

FROM ARTISAN TO ARTIST: A DECADAL REVIEW OF HANDICRAFTS AWARDS IN INDIA

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Abstract

The handicrafts sector in India carries profound cultural heritage, economic importance, and social relevance. Over the past decade, the journey of Indian artisans has seen a significant transformation—from being traditional craftspeople to being recognized as artists of national importance. This decadal review of handicraft awards in India highlights how government recognition through national awards has not only honoured their exceptional skills but also elevated their social and economic status. This research paper presents a comparative analysis of data collected from the official website of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Government of India, focusing on awardees from 2012 to 2023. The study aims to understand the, gender-wise, craft-wise, state-wise and region-wise distribution of awarded artisans. Data from 447 awardees, comprising 329 males and 118 females, has been analysed. The data reveals a wide range of crafts—from painting, woodwork, and metal craft to lesser-known forms like palm leaf engraving and natural fiber craft—being acknowledged across regions. Notably, the Northern and Eastern regions dominate in terms of the number of awardees, while unique regional crafts continue to gain national visibility. The growing participation of women artisans and the diversification of awarded crafts indicate a positive trend toward inclusivity and innovation. This shift from mere craftsmanship to artistry marks a cultural resurgence and calls for sustained efforts in training, market access, and preservation of traditional knowledge systems.

Keywords: Handicrafts, Artisan Diversity, Awards, Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Cultural Heritage, Rural Economy, Policy Support, Craft Preservation

The handicrafts sector in India holds immense cultural, economic, and social significance. It is a vital contributor to the country's economy, providing employment to a vast segment of craftspeople, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, and generating substantial foreign exchange through exports. Beyond its economic contributions, the sector plays a crucial role in preserving India's rich cultural heritage and traditional skills. The office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) serves as the nodal agency for promoting and developing this sector, offering technical and financial support through various schematic interventions and its extensive network of regional and field offices. To recognize excellence, encourage new talent, and promote innovation within the sector, the Government of India confers various Handicrafts Awards under the National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP) with an aim to acknowledge outstanding skills, foster creativity, and ensure the perpetuation of traditional craft forms. This research paper seeks to analyse the demographic trends among the recipients of these prestigious awards from 2012 to 2023. By examining the craft-wise, state-wise, gender-wise, and region-wise distribution of awardees, the study aims to understand patterns of recognition and identify potential disparities or concentrations within the

Indian handicrafts ecosystem. The data, comprising 447 artisans (329 male and 118 female), provides a valuable dataset for this comparative analysis.

The Handicraft Industry& Awards by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts)

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. The Handicrafts Awards program is a crucial initiative by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) to acknowledge and promote excellence in the sector. The program's core objectives are -To honor artisans and designers who have significantly contributed to the promotion, development, and preservation of craft traditions and the welfare of the craft community; To motivate young artisans to continue their work with enthusiasm and productivity, and to inspire others to aspire to similar levels of excellence; To acknowledge individuals and designers who adopt innovative marketing strategies and achieve success in the handicraft domain; and To raise awareness about and celebrate the adoption of innovative technology in handicraft production, leading to increased output.

The paper includes main four types of awards as under: Shilp Guru Award: The Shilp Guru Award is the highest honour bestowed upon master craftspersons in India by the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts). Instituted in 2002, the award recognizes lifetime achievement, mastery, and outstanding contribution to the preservation and promotion of India's rich handicraft traditions. Each awardee receives a certificate, a gold coin, a cash prize, a shawl, and a plaque, making it a highly prestigious recognition.

National Handicrafts Award: Instituted in 1965, the National Handicrafts Award is one of the most prominent recognitions for outstanding craftsmanship and innovation in the Indian handicrafts sector. It is awarded annually to craftspersons who demonstrate exceptional skill, creativity, and innovation in their craft. This award aims to encourage artisans by providing national recognition and visibility for their work. Awardees are selected through a multi-tier selection process involving expert committees. They are honored with a certificate, a cash prize, a Tamrapatra (bronze plaque), and a shawl. National Handicrafts Award for Start-up Venture is also a sub category of National Handicrafts Award.

