

**Eighth Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay  
Memorial Lecture**

**Towards a Renaissance of India's Crafts**

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**Jaya Jaitly**

**Friday, February 23, 2018**



**CENTRE FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES AND TRAINING  
NEW DELHI**

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## **KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAY**

Known in her student days as the ‘uncrowned queen of India’, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was a rare combination of beauty, intelligence, courage and commitment. In her person, since her early childhood, she assimilated the values imparted by her mother, grandmother, and the English suffragette Margaret Cousins; in short, a generation of women who instilled in her values which guided her life and work for over seven decades. Kamaladevi represented a generation of Indian women who were freedom fighters, in and out of jail, but also those who were responsible for freeing Indian women from the shackles of narrow social and economic boundaries.

In this long journey, Kamaladevi eschewed power, position, explicit political leadership. No public office could attract her, and, instead, it was the mission of alleviating the suffering of the people which was her calling. She was active in the movement of rescuing women soon after Partition. She gave her full energies to the Faridabad refugee camp. Cumulatively, her proximity to Mahatma Gandhi and conscientiousness of the creativity of economic disempowerment gave rise to the Indian cooperative movement. It was this movement, along with her work at the grassroots level and her advocacy, which resulted in the recognition of Indian handlooms and handicrafts. She not only nurtured craftspeople but also gave dignity and value to their products. All this and more has brought about a sea-change in the tastes of the modern generation. Today, the handicrafts sector is recognized both for its vibrancy and its market value in India and abroad. The institutions of the All India Handicrafts Board and the All India Handloom Board came into existence as a result of her active advocacy.

For Kamaladevi, life was an integrated whole – the hand, the heart and the mind, and an unflinching commitment went together. As a young girl, she had defied convention to be a theatre artist. The arts were her love and passion, be it music, dance, theatre or the crafts. There was not an occasion when

she did not discover a remote tradition of handloom or craft, or an obscure theatre form, to nurture it, to promote it and to present it.

And yet, there was a last mission to be fulfilled, to integrate the rich diverse and living traditions of our cultural heritage with the formal systems of education. It was her firm belief that unless there was equity between the creativity of the hand, the intellectual critical discriminating mind and the pulsating heart, a total human being would not be possible. It was this vision and conviction which motivated the Government to establish the institution of the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT).

*Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan*

# KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAY

## Personal Details

1903 April, 3

Born at Mangalore, Karnataka

1988 October, 29

Died at Mumbai, Maharashtra

## Major Publications

*The Awakening of Indian Women.* Madras: Everyman's Press, 1939.

*Towards a National Theatre.* Aundh Pub. Trust, 1945.

*Socialism and Society.* Bombay: Chetana, 1950.

*Indian Handicrafts.* New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1963.

*Carpets and Floor Coverings of India.* Bombay: Taraporevala, 1969.

*The Glory of Indian Handicrafts.* New Delhi: India Book Co., 1976.

*Indian Carpets and Floor Coverings.* New Delhi: All India Handicrafts Board, 1974.

*Handicrafts of India.* New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1975.

*Tribalism in India.* Leiden: Brill, 1978.

*Indian Embroidery.* New Delhi: Wiley Eastern, 1977.

*The Glory of Indian Handicrafts.* New Delhi: Indian Book Co., 1978.

*Indian Women's Battle for Freedom.* New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1983.

*Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces: Memoirs.* New Delhi: Navrang, 1986.

## **Major Awards and Recognitions**

1955, the Padma Bhushan of the Government of India.

1966, the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership.

1974, the lifetime achievement award of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the Ratna Sadasya.

1977, the UNESCO Award for promotion of handicrafts.

1987, the Padma Vibhushan of the Government of India.

## JAYA JAITLEY



Jaya Jaitley studied in Japan, Burma, Belgium, UK, and graduated from Smith College, USA in 1963.

She has an intimate knowledge of the craft traditions of the country having worked in the field for over 40 years. She is considered a leader and expert in this field.

In 1986 she founded an association of crafts people called the Dastkari Haat Samiti, which enables traditional workers to gain confidence in the marketplace through many innovative strategies. She regularly guides crafts people in design, organization and marketing all over India and organizes major exhibitions promoting India's arts, crafts and culture in India and abroad in which craftspeople are an intrinsic part.

She is the creator of the concept of Dilli Haat, a crafts marketplace, and saw to its establishment in Delhi. It enables thousands of artisans to sustain their livelihoods and preserve their cultural heritage.

It now serves as a model for other such establishments.

Her ongoing work in bringing together crafts people of India and Pakistan, Vietnam, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Iran, Egypt, apart from South Asian and African countries has been taken up by the government as an instrument in diplomacy to bring together crafts practitioners in many countries to share skills and assist in capacity building.

