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6 RESEARCH AND PREPARATION

Long Assignment on Exploring a Craft

The long assignment for both Classes XI and XII will necessarily be a scientific, methodical documentation of a particular craft tradition prevalent in the region. The long assignment will focus on:

- ♦ Craft traditions and history of the craft
- ♦ Philosophy and aesthetics
- ♦ Materials, process and techniques
- ♦ Environment and resource management
- ♦ Social structures
- ♦ Economy and marketing
- ♦ International examples.

The long assignment taken up for this subject may have different stages of planning, execution and presentation. It may be taken up in a group of four to six students and they can work together on a particular tradition.

In Class XI students and craftspersons can work together on a particular craft tradition.

In Class XII students may take up craft clusters of another region if the schools and the students find it convenient.

In the preparatory stage, students along with teachers, can discuss various crafts traditions practised in the region, their history, distribution, etc., collect all information available through various sources including the library, the Internet and resources persons. To avail comprehensive data on various aspects of the crafts, students may develop an interview schedule and decide on the number of craftspersons to be interviewed, the places they would be visiting, etc.

Teachers must advise the students on how to interact with craftspersons and other people from the community. Students can buy some of the objects from craftspersons, take photographs after seeking their permission, make drawings, etc. which later on they can use in their presentation or project report.

After the completion of documentation, students could make a presentation at the school assembly, in the class or at a parent-teacher meeting.

The field study may be rationally divided into three steps. All three are interdependent and equally important.

- ◆ Background research and preparation
- ◆ Fieldwork
- ◆ Organisation and presentation of data

A number of different activities need to be carried out in your school before starting a field study.

6.1 Finding a Resource Person

Every group would definitely need the guidance and assistance of at least one resource person from outside the school for doing a long assignment.

Such a person should be knowledgeable about the craft and its linkages with your own town or city. He/she should further be able to direct the teacher and students to the respective craftspersons and their work/living places, as well as indicate any other resource centres in the city (museums, schools of craft, cooperatives, etc.) connected with the specific craft.

The resource person should have access to one or all resource materials, such as books, photographs, films, slides, etc. This will enhance the quality of his/her presentation and give students the necessary input from an expert and, above all, the interaction would motivate them.

The teachers concerned should locate the resource person in advance. They should have a meeting to acquaint him/her with the idea, the overall plan and the concept behind the project before he/she meets the students, which could take place soon after the school reopens. The teacher could be the best judge of whether the resource person would be able to talk informally with the 16/17-year-old students at their level, be able to answer their queries and, above all, hold their interest.

The resource person should be available for any interesting interaction, e.g. field visits, debates, a residential camp, etc. during the project period.

The students could also tape their interviews or talks by the resource person for future reference.

Craftsman as a resource person



6.2 Library Work

Though many cities and schools today have developed well-equipped libraries, not all students know how to use them effectively and efficiently. Here are some guidelines.

- ♦ A subject (a general area of interest or a specific topic), must be decided on before going to the library.
- ♦ The subject/topic should be subdivided into different sub-themes where information is necessary, e.g. history of a particular craft, area where the craft is now prevalent, influences and assimilation of design, patronage, etc.
- ♦ Libraries are usually organised using either a card-index or a computer-index system arranged systematically according to subject, title or author. The librarian can suggest the shelf on which books of interest can be found. Or he/she can create a special shelf of relevant material for the use of all those working on the project.
- ♦ Choose two or three books that seem appealing and promise to have the required information.
- ♦ After choosing these books, browse or scan through them.
- ♦ At the end of most reference books, there is an index where topics and titles are highlighted and the corresponding page numbers are given. Using the index references, quickly scan through the pages. When you find the information you are looking for, start making notes in point form classifying the information under relevant subtitles, leaving enough space for adding points from other books.
- ♦ Remember, most books will have the same basic matter on a given subject, so while assimilating various points of view *note down only what is new*.
- ♦ Points should be written down in your own language while making sure you also collect some excellent quotations.

The following passage describes the effects of the changing scenario on the life and work of a traditional craftsman.



Hanging by a Thread

Tell them to add a tasselled dori to your choli-cut blouse, and they will comply. Put on a little post-marital weight, and they will happily loosen your kurta by opening up the generous margins they provide in anticipation. Tailors in practically every locality in the city are subjected to the whims and fancies of customers who want their clothes done just so. Personalised service notwithstanding, there is a dwindling demand for their expertise, owing to the surfeit of readymade garments in the market.

