first undergraduate program in design. However, all these institutes had an innate connection with Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulms ideas and philosophy of design education- “Industrial products” (Kuriachan, 2014).

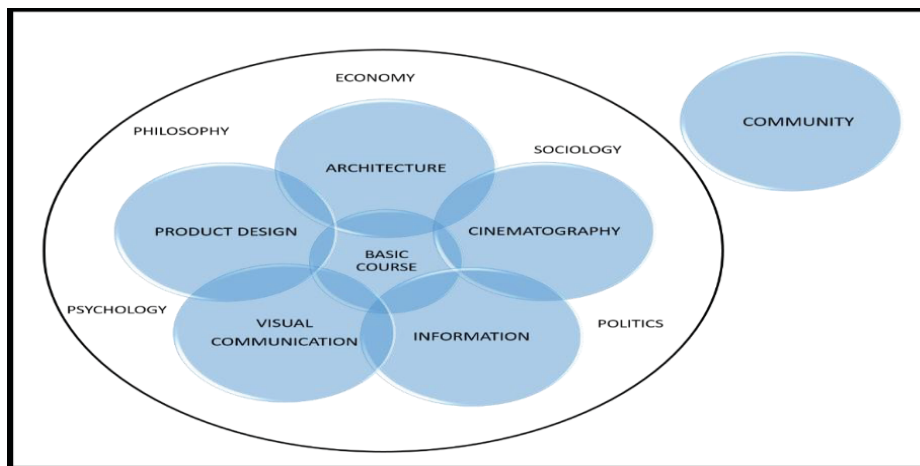


Figure 2: Adaptations from Wikipedia of mutually exclusive Venn diagram of Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulms ideas and philosophy of design education, that excluded the role of community involvement in the design process. Source: Author



In the early days of design education, the knowledge and skills required to be professionally creative concentrated more on physical products and as the Foundation Programme in India continued to be under the influence of Ulm doctrine, the learnings in design across schools resulted in homogenization of art and skill. This Foundation Programme was not changed for a long period of time in spite of substantial changes in the tools and processes of design in the information age. (Kuriachan, 2014) It was only in the last few decades; realisations have occurred and design education has seen the paradigm shift with new models coming forward to steer, explore and transform conventional hypothetical approaches and lead individuals into new paths of inquest (Crawford, 2014).

During the 80's and 90's there have been major changes in the design education scene in the country. With the National Education Policy (NEP) of 1986, a drift towards integrating vocational education in the standard curriculum was seen. This led to the establishment of multiple ITI, Training research centres, diploma courses that trained individuals in indigenous techniques of arts and crafts. These schools focused on promoting vocational skills to develop products using indigenous materials and techniques with a pinch of modernisation.

Craftsmanship and Design education in India: Present

In this era of rapid modernization, many traditional arts and crafts such as Assam's Mirizhim, Andhra Pradesh's Cherial painting, Udaipur's Warak painting, Odisha's Horn craft, and Karnataka's Bidriware and many more are at risk of extinction or already critically endangered. Only a handful of artists or families are remaining, who still practice these crafts with indigenous techniques. To preserve such rich cultural heritage and reinvigorate the communities that uphold-it, it is essential for educational, cultural and governmental institutions to step-in to ensure that these age-old practices not only survive but thrive in the modern world.

Recognizing the value and role of IKS is an important first step in addressing the revival of traditional arts and crafts (Gaotlhobogwe, 2012). Art learning that was previously seen as complementary learning or that was a distraction or entertainment has now received attention by the Government (Wijayanti et al., 2023). NEP 2020, takes a leap in prioritising the Indian



knowledge systems of arts and crafts in the country by addressing, Learner centric education as well as accelerating industry-institute collaboration for revival of IKS.

Presently, many design schools in India have started to incorporate learnings from traditional craftsmanship into their curricula, that blends contemporary design practices with indigenous techniques, however there still lies a lacuna in completely incorporating traditional crafts knowledge into educational curricula. This is because Art learning presently in schools that offer design learning is more focused on studio-based exercises, Action learning programs, or workshop-based teaching-learning methods. These modules are majorly classroom-oriented learnings with occasional or as required by the subject a field interaction is assigned.

Research Hypothesis:

Hypothesis suggest that, to completely integrate a craft centric learning and impart education that not only teaches craft-based learnings, but develops an individual who infuses the learnings into meaningful products and takes the legacy of long forgotten crafts ahead, eventually helping to preserve cultural heritage; early exposure with the communities practicing traditional art is paramount. A study was conducted with participants currently in different years of study, pursuing their bachelor's degree in fields of design ranging from communication design, space design, architecture, textile design and others. A preliminary survey using convenience sampling was conducted amongst 319 students to assess our hypothesis and understand how early exposure to craft-clusters has impacted their design thinking and transformed them as individuals. These results can also be used to further guide the design andragogy to meet the needs of future design education curricula.

Survey question majorly focused on Qualitative implications on designs and personal orientation as a design enthusiast by having early exposure to craft clusters and experiencing first hand interaction with communities practicing traditional art, apart from regular studio-based exercises or classroom-oriented learnings that are necessary for a wholesome development.

