

Indian Knowledge System and Empowering Craftsmanship: Government Support for Livelihood of Village Doll Making Artisans

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Abstract

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) deeply influences village doll-making, preserving cultural heritage through traditional materials, sustainable techniques, and themes from mythology, folk tales, and daily life. It empowers rural artisans—such as those in Kondapalli and Natungram—by providing sustainable livelihoods and enabling the creation of eco-friendly, handmade products that connect, to local and international markets. The Indian Knowledge System deeply influences village doll-making, transforming it from mere manufacturing into a sustainable, cultural livelihood for rural artisans. Rooted in tradition, this ancestral knowledge uses local materials, mythology, and generational skills to create unique, eco-friendly, and marketable products that support rural economies and prevent migration. The Government of India supports doll-making artisans through the PM Vishwakarma scheme, which provides training, modern toolkits, collateral-free credit, and marketing support. The Ministry of Textiles offers financial assistance to senior artisans, with registration via Common Service Centres.

Keywords: Artisans, Livelihood, Central Government Schemes, Sustainable Techniques

Introduction

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) deeply influences village doll-making, transforming it from mere manufacturing into a sustainable, cultural livelihood for rural artisans. Rooted in tradition, this ancestral knowledge uses local materials, mythology, and generational skills to create unique, eco-friendly, and marketable products that support rural economies and prevent migration. The Indian Knowledge System sustains village mud doll-making by passing down ancestral techniques, local material usage, and cultural narratives, forming a vital, eco-friendly livelihood. The office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) is the nodal agency in the Government of India for craft and artisan-based activities.

It assists in the development, marketing and export of handicrafts, and the promotion of craft forms and skills.

Artisans in regions like West Bengal’s Ghurni use local river clay and traditional methods, ensuring economic stability through cultural preservation and high-demand, sustainable, handmade products. The Government of India supports doll-making artisans through the PM Vishwakarma scheme, which provides training (with a Rs. 500/day stipend), modern toolkits (Rs.15,000 grant), collateral-free credit (up to Rs.3 lakh), and marketing support. The Ministry of Textiles offers financial assistance (up to Rs. 8,000/month) to senior artisans, with registration via Common Service Centres.

Role of Indian Knowledge System

- **Generational Knowledge Transfer:** Craft techniques, such as those for making clay dolls in Ghurni, West Bengal, are passed down through families, creating a sustainable, self-reliant livelihood rooted in cultural heritage.
- **Use of Local Resources:** IKS encourages using readily available materials like local soil, riverbed mud (e.g., from the Jalangi River), and eco-friendly paints, reducing production costs and enhancing economic feasibility.
- **Cultural & Ritual Significance:** Mud dolls are often tied to festivals and rituals, providing a consistent demand that supports artisans’ economic survival throughout the year.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Traditional methods are often eco-friendly and sustainable, aligning with modern preferences for biodegradable products, thus boosting marketability.
- **Skill Development:** The mastery of these traditional skills, passed down from generation to generation, fosters rural entrepreneurship and preserves intangible cultural heritage.

Challenges and Support

- **Economic Pressures:** Despite their cultural value, many artisans face low incomes, limited market reach, and reliance on middlemen.
- **Modernization Threats:** The influx of, and competition from, mass-produced, cheaper goods often marginalize traditional artisans.
- **Government Initiatives:** Various government initiatives are aiming to support these artisans by providing better market access, credit, and promotion of their products.
- In essence, the Indian Knowledge System turns the traditional art of mud doll-making into a viable livelihood that supports both cultural continuity and local economies.

Impact on Livelihood and Cultural Heritage

Cultural Identity and Heritage: Doll-making is not just art but a reflection of community, tradition, and local myths, such as in Natungram, where generations of artists (Sutradhar/Bhaskar families) carry on this legacy.

Economic Sustainability: It acts as a primary or secondary source of income, crucial for rural households. For example, in Ghurni, West Bengal, a 250-year-old clay doll tradition supports local families.

Traditional Materials and Techniques: The use of locally sourced materials—clay, wood (Gamhar, Mango, Amra), tamarind seeds, and natural dyes—aligns with sustainable practices and keeps production costs relatively low.

Division of Labor: The production process often involves the whole family: men usually handle the carving, while women and children contribute to coloring and detailing.

Market Protection: Geographical Indication (GI) tags, such as for Etikoppaka toys, help protect the traditional knowledge and unique identity of the products against counterfeits, improving market value and income.

Challenges: Despite its importance, the industry faces threats from modernization, such as the decline of natural dyes, the need for better technology to handle raw materials, and low wages, leading to a decline in the number of artisans.