National Merit Certificate: The National Merit Certificate was awarded to artisans who have demonstrated commendable craftsmanship and potential, though they might not have reached the level required for the National Award. It served as a form of encouragement and recognition for promising talent in the field of handicrafts. This has been discontinued after 2018.

Design Innovation Award: The Design Innovation Award is a relatively new initiative introduced to promote creativity, experimentation, and design evolution in the handicrafts sector. The award is intended for artisans who integrate traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design sensibilities, producing items that appeal to modern markets while retaining cultural value. This award reflects a strategic shift in policy focus toward design-led

development and market adaptation, especially in the context of globalization and competition with machine-made products. This award consists of a cash prize to be shared equally between the concerned designer and the artisan, a shawl, a certificate and Tamrapatra for both designer and artisan.

The application and selection process for these awards are rigorous, involving a three-tier system: Regional Level Selection Committee (RLSC), Headquarter Level Selection Committee (HLSC), and the Central Level Selection Committee (CLSC). This multi-stage evaluation ensures a comprehensive assessment of the applicants' skills, contributions, and the quality of their craftwork. Special emphasis is placed on identifying and supporting endangered crafts, with specific consideration given to efforts in their revival.

Objectives of the Study

To analyze the trends of various types of Handicraft Awards offered by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) from 2012 to 2023; To examine the gender-wise representation of handicraft awardees; To explore the awarded craft categories and their regional concentration; To provide suggestions for policy interventions that can help bridge disparities and promote equitable recognition of artisans across gender and region.

Research Methodology

The data for this study were collected from the official website of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Government of India. There are 447 artisans from 26 states found from the list available 2012 to 2023. After the data entry with identified variables in excel and SPSS, crafts were categorised in to 16 categories for further analysis. The analysis involved quantitative tabulation, percentage calculation and comparative analysis using cross tabulation and charts.

Results and Discussion

The data on the distribution of different types of handicraft awards over the years offers a clear picture of evolving priorities and patterns in artisan recognition in India. These awards include the Design Innovation Award, National Award, National Merit Certificate, and the prestigious Shilp Guru Award, collectively amounting to 447 recognitions between 2012 and 2023.

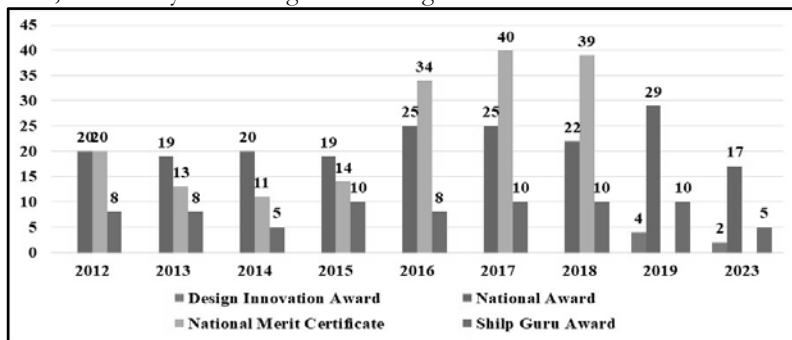


Figure 1: Distribution of Different Types of Handicraft Awards Over the Years

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The National Award consistently remains the most frequently conferred recognition across all years. It peaked in 2017, with 40 awards, followed closely by 2018 with 39 awards, and 2016 with 34 awards. The policy document shows that the National Award are now given under 17 identified categories including- Exclusively for women artisan, Young artisan below 30 years of age, Divyang artisan, Endangered Craft and Tribal artisan under Craft Category.

