

Handicraft exhibition in Kamrup(M) concludes

GUWAHATI, May 11 – For the promotion of handicraft industries, the department of Industries and Commerce, Assam conducted handicraft exhibition in each subdivision of the district except BTAD and KAAC and DHAC areas. This was stated in an official press release.

The handicraft exhibition was also held in Kamrup district, with the participation of handicraft units of Kamrup (Metro) and Kamrup (Rural) district at the ASIDC Ltd campus, Bamunimaidam from May 2 to 9.

The exhibition was inaugurated by MLA of East Guwahati constituency Capt Robin Bordoloi on May 2 in the presence of senior officials of NSIC,

MSME and additional director of Industries and Commerce, HK Sarma. The meeting was presided over by MU Ahmed, additional director of Industries and Commerce.

As many as 30 handicraft units participated with their products including those made from water hyacinth, traditional Assamese jewellery, jute products, handmade shoes, dry flowers, incense sticks, wood carving products, cane and bamboo products, handloom products, *pat* and *muga* products etc.

The valedictory function was held on May 9 in which Manjula Saikia Bhuyan, additional director of Industries and Commerce was present as the chief guest and the function was chaired by Amulya Kumar

Nath, GM, DICC, Kamrup (Rural), Mirza in the presence of a number of invited guests.

Before the closing ceremony, a 'buyers-sellers meet' was held at the Rupak Agarwalla Memorial Hall, DICC, Kamrup (Metro) which was chaired by Himanga Dip Das, GM, DICC, Kamrup (Metro) and attended by HK Sarma, additional director of Industries and Commerce as the chief guest in the presence of invited guests including Rajendra Singh, DD, O/o DC Handicraft, Khanin Dev Choudhury, HPO, AGMC, Krishnangi Kakati and Pradhan of NEHHDC and Das Gupta, assistant director of MSME.

In the meet, entrepreneurs apprised the gathering about the problems they faced while

making their products and sought some remedies to solve their problems.

HK Sarnia suggested to fix competitive prices based on proper costing of the products. HD Das while mentioning about the stiff competition from Chinese products, asked the artisans to take it up as a challenge and try to maintain quality of the products and fix competitive prices. Krishnangi Kakati called upon the artisans to submit the product details with their brochures for uploading in the website. Certificates and prizes were distributed among the artisans by Manjula Saikia Bhuyan, additional director of Industries and Commerce. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks from the Chair.

Handicraft expo, artisans meet conclude

CORRESPONDENT

MANGALDAI, May 11 – “If your products have failed to draw customers in comparison to that of the products in some other stalls surrounding you then you should find out the reason why buyers are not drawn to you and you must rectify it at the earliest. Being a seller you need to attend each and every buyer in an impressive manner. In this present world of competitive market one must earn the art of selling a comb to a bald man”, stated Anupam Deka, a leading industrialist of the State and one of the directors of the SRD group of companies while sharing his ideas with the local handicraft producers and artisans.

He was speaking at the closing function of eight day-long handicraft expo-cum-artisans meet organised by the District Industries and Commerce Centre (DICC), Darrang here at the Youth Club on Saturday.

Appreciating the artistic skill of a section of artisans

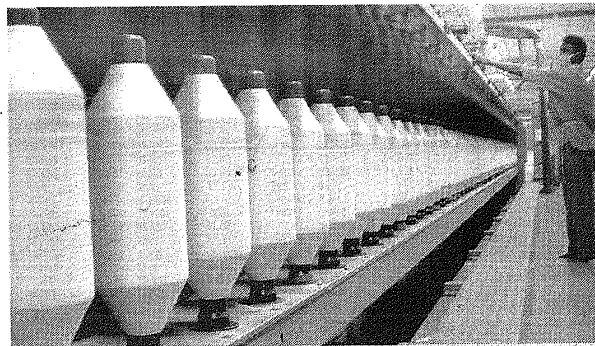
who developed different items out of waste materials, Deka informed the artisans that if anyone comes forward to produce items out of the hard surface of an egg, he is ready to deliver 1,200 kilograms of waste eggs per day to the unit free of cost. He also spoke on the benevolent schemes carried out by their companies for economically backward genuine artisans under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Similarly sharing their experiences in the exhibition and artisans meet participating artisans like Malati Deka, Himashri Boro, Rajani Sarma, Swarnalata Devi, Lakshi Bhuyan termed the meet beneficial in many ways including financially, exchange of ideas with fellow artisans, interaction with the buyers of different perception etc.

