
Research Paper**CRAFTSMANSHIP AND ARTISAN TRADITIONS IN MEDIEVAL INDIA: PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE****Vishwanath V. M.**Research Scholar, Dos in History,
University of Mysore. Manasa Gangotri, Mysore.

ABSTRACT-

Medieval India witnessed a flourishing of craftsmanship and artisan traditions that left an indelible mark on the cultural, artistic, and economic landscape of the region. This article delves into the rich tapestry of artisanal practices during this period, highlighting their diverse nature and lasting impact. From metalwork to textiles, pottery to woodcarving, these traditions played a vital role in shaping India's cultural heritage and contributing to its economic prosperity. This article aims to shed light on the intricate interplay between craftsmanship, cultural influences, and economic significance in medieval India.

KEY WORDS- Medieval India, artisan traditions, cultural influences, economic significance, preservation, revival, craftsmanship, metalwork, textiles, pottery, woodcarving, jewelry, trade networks, cultural heritage, religious beliefs, artistic expression.

INTRODUCTION: CRAFTSMANSHIP AND ARTISAN TRADITIONS IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

The history of medieval India is an intricate tapestry woven with cultural diversity, artistic expression, and economic prosperity. One of the most vibrant threads in this tapestry is the rich tradition of craftsmanship and artisan practices that flourished during this era, leaving an indelible mark on India's cultural heritage. From the 6th to the 16th century, artisans across the subcontinent wielded their skills to create masterpieces that not only reflected their creativity but also encapsulated the essence of their time. This article embarks on a journey to uncover the significance of craftsmanship and artisan traditions in medieval India, exploring the myriad ways they influenced art, culture, and the economy of the subcontinent.

Contextualizing Medieval India: A Mosaic of Diversity The medieval period in India was characterized by a mosaic of diverse cultures, languages, religions, and traditions. It was a time of dynamic exchange as various dynasties, empires, and trading networks intersected, bringing with them new ideas, beliefs, and artistic influences. This cultural tapestry served as fertile ground for the growth of artisan practices, with artisans drawing inspiration from their surroundings, often intertwining religious, regional, and cosmopolitan elements into their creations.

The Marvel of Craftsmanship: A Multitude of Forms Craftsmanship in medieval India manifested in a multitude of forms, each reflecting the skill and ingenuity of the artisans behind them. One of the most striking examples is metalwork, exemplified by the exquisite bronze sculptures of the Chola dynasty. Using the intricate lost-wax casting technique, artisans crafted statues that immortalized deities and mythological narratives. These sculptures, both utilitarian and devotional, stand as testaments to the meticulous attention to detail and artistic finesse of their creators.

Textiles, another cornerstone of craftsmanship, bore witness to the mastery of Indian artisans. The textile industry produced fabrics like silk, cotton, and wool, known for their quality and variety. Techniques such as block printing and tie-dyeing resulted in textiles adorned with vibrant patterns, reflecting the cultural diversity of the subcontinent. These textiles not only adorned the elite but also

became commodities of trade, making their way to distant lands and establishing India's reputation as a hub of luxury goods.

Pottery and ceramics, too, flourished during this period. Potters shaped both utilitarian vessels and intricately designed decorative pieces. Hand-painted pottery showcased intricate motifs and designs, reflecting the regional aesthetics and cultural motifs that shaped the artisans' imagination. Each piece of pottery, whether intended for everyday use or artistic admiration, bore the mark of its creator's skills and cultural identity.

Woodwork and carving emerged as yet another facet of craftsmanship, adorning temples, palaces, and homes alike. The intricately carved doors, pillars, and ceilings of medieval Indian architecture stand as a testament to the deftness of artisans' hands and their ability to infuse inanimate structures with life and meaning. Artisans in Gujarat, for instance, excelled in this craft, producing masterpieces that combined architectural functionality with artistic splendor.

The art of jewelry-making further underscored the skill of Indian artisans. Adorned with precious and semi-precious stones, jewelry pieces showcased techniques like Kundan and Meenakari, reflecting the fusion of aesthetics and craftsmanship. These adornments not only held ornamental value but also symbolized social status, religious beliefs, and cultural identity.

