

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE PRESENTATION OF
SHILPGURU AWARDS AND NATIONAL AWARDS TO MASTER
CRAFTSPERSONS FOR 2012, 2013 & 2014**

Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi: 9 December 2015

1. It is really happy occasion for me to be present amidst you today for conferring the prestigious National Awards & Shilp Guru Awards to outstanding master craftspersons for the years 2012, 2013 & 2014.

2. I would like to first of all congratulate the award winners and master craftspersons. I also place on record my appreciation for their unique contribution to the preservation and promotion of Indian handicraft traditions and for enriching the cultural heritage of our country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. Our indigenous handicrafts are a cherished aspect of our way of life. Their extensive range reflects our nation's diversity and infinite creativity. Each geographic region and sub-region has its individual style and tradition that stems from the ancient life-rhythms of its society. Our shilpkars have, down the centuries, developed their own, often unique, methods and techniques of bringing life into stone and metal, sandalwood and clay. They had, many centuries ago, perfected scientific and engineering processes far ahead of their times. The creations of that time reveal their sophisticated knowledge and highly developed aesthetic sense.

4. Production of handicraft items provides livelihood opportunities to millions of people living in rural areas. Handicrafts entail low capital investment and facilitate environmental conservation. They also empower disadvantaged segments like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and minorities thus making development inclusive and sustainable. Production of handicraft items holds particular significance in the economic empowerment of women living in the rural areas, as production is carried out in the house alongside other household chores. Women form a large part of the work force and constitute more than half of the artisan sector. It is estimated that over 70 lakh people are earning their livelihood from production of handicrafts and related activities.

5. Exports of handicrafts, excluding handmade carpets, constituted 11% of total exports and grew from Rs.23,504 crore in 2013-14 to Rs.27,747 crore in 2014-15. Handmade carpets constituted 3% of the total exports from India and their value increased from Rs.7,110 crore in 2013-14 to Rs.8,442 crore in 2014-15 representing a 19% growth, year-on-year. Artmetal wares, wood wares, imitation jewellery, embroidered & crocheted goods and hand printed textiles & scarves constitute the bulk of our handicraft exports. It is indeed a matter of satisfaction that handicraft exports, including handmade carpets, registered an impressive increase during 2014-15, rising from Rs.30,614 crore to Rs.36,189 crore. The domestic market is also shaping up well given the growth in the urban middle class. However, in spite of these healthy growth

figures, the handicraft industry in India is highly fragmented and the sector has been facing significant challenges mainly due to lack of design, innovation, technology upgradation, scarcity of raw materials, inadequate finance and increased competition from mill and factory made products.

6. I am, therefore, pleased to learn that various schemes for development of the handicrafts sector have been reviewed and a comprehensive National Handicraft Development programme launched. The programme emphasizes an integrated approach for development of handicraft clusters. The major thrust is on result oriented interventions focusing on empowering artisans through skill and technology upgradation, design development and supply of raw materials through easily accessible common facility centres at cluster level. Developing and strengthening marketing linkages through various options such as direct sale, participation in sale expos and e-commerce is another major component of the new approach. Information technology is also being utilized to provide assistance to artisans directly through Aadhar linked bank accounts.

7. To provide a fillip to this sector, it is necessary that we take concerted steps at various levels. These may include, for example, facilitation of easier access to credit from banks and other financial institutions and the promotion of these products in domestic and foreign markets. Universities, Corporate houses and Government departments can contribute by sponsoring and also undertaking research which results in new and innovative technologies that will enable upgradation of the traditional tools and designs of local artisans. The plan to set up a Hastkala Academy is a welcome step in this direction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Our “guru shishya parampara” is an exceptional aspect of our traditional arts and crafts. Master-craftsmen, down the ages, have taken pride in passing on their skills to their succeeding generations. I can do no better than quote Gandhiji who had said, *“if we want to keep all seven lakhs of our villages alive and not only a fraction of them, we have to revive our village handicrafts. And you may be sure that if we impart scholastic training through those crafts, we can bring about a revolution”* (unquote).

9. Conferring the National Awards and Shilpguru Awards today is a recognition of the outstanding contributions of our artisans who have through their creativity carved out a niche for India and its products worldwide. The eighty craftspersons who are the proud recipients of these Awards richly deserve this honour. I once again take this opportunity to congratulate the awardees, and the entire handicrafts community, for their creative efforts and wish them the very best in their future endeavours.

JAI HIND