She is a prolific writer and has published books on the *Crafts of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh*, the *Craft Traditions of India*, *Viswakarma's Children*, a socio-economic study of crafts people, and *Crafting Nature*. She has created a vast documentation of the arts, crafts and textiles of India through

24 highly artistic and unique maps of all the states of India, called *Crafts Atlas of India*. She has written stories on crafts children that were first published by Penguin and now widely distributed in many regional languages through the well-known NGO Pratham. She has assisted in creating a syllabus for schools of India's craft heritage for NCERT. Her recent publication *Crafting Indian Scripts*, is based on a major project called Akshara combining literacy, craft and calligraphy. The exhibition created and curated by her on this subject has been shown in Delhi, Cairo, and the Unesco headquarters in September 2013.

*A Podium on the Pavement* is a selection of her writings on a variety of subjects including politics, foreign affairs, women and social issues. She regularly contributes articles to mainstream newspapers and journals.

She was in mainstream politics for nearly 30 years and headed the Samata Party, first as its General Secretary and Spokesperson, and then its National President from 2000 - 2001. She now restricts her public work to the craft sector and writing, although she is still active on many political issues, including women's empowerment, democracy and human rights. She often appears on television debates and discussions as a political and social analyst.

She was the editor and Publisher of *The OtherSide*, a political monthly journal of democratic socialist thought and action from 2006 to 2015. She serves on Advisory bodies related to Crafts and Livelihoods, Social Science studies, and other public causes.

She has been deeply involved in heritage and livelihood issues at all levels and has received awards for her work in culture and the arts and as a role model for women leaders.



## JAYA JAITLY

### **Personal details :**

June 14, 1942 Born at Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

### **Publications:**

Editor and Publisher, '*The OtherSide*' a monthly journal of socialist thought and action since 2006. It contains archival writings of Gandhi, Lohia and others, editorials on topical issues, articles on the economy, foreign affairs, women, politics human rights and society. Also book reviews. Now only on the Internet at [www.theotherside.org.in](http://www.theotherside.org.in)

### **Published Books:**

*Crafts of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh*: Edited – One of a series of books on the Living Traditions of India, Mapin Publishing India, 1990

*The Craft Traditions of India*: Lustre Press, India, 1991

*Vishvakarma's Children*. Concept Publishing, India, 2001

*A Podium on the Pavement*. UBS Publishers and Distributors, India, 2004.

*Crafting Nature: On natural materials and crafts*. Wisdom Tree publications, India, 2006.

*Biju Spins some Magic* : Puffin ( Penguin ) India 2003.

*My Mother*, Pratham Books, 2012.

*Indian Crafts Atlas*, Niyogi Books, Delhi, 2012

*Crafting Indian Scripts*, Dastkari Haat Samiti, 2012 on crafts, calligraphy and literacy

*The Artistry of Handwork*, Niyogi Books, 2013

*Woven Textiles of Varanasi*, Niyogi Books, 2014

## **Chapters in Books:,**

*Creative Hands* : Insight Guides - South Indian APA Publication, 1991.

*Gujarat* : Insight Guides - South APA Publication, 1989.

*Arts and Crafts of Kashmir and Ladakh* : Insight Guides - Himalayas APA Publications.

*Embroidery in Crafts of Gujarat*, Living Traditions of India series - Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 1985.

*Gandhi & Women – Empowerment of Women: Miles to go* , Ed. SavitaSingh Commemorative volume by Kasturba Gandhi Trust published by Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, 2001.

*Sons of Vishwakarma* : in *Gods Beyond Temples* – edited by Harsha Dehejia – Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2006

*Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay – India’s Iconic Women* – Penguin Publishing

*Memories of Kerala*, Penguin First Proof Series Volume IV

*Creative Ways to Hope*, in *Together We Survive*, published by Public Diplomacy Division, Ministry of External Affairs, 2011.

*Sacred Crafts of India*, *Sacred Arts of India* edited by Sushma Bahl, published by Niyogi Books, 2015

## **Awards and Recognitions**

1999, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi Chamber of Commerce award for Outstanding Contribution to Art and Culture.

2005, Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce Ladies Organisation ( FLO ) for Outstanding leadership qualities and role model in the field of art and culture and social work.

2007, Mahila Ujjaswini award for woman achievers, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

2012, Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce Ladies Organization, ( FLO ) Gujarat, Woman of Excellence Award .

2014, Aruna Asaf Ali Award for lifetime social work, Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh.

2014, Award in recognition of work among the Sikh victims of one-sided attack on them after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984 , New Delhi.