Artisans in places like Channapatna or Natungram continue to rely on these age-old techniques, blending cultural expression with economic survival.

Empowering Craftsmanship: Government Support for Handicrafts

The Government has demonstrated support for the handloom and handicrafts sector through a slate of dedicated schemes and policy interventions. This consistent support has been crucial in modernizing the sector, enhancing artisans' incomes, and ensuring the sector's resilience. Key government initiatives and their impacts include:

National Handicraft Development Programme (NHDP)

NHDP is the flagship scheme for handicraft sector promotion. It has an approved outlay of Rs.837 crore for FY2022-26. During 2023-24, 2,325 projects and events were sanctioned under NHDP, benefiting more than 66,000 artisans.

The scheme provides comprehensive support to handicraft clusters and artisans through basic inputs, infrastructure support, and capacity enhancement to cater to target markets. Its components are designed to offer end-to-end assistance, create a conducive environment, and ensure fair competition with machine-made products.

The focus is to bring every artisan into the mainstream while preserving traditional crafts by offering marketing platforms, infrastructure support, and design and skill training for new entrants. Along with strengthening the sector and empowering artisans, the scheme also extends social security through initiatives like Aam Admi Jeevan Jyoti Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana, including pension support for elderly artisans.

In essence, NHDP scheme adopts the following three-pronged approach to put the sector on high growth trajectory as well as preserving existing cultural heritage: -

- Promoting premium handicraft products for the niche market.
- Expansion of production base for utility-based, life style and mass production handicrafts products.
- Empowerment and sustainability of artisans along with preservation and protection of heritage/ languishing crafts.

Sector Promotion Through Artisan Clusters

- Comprehensive Handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS)

Complementing NHDP is the Comprehensive Handicrafts Cluster Development Scheme (CHCDS) with an outlay of Rs.142.5 crore for FY2022-26. The objective of the program is to develop handicraft clusters with world-class infrastructure to meet the business needs of local artisans and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), enabling higher production and export.

The clusters aim to support artisans and entrepreneurs in establishing modern units equipped with advanced infrastructure, updated technology, and adequate training and human resource development inputs, along with market linkages and production diversification.

Objectives of the Program

The broad objectives of the program are as follows:

- To enhance the competitiveness of selected clusters by increasing market share and productivity through higher unit value realization.
- To integrate scattered artisans, strengthen grassroots enterprises, and link them with SMEs to achieve economies of scale, build critical mass, and meet global market requirements of quality and standardization.
- To provide essential support and linkages in infrastructure, technology, product diversification, design development, raw material banks, marketing, promotion, and social security to ensure long-term sustainability.
- The strategy includes strong technical and program management assistance for capacity building, designing interventions, and implementing them through a competent professional agency.

Support Initiatives for Traditional Doll and Toy Makers

The support initiatives for traditional doll and toy makers include:

- **PM Vishwakarma Scheme (Launched 2023):** Specifically includes traditional doll and toy makers (listed under 18 eligible trades) to integrate them into formal markets.
 - **Skill Upgradation:** 5-7 days of basic training and 15 days of advanced training.
 - **Toolkit Incentive:** A grant of Rs.15,000 to purchase modern tools.
 - **Credit Support:** Collateral-free loans up to Rs. 3 lakh at a concessional 5% interest rate.
 - **Marketing Linkage:** Assistance with branding, e-commerce, and participation in trade fairs.
- **Financial Support for Artisans in Indigent Circumstances:** Under the National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP), this scheme provides up to ₹8,000 per month to eligible senior artisans.
- **Marketing and Infrastructure:** The Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) provides support through, exhibitions, and marketing events to help artisans sell their products.
- **Skill Development and Awards:** The government offers training programs and prestigious awards like the Shilp Guru and National Master Craftsman Awards to encourage excellence.
- **State-Level Initiatives:** Various states, such as West Bengal, provide specific financial benefit schemes for traditional artisans, including doll makers, for registering and forming cooperatives.

Artisans can register for the PM Vishwakarma scheme at their nearest Common Service Centre (CSC) using their Aadhaar and mobile number.

Support for Traditional Doll Crafts

- **GI Tagging:** Efforts are made to secure Geographical Indication (GI) tags for traditional doll crafts to boost their market value and authenticity.
- **Infrastructure:** Support for establishing handicrafts clusters and providing modern, improved tools to increase productivity.

Conclusion

Government initiatives are vital in transforming traditional doll-making from a struggling, localized craft into a sustainable livelihood. By offering structured support covering skill enhancement, financial aid, and market access these programs (specifically PM Vishwakarma) empower artisans to compete with mass-produced goods, fostering both economic independence and the preservation of India's rich cultural heritage.

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