The function presided over by Razvee Hussain, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Darrang was also addressed among others by Dilowar Rahman, Chief Manager, AGVB, Mangaldai branch and C Ku-

mar, Assistant Lead District Manager. Earlier, explaining the objectives of programme Biswajit Das, General Manager, DICC, said that providing an organised platform for marketing the handicraft products and to inspire the artisans for a better future was the main purpose of the programme. Meanwhile, as a part of boosting the morale of the artisans, three best participating artisans namely Bipul Kalita of Maa Durga Handicraft, Lakshmi Bhuyan of Bhuyan Handicraft and Manash Kalita of Swarna Prabha Paper Products were provided cash prizes of Rs 20,000, Rs 10,000 and Rs 7,000 respectively while five other artisans were provided cash prizes of Rs 5,000 each along with the certificates. It may be mentioned here that as many as 30 promising artisans of the district working in various handicraft fields including cane and bamboo, fashion and weaving, wooden crafts, traditional Assamese foodstuff etc., were invited to take part in the expo which was inaugurated on May 2 last.

Slow growth in textile, clothing exports



VINAY UMARJI
Ahmedabad, 13 May

Sluggish global demand and declining competitiveness is expected to mean less of export in 2014-15 for the textile and clothing (T&C) sector. The dip, say industry sources, should be five per cent.

On a stand-alone basis, though, apparel export is expected to show 10-13 per cent growth. However, this would be the lowest in recent years.

From Union textiles ministry data, the *Business Standard* Research Bureau says the 10-month period of April 2014 to January 2015 saw T&C export

grow almost four per cent, to \$34 billion. Extrapolated, it would mean \$41 bn for the year, growth of 3.8 per cent. In 2013-14, this rise was 12.4 per cent, to \$39.3 bn.

In June 2014, Union textiles minister Santosh Gangwar had said sector exports in 2014-15 were expected to grow 25 per cent to \$50 bn.

Experts give several reasons for the subdued growth, also likely in 2015-16 if the current situation persists.

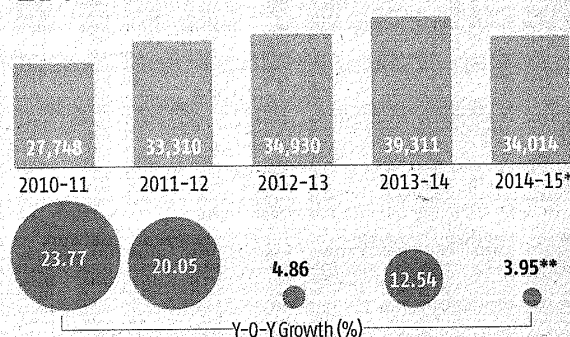
"There are several export-related incentives the industry has been demanding from the government. It faces reduced competitiveness as compared to peers. For next year to be better, the government will have to take steps to incentivise textile and garment exports further," said D K Nair, secretary general of the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry.

Almost the entire value chain, barring garments, are witnessing a lower trend in export growth. For instance, according

to K Selvaraju of the South Indian Mills Association, as against an export capability of 140-160 million kg of cotton yarn, it is seeing 110-120 mn kg.

However, garment exports will continue to grow at a little over 10 per cent, perhaps 10-13 per cent, said a senior official of the Apparel Export Promotion Council.