Award Data 2023 shows that Smt. P. Vijayalakshmi from Andhra Pradesh has received award under Women artisan category for Kalamkari Painting, Smt. Sabina Teronpi from Assam under Tribal artisan category for Karbi Tribal Textile, Ms. Priya (Young Artisan below 30 years) from Himachal Pradesh for Painting, Smt. A. Bimola Devi (Endangered Craft category) from Manipur for Shaphee-Lanphee handicrafts and Ms. Yengkhom O Indira Devi (Divyang Artisan Category) from Manipur have received the Nation Award for Hand embroidery.

The Shilp Guru Award, which is considered the highest honor for master artisans for an exceptional piece of craftwork to promote the handicraft and to impart their skills to the next generation of artisans. Data shows that during 2012-19, about 8-10 awards were given to the artisans. Afterwards, it has been decided that 6 such awards are to be given among which one is dedicated exclusively for women artisan. In 2023, two female artisans received this award (Smt. D. Sivamma from Andhra Pradesh for Leather Puppet Craft and Smt. Dolon Kundu Mondal from West Bengal for Terracotta Craft).

The National Merit Certificate, which is indicative of commendable craftsmanship just below the National Award level, also saw high numbers during the years 2016 to 2018, with 34, 40, and 39 awards respectively. Afterwards, it has been discontinued due to policy changes.

The Design Innovation Award has been introduced later after 2018. It has been found that 2 handicrafts Kantha Hand Embroidery (West Bengal) and Kundan Jadai Meenakari (Rajasthan) were awarded (4 artists - Two pairs of each – Designer and Artisan). In 2023 a pair of two- designer (Ms. Kavita Chaudhary) and artisan (Smt. Dhapa Devi) from Rajasthan were awarded with The Design Innovation Award for Carpet Knotting.

Table 1: Year-wise Distribution of Handicraft Awardees by Gender

Year of Award		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
2012	Count	12	36	48
	% Within Year of Award	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
2013	Count	12	28	40
	% Within Year of Award	30.0%	70.0%	100.0%
2014	Count	7	29	36
	% Within Year of Award	19.4%	80.6%	100.0%
2015	Count	4	39	43
	% Within Year of Award	9.3%	90.7%	100.0%
2016	Count	13	54	67
	% Within Year of Award	19.4%	80.6%	100.0%
2017	Count	22	53	75

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	% Within Year of Award	29.3%	70.7%	100.0%
2018	Count	22	49	71
	% Within Year of Award	31.0%	69.0%	100.0%
2019	Count	14	29	43
	% Within Year of Award	32.6%	67.4%	100.0%
2023	Count	12	12	24
	% Within Year of Award	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	118	329	447
	% Within Year of Award	26.4%	73.6%	100.0%

The present study includes 447 handicraft awardees who have received various awards from 2012 to 2023. Out of a total of 447 awardees, 329 are male, accounting for 73.6% of the total, while only 118 are female, representing 26.4%. Thus, the gender-wise distribution of handicrafts awardees reveals a clear imbalance inrepresentation.

The gender-wise distribution of national handicraft awardees from 2012 to 2023 reveals significant disparities as well as gradual shifts toward inclusivity. Out of the total 447 awardees during this period, 329 (73.6%) were male, while only 118 (26.4%) were female, indicating a strong gender imbalance in recognition. However, deeper analysis of year-wise trends shows some positive developments in recent years.

