



# 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)**