2016, Ustad Bismillah Khan Award for Culture

## **Towards a Renaissance of India's Crafts**

**Jaya Jaitly**

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was an extraordinary woman who lived in extraordinary times and made full use of her innate potential to change and shape events for a better India. It was a new India in the making in the early years after we became an independent country. It was a time the country became ours to mould policies as we wished. During the times of the struggle for freedom, women stood alongside men, fighting in a non-violent manner, going to jail, standing tall, and believing in their potential as equal and free citizens. Once we became free, it was largely the male leadership that decided what form India's development would take. It is this trend and mindset that continues even today, when we see the woefully small numbers of women in the decision-making and legislative processes of this country.

Some women remained undeterred. Kamaldeviji was one of them. She moved away from party politics but chose to continue her passion for identifying and nurturing the cultural expressions of India. The theatre arts, hand crafts, handmade textiles, art forms, alongside with justice and equality in society, development and creativity were all part of an integral whole for her. Creativity for her was freedom – freedom of expression. But what followed over the decades was a compartmentalization of these facets; development meant industrial development, secularism meant forgetting the immense source of India's cultural forms that are rooted in spirituality, myth, legends, history and even the worship of the sacred through work. We opened our doors to mechanized and automated production, silos of specialization, and a preference for the 'organised' as against the unorganized. Kamaladevi ji, and all of us who derive inspiration from her life and thoughts have worked against these false separations, the relegation of India's creative soul to secondary importance.

A book was published recently called *A Passionate Life : Writings by and on Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay* edited by Ellen Carol Dubois and Vinay Lal. I had the good fortune to review it for the *Indian Express*. I found that the eminent feminist writer Gloria Steinem, had met Kamaladevi briefly. Later she wrote of the meeting, “Because of Kamaladevi, I also began to understand the politics of history... we often dismiss 95 per cent of the 100,000 or so years that humans have been around, call that ‘pre-history’ and only begin our study after patriarchy, hierarchy, monotheism, colonialism, racism, caste, class and other relatively new institutions began...”

I would like to share what Kamaladevi ji said about the women of India in her writings published in this book: She wrote, “In those beautiful days of the Vedic period of India, the glory of which still surrounds the country like a faint halo, women took part freely in the social and political life of the country, and, in the celebration of religious and cultural festivals, they had a special place of importance assigned to them.” She quotes the Rig Veda to list examples like Viswavara, Lopamudra, Vak, Maitreyi, Gargi and Tara as great philosophers and intellectuals of their time.

As a staunch nationalist, a progressive, liberal, promoter of India’s creative arts, craft and theatre, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay never pushed the ancient greatness of India aside.

In some months, it will be 30 years since Kamaladevi ji left this world. Just before she passed away she mentioned to me, sadly, that her work lay destroyed around her. I do not believe she was right. A clearer understanding of her, as we come to look inwards at the great hidden potential in our country, will lead us to the renaissance in the field of hand crafts that awaits us. This is her legacy and it has not been destroyed. Put in a different way, in our past lies the pointers to the future of our crafts and the world of crafts practitioners.

The composite and multi-layered culture of India that we often hear in speeches is a living, organic reality that has to be engaged with, understood, stimulated and appreciated at its many levels and its changing contours. Our artists and artisans delve into the wellspring of mythical references, legends, identities, individual and collective histories, religious practices, seasonal celebrations, and even specificities like community perceptions of the sacred meanings of colour and motif. Even the craft-art of tattooing among our tribal communities is a collection of symbolic and auspicious messages that make them more than body decorations of the angst-ridden generations of the West. A multitude of deities lead to one common belief in the oneness of all sentient beings. India's crafts people replicate them in clay, wood, stone, cloth, and even rice husks tied together with thread. They believe their deities bless them and guide their work. All these actions underpin the spiritual and emotional foundations of the creativity of our people. These are their constant references. If they are cut off from these cultural roots, they lose their moorings, and worse still, their sense of identity and the sacredness of their value systems that guide their moral and ethical beliefs.

The most significant and important part of our cultural heritage, particularly in the production of arts and artefacts for ritual, celebration or daily utility, is the fact that all have a purpose, a meaning that validates their existence beyond the personal preference or mere individualistic view. This is what makes India's crafts different. This is where we can offer meaning that takes craft creation to another level, beyond a mere product on a shelf, or a scarf on our shoulders, or a picture hung on a wall. While it may find its place there, it carries with it a meaningful story rooted to a universal thought. On Raksha Bandhan day in Madhya Pradesh a sister ties a rakhi on her brother's wrist and makes a small plaque of a boy and girl, to commemorate the meaning of the ritual. It is not just a whimsical wall decoration. A sculptor or a painter who creates an image of a deity only places the eyes last when the rest of the torso is completed. This is in the belief life is brought through the

eyes from where the deity can enter the complete figure to sanctify it.