EXPORTS: TEXTILE & CLOTHING



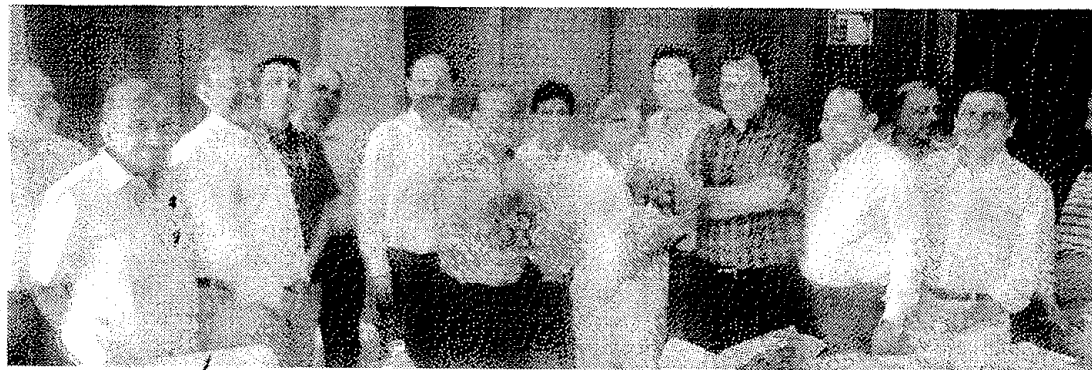
*April-January; **Exports for 2013-14 (April-Jan) is \$32,722.95 mn
Compiled by BS Research Bureau

Source: Ministry of Textiles

The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) has unanimously elected Dinesh Kumar as the new chairman in its 144th meeting of committee of administration (COA).

Kumar, representing M/s Orient Art & Crafts, New Delhi, is a leading exporter of handicrafts from India. He has been associated with the handicraft sector for more than four decades. Kumar is also running retail business of handicraft products and manufacturing units. He has served as member of the committee of administration, president, trade fairs and vice-chairman of EPCH and is also one of the directors of

A welcome note



Outgoing chairman of Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts, Lekhraj Maheshwari, welcoming his successor, Dinesh Kumar. Others seen are Navraj Goyal, additional development commissioner, handicrafts, Rakesh Kumar, executive director, EPCH and other COA members of EPCH

India Exposition Mart Limited.

Kumar expressed his gratitude to members of COA of EPCH for electing him as chairman and said, that in order to sustain this growth, the international marketing initiatives, cluster development projects, design, product development and new policy initiatives need to be pursued more vigorously.

The export of handicrafts have shown an increase from ₹27,746.84 crore (2014-15) to ₹23,504.42 crore during the year (2013-14), showing an increase of 18.05 per cent over previous year. The handicrafts export has surpassed the target of US \$ 4,468 million.

The Accidental Designer

Suket Dhir, a contender for this year's International Woolmark Prize, talks about being his own muse and the importance of organic fashion