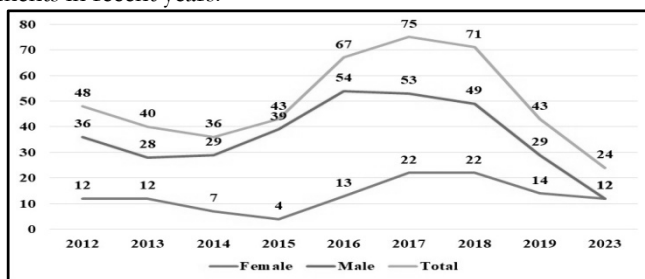


Figure 2: The Trend and Gender-Wise Pattern of Handicraft Awardees

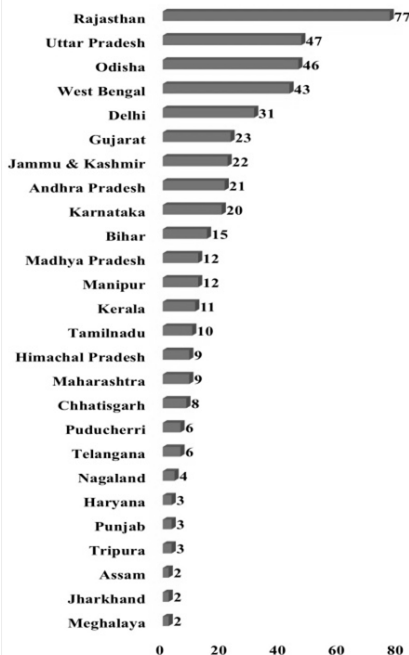
In the early years of the period under study, particularly 2012 to 2015, the participation of women remained consistently low. For instance, in 2015, women made up only 9.3% of awardees, the lowest across all years, with just 4 female recipients out of 43 total awards. Similarly, in 2014, female representation was limited to 19.4%, and in 2013 and 2012, women accounted for just 30% and 25%, respectively. These years reflect a notable gender gap in terms of national recognition for handicrafts.

A positive shift becomes visible beginning in 2016, where female awardees began to receive relatively more recognition. The year 2017 saw 29.3% of awards going to women, and this increased further in 2018 and 2019, with 31% and 32.6%, respectively. These years mark an encouraging trend toward gender inclusion, reflecting a possible change in policy emphasis or growing visibility of women artisans.

The most remarkable development occurred in 2023, which stands out as the only year in the dataset to achieve perfect gender parity, with 12 male and 12 female awardees. This 50-50 distribution not only marks a milestone in the recognition of female artisans but also suggests a meaningful shift in the award selection process or nomination practices.

Table 2: State-Wise Distribution of Handicraft Awardees (Including Figure-03)

	State	Awardees		Rank
		No.	%	
1	Rajasthan	77	17.2 %	1
2	Uttar Pradesh	47	10.5 %	2
3	Odisha	46	10.3 %	3
4	West Bengal	43	9.6 %	4
5	Delhi	31	6.9 %	5
6	Gujarat	23	5.1 %	6
7	Jammu & Kashmir	22	4.9 %	7
8	Andhra Pradesh	21	4.7 %	8
9	Karnataka	20	4.5 %	9
10	Bihar	15	3.4 %	10
11	Madhya Pradesh	12	2.7 %	11
12	Manipur	12	2.7 %	11
13	Kerala	11	2.5 %	12
14	Tamilnadu	10	2.2 %	13
15	Himachal Pradesh	9	2.0 %	14
16	Maharashtra	9	2.0 %	14
17	Chhatisgarh	8	1.8 %	15
18	Puducherri	6	1.3 %	16
19	Telangana	6	1.3 %	16
20	Nagaland	4	0.9 %	17
21	Haryana	3	0.7 %	18
22	Punjab	3	0.7 %	18
23	Tripura	3	0.7 %	18
24	Assam	2	0.4 %	19
25	Jharkhand	2	0.4 %	19
26	Meghalaya	2	0.4 %	19
	Total	447	100 %	



The table presents a state-wise distribution of handicraft awardees, ranking the states based on the number of individuals who received awards. The analysis reveals distinct regional patterns in award recognition across India. The main observations are as follows:

Top Performing States: Rajasthan leads the list with 77 awardees, accounting for 17.2% of the total, indicating the state's strong heritage and active engagement in handicrafts; Uttar Pradesh and Odisha follow, contributing 10.5% and 10.3% respectively, further reinforcing the prominence of northern and eastern Indian states in the traditional crafts sector; West Bengal (9.6%) and Delhi (6.9%) complete the top five, highlighting their significant presence in craft production and promotion.