What happens when the craftsperson's world view comes in confrontation with the world of industrialization and technology created in alien cultures? Technologies come with an unspoken footnote: "Can be harmful if misused". The scientific discovery of how to shatter an atom brought us nuclear energy that could, in a few seconds, annihilate millions of people, or can provide cheap energy to simultaneously light up millions of homes, if used for peaceful purposes. Similarly, can the rectangular lit up screen we stare at, work on for information, inspiration and communication, help or hinder the meticulous skills honed over generations by our crafts people who are still discovering this new world? Will digitization, electronics and the regimentation of urban demands take away their markets or enable them to look further for inspiration, connect their enterprises to the rest of the world, and take the visibility of India's crafts far wider than before? We conducted a photography workshop with crafts people across many disciplines to learn how to arrange and photograph their products to best highlight their qualities. These would then be 'Whatsapped' to different customers. It is how to find ways of negotiating technology for the benefit of craftspeople that is the exciting part of today and tomorrow.

I would like to share with my audience how we use creativity, for example, among traditional artists, to tackle these very questions. We collaborated, discussed and created three children's stories; one of a tribal boy from the Gond artist community who lived in the forest, brought up in the mythological world of mystical, magical animals, where snakes, tigers, parrots and buffaloes were all friends. Time had a different meaning and, of course, he didn't have a wristwatch. With changing times and repressive forest laws, he found work in a factory at the edge of his forest. However, he always missed the bus because the 'animals' he encountered in the forest gave him a ride on their backs, engaging him in chatter, and delaying him every day. He had no concept of time, work

schedules at the factory and regimentation. The factory owner was a kind man who could never see the animals the young boy gave as the cause of his lateness, because they were only in his vivid imagination. He simply got lost in his timeless, imaginary world that is so typical of Gond art.

In another story, a young married girl comes to the city from Madhubani where she and the other women in her family used to customarily adorn the walls with their art. When she tried painting a blank wall in an unfamiliar city, someone spat against it or stuck an election poster on it without noticing the art. She is despondent till one day, a young 'techie' college boy suggests scanning her paintings and projecting them electronically on large blank wall spaces in the city to entertain and educate people about her art form and skill. Her story is called *Hira Devi paints the town*. The municipal authorities reward them for their artistry and ingenuity.

In the last story, to be very brief, to assuage his ever-expanding appetite, Lord Ganesha adjusts with the modern technological world by ordering his favourite laddoos through an online food ordering app.

In the same line of thought, the well-known writer on mythological subjects, Devdutt Pattanaik, has written a charming children's story titled *An Identity Card for Krishna*. Lord Krishna goes to an airport and is asked for his identity card. His identity for him is his peacock feather headpiece. He knows no other. The story proceeds to explain how every deity has a recognisable symbol of his or her identity. It is both fun and educational. Traditional artists can relate to these stories as they emerge from their villages to fly to other places for marketing opportunities. We are working on creating art works for murals for newly built airports with such stories painted by our traditional artists, bridging the gap between the new and old world and offering travellers a glimpse of India's dynamic contemporary art when created by traditional practitioners and enhanced through digital technology.



There are many opportunities for teachers, contemporary artists, rural development agencies, designers and students to understand both worlds and help craftspeople cross the bridges. This challenge stirs the creative imagination of both and opens up a whole new world of ideas.

I am telling you these stories because I believe a whole world is open to us to enable our traditional artists and illustrators, who know every religious and mythological tale even while they may be uneducated in the urban sense, to open their minds to expanded options, turning a story into something new and recognisable for the youth of today who are growing up only knowing Batman, Spiderman and laser swords. We owe it to our artists and our future generation to find these meeting points. That is why these stories hint at the confrontation and adjustment of traditional worlds with a new technological world. In other words, learning to overcome obstacles and breaking old boundaries in storytelling, which forms the basis of traditional art. It is about an older world meeting and shaking hands with a new one. The moral and ethical values embedded in mythological tales will bring content to a word dealing with a world of technologies that are neither moral nor immoral. Otherwise we may allow cultural disconnects in society to widen.

Another small exercise of mine called *Akshara - Crafting Indian Scripts*, attempts to bring craftspersons in many disciplines to acquaint themselves more closely with their own regional scripts and learning to turn them into calligraphy. The results have helped interest in literacy, turning words into art, find little known cultural stories to express through craft. The resulting exhibition contains 150 museum quality objects, and has been appreciated in Delhi, Mumbai, Cairo, Paris and now in Singapore. Best of all, barely literate crafts people are exploring their own scripts and children from different parts of India enjoy learning to write their names in calligraphic styles.

