



Cultural Exchange and Growth of Kashmir's Craft Industry

For Prelims: [World Craft City](#), [Silk Route](#), [Pashmina shawls](#), [UNESCO Creative City Network](#), [Geographical Indication Tag](#), [Skill India Mission](#)

For Mains: Significance of cultural heritage in International relations, Challenges and opportunities in handicrafts

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

Recently, Artisans from Kashmir and Central Asia reunited after nearly **500 years in Srinagar** for a **three-day craft exchange initiative**, celebrating shared heritage and reviving cultural connections.

- The event celebrated **Srinagar's recognition as a “World Craft City” by the World Crafts Council (WCC).**

How did Central Asia Influence the Development of Crafts in Srinagar?

- **Historical Craft Connections: Zain-ul-Abidin, the 9th Sultan of Kashmir (15th century),** introduced Central Asian craft techniques to Kashmir with the help of artisans from **Samarkand, Bukhara, and Persia.** Post his reign, these connections weakened and **came to an end by 1947.**
 - Located on the historic [Silk Route](#), Srinagar became a **melting pot of cultural, economic, and artistic exchanges.** This cross-cultural interaction played a vital role in the development of Kashmir's distinctive crafts.
- **Craftsmanship Techniques:**
 - **Wood Carving:** Kashmiri artisans, known for their intricate woodwork, adopted techniques from Central Asia.
 - While **Kashmiri woodcarvers used chisels and hammers** for detailed designs, **Iranian woodcarvers typically employed a single chisel** for floral motifs.
 - **Carpet Weaving:** Kashmir's carpet weaving was profoundly shaped by **Persian techniques.**
 - The Persian knotting methods, including the **Farsi baff and Sehna knots**, were incorporated into Kashmiri carpets.
 - Additionally, Kashmir's carpet patterns named after Iranian cities like Kashan and Tabriz highlight the cultural ties, with artisan exchanges further enhancing skills and inspiring craftsmanship.
 - **Embroidery:** Uzbekistan's suzani embroidery was recognized as a precursor to **Kashmir's sozini work.** Similarities were observed in techniques, color palettes, and floral motifs.

What is the World Craft City?

- **About:** The "**World Craft City**" initiative, launched in 2014 by the **World Crafts Council AISBL (WCC-International)** under the **WCC-World Craft City Programme**, recognizes cities for their contributions to cultural, economic, and social development through crafts.
 - The WCC AISBL, established in 1964 as a **non-profit organization**, aims to enhance the status of crafts in cultural and economic life and promote fellowship among crafts persons through support and guidance.
- **Indian Cities: Srinagar (Jammu and Kashmir), Jaipur (Rajasthan), Mamallapuram (Tamil Nadu) and Mysore (Karnataka)** have been recognized as World Craft Cities by WCC.
 - The WCC announced the '**Seal of Authenticity of the Craft**' for Kashmir's handicrafts, certifying **handmade products from J&K**. This initiative aims to provide global recognition and enhance quality in the textile industry.
- **Key Crafts of Srinagar:**
 - **Pashmina Shawls:** Known for their fine quality and intricate handwoven patterns. **Pashmina shawls** originate from Kashmir, where the **Pashmina fabric is hand-spun and hand-woven**.
 - **Mughal Emperor Akbar** promoted the craft by commissioning shawls for the royal family.
 - **Kashmiri Carpets:** Renowned for their rich designs, particularly the traditional Persian-style carpets.
 - The unique **hand-knotted kashmir carpets** use a **coded script called Taleem** for design instructions. These carpets feature traditional oriental and floral motifs and are made from various materials like silk and wool.
 - **Paper Mâché:** It is the art of creating objects from **molded paper pulp**, traditionally painted and lacquered.
 - In Kashmir, it began with pen cases and evolved into a distinct art of surface decoration (**naqashi**).
 - **Embroidered Textiles:** Fine embroidery techniques like Sozni and Aari work, used in garments and accessories.
 - Sozni shawls originate from Kashmir, with "**Sozni**" meaning **needle in Persian**.
 - **Wood Carving:** Intricate designs carved into **walnut wood**, creating beautiful furniture and home décor.
 - **Copperware:** Traditional Kashmiri metal crafts, especially the copper samovars and tea sets. Part of the ancient heritage of Kashmir, with artisans skilled in **metallurgy**.
 - **Khatamband:** It is a handcrafted art of making ceilings by fitting small pieces of walnut or deodar wood into geometric patterns without using nails.