Moderately Represented States: Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka each contribute between 4.5% to 5.1%, reflecting moderate but

notable participation in national handicraft recognition; States like Bihar, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, and Kerala hover around 2.5% to 3.4%, indicating emerging or underrepresented artisan communities.

Lower Representation: A considerable number of states, including Nagaland, Tripura, Punjab, Haryana, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, and Assam, have fewer than 5 awardees each, suggesting geographic imbalance in recognition or participation; These regions may require policy attention, outreach, or capacity building to encourage and support artisans.

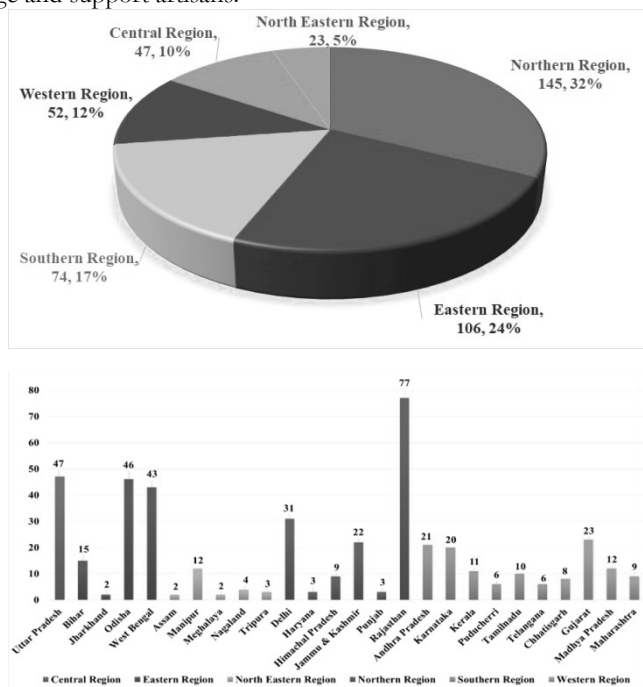


Figure 4: Region-Wise Distribution of Handicraft Awardees

The Figure 4 presents the region-wise distribution of 447 handicraft awardees, offering insight into the geographical spread of national recognition for handicraft excellence in India. It is to be noted here that the regional classification is based on administrative regions of DC (Handicrafts), not on cultural zones.

The Northern Region tops the list with 145 awardees, accounting for 32.4% of the total. This suggests a significant concentration of recognized handicraft talent or institutional support in northern states like Rajasthan, Delhi and Jammu & Kashmir.

The Eastern Region follows with 106 awardees (23.7%), indicating a strong presence of award-winning artisans from states such as Odisha and West Bengal, both of which have rich cultural and artisanal traditions.

The Southern Region has 74 awardees, contributing 16.6% to the total. This is a notables share and reflects active participation from southern states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala.

The Western Region (including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh) accounts for 11.6% with 52 awardees, while the Central Region (Uttar Pradesh) has 47 awardees (10.5%), showing moderate representation.

The North Eastern Region, despite its unique and rich craft heritage, is the least represented with only 23 awardees, forming 5.1% of the total. This underrepresentation may suggest the need for increased support, visibility, and outreach efforts in this culturally vibrant area.

Overall, the data highlights regional disparities in the distribution of handicraft awards, with a concentration in the Northern and Eastern regions and relatively lower representation from the North East and Central India. This information could be vital for policymakers and cultural institutions in promoting more balanced national recognition across all regions.