When we go to fairs and government-organised festivals their beautiful artefacts or the faces of turbaned craftspeople in

their quaint mud huts are romanticized on posters. The real lives are often a different picture, and that is what I have worked hard to change. The instruments to do that have to be constructive, positive, creative and innovative. Lamenting alone will not do. I can say with a fair degree of positivity today, that if we address every advantage we have, and turn the perceived disadvantages for growth into strengths, India will lead the world in what can truly be defined as craftsmanship.

More importantly, the key outcomes will be ecologically sustainable practices and the sustenance of livelihoods for millions who otherwise would go in search of menial work. A third advantage would be the preservation of our cultural heritage which is a rich mixture of tribal, Persian, Hindu, European, Chinese and even African influences if we study the history of trade and commerce across the world over centuries. Last year we explored Persian influences in Indian art and craft forms since Mughal times, shared it with Iranian crafts practitioners and shared experiences and ideas of today with them in a heratening exercise of public diplomacy through cultural exchanges.

### **Ecological advantages**

The world is today becoming increasingly conscious of the serious consequences of disastrous climate changes and the loss of unrenowable natural resources needed to sustain human life in every form. Inextricably linked with this realisation are the limits of wild capitalism, of mega-corporate ways of accessing raw material and cheap labour in developing countries to feed greed rather than need in society. Mahatma Gandhi had warned us of these much earlier. Tourism came to mean destroying both the geographical and local cultural environment, as Pico Iyer in his wonderful book *Video Night in Kathmandu* described. We learned English, and offered 5-star hotels and hamburgers, planted in surroundings that had no cultural affinity. Today, I am happy to find a serious movement towards ‘sustainable’ and ‘responsible’ tourism where awards are given to those offering

our cultural ways of farming, and even simple living practices to open up the real India to travellers. The earlier tourism projects were thought to offer a fillip to crafts as trinkets and souvenirs. Today, Dilli Haat and the Surajkund Crafts Mela among many folk festivals and *melas* across the country draw tourists and incomes because of the crafts and arts.

Kagzipur, near Aurangabad in Maharashtra, continues with its practice of a 700-year old handmade paper making craft. All they need is access to waste materials to process and improvement of quality in their output. Vast areas can come under handmade paper manufacturing processes with very little mechanisation and capital-intensive processes offering women employment. The world awaits ethically produced, recycled materials that help restore rather than ruin forests, and this need not all be made by machines in Sweden when India can offer its recycled options too.

I am often confronted with suggestions by corporate leaders to bring better branding and packaging into the handmade sector. It comes to mind that the old style of using old regional language newspapers and jute string or even cheap cloth bags is cheaper and more ecologically sound if helped to a better level of sophistication through small technological interventions. Thousands of women's Self-Help Groups could benefit if their work in creating packaging material of this nature were formalized. The lifting out of poverty into luxury can start with small steps and become part of a global movement to save the planet and provide livelihoods.

## **Tourism**

When we say local to global, let us make the advantages of the 'global' being brought to the 'local' rather than the other way around. Local would mean the use of local resources, often recycled resources or those that can be regrown. An eminent organisation in the USA called the National Association of Governors which regularly met to share policies and planning

for economic development came to the important conclusion that if the art and culture of a particular area were to be highlighted, it would attract development and visitors, enhancing the earnings of the local people. As did Kamaladevi ji, I am combining craft, art and culture as belonging to an integral part of a larger societal construct that disallows separate compartments which create disconnects and exclusion.

In China the government plants bamboo forests in 8-year cycles for the bamboo industry, farmers in the region grow small clumps of bamboo in their homesteads and link with factory owners to learn how to semi-process them before supplying them the bamboo to be used for machine made floor boards, mats, boxes etc. The link between the farm and factory takes on another dimension. We are extremely thankful that the government, in its budget for 2018 has removed bamboo from the list of forest items to be protected and allowed them to grow freely for the artisans of the entire North-Eastern states of India, apart from enabling it to be used in legitimate construction of homes. Bamboo is at times found to be as strong as steel and opens up livelihood and employment opportunities for bamboo artisans everywhere. The environment and livelihoods are sustained. Bamboo villages can attract tourists in the most authentic and natural manner.

A tiny village in Chhattisgarh, where unlettered women like the late Sonabai Rajwar and now Sundari Bai and her apprentices, use their creative imagination to create lattice, and figures of people, birds and monkeys to enliven their own walls, partitions and doorways. A little imagination, passion and a new view of what development means can make this village a living museum of clay art if access and infrastructure were even marginally improved. Similarly, a village of enterprising weavers in Bhujodi, Kutch, have very achievable goals like creating a small museum of their earlier masterpieces and even setting up a cafeteria serving local food. They display their dyeing and weaving techniques to visitors, which encourages them to buy their woven textiles. It also demonstrates the human

skill involved in all the intricate processes of production, thus celebrating the human rather than the machine. This village could then be declared a heritage craft village which adds to its value in the world of tourism. It can be promoted on the internet as an integral whole consisting of place (tourism), people (culture), process and product (craft), *within India's own culture*, for economic benefit.