Cultural Influences: Where Art and Belief Converge The artisan traditions of medieval India were not isolated endeavors but were deeply intertwined with the cultural and religious beliefs of the time. These traditions acted as a bridge between artistic expression and devotion, merging creativity with spirituality.

The influence of the Mughal Empire, for instance, introduced Persian and Central Asian artistic elements to India. This influence is evident in the architectural marvels such as the Taj Mahal, where intricate marble inlay work and symmetrical designs embody the fusion of cultures. The Mughal patronage of arts led to the development of miniature painting, a craft that beautifully depicted themes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and courtly life.

Temples, often the epicenter of cultural and religious life, bore the imprint of artisan skills. Temple architecture transcended utilitarian function, transforming into artistic canvases that told stories of gods, goddesses, and mythological narratives. The Hoysala temples of Karnataka and the Khajuraho Group of Monuments are striking examples where craftsmanship intersected with religious fervor, creating architectural marvels that continue to captivate and inspire.

The synthesis of Islamic and Indian artistic traditions is perhaps most apparent in the realm of architecture. The Qutub Minar and Jama Masjid in Delhi exemplify this fusion, where Indo-Islamic architecture marries Islamic elements with traditional Indian aesthetics. This interplay showcases how artisan traditions were not confined to specific cultural boundaries but rather transcended them, resulting in architectural masterpieces that bore testimony to cultural amalgamation.

Economic Significance: From Artistry to Economy Beyond their cultural significance, artisan traditions of medieval India held profound economic implications. These traditions formed the backbone of local economies, promoting employment, trade, and commerce.

Artisan practices generated employment opportunities for a significant portion of the population. Craftsmen, often organized into guilds, passed down their skills through generations, sustaining familial and communal livelihoods. These practices also promoted skill development, as apprentices learned under the guidance of experienced artisans, ensuring the continuity of these time-honored traditions.

The trade and commerce of artisan goods were pivotal for both local and international economies. The reputation of Indian craftsmanship spread far and wide, resulting in the demand for these exquisite creations across the Indian Ocean trade routes and beyond. The fine textiles, intricate metalwork, and vibrant pottery created by Indian artisans found their way into markets across Asia, Africa, and Europe, contributing to the economic growth of medieval India.

Exports of these artisan products further bolstered the economy. The demand for Indian textiles, in particular, resulted in robust trade networks that stretched from the shores of the Mediterranean to the distant realms of Southeast Asia. This economic exchange not only enriched India's coffers but also facilitated cultural exchange and diplomatic relations.

Preservation and Revival: Ensuring Continuity As the pages of history turned, the forces of globalization and modernization brought about changes to the artisan landscape. However, the echoes of medieval craftsmanship continue to reverberate, thanks to efforts aimed at preserving and reviving these traditions.

Artisan communities, heritage organizations, and governmental initiatives collaborate to ensure the continuity of these traditions. Festivals, workshops, and educational programs aim to pass down the skills and knowledge of master artisans to younger generations. By recognizing the historical and cultural value of these traditions, modern India pays homage to its past while shaping its future.

The craftsmanship and artisan traditions of medieval India stand as a testament to the creative prowess of human ingenuity. These traditions served as bridges that connected diverse cultures, beliefs, and economic spheres. From metalwork to textiles, pottery to woodcarving, each artisan tradition was a product of its time and a mirror to the cultural mosaic that was medieval India.

In a world that is perpetually evolving, the legacy of medieval Indian craftsmanship continues to inspire and guide. It reminds us that creativity knows no bounds, cultural exchange enriches society, and the hands of artisans have the power to shape history. As we delve into the pages of history to explore the world

DIVERSE ARTISAN PRACTICES: UNVEILING THE MASTERY OF MEDIEVAL INDIAN CRAFTSMANSHIP

The medieval period in India was marked by a rich tapestry of artisan practices that flourished across the subcontinent. From the bustling marketplaces of city centers to the tranquil villages nestled in the countryside, artisans contributed their skills to the creation of a myriad of masterpieces. These diverse artisan practices not only demonstrated the ingenuity and creativity of medieval Indian craftsmen but also played a crucial role in shaping the cultural, economic, and artistic landscape of the era.