Note

In 2021, Srinagar city was designated a creative city as part of the [UNESCO \(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization\) Creative City Network \(UCCN\)](#) for crafts and folk arts.

- Other Indian cities in the UCCN include **Jaipur** as the 'City of Crafts and Folk Arts' (2015), **Varanasi** as the 'Creative City of Music' (2015), **Chennai** as the 'Creative City of Music' (2017), **Mumbai** as the 'City of Film' (2019), **Hyderabad** as the 'City of Gastronomy' (2019), **Kozhikode** as the 'City of Literature' (2023), and **Gwalior** as the 'City of Music' (2023).

Geographical Indication Tag for Kashmir Crafts

- Kashmir's seven crafts including the **Kashmiri Carpets, pashmina, sozni, kani shawl, walnut wood carving, khatamband, and papier mache**, have earned **Geographical Indication (GI) tags** under the **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999**.
 - A GI tag ensures that only authorized users or those residing in the specific geographical area can use the product name, protecting the authenticity and heritage of the craft.

How Can Artisans Benefit from Cross-Border Cultural Exchanges?

- **Skill Enhancement:** Exposure to different techniques and styles can help artisans refine their **skills and innovate within their craft**, leading to unique and innovative products that stand out in the market.
- **Market Expansion:** Cultural exchanges open up new markets, allowing artisans to showcase their work to a global audience and **increase their customer base**.
 - By participating in international events, artisans can gain insights into global **market trends and adapt their products to meet international demand**. Exposure to international buyers can help them achieve financial sustainability, ensuring the preservation of their craft for future generations.
- **Artisans as Cultural Ambassadors:** Artisans acting as cultural ambassadors. Showcase their crafts internationally fosters global respect and understanding, while promoting mutual appreciation of diverse traditions.
 - These interactions help preserve their crafts and **contribute to global cultural dialogue**, enriching both their artistic practice and economic opportunities.

What are the Challenges Faced by Kashmiri Artisans?

- **Workforce Participation:** Approximately **92% of artisans rely on crafts as their primary source of income**, but the income generated is often insufficient, forcing many to take up secondary livelihood options such as agriculture or daily labor.
- **Gender and Wage Disparities:** While a significant number of female artisans (63%) are engaged in crafts like Sozni, wage disparities between men and women persist.
 - Some crafts, such as Khatamband and wood carving, remain male-dominated.
- **Declining Interest in Craft:** Many artisans are abandoning traditional crafts in favor of more stable employment opportunities.
 - A notable percentage (4%) of artisans have already **shifted to other forms of livelihood**, especially in regions like Dal, where agriculture serves as a secondary income.
 - The **drop in international demand**, coupled with competition from **cheaper alternatives** and **machine-made products**, has placed additional pressure on the sector.
 - Younger generations are often reluctant to continue practicing traditional crafts due to the lack of financial stability, many prefer to pursue careers that offer more economic security and social recognition.
- **Lack of Innovation:** There is a lack for innovation and modernization in the craft sector to keep up with changing market demands.

India's Initiatives to Promote Handicrafts

- [National Handicraft Development Programme](#)
- [Comprehensive Handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme](#)
- [Shilp Didi Mahotsav](#)
- [PM Vishwakarma Scheme](#)
- [Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana](#)
- [One District One Product](#)

Way Forward

- **Government Support:** Promoting GI Tag recognition for crafts like Kashmir carpets and Pashmina shawls has elevated their status.
 - Global promotion through **online platforms** and **trade fairs** can further help artisans access new markets. Improving the supply chain and supporting local cooperatives can also boost the craft sector's profitability.
- **Educational and Training Programs:** Investing in training and skill development for young

generations under the [Skill India Mission](#), artisans can help preserve traditional crafts while incorporating modern techniques to appeal to global markets.

- **Tourism Integration:** Develop **craft tourism circuits** in Kashmir, allowing tourists to visit artisan workshops and purchase products directly.
 - This can boost local economies and provide artisans with a steady income stream.
- **Sustainability Practices:** Encourage the use of **sustainable and eco-friendly materials** in craft production. This can attract environmentally conscious consumers and open up new market segments.

Drishti Mains Question:

What are the challenges faced by the Kashmiri handicraft sector? Suggest measures to make the sector globally competitive.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. With reference to 'Changpa' community of India, consider the following statements: (2014)

1. They live mainly in the State of Uttarakhand.
2. They rear the Pashmina goats that yield a fine wool.
3. They are kept in the category of Scheduled Tribes.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)