Darzis with small businesses, who have borne the brunt of the readymade revolution, discreetly fit into the nooks and corners of bustling markets. A tailor pays a daily rent of Rs 200 for a small space outside a retail shop in the crowded Sarojini Nagar market. Bitter about the decline in clients, he says, "Main to chahta hoon sabhi kapde ki dukane band ho jayen. Unke wajah se mera kaam band pada hai." (I want all the readymade clothes shops to close down; my work is suffering because of them). His once flourishing business of tailoring men's trousers no longer exists, and he survives only because there is constant demand for minor alterations like stitching a fall onto a saree and loosening a kurta. "Pehale 2-3 karigar mere saath the, ab mein akela hoon." (I once employed 2-3 tailors, now I work alone). Despite the slump, his confidence in his dexterous tailoring is reflected in the amount he charges — Rs 150 for a blouse stitched painstakingly on a pavement.

A small tailoring shop owner in one of the many corridors of Shankar Market, wishes the young girls in the area weren't so enamoured by "readymade garments". And although a few regular customers keep returning for the perfect fit, he jokingly admits that these days his wife is his most loyal customer... For many girls living in the city, the local darzi is of paramount importance only if there is a wedding to attend and when they need a fancy kurta-churidaar. Trendy western clothes that can be bought off the rack now dominate their wardrobe.

Chandni Chowk, the bygone hub of the city's glitterati, has also seen a slow decline in a clientele that once demanded clothes designed and stitched to match flamboyant lifestyles. An older tailoring shop owner in Sitaram Bazar is nostalgic about a time when clothes were stitched in this small shop for emperors and prime ministers. His father, who opened the shop around 1950, had in his heyday stitched kurtas, bandgalas, jackets and trousers for Lal Bahadur Shastri. Now, customers are no longer high-profile, and the only men who ever want trousers stitched are the local lalas with massive paunches.

Men's tailors in the city, with less optimistic business prospects have now diversified into retailing readymade shirts, trousers as well as suit lengths, to retain customers and attract a younger lot. The proprietor of a shop in Connaught Place,



believes that nothing comes close to a hand-crafted shirt, not even big brands. And while he does retail readymade shirts, the old Dilli-walas still like to get their shirts tailored.

The masterji at one of the oldest men's tailoring shops in Connaught Place, feels the slump in orders nowadays is a mere seasonal phenomenon. The marriage season (October–February) is predictably busy. But tailored suits are popular mostly amongst greying customers. The young typically pick up young branded clothes. Also, younger clients, now armed with international exposure, are looking for slick styling and sometimes carry fancy Parisian catalogues to explain the cuts they want.

Traditional men's tailoring establishments are capitalising on this trend, truly states an old player in this business. "Young women executives usually come to us before an interview or a presentation. The outlet, which also tailors Jodhpuri suits for a foreign clientele, has a firm retail base in readymade shirts and suit lengths."

A shop of tailors and drapers in Daryaganj has also, unavoidably, expanded into readymade garments to combat a slackening demand. But like other craftsmen in his field, the owner is determined not to let go of his tailoring business. "My clients include NRIs who leave their naap (measurements) with me and expect me to deliver." Bursting with pride at the flawless contours of his achkans and sherwanis, he says, "Earlier, a karigar would spend at least three days on a coat. The inner lining was entirely hand-stitched. Now, technology makes it possible to make a coat in 15 minutes."

And while the 15-minute coat makes good business sense, adept darzis are unwilling to give up on a skill acquired over generations of meticulous practice. For them, the struggle to keep their talent commercially viable continues one stitch at a time.

— RADHIKA OBEROI, Sunday Times of India, 18 May 2008

This article is a good example of the changing trends in the business of tailoring which affects the traditional self-employed neighbourhood tailor.



ACTIVITY

Write an article for a newspaper of approximately 1000 words based on a similar case study in your neighbourhood, for which you can interview and interact with several craftpersons. Explain how changing fashions affect a crafts community.