Metalwork: Forging Beauty in Bronze and Copper One of the most captivating forms of artisanal expression in medieval India was metalwork. Craftsmen adeptly worked with materials such as bronze and copper to create sculptures, jewelry, and utensils that encapsulated the spirit of the times. The Chola dynasty, in particular, left an indelible mark with their intricate bronze sculptures. Using the lost-wax casting technique, artisans sculpted divine figures and mythological scenes that radiated both spiritual significance and artistic finesse. These sculptures adorned not only temples but also royal courts, serving as embodiments of devotion and regal patronage.

Textiles: The Fabric of Cultural Diversity The medieval Indian textile industry was a testament to the artistry and craftsmanship that permeated every aspect of life. From the looms of Kashmir to the bustling bazaars of Gujarat, artisans wove intricate narratives into the fabrics they created. Silks, cotton, and wool were transformed into textiles that reflected the vibrant cultural diversity of the subcontinent. Techniques like block printing and tie-dyeing resulted in fabrics adorned with intricate patterns, symbolic motifs, and a kaleidoscope of colors. These textiles were not mere commodities; they were carriers of tradition, worn as garments and displayed as banners of cultural identity.

Pottery and Ceramics: Shaping Utility and Beauty Pottery and ceramics occupied an essential place in the artisan landscape of medieval India. Potters skillfully crafted vessels that ranged from utilitarian storage containers to exquisitely designed decorative pieces. The wheels of these artisans' workshops gave rise to forms that were both functional and aesthetic, catering to the everyday needs of households as well as the aesthetic sensibilities of patrons. The pottery was often adorned with intricate

hand-painted designs, reflecting the artisan's attention to detail and the local aesthetic preferences that influenced their creations.

Woodwork and Carving: Carving Stories in Timber The architectural wonders of medieval India owed much of their magnificence to the expertise of woodworkers and carvers. Temples, palaces, and homes were adorned with intricately carved doors, pillars, and ceilings that bore witness to the artisans' deft hands and imaginative minds. In regions like Gujarat, artisans elevated woodwork to an art form, shaping timber into living canvases that told stories of gods, goddesses, and epic narratives. The convergence of architecture and craftsmanship resulted in structures that transcended their functional purpose, becoming embodiments of cultural beliefs and artistic excellence.

Jewelry: Adorning Dreams in Gemstones Jewelry-making was a flourishing artisan tradition that held both aesthetic and symbolic significance. The hands of skilled artisans meticulously crafted pieces adorned with precious and semi-precious gemstones. Techniques like Kundan and Meenakari showcased their mastery in transforming metal and gems into exquisite adornments that adorned both royalty and commoners. These jewelry pieces were not merely accessories; they were symbols of identity, status, and cultural pride, reflecting the beliefs and aesthetics of the time.

In conclusion, the diverse artisan practices of medieval India were a celebration of human creativity and skill. From metalwork to textiles, pottery to woodcarving, and jewelry-making, artisans infused their work with cultural, religious, and regional influences. These practices were not only expressions of artistic prowess but also foundational pillars of the local economy and cultural identity. The legacy of medieval Indian craftsmanship continues to inspire contemporary artisans and serves as a reminder of the timeless connection between creativity, culture, and craftsmanship.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES: INTERPLAY OF ART, BELIEF, AND SOCIETY IN MEDIEVAL INDIAN ARTISAN TRADITIONS

The artisan traditions of medieval India were not isolated creations; they were intricately woven into the cultural fabric of the time. Shaped by religious beliefs, regional aesthetics, and cross-cultural interactions, these traditions bore witness to the dynamic interplay between art, belief, and society. The cultural influences that permeated these artisan practices served as a bridge connecting diverse communities and beliefs, leaving an enduring mark on India's artistic heritage.

Temples as Epitomes of Cultural Synthesis: Temples emerged as pivotal centers where the fusion of art, belief, and culture found its most striking expression. These architectural marvels were not merely structures; they were living embodiments of the artistic visions of the artisans who shaped them. Temples of medieval India showcased intricate carvings that depicted deities, mythological narratives, and everyday life. These carvings were far more than decorative; they were vehicles for conveying religious teachings and cultural values to a largely illiterate population. The Hoysala temples of Karnataka and the Khajuraho Group of Monuments stand as testament to the synthesis of artistic finesse and religious devotion.