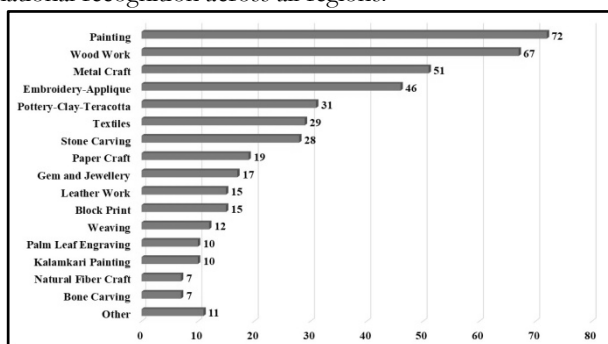


Figure 5: Craft Category Distribution among Handicraft Awardees

The given figure presents a detailed distribution of handicraft awardees across various craft categories. The most prominent category is Painting, with 82 awardees, accounting for 18.3% of the total. This indicates the widespread practice and cultural significance of traditional Indian paintings such as Madhubani, Kalamkari, Pattachitra, Mithila, Godana, Kangra, Thanjavur, Tanjore, Rogan, Mandana, Warli, Miniature Painting, etc. which continue to receive strong national recognition.

Following closely is Wood Work, with 67 awardees (15.0%). This high representation reflects the enduring popularity and heritage of wooden handicrafts such as Wooden toys, Carving, Cane and Bamboo work, Sandal wood carving, Walnut wood carving, Plastic inlay on wood, Wooden block, Tarkashi inlay, Lacquer-ware, etc. across various Indian states, especially in Northern and Southern regions.

Metal Craft ranks third with 51 awardees (11.4%), underscoring the artistic and utilitarian value of metal-based crafts such as Dhokra, Bidri-ware, Brass

engraving, Copper engraving, Bronzecarving, Silver filigree, and Bell metal items that are rooted in tribal and folk traditions.

Embroiderywork holds significant importance, with 46 awardees (10.3%), demonstrating the intricate textile embellishment traditions that are particularly rich in states like Jammu-Kashmir, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. This craft includes Chikankari, Applique work, Zari Zardozi, Katha Kashidakari, Chamba, Sozni, Soof &Kharek embroidery, Lace and Crochet, etc.

Other moderately represented categories include Pottery-Clay-Terracotta (6.9%), Textiles (6.5%), and Stone Carving (6.3%), which together show the strong presence of India's material culture and its deeply rooted artisanal skills in clay, fabric, and stone.

Crafts with lower but notable representation include Paper Craft (4.3%), Gem and Jewellery (3.8%), Leather Work and Block Print (both 3.4%), and Weaving (2.7%). These figures may reflect either regional concentration or relatively lower promotion or visibility at the national level.The least represented categories, such as Palm Leaf Engraving (2.2%), Natural Fiber Craft, and Bone Carving (both 1.6%), as well as Other crafts (2.5%), suggest that while these arts exist, they receive less national recognition or have fewer practitioners engaged in competitive award platforms.

Table 3: Region-Wise Craft Category Distribution among Handicraft Awardees

Handicraft Categories		Regions						Total
		Central Region	Eastern Region	North Eastern Region	Northern Region	Southern Region	Western Region	
Block Print	Count	0	0	0	4	0	11	15
	% R	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%	0.0%	73.3%	100.0%
	% C	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	0.0%	21.2%	3.4%
Bone Carving	Count	3	0	0	4	0	0	7
	% R	42.9%	0.0%	0.0%	57.1%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% C	6.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%
Embroidery-Applique	Count	7	9	2	16	4	8	46
	% R	15.2%	19.6%	4.3%	34.8%	8.7%	17.4%	100.0%
	% C	14.9%	8.5%	8.7%	11.0%	5.4%	15.4%	10.3%
Gem and Jewellery	Count	4	1	0	11	0	1	17
	% R	23.5%	5.9%	0.0%	64.7%	0.0%	5.9%	100.0%
	% C	8.5%	0.9%	0.0%	7.6%	0.0%	1.9%	3.8%
Leather Work	Count	0	0	0	6	7	2	15
	% R	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	46.7%	13.3%	100.0%
	% C	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.1%	9.5%	3.8%	3.4%
Metal Craft	Count	16	3	0	10	13	9	51
	% R	31.4%	5.9%	0.0%	19.6%	25.5%	17.6%	100.0%
	% C	34.0%	2.8%	0.0%	6.9%	17.6%	17.3%	11.4%
Natural Fibre Craft	Count	0	4	0	1	2	0	7
	% R	0.0%	57.1%	0.0%	14.3%	28.6%	0.0%	100.0%
	% C	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	0.7%	2.7%	0.0%	1.6%
Painting	Count	0	27	0	33	18	4	82
	% R	0.0%	32.9%	0.0%	40.2%	22.0%	4.9%	100.0%