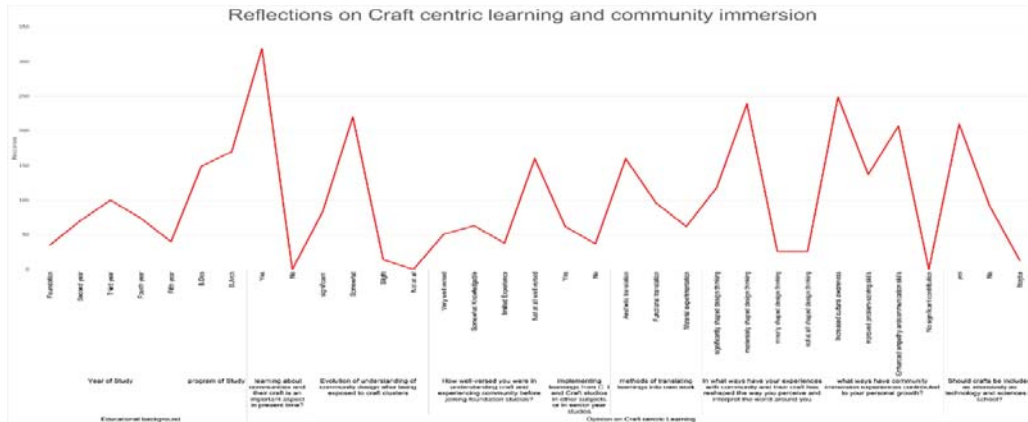


Results and Discussions:

Grassroots change begins with community outreach!!!

In a society that looks forward and emphasizes technical learnings over craft based careers, as per the survey, all of the respondents believed that learning about crafts and communities is equally important as indulging in the technology itself. Craft and communities should not be seen as a separate entity, instead both together paves a way of understanding life in alternate dimensions. Participants believed that indulging in crafts and experiencing community outreach gave them a wider perspective when it came to designing and fostering creative imagination. About 87% of the respondents, from the surveyed cohort, were new at witnessing craft as a community-oriented design process, whereas 17% were well versed with understanding craft and communities altogether. Foundation studies is the primary year into the realm of design education. Here students were exposed to various craft clusters and communities that specialized in embroidery, various weaving techniques, wood work, Lippan work, Koftgari from Kutch, Pethapur, Varanasi, Udaipur, Jaisalmer and many more during community immersion in their foundation year. Experienced or not having any prior experience of witnessing craft and communities, post visiting various craft clusters, a consequential drift in understanding and perceiving traditional craft was observed. While most of the participants (68%) recognized integration of local practice for design development, a smaller section of participants (27%) recognised design as a community centric practice. It also enabled them to strongly empathize with community along with improving communication skills (65.2%), reflecting on complex problem-solving skills (43.5%) and develop strong cultural awareness (78.3%).

Survey results also pointed out that immersing the participants early into communities while their design thinking is still raw, where they experience the fundamental techniques and different craft forms, enabled them to justify their learnings into their own work from an early stage. Participants were able to translate their learnings in forms of functional enhancement, Aesthetic enhancement and Material experimentation in their senior year works.



Learnings from Jaisalmer’s immersion of Wood crafting helped students in making creative blocks during block printing elective, Learnings from Bamboo craft during the Dang immersion were later translated into meaningful products in the bamboo elective, learnings from Tangliya weaving, Durry weaving, Kutch embroidery immersion were later translated into motifs on ceramic and paper.

Examples of translated works from community immersion



Figure 3: Students learning wood block crafting at Jaisalmer



Figure 4: students developing their own blocks during the community immersion



Figure 5: Exhibition setup by students



Figure 6: Students learning bamboo weaving and joineries at Dang, Gujarat



Figure 7: Students developing their own models for their bamboo elective



Figure 8: Final output of the elective.

While these are some of the tangible outcomes of community immersion, there were intangible benefits reflected in the later work of the participants. As per the responses available during the survey, participants experiencing these community settlements also paved their ways of understanding the spatial organization of the living-working hierarchy of spaces.

Conclusion:

In conclusion we can say that, integrating traditional crafts knowledge into the curriculum can offer significant benefits for enhanced skill development. It can foster creativity, hands-on learning, and problem-solving abilities by encouraging students to engage with materials and techniques that have been refined over centuries. This approach helps preserve cultural heritage while simultaneously teaching students valuable craftsmanship skills that can be applied in modern contexts. Community immersion is one such method that broadens the experience and vision of seeing traditional crafts in a rapidly modernizing world. However, if this approach is minimized to reflect upon ideas solely for academic purpose, sooner or later this too can become tokenistic like classroom-oriented study. To truly revive the traditional crafts in totality, design graduates should be further encouraged to opt for alternate ways to bring these arts on global platforms and reach a wider audience.



Recommendations and way forward:

Here are few methods that can be adapted in present time to bring the traditional crafts on a global platform to truly achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat@2047 along with 2014's "Make in India" and 2024's "Design in India, design for world" idea's

Integration into Education Curriculum

1. Introduce Indian crafts as part of the early school curriculum, ensuring that students engage with local crafts, both theoretically and practically.
2. Introduce various satellite programs apart from classroom learning in HEI's that comprehensively train students the craft.

Entrepreneurship and Technological integration

1. Provide seed funding and incubator programs for craft-based start-ups.
2. Promote the blending of traditional craft techniques with modern technologies

Government Support and Funding

1. Individuals are sometimes hesitant to pursue or develop new art as a career due to insufficient economic returns and funding for product development. To counter this, incentives via the public sector or private sector can be provided to maximize innovation and incubation in the field of traditional crafts.
2. Develop future shift labs, tinkering lab in HEI's to support independent development of Arts and crafts.
3. Encourage individuals to file IPR or Patents
4. Encourage the recruitment of skilled artisans as visiting professors in HEI's



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Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare no competing interests related to “*Craft centric learning: A model approach to integrate IKS for skill-based learning.*”

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