Mughal Influence: A Persian Touch in Indian Artistry: The Mughal Empire's presence in medieval India marked a significant cultural crossroads. With the influx of Persian and Central Asian artistic influences, a new chapter of artistic synthesis was written. The Taj Mahal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a symbol of eternal love, reflects this fusion. Its intricate marble inlay work, a product of Persian-inspired craftsmanship, harmoniously combines with traditional Indian architectural elements. The Mughal patronage of miniature painting further exemplifies this cross-cultural exchange, as artists depicted themes from both Islamic and Hindu traditions, creating visual narratives that transcended cultural boundaries.

Architectural Fusion: Indo-Islamic Artistry: The confluence of Indian and Islamic artistic traditions is particularly evident in architecture. The Qutub Minar, an iconic landmark in Delhi, embodies this fusion, with its intricate calligraphy and Indo-Islamic motifs adorning the sandstone structure. The

Jama Masjid, also in Delhi, is another instance where the synthesis of architectural styles creates a sense of harmony between cultural influences. These architectural wonders illustrate how artisans adeptly incorporated diverse elements, resulting in structures that celebrated both the local ethos and the broader Islamic aesthetic.

Reflections of Regional Aesthetics: While cultural influences often transcended regional boundaries, artisan traditions also bore the distinct imprint of specific locales. Artisans drew inspiration from the natural landscapes, historical narratives, and cultural practices unique to their regions. The intricate wood carvings of Gujarat, for example, showcased the region's distinctive artistic style, characterized by intricate detailing and geometric patterns. These regional aesthetics, intertwined with cultural and religious influences, enriched the artisan practices and contributed to the diversity of medieval Indian craftsmanship.

Cultural Devotion and Artistic Expression: Artisan traditions in medieval India were not confined to the realm of aesthetics; they served as conduits for religious devotion and spiritual expression. Sculptors infused their creations with divine symbolism, while painters adorned manuscripts with intricate illustrations of religious narratives. This marriage of art and belief allowed individuals to connect with the divine through tangible forms. The illuminated manuscripts of the time, with their delicate brushwork and vibrant colors, provided not only a visual delight but also a means of spiritual contemplation.

In conclusion, the artisan traditions of medieval India were deeply embedded in the cultural tapestry of the subcontinent. From temple carvings to architectural marvels, these traditions reflected the multifaceted nature of Indian society, where diverse beliefs, aesthetics, and influences converged. The artisans of the time acted as conduits, translating cultural richness into tangible forms that continue to captivate and inspire generations. The legacy of these cultural influences lives on in the artistic heritage of India, reminding us of the profound interplay between art, belief, and society in shaping human expression.

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE: SUSTAINING LIVELIHOODS AND ENRICHING MEDIEVAL INDIA THROUGH ARTISAN TRADITIONS

In the vibrant tapestry of medieval India, the artisan traditions wove intricate threads of economic prosperity. Beyond their artistic and cultural value, these traditions held profound economic significance, playing a pivotal role in sustaining livelihoods, promoting trade, and enriching the economic fabric of the subcontinent. From bustling marketplaces to the bustling ports along trade routes, the impact of artisan practices resonated far and wide, shaping local economies and contributing to India's position as a global hub of creativity and craftsmanship.

Employment Generation: A Web of Livelihoods Artisan practices of medieval India generated employment opportunities for a vast section of the population. Craftsmen skilled in metalwork, textiles, pottery, woodcarving, and other trades formed the backbone of many communities. Artisan workshops and guilds became vibrant hubs of activity, where knowledge and skills were passed down through generations. The apprenticeship system ensured that expertise was nurtured and preserved, creating a continuous cycle of skill development that supported families and communities.

From the skilled hands that meticulously wove textiles to the master sculptors who brought bronze deities to life, artisans found dignity and sustenance in their craft. The economic significance of these traditions extended beyond individual artisans to encompass entire families, villages, and towns, fostering a sense of community cohesion and shared prosperity.