When spiritual and economic well-being, cultural rootedness, and traditional wisdom are respected, the quantum of money earned and the happiness it brings is relative and not primary.

Tourism agencies and entrepreneurs are consciously looking out for local craft and other cultural practices when they develop a site or a route for tourism. The once dying River Nila in Kerala was revived by an agency called The Blue Yonder, through cleansing, homestead development on its banks and the encouragement of local crafts, rare rituals, music and unknown art forms along the route of the river, for tourists to see. It has increased local earnings and crafts, and revived a natural water body to its old glory. Linking local crafts to bigger grids of development rather than wiping them out while widening a road can give long term benefits to the economy that starts at the grass roots and is not 'top down'. The local inhabitants become the stakeholders enabling them to be more evolved and involved. Hodka village in the Banni area of Kutch is a fine example of profits earned in 6 months through craft related tourism, enabling them to live in comfort for a whole year. Today, a tourist resort has been created, and is maintained and run by them based on the strength of their local crafts, done mostly by their womenfolk. The opposite can be seen in Kashmir, when political turmoil during the tourist season of April to October destroys the sale of handicrafts, the second most important industry in the state. It leaves the practitioners impoverished for the entire year.

## Fashion

Our clothes have been part of our cultural identity. A sari was never in or out of fashion. It was what we wore. Design had meanings, colours were for an occasion, some expressed status and others became heirlooms. Weavers sanctified their saris in temples before their daughters wore them at their weddings, or the female deity in the temple was honoured with a gift of a traditional sari at the beginning of the festive season. The sari at one time was our outer skin and high-end fashion at the same time. Today, fashion brings with it seasonal changes, styles and colours dictated by countries on the other side of the globe. We can instead show the world our *khadi*, our handlooms, our most stylish and elegant weaves and designs, new textures woven with natural fibres from banana and bamboo to hemp and nettle. We can even offer colour palettes from our own environment and natural resources. Indigo blue, madder red, turmeric yellow, henna green and as Varanasi weavers of old described whites, ranging from mist, the vapour rising out of boiling milk, to fresh *kishmish*. Let us create our own vocabularies and through it define our future.

At the nascent stages of our fashion industry designers looked outwards to inspiration, styles and techniques from the west. There was obviously tough competition if they tried to compete with famous well-established names like Dior. I specifically mention Dior to point out that very recently this great establishment that adorns film actors on every red carpet across the world, copied and digitally altered a design evolved by a very small producer of Indian clothing which works with rural block printers and dyers in Rajasthan. Dior designed a dress modelled by an Indian actor, and presented it on the cover of a reputed fashion magazine. Leaving copyright, patent and intellectual property theft and other such ethical issues aside, what does it tell us? It tells us we have the designs and colour right here and need not look outward to imitate. Let us offer our talents, skills, fabrics and designs to the world with the full support of those in the corporate sector, government and

individuals and design institutions supporting a “push with pride” movement to tell the world what treasures we can produce through a combination of our hands and our heritage.

Indian crafts and textiles can offer the world its creative bounties now from a position of strength rather than subservience. Would you not agree that we now have the requisite confidence in ourselves to do that? How do we shift our position and what are the arguments to demonstrate our strengths?

### **Moving away from non-standardization**

Kamaladevi ji used to wear handloom saris which she would then embellish with a little bit of whimsical embroidery of her own. Each village woman decorates the walls of her home or the handle of her broom or the cover of her pillow case in a different way. We ‘custom’ make our clothes and articles of utility to please ourselves. Local cultural practices also involve displays of community identities through common dressing styles. Fashion and identity are two different things. And all cultural clothing has nearly always been hand-made.

How far should we submit to the rigid specifications of machine produced synthetic goods that take away livelihoods and often bring in pollution? Instead of fearing or attempting to imitate the container-load culture of China we could devise a system of capsule collections that become a large mass of smaller producers and quantities. Otherwise we risk being washed away by the modalities required to produce huge numbers.

My first proposition is to argue against standardization. When every human being, every leaf, every snowflake is different from the other on this planet of a billion wonders, why should the output of human beings be exactly the same? Over-production by machines led to over-hyped marketing to create need among consumers and more wealth for the owners. Many across the world are beginning to realize and react against this. We can measure the same amount of tea that

goes into a cup but why should the cup always be the same size, weight and colour? When natural-dyed textiles dry into different shades depending on the quality of the water and the heat of the sun, why do we want them the same colour when all of us human beings are not of the same colour? And don't we celebrate this fact?