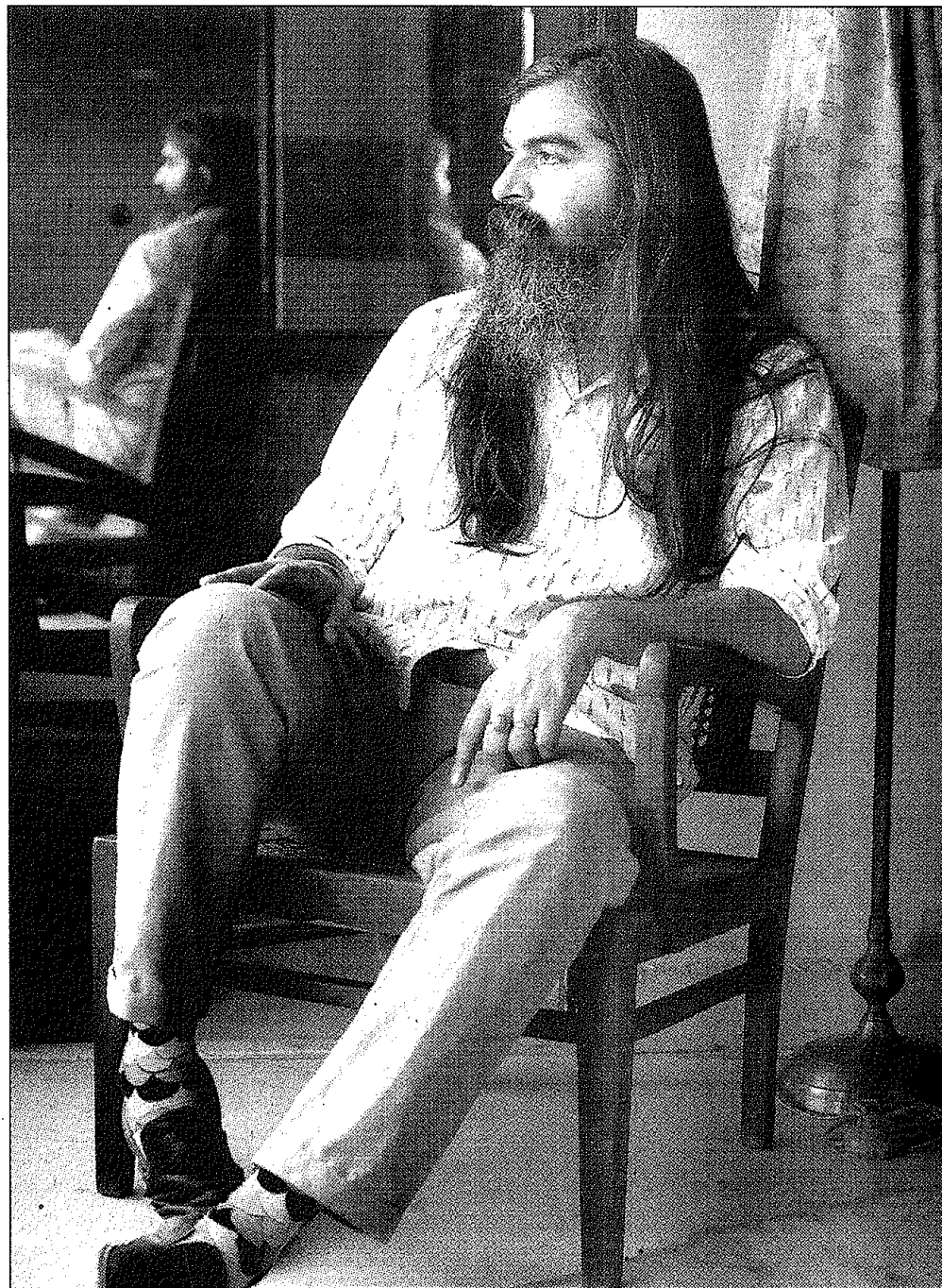
SOMYA LAKHANI

ON A sultry Delhi afternoon, a cup of tea at designer Suket Dhir's studio spells bliss. The room is big and airy, with a rack full of pastels and prints, the sunlight falls on an old wooden chair just right, and the Qutub Minar stands tall when you look out the window. The desks are busy, with computers, files, fabric swatches, a rattle and a toy car. There is a baby blanket on the floor with building blocks. "This is the full team, the three of us," says Dhir, pointing to his wife Svetlana and Zorawar, his year-and-a-half-old son.

For a four-year-old label that has been shortlisted for the India and Middle East (menswear) round of the International Woolmark Prize this year, the studio vibe reflects no chaos, not even an electric excitement. It's calm, just like Dhir's clothes and persona. "I went into a shell for a month when the Woolmark nomination was announced. Why were they inviting me? I just make pants and shirts. I began questioning myself, and then finally sent a sketch with a proposal concept," says the 35-year-old menswear designer. That he has never showcased at a fashion week but gets noticed irrespective of that only narrates the story of his quick success.

With time, the menswear designer, with his flowy beard and salt-and-pepper mane, has created a niche for his label, which is all about comfortable, quirky silhouettes, parrot and umbrella prints and fabrics that breathe. "I am my own muse, I design for myself. Personally, I have a problem with synthetic fabrics because they cause body odour. You need clothes that breathe, it's that simple," he says. This is why he uses linen, cotton, wool, silk and even hemp. The "organic" or "natural" term in his clothes are necessary, he mentions, yet he stays away from being called an activist. So instead of polycotton thread mostly used to stitch clothes, Dhir uses pure cotton. This effort also makes his clothes more expensive. Recently, he created a line using "cool wool" that can be worn in the summer, for Woolmark.

Dhir also runs a wedding-wear and womenswear capsule but these are not his priority.