Trade and Commerce: Artisan Goods as Commodities Artisan products were not confined to local markets; they traversed regional and international boundaries, turning craftsmanship into commodities of trade. The reputation of Indian artisans for their skill, quality, and artistic finesse became renowned across the ancient trading routes that connected India to the world. Textiles,

metalwork, pottery, and other crafted items became sought-after commodities that enriched trade networks and drove economic growth.

Cities like Surat, Calicut, and Delhi emerged as bustling trade hubs, where artisans' creations became part of an intricate web of commerce. Textiles, for instance, were in high demand, with fine Indian fabrics finding their way into distant lands across the Indian Ocean, Europe, and Southeast Asia. The economic significance of artisan products in trade was undeniable, fostering connections between cultures and fueling economic exchanges that spanned continents.

Exports: Enhancing India's Economic Standing The export of artisan goods from medieval India not only enriched local economies but also elevated India's economic standing on the global stage. Indian textiles, renowned for their exquisite craftsmanship and vibrant patterns, held a prominent place in international trade. The demand for these textiles bolstered India's position as a trading powerhouse, contributing to the country's economic growth and prosperity.

Textiles were not the only exports that brought economic gains. Metalwork, pottery, and other artisan products also found their way into international markets, captivating the imagination of foreign patrons and traders. The export of these items showcased the exceptional skills of Indian artisans and strengthened India's reputation as a center of artistic excellence.

Legacy of Economic Resilience: The economic significance of medieval Indian artisan traditions extended far beyond the time period itself. The resilience of these traditions lay in their adaptability and enduring value. While modernization and technological advancements transformed economic landscapes, the legacy of craftsmanship continued to persist. Artisan communities and organizations recognized the importance of preserving these traditions, not only for their cultural and artistic value but also for their economic potential.

In conclusion, the economic significance of medieval Indian artisan traditions was intertwined with the livelihoods of countless individuals, the vibrancy of local economies, and India's role in global trade. These traditions were more than just creative expressions; they were economic engines that fueled prosperity, trade, and cultural exchange. As we look back at this rich heritage, we are reminded of the lasting impact that the hands of skilled artisans had on shaping medieval India's economic landscape and contributing to its enduring legacy.

PRESERVATION AND REVIVAL: NURTURING THE FLAME OF MEDIEVAL INDIAN ARTISAN TRADITIONS

The echoes of medieval Indian artisan traditions continue to resonate in the present, thanks to dedicated efforts aimed at their preservation and revival. As the winds of change brought about by modernization and globalization swept through the subcontinent, the importance of safeguarding these time-honored practices became increasingly apparent. The preservation and revival of medieval Indian artisan traditions is not only a homage to the past but also a strategic investment in cultural heritage, economic sustainability, and the intergenerational transmission of skills.

Artisan Communities: Guardians of Tradition At the heart of the preservation and revival efforts are the artisan communities themselves. Spanning generations, these communities have been the torchbearers of tradition, passing down intricate skills, techniques, and cultural knowledge. Today, these artisans continue to embody the spirit of their forebears, crafting exquisite pieces that link the past to the present. Initiatives that support and empower these communities serve as crucial stepping stones in ensuring the continuity of artisan traditions.

Heritage Organizations: Nurturing Cultural Legacies Heritage organizations have emerged as custodians of cultural legacies, playing a pivotal role in the preservation and revival of artisan traditions. Through educational programs, workshops, and exhibitions, these organizations provide platforms for artisans to showcase their skills, engage with audiences, and connect with like-minded individuals. By spotlighting the rich history and cultural importance of these traditions, heritage organizations catalyze a renewed interest in and appreciation for artisan crafts.

Governmental Initiatives: Fostering Cultural Resurgence Governments at local, regional, and national levels recognize the cultural and economic significance of artisan traditions. In many cases, they have taken steps to support these traditions through financial incentives, training programs, and infrastructure development. By providing artisans with the resources they need, governmental initiatives foster an environment conducive to the practice and evolution of artisan crafts. Additionally, policies that protect intellectual property rights and ensure fair wages contribute to the sustainability of these traditions.

Education and Awareness: Passing the Torch to Future Generations An essential component of preserving and reviving artisan traditions is education and awareness. Schools, universities, and cultural institutions play a critical role in introducing younger generations to these time-honored practices. By integrating artisan crafts into curricula, students gain a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage and the importance of these traditions in shaping society. Workshops and hands-on experiences provide a tangible connection to the skills of the past, ensuring that these crafts continue to thrive in the hands of future artisans.