### **Redefining luxury**

Luxury itself has to be redefined and taken away from ideas of cost, brand, power and status to the luxury of wearing something exclusively made by hand that represents a better value system. "Made by Hand" is a luxury concept not defined by money but by the wider benefits to society that accrue and the reflection of India's timeless cultural aesthetics.

For me personally, luxury has meant the opportunity to work with remarkably creative people possessing skills that have from most other parts of the world except our neighbouring countries. We have a collective responsibility to preserve and nurture them.

### **Focussing on inclusiveness**

We also have a responsibility to be furthering inclusiveness in terms of fair and equal earnings for both men and women in the production processes of crafts. Of course, this will ultimately affect the final price of a product but that does not mean the woman becomes the free labourer. Better promotion and marketing opportunities will raise the value of the product. Women are also more rooted to the soul of our culture and do not lose touch with it as easily as men, who have access to many more outside influences and work options. Their creative instincts arising out of this special connectivity can be tapped to increase their own self-worth and autonomous expressions. I have found that the Aadhar card makes a rural woman feel special because she has her own identity recognised, her own



mind and talent can express itself much more if they are given better recognition both economically and visibly.

Many well-known professionals in fields such as architecture, interior design, education, fashion, the hospitality sector and photography are turning to the skills of artisans who can give their work an identifiable 'Indian-ness' in order to be unique. This will require systemised and ethical methods of co-creation that lift the artisan up to the level of the professional rather than be a nameless factor. This will help as much as the certifications offered by the newly created Skill Development Ministry.

India has achieved an international flavour that must be tapped into and built upon by those concerned with cultural issues.

### **Hast Kala Akademi – a proposed repository of craft cultures**

In 2011, I began to sense the glaring absence of the word 'culture' in official conversations about craft. The Ministry of Textiles had laid emphasis on marketing, exports and product design. While all these are important in a globalised world, the human and cultural elements were never mentioned. Craft became a mere object without a history of its source, maker or special story that rooted it in its very own cultural well-springs. This was clearly giving rise to machine-made imitations from China. How could we re-claim our heritage and the sources that first inspired the making of the artefact? When I met buyers from abroad and showed them a beautiful hand-crafted textile or object they would always ask about the story and meaning behind it, indicating that this information would make it more valuable and interesting. I realized that almost a generation had passed. One more generation and we would be story-less if we did not research and document them. I also realised that while immediately after Independence we had set up the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Lalit Kala Akademi and the Sahitya

Akademi but there was none for the nurturing of the cultural repository from every craft and textile emanated. This sector probably contains the most cultural stories of all. Therefore, there is a massive treasure of knowledge, referring to the location, community, ritual, practice, processes, technologies, meaning and materials residing in the organically learned systems of our craftspersons. I believe these had to be recorded for posterity, for economic value addition and for their protection from appropriation. I believe hundreds of research students could be motivated to study all these aspects of a craft. Master craftspersons could be encouraged to give lectures and demonstrations to visitors from everywhere. Historians could be interested in seeing linkages between countries, movements and influences that converged to create a particular textile or object.

All this material could be easily stored digitally and accessed with ease. It was not for the purpose of legally claiming our ownership of a craft as with GI Systems, patents or copyrights, but to demonstrate the undisputable cultural roots from which it emerged. I strongly believe we cannot allow this knowledge to be lost by allowing our crafts to become mere objects without the cultural story that accompanies it. This valuable cultural knowledge is absent in modern art, literature or new forms of electronically created art which reflect contemporary concerns but should be informed of the wealth of the past.

I proposed the setting up of a Hast Kala Akademi to the UPA government which put it into the Approval of the 12<sup>th</sup> Plan. Both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Textiles showed great enthusiasm in setting it up. I had the proposal revived at the beginning of the term of the NDA government. Its establishment was announced in the first budget of 2014, with an allotment of Rs 30 crore set aside towards it. Unfortunately, at present it is still shuttling between various desks within the government administrative systems.

I do believe, that when and if such a body comes alive, it will provide immense cultural resources to an institution like this august one. It would educate and inspire teachers, students and the world alike and add a true cause for pride in the cultural heritage of our great country.

Ultimately there is no lasting honour in talking of crisis and suffering in the craft sector. There are many, many avenues to create a renaissance today, with better technology, education and opportunities. The world looks at India differently now, as a country that can give much to the world on equal terms and not as an exploitable one. Among other things, people in India and abroad are noticing the unique advantages of our crafts and textiles. India is a country of a million stories and as many possibilities if we know how to seize them. It is up to all of us, and especially all of you here, whose job it is to both educate and inspire students about our wonderful craft and textile practitioners and their infinite special cultures, just as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, inspired many of us.