Oinam Anand

With "less is more" as his fashion philosophy, Dhir doesn't believe in loading his clothes with branding. Even then a Suket Dhir garment is easily recognisable — just look at the double seam with a *jaali* on the side of a shirt. It's his signature, one with a funny story. "In 2010, I had a meeting with my first buyers ever, Good Earth. I had sampled the entire collection on myself, but 20 days before the meeting, I gained weight. So, I asked the *masterji* to add an inch on each side, with a *jaali* in the middle. And it worked, they loved it. Since then the double seam has been part of all the garments," says Dhir, as he runs behind Zorawar with a glass of juice.

The roles in the studio are clearly defined — Dhir handles the creatives, Svetlana manages the business side of things,

Suket Dhir (above); a photograph from his linen collection; the sketch that he has submitted for the Woolmark competition (below); another design by Dhir



while Zorawar keeps them cool and calm with his presence all day. For someone so confident in his demeanour, it sounds like Dhir was born in fashion, while the story is quite different.

He is, what you may call, "an accidental designer". Born in Banga, raised in Delhi and educated in Dehradun, Dhir tried BCom, BCA, design and also worked at a call centre much before he found himself at NIIFT, Delhi.

Before launching his label, Dhir designed a low-budget line for denim brand, Wrangler. "I was on this journey of trying to figure out what I did not want to do in life, through that I found my calling. I didn't know fashion, I just knew that I was better dressed than my peers in school, and that one Sunday a week, my friends would borrow my clothes," he says, with a laugh.

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A signature of India we need to protect

Regulatory changes threaten to destroy the priceless craft of Indian weavers and impoverish millions in the sector

Ritu Kumar

India is the only country that still creates textiles coming from the genius of its master weavers. The world has lost the hand-weaving and loom process, along with all natural and organic processes of creating textiles. Mill-made fabrics and synthetics largely dominate fashion markets, with China as the main example.

India's handloom industry is not the basket case it is made out to be. Its market for both saris and woven fabrics is largely the Indian subcontinent. There is no country that still has an indigenous fashion like India. Japan, China, or countries in South America or Africa have taken to clothing dictated to them by a Europe-centric, multinational-funded fashion world.

One of the miracles of India is that we still have distinctive fashion handwriting, created by our craftspeople and designed by Indians. A large part of this miracle is due to the availability of organic textiles and their crafts.

The fashion industry is not static. Along with mill-made fabrics, handloom textiles need constant innovation, design input and facilitation. The central govern-

ment set up the Handloom Board in the 1960s to address the design needs of this sector. The government and the textile ministry need to focus again on the sector. The weavers service centres (WSCs), spread throughout the country, are part of a large infrastructure of the Handloom Board. They are lying largely idle.

Instead of driving growth in the sector, the government of India is considering doing away with the Handloom Reservation Act, which gives protection to handloom weavers. The All India Federation of Handloom Organisations has been submitting memorandums to the ministry of textiles and other authorities, protesting a proposal to change the definition of the handloom.

Textiles are the biggest employment generator in India after agriculture. Though the share of handloom in production is only 11% and the revenue of the sector is just ₹2,812 crore, it provides employment to 4.4 million weaver-families. The livelihoods of our weavers are an endangered part of our textile heritage and in recent years several weavers have committed suicide.

The sector also provides employment to women in poorer areas. Women who

initially used to only spin yarn have taken up weaving and form a unique, potentially rich, eco-friendly cottage industry.

I do not believe that the powerloom is not required, but can't both handloom and powerloom fabrics co-exist? With the right policy framework, there surely can be peaceful co-existence between the two.

If the Act is diluted, millions of weavers in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh alone will be affected. There have been satyagrahas and meetings in Telangana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, and there are desperate weaver voices being heard in West Bengal and Varanasi, which has one of the oldest traditions of weaving in this country.

I feel the need of the hour is to not eliminate what we have but to help nurture it. Handloom products must be marketed to niche clients, who appreciate the value of handmade products and are willing to pay a premium for them.

In any society it is the arts that need protection, and governments need to act with sensitivity on this.

*Ritu Kumar is a textile revivalist and fashion designer
The views expressed are personal*