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	% C	0.0%	25.5%	0.0%	22.8%	24.3%	7.7%	18.3%
Palm Leaf Engraving	Count	0	10	0	0	0	0	10
	% R	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% C	0.0%	9.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%
Paper Craft	Count	3	2	0	13	0	1	19
	% R	15.8%	10.5%	0.0%	68.4%	0.0%	5.3%	100.0%
	% C	6.4%	1.9%	0.0%	9.0%	0.0%	1.9%	4.3%
Pottery-Clay-Terracotta	Count	2	8	2	13	3	3	31
	% R	6.5%	25.8%	6.5%	41.9%	9.7%	9.7%	100.0%
	% C	4.3%	7.5%	8.7%	9.0%	4.1%	5.8%	6.9%
Stone Carving	Count	2	16	0	4	5	1	28
	% R	7.1%	57.1%	0.0%	14.3%	17.9%	3.6%	100.0%
	% C	4.3%	15.1%	0.0%	2.8%	6.8%	1.9%	6.3%
Textiles	Count	0	3	8	7	2	9	29
	% R	0.0%	10.3%	27.6%	24.1%	6.9%	31.0%	100.0%
	% C	0.0%	2.8%	34.8%	4.8%	2.7%	17.3%	6.5%
Weaving	Count	2	5	0	4	0	1	12
	% R	16.7%	41.7%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	8.3%	100.0%
	% C	4.3%	4.7%	0.0%	2.8%	0.0%	1.9%	2.7%
Wood Work	Count	6	11	11	18	19	2	67
	% R	9.0%	16.4%	16.4%	26.9%	28.4%	3.0%	100.0%
	% C	12.8%	10.4%	47.8%	12.4%	25.7%	3.8%	15.0%
Other	Count	2	7	0	1	1	0	11
	% R	18.2%	63.6%	0.0%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%	100.0%
	% C	4.3%	6.6%	0.0%	0.7%	1.4%	0.0%	2.5%
Total	Count	47	106	23	145	74	52	447
	% R	10.5%	23.7%	5.1%	32.4%	16.6%	11.6%	100.0%
	% C	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

%R=% Within Craft Category (Raw-wise percentage); %C=% Within Region (Column-wise percentage)

The data reveals a noticeable variation in the distribution of handicrafts across India's regions. Among all categories, Painting (16.1%), Wood Work (15.0%), and Metal Craft (11.4%) are the most dominant crafts across India. These three categories collectively account for more than 42% of the total artisan representation. Painting is especially concentrated in the Northern (45.8%) and Eastern (37.5%) regions. Similarly, Wood Work is well-spread, with significant activity in the Southern (28.4%), Northern (26.9%), and Eastern (16.4%) regions. Metal Craft sees a prominent presence in the Central (31.4%) and Southern (25.5%) regions.

Certain crafts are highly localized and showcase regional uniqueness. For example, Palm Leaf Engraving is found exclusively in the Eastern Region, while Kalamkari Painting is practiced largely in the Southern Region (70%). The North Eastern Region, despite having a small overall share, is notable for its strong presence in Textiles (34.8%). Similarly, Block Printing is predominantly practiced in the Western (73.3%) and Northern (26.7%) regions. This indicates that many crafts have evolved regionally, influenced by local traditions, materials, and cultural practices.

