

EPCH's Mana Craft Project takes off

Union Minister of Jal Shakti, Shri. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat launches craft fusion fashion line - a unique blend of Himalayan and Desert crafts

Handmade crafts and artisans from Mana Village take centrestage at IHGF Delhi Fair-Autumn 2019



Hon'ble Union Minister of Jal Shakti, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, with Chairman, EPCH, Mr. Ravi K Passi; Director General, EPCH & Chairman, IEML, Mr. Rakesh Kumar; EPCH designers; artisans from the Mana village; and models wearing the newly launched collection

Hon'ble Union Minister of Jal Shakti, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat launched an enticing craft fusion fashion line created by synergising distinct raw materials and craft techniques. This collection was developed on the initiation of EPCH, by designers and artisans synergising the exclusive raw materials and craft techniques of Mana, the last Indian village

near China border and Barmer in Rajasthan, the desert State of India. Shri Shekhawat also met the artisans of the Mana region and encouraged them towards broad basing their traditional crafts, assuring of support to the initiative. The new fusion collection was launched on the Ramp at IHGF Delhi Fair - Autumn 2019 (glimpses from the ramp in ensuing pages). As part of its design intervention, hand holding and confidence building initiatives, EPCH has



Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat seen viewing pieces from the collection and interacting with the women artisans from Mana at their stalls at IHGF Delhi Fair-Autumn 2019



successfully brought several artisans and crafts persons into its fold and gradually introduced them into the mainstream handicrafts industry, having honed their skills through design & product development support. Many artisans have benefited and the industry as well as buyers have gained from new assortments and innovations involving resources & skills from grassroots artisans from far flung craft pockets and villages in India.

A recent intervention was carried out at Mana, a village in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, located at an altitude of 3,200 meters. In fact, Mana is the last village before the Mana Pass and is 24 kilometres from the border of India. The inhabitants follow a migratory way of life. They are said to be the last descendants of the Bhotia tribe. Craft forms practiced in and around Mana primarily include handcrafted shawls and carpets that can find many takers owing to their potential for design aesthetics and commercial viability. Among raw materials, abundantly available is wool with purity and texture unique to sheep and goat living at this high altitude. The material is sustainable, resilient, eco-friendly and is a natural animal derivative that is sheared once a year. People in Mana generally weave 100% woolen items such as Gudma, Thulma, Pankhi, Pattu, sweater, cap, muffler, scarf, carpet, Ashan and Pankhi as well as a host of handicrafts.

With EPCH designers' guidance, this raw material and crafting nuances of Mana artisans were combined with hand crafting skills of women artisans in Barmer (Rajasthan) to bring out a range of products and also open up a world of product innovation possibilities for both sides.

IHGF Delhi Fair-Autumn 2019 also featured a collective participation of 10 artisans at a stall in the Theme Area, with a display of carpets, artisanal garments and cushion covers. "This gesture by EPCH is to give them market exposure," said a member of EPCH's Design Team that has been coordinating this project. He informed that EPCH is training a batch of 40 artisans with a designer from National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), at Mana village itself. In a unique craft exchange and mutual knowledge sharing format, EPCH will also take some women artisans from Barmer who will train artisans at Mana in their traditional embroidery and patchwork.

EPCH strives to bring in all artisans and crafts into its fold as part of its 'all-inclusive' approach



Rakesh Kumar,
Director General,
EPCH

No one should be left behind. That's what we believe in at EPCH with our 'all-inclusive' approach. As a Council, we are working very closely with artisans and locals in the interior parts of the country and whenever we find any unique craft

skill that has been developed with the help of raw material available exclusively in these areas, we try to provide them design support so that their crafts can be further honed for a competitive market and innovations can come forth. EPCH's endeavour is that such craft traditions do not go unnoticed or languish due to lack of commercial avenues. Our IHGF Delhi Fair is one such platform where we get such artisan crafts to be showcased for buyers from across the globe.

We are not isolated anymore...

Mr. Bharat and Mr. Rajender, team leaders with the Mana women artisans contingent share, "It's our very first time at this fair and we are observing and learning a lot. We belong to the

Bhotia tribe and have been making products from wool we get from local animals. Here we have 10 artisans from our team who have been trained by EPCH. We are really thankful to EPCH for their design support and effort to bring out more of our potential that we could not comprehend ourselves. We are also thankful for this opportunity as now we feel we are not isolated. Rather, we have support in conserving our tradition & heritage."



Team Mana at IHGF Delhi Fair-Autumn 2019, with their team leaders, Mr. Bharat and Mr. Rajender



On the Ramp



Fusion collection with Mana crafts

This is a winter collection and beautifully amalgamates three different local handicrafts from two completely different regions of India-Mana and Barmer & Jaipur, to create a fusion of the two. One is Pankhi shawls that are a bit coarse like throws made using sheep and goat wool, by the Bhotia tribe of Mana, located at an altitude of 11,000 feet in Uttarakhand; the other is Jaipuri prints from Jaipur and surface effects like patch work and mirror embroidery of Barmer in Rajasthan.

The first collection includes shawls, made by dyeing Pattu and Pakhi using natural dyes like indigo (derivative of the indigo plant), siahi (refers to the black dye from a fermented mixture of iron and molasses, used in traditional dyeing techniques) and kashish printing (a mineral dying process that involves the use of dye and a resist). Thereafter the collection went through a surface effect of printing at Jaipur with the traditional Jaipuri technique. The second collection was made by combining pakhi and pattu with intricate surface embellishments of patch work and mirror work typical of Barmer, a village in Rajasthan famed for this craft. This collection includes overcoats, shawls, bags and winter caps.