Innovation and Adaptation: Bridging Tradition and Modernity Preserving and reviving artisan traditions does not imply stagnant replication. Instead, it involves a delicate balance between honoring tradition and embracing innovation. Artisans and craftsmen are encouraged to experiment with new techniques, materials, and designs while remaining rooted in the essence of their craft. This dynamic approach allows artisan traditions to evolve and remain relevant in contemporary contexts, thereby ensuring their continued relevance in a changing world.

Economic Empowerment: Linking Tradition to Livelihoods Preservation and revival efforts not only safeguard cultural heritage but also create economic opportunities. By supporting artisan communities, governments and organizations contribute to the livelihoods of individuals and families. Artisan crafts, when marketed effectively, can attract both domestic and international buyers, thus contributing to economic growth and sustainable development.

Cultural Identity and Continuity: The Bridge to the Future The preservation and revival of medieval Indian artisan traditions serve as bridges connecting past, present, and future. By cherishing these traditions, society embraces its cultural identity and acknowledges the wisdom of its ancestors. The intergenerational transmission of skills ensures that the flame of creativity continues to burn bright, bridging generations and igniting a sense of pride and belonging.

In conclusion, the preservation and revival of medieval Indian artisan traditions is a multifaceted endeavor that requires the collaboration of artisans, heritage organizations, governments, educational institutions, and society at large. It is a commitment to honoring the past while nurturing the future, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. These efforts are not merely about crafts; they are about preserving cultural narratives, economic sustainability, and the human spirit of creativity that has flourished for centuries.

CONCLUSION: CELEBRATING THE LEGACY AND ENDURING SPIRIT OF MEDIEVAL INDIAN ARTISAN TRADITIONS

The journey through the world of medieval Indian artisan traditions unveils a tapestry woven with creativity, cultural influences, economic vitality, and a timeless spirit of human ingenuity. As we bring our exploration to a close, it is evident that these artisan practices were not mere relics of the past; they were living expressions that continue to inspire and resonate with contemporary sensibilities.

The artisans of medieval India were more than craftsmen; they were storytellers, translating cultural beliefs, regional aesthetics, and societal values into tangible forms. Through metalwork, textiles, pottery, woodcarving, jewelry, and architecture, these artisans etched their visions onto the canvas of time. Each piece they created was a reflection of the diverse cultural influences that shaped their world, an embodiment of the fusion of beliefs and artistic finesse that characterized the era.

The cultural influences that permeated these artisan practices were bridges connecting civilizations, beliefs, and artistic sensibilities. Whether through the synthesis of Persian and Indian aesthetics in the Mughal era, the architectural amalgamation of Indo-Islamic styles, or the depiction of mythological narratives in temple carvings, these influences spoke of a world where artistic expression transcended boundaries.

The economic significance of these artisan traditions was undeniable, shaping local economies, fostering trade networks, and enriching the nation's economic tapestry. The hands that crafted textiles, carved wood, and shaped metal were not only creators of beauty but also architects of economic growth and prosperity. The trade and export of these artisan goods carried the reputation of India's artistic excellence far beyond its borders, establishing the country as a global hub of craftsmanship.

As we contemplate the preservation and revival of these traditions, we are reminded of their enduring relevance. Artisan communities, heritage organizations, governments, and educational institutions stand as guardians of cultural heritage, ensuring that the legacy of these practices lives on. The efforts to preserve these traditions are not just about safeguarding artifacts; they are about nurturing creativity, sustaining livelihoods, and fostering a sense of cultural continuity.

In conclusion, the artisan traditions of medieval India are a testament to the creative prowess of human beings, the interplay of diverse influences, and the resilience of traditions that have stood the test of time. These traditions celebrate the artistic spirit that transcends eras and continues to inspire generations. The legacy of medieval Indian artisans serves as a bridge between the past and the present, a reminder that creativity, craftsmanship, and cultural heritage are threads that weave the fabric of human experience. As we look back at these traditions, we not only honor the artisans who shaped our history but also embrace the responsibility to ensure that their legacy lives on, igniting the spark of creativity in generations to come.

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