6.3 Using Maps

Maps are visual ways of summarising the matter that has been collected and written about earlier in an attractive manner. However, as making and filling maps is a very familiar activity for students, they should be taught some unusual yet effective ways of presenting maps. Students can create maps for this project to indicate:

- ◆ The travel of the craft
- ◆ Area from where the raw material originates
- ◆ Linkages: 'Who makes it?' as compared to 'Who uses it?'
- ◆ Where in the city/town/village does the crafts community live, work, and sell their wares.

Many types of maps can be made, each by a different group, focusing on a state, India and the world. Some of the following methods may be useful.

- ◆ Cardboard cut-outs can be used to demarcate areas.
- ◆ A variety of coloured drawing-pins can link areas.
- ◆ Coloured threads can be used to show travel routes.
- ◆ Symbols can be designed that are related to the craft, with a key explaining them.

For even more professional looking maps, you could think of including cartouches or decorated panels containing the title of the map, or the key to its symbols. Cartouches are often elaborately decorated, with drawings of foliage or birds. You could think of designing cartouches using embroidered *kantha* motifs for the textile/embroidery maps, or within a *ghada* for one on pottery traditions or techniques in different parts of India. Look at any ancient maps reproduced in history books for further ideas.

Give your map an *old* look by rubbing a warm teabag over the paper before you begin work. This will give your paper that uneven pale brown look of old paper. Use water colours to paint in the details, and after your map is ready, fold it several times to create some real old creases! This would be effective in a map of traditional jewellery in India, or ancient trade routes and exports in the past.

6.4 Studying Photographs

An interesting activity and one that is often used by schools is the collection of photos that have been reproduced in magazines and tourist brochures, to be used as a teaching aid. However, most of these only get looked at in a superficial way. More often they are used decoratively — as the centre point of a collage or chart. But there are many more ways of using these photographs as a study tool, as a way of expanding our awareness about an issue.

Here is one way of *getting* into the photograph. Begin by looking closely at each object in the photo, identifying them all if possible. Then look at each quarter of the photo. Guess the season, the time of day, the location of the sun, the weather conditions. Think about what might be just beyond the edge of the photo. Now look at the particular spot in the photo, where there may be room for another person. Look at that spot, close your eyes and imagine yourself in that spot — inserted into the photo. With your eyes still closed visualise the scene around you — its colours, textures, smells, feelings. Believe that you are really there. You can even see the cameraman pointing at you. Hear the sounds and see what is beyond the frame. Stay there for a while, relax and let it all seep in.

This imaginative exercise could be followed by an attempt at writing a descriptive piece on the experience you have just gone through.

Write interesting titles for the visuals given below



ACTIVITY

You can make a collection of photographs from magazines to gain a deeper understanding about craftspersons. Travel magazines are a good place to look for photographs. Look at the craftspersons depicted in the photographs and try to gauge their thoughts and feelings, by seeking/imagining answers to the question given below.

- ◆ What do you think about the events shown in the photographs?
- ◆ What will happen subsequently?



- ◆ Choose the photograph you like best. What was the reason for the photographer to take this particular photograph?
- ◆ What kind of childhood do you think the person in this photograph had?
- ◆ When, do you think, he/she began working and why?
- ◆ What is a hobby for you is work for another. Discuss.
- ◆ Make up an imaginary fact sheet for the person: address, occupation, family members and their background and so on.
- ◆ Write a letter from this person to a friend or to the person from a friend. Think of what you could include.
- ◆ Write an imaginary entry from the person's diary.
- ◆ Describe where the person lives and what he or she does during a typical day.
- ◆ Imagine that this person is you at an older age. What would you like or not like about being this person.
- ◆ Let each individual in your group give any one photograph a title of his/her own. Which of these titles best describes the photograph? Which title forces you to think more about this topic?

Arrange an exhibition of these photographs, properly mounted, with interesting titles and with a series of related questions to bring the issue home to other students of your school.

6.5 Preparing for an Interview with a Craftsperson

Now it is time to plan an interview with a craftsperson located in the neighbourhood, to find out details regarding his/her life and occupation. Think of the following points.

- ◆ Where does she/he live?
- ◆ Has she/he traditionally followed this occupation?
- ◆ How many hours a day does she/he work?
- ◆ How many family members work along with her/him?
- ◆ Does she/he work around the year?
- ◆ If she/he is not occupied round the year, what other sort of employment does she/he take up?
- ◆ How much does she/he earn?
- ◆ What does she/he do when the market dries up?