Several handicrafts show limited geographical spread and low artisan participation. Categories such as Bone Carving, Natural Fiber Craft, and Palm Leaf Engraving have fewer than 10 practitioners each and are restricted to one or two regions. For instance, Bone Carving is seen only in the Central and Northern regions, while Natural Fiber Craft appears mainly in the Eastern and Southern regions. These crafts may be at risk of decline if not supported adequately through training, promotion, and market access.

Suggestions to strengthen the recognition, inclusivity, and sustainability of the handicraft sector: Based on the comprehensive analysis of handicraft awards in India over the past decade, the following expert suggestions can be offered to strengthen the recognition, inclusivity, and sustainability of the sector:

Promote Gender Inclusivity:The data reveals a consistent gender disparity, with male artisans receiving a significantly higher number of awards than females. Despite some improvement in recent years, targeted efforts are needed to identify, support, and promote the work of women artisans. Policy interventions such as women-focused capacity building, exclusive award categories, and outreach in women-dominated crafts can help bridge this gap.

Strengthen Regional Representation:States like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha dominate the award list, while several north-eastern and smaller states remain underrepresented. This calls for decentralization of the award nomination process and increased awareness campaigns in underrepresented regions. Regional craft fairs, workshops, and mobile jury evaluations could ensure equitable participation across India.

Support Craft Diversity:The findings indicate a concentration of awards in certain craft categories like painting, woodwork, metal craft, and embroidery, while many traditional or rare crafts such as bone carving, palm leaf engraving, and natural fibre crafts receive minimal recognition. Reviving endangered crafts through special grants, promotional exhibitions, and research-driven documentation should be prioritized.

Link Awards to Livelihood Sustainability:While awards provide recognition, they must also translate into sustained economic benefit for artisans. Linking awardees with national and international markets, providing branding and marketing support, and encouraging entrepreneurship through skill upgradation and digital literacy will enhance their livelihood opportunities.

Transparent and Periodic Evaluation:The analysis shows fluctuations in the number of awards given each year, with missing or reduced representation in certain years. A more consistent and transparent framework for award nomination, evaluation, and declaration can help maintain credibility and motivate artisans across all regions and categories.

Establish Mentorship Programs:Shilp Gurus and national awardees should be engaged in mentorship programs to pass on traditional knowledge to younger artisans. This would help preserve intangible cultural heritage and foster

intergenerational transfer of skills, ensuring continuity and innovation in the crafts sector.

Leverage Digital Platforms for Visibility: Digital tools and platforms can be powerful in documenting artisans' journeys, showcasing their work globally, and streamlining the award nomination process. Government and non-government agencies must collaborate to create robust online databases and storytelling platforms for artisans.

Regional Craft Resource Centres: Establishing regional craft resource and training centres can help artisans improve product design, quality, and competitiveness. These centres should also offer guidance on intellectual property rights, especially for crafts with geographical indication (GI) potential.

Conclusion

The handicrafts sector in India, deeply rooted in cultural heritage and traditional knowledge systems, plays a vital role in sustaining livelihoods and preserving artistic diversity. This decadal review of national handicraft awards reveals critical insights into patterns of gender representation, regional dominance, and craft category distribution. While the awards have successfully recognized and celebrated exemplary craftsmanship, the analysis also uncovers disparities that merit attention—such as the underrepresentation of women, north-eastern regions, and lesser-known crafts. The findings underscore the need for more inclusive, transparent, and balanced mechanisms to identify and honor deserving artisans across the country. Strengthening outreach, capacity-building initiatives, regional equity, and craft-specific promotion are essential to making the award ecosystem more representative and sustainable. Furthermore, linking recognition with economic empowerment and intergenerational knowledge transfer can help artisans evolve from tradition-bound workers to celebrated cultural ambassadors.

In conclusion, the journey from artisan to artist must be supported through proactive policy interventions, holistic development strategies, and sustained recognition. Only then can India's rich handicraft legacy thrive in the contemporary era, securing its place both in national development and global appreciation.

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