



Crafting A Future

Stories of Indian Textiles and Sustainable Practices

Archana Shah

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- A book that maps down the journey of the tradition of textile and crafting
- Locates the culture of craft in the pages of history
- A guideline to the generations to explore the field

Crafting a Future is a heartfelt celebration of artisans and their vocational skills. Each region in India has its own distinctive raw materials, craft techniques, textiles, motifs and color palettes, and through her well-researched narrative enriched with numerous stories, Archana Shah demonstrates the diversity and true value of handcrafted textile processes. She believes that handspun, handwoven fabrics made using indigenous fibers and natural materials for dyeing will help create a unique identity for handcrafted textiles, and suggests ways to repurpose the abundant artisanal talent available across the country to rejuvenate this sector. These tenets are woven throughout the book, which is broadly divided into three sections based on natural fibres: cotton from plants, silk from insects and wool from animals. This resonates with Gandhiji's concept of developing khadi and village industries to rejuvenate the rural economy, and stimulate development through a bottom-up approach.

Beyond its beauty and heritage value, artisanal production is eco-friendly, has a negligible carbon footprint and fulfils most of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has the potential for creating dignified employment opportunities for millions of people in their own regional location, so that they are not compelled by economic constraints to abandon their ancestral professions and migrate to urban slums to earn a meagre livelihood as unskilled laborers. In essence, the book focuses on artisans, their aspirations and fulfilment in their work. It also draws upon their traditional wisdom to address two of the most serious challenges that we face today: growing unemployment and climate change.

Archana Shah has been collaborating with artisans around the country for the last 40 years to create textiles for urban markets. As a design student, she developed a keen interest in the traditional craft skills of indigenous artisans. This encouraged her to travel to remote corners of the country to study, understand and experience the vast variety of weaving, dyeing, printing, embroidery and ornamentation techniques practised by different communities. This proved to be a very enriching journey, and the unique skills of the people of various regions, their distinctive color palettes and rich design vocabulary became the base for all her future work.

This experience motivated her to start a clothing company, **BANDHEJ**, in 1985, a label that focuses on traditional textile skills, and offers a range of eco-friendly, handcrafted clothing for Indian women with an eastern sensibility. The company was started with the vision of upholding, preserving and promoting the precious skills and inherent knowledge of indigenous artisans through collaborative design interventions. Over the years, through many initiatives and interactions, she has been able to revive and rejuvenate several craft skills, thereby encouraging young artisans to realize that they can earn a decent livelihood by pursuing their traditional vocation.

In 2013, Archana published her first book, *SHIFTING SANDS, Kutch: A Land in Transition*. It recounts her personal journey of discovery, which is interwoven with her association of over four decades with the land of Kutch, its people and their crafts. She continues to believe that there is a lot to learn from traditional wisdom.