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## ABOUT CCRT

The Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) was established in May 1979 as an institution to bridge the gap between the systems of formal education, and the diverse, rich living cultural traditions of India. The CCRT owes its genesis to the vision and efforts of Shrimati Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, who served as its first Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, respectively, and to the support of the Government of India, Ministry of Education, Social Welfare and Culture. Its principal aim and objective is 'to draw upon all the cultural resources and interweave them into the educational system at all stages of formal and non-formal education'. As, for example, to use the traditional arts – ranging from pottery, carpet-weaving, print-making, block-making, different forms of puppetry, and multiple forms of music and dance – as pedagogical tools in disciplines such as mathematics, chemistry, physics, not to speak of history and the social sciences.

In order to meet these goals, several innovative schemes have been evolved. At the level of programmes, regular workshops are held for educational administrators and teacher trainers; orientation and refresher courses for teachers; and workshops and camps for students. Finally, for the identification of cultural talent and scholarships, the CCRT serves as an institution for a Government of India scheme.

Towards fulfilling these objectives, the CCRT collects and documents material, and prepares audio-visual kits, which are used in different configurations, to promote, say, the study of a regional culture or a specific art form, and knowledge about the people who create these art forms. The CCRT publications aim at providing an understanding and appreciation of different aspects of Indian art and culture. They also highlight the influence of nature on artistic expression so as to develop an understanding of the impact of environment on cultural manifestations. On successful participation in the training

programmes, the participants are issued these publications for use in their institutions, nearby schools and public at large.

The Cultural Talent Search Scholarship Scheme aims at providing facilities to selected meritorious young children to develop their talents in various artistic fields. 650 children in the age group of 10 to 14 years studying either in recognized schools or belonging to families practicing traditional arts forms, are selected for the scholarships.

The Scheme for “Award of Scholarships to Young Artistes (SYA) in Different Cultural Fields” is implemented under which maximum 400 scholarships are provided in the age group of 18 to 25 years in the field of Indian Classical Music, Classical Dances, Light Classical Music, Theatre, Visual Arts, Folk/Traditional and Indigenous Arts.

The CCRT also implements some other important policies of the Ministry of Culture, e.g., awarding 200 each Junior and Senior Fellowships focusing on “in-depth study/ research” in various facets of culture. These include New Emerging Areas of Cultural Studies.

In 1985, the CCRT instituted awards for trained teachers doing commendable work in the field of education, especially in the context of linking education with culture. Based on evaluation reports and interaction with trained teachers, a few teachers are selected each year for this award. The award carries with it, a citation, a plaque, an angavastram and an amount of ₹ 25,000/-.

Under Centrally Sponsored New Plan Scheme, document of the Ministry of Culture for 12th Five Year Plan period, starting of National Institute of Cultural and Heritage Management (NICHM) had been recognised. The Ministry of Culture took

this initiative by assigning CCRT the task of carrying out this Project/Scheme by making it the Nodal Agency for implementation. CCRT has been organising Workshops and Art Management Courses for professionals.

CCRT has been entrusted the implementation of Pilot Project 'Sanskriti' by Ministry of Culture under which Interpretation Centres creating awareness about the luminaries of Varanasi are to be set up.

CCRT celebrates a Cultural Festival-Virasat every year in memory of its founder Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay.

Institutionally, the CCRT has established a wide network with the SCERTs, NCERT and a host of other organizations. Today it has three regional centres – in Udaipur, Hyderabad and Guwahati.

For further information you may visit CCRT's website:[www.ccertindia.gov.in](http://www.ccertindia.gov.in)

## कमलादेवी चट्टोपाध्याय स्मृति व्याख्यान

First Lecture / May 29, 2009

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan/Education through the Arts: Values and Skills

Second Lecture / February 12, 2011

Prof. Krishna Kumar/हस्तकलाएँ और शिक्षा

Third Lecture / March 10, 2012

Prof. B.N. Goswamy/The Indian craftsman in history

Fourth Lecture / March 13, 2014

Prof. Bharat Gupt/Reviving Indian heritage in education

Fifth Lecture / October 29, 2014

Prof. Ashoke Chatterjee/Can our future be handmade?

Sixth Lecture / October 29, 2015

Mrs. Mrinal Pande/संगीत-शिक्षा और महिलाएँ: हम कहाँ से कहाँ आ गईं?

Seventh Lecture / December 26, 2016

Prof. Asghar Wajahat/हिन्दी क्षेत्र की शैक्षिक-सांस्कृतिक चुनौतियाँ

