

BINDU GOPAL RAO speaks to Mr Rakesh Kumar, Executive Director, The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) & Managing Director, India Exposition Mart Limited, on the role of the Council in promoting handlooms and handicrafts.



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The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts was established under the EXIM policy of the Government of India in 1986. It is a non-profit organisation set up for the promotion of handicrafts from the country and project India as a reliable supplier of high quality handicraft goods and services. Rakesh Kumar, Executive Director, The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) & Managing Director, India Exposition Mart Limited, is responsible for taking handicraft exports from India to new heights. He is also on the board of National Centre for Trade Information (NCTI) as a director. A post-graduate in public administration and international foreign trade, he has a lot of experience working with SMEs, especially export potential enterprises, for more than 20 years. He has represented and led Indian delegations in a number of important international fairs, trade committees and boards abroad. He has also served as the founder secretary of national level Design Center where foreign and Indian designers collaborate. Kumar is the key architect of



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Please throw light on the Export Promotion Council of Handicrafts and your role in the Council.

The EPCH is the apex body of handicrafts exporters for promotion of Indian handicrafts. The body also plays a key role in projecting India's image abroad, as a reliable supplier of high quality handicrafts goods and services. It started off with 35 members on its list; today, it has 10,001 members. The council has created necessary infrastructure in various craft clusters of handicrafts during the 30 years of existence.

FOR HANDLOOMS

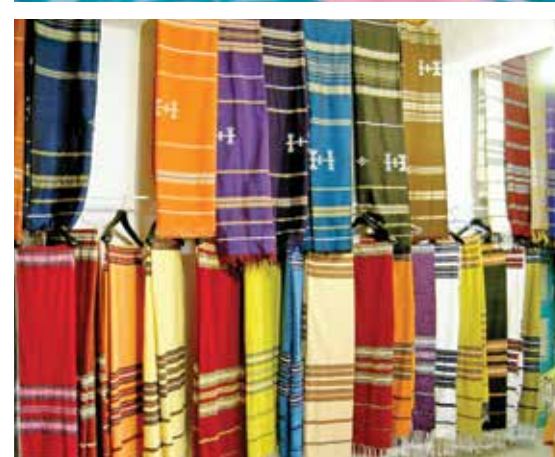
several important projects in India such as setting up of the National Centre for Design & Product Development (NCDPD). He is a pioneer in the development of North Eastern handicrafts for exports. In an exclusive conversation, he tells us more about what EPCH is doing to promote handlooms and handicrafts.

As a result, handicraft exports, which were earning ₹387 crore in the year 1986-87, are earning ₹21,458 crore in 2015-16. The Council has provided marketing links to the artisans and crafts persons who are the backbone of the handicraft sector by inviting them to display at the world's largest fair called IHGF-Delhi Fair Autumn And Spring, organised twice a year. The fair sees more than 5,000 overseas buyers and representatives who come to source Indian handicrafts.



MR RAKESH KUMAR

"Indian arts and crafts are renowned for their intricate workmanship, exquisite and exclusive designs."



How are traditional handlooms and handicrafts of India being promoted?

Each state of India has a distinct art and craft culture produced at the village level for centuries. Handicraft production plays an important social and economic role by providing employment at the grassroots level, to women and economically weaker sections of society. EPCH has been performing multifarious activities to ensure the overall growth of handicrafts. For the promotion of traditional handicrafts, EPCH has created infrastructural facilities at cluster levels in different parts of the country, in order to provide a marketing platform, intelligence and technical know-how with a focus on new designs and production techniques. The following infrastructural facilities have been set up at different craft clusters:

- India Expo Centre and Mart, Greater Noida.
- Common facility centres at Jodhpur.
- National Centre for Photo and Picture Framing Technology at Saharanpur also includes a technology upgradation centre and a wood seasoning plant.
- Resource-cum-facilitation Centre at Moradabad.
- International Lace Trade Centre at Narsapur.

Special emphasis is being given to products of North Eastern states, mega cluster of Jodhpur, Narsapur and Jammu and Kashmir, so that the international buying community can see products from interiors of the country.

How is the market for hand-printed textiles, embroidered and crocheted goods doing?

Hand-printed textiles, scarves, embroidered and crocheted goods are being exported to the markets of Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, UAE, Switzerland, USA, UK and Latin American countries. The demand for these products has been positive from these countries.

Exports of these items during the two years is given below:

Items	₹ In Crores	
	2014-15	2015-16
Hand-printed textiles	1,907.29	2,861.3
Hand knitted and crocheted goods	2,439.93	2,937.21
Shawls as artware and zari goods	97.62	117.29
TOTAL	4,444.84	5,915.80

What challenges are these textiles facing from machine made textiles?

One of the major challenges is non availability of skilled crafts persons. The voluminous export orders need to be fulfilled in a proper standard and uniformity of work. Different craft pockets adopt different methods, and therefore, export market faces challenges of quality and consistency. Skill development is a very important aspect for achieving high quality production with maximum efficiency. In India, our crafts persons and artisans still use age old techniques. To bridge the skill gap, EPCH has set up Handicrafts & Carpet Sector Skill Council (HCSSC).

HCSSC has trained more than 5,000 artisans working in Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, in the recently set up International Lace Trade Centre at the Narsapur Comprehensive Handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS) of the Ministry of Textiles. Narsapur is an important location from the point of concentration of artisans, craft persons, producers and the exporting community of lace products. It is estimated that more than one lakh women are involved in making lace products as a part-time occupation in their households. Lakhs are involved on a full-time basis, in the region. More than 80 per cent of the exports of lace products originate from the East and West Godavari region, even though other states are also involved in making lace products. The quality, workmanship and finish of lace products in Narsapur area is well known not just in India but also in major world markets.

What is the response to the exhibitions that EPCH conducts and what are your plans to promote home grown fabrics differently?

Home grown fabrics have seen significant demand in the exhibitions. To promote not only home grown fabrics but all handcrafted products, the Council has already taken up the initiative to tap into the domestic market by inviting e-commerce companies to participate in IHGF-Delhi Fair, Home Expo India and Indian Fashion Jewellery & Accessories show. Gradually, handicraft exporters are getting attracted to domestic market which has a very large scope in India. ■