

## **“Transforming Minds”— Interactive Craft Education in India**

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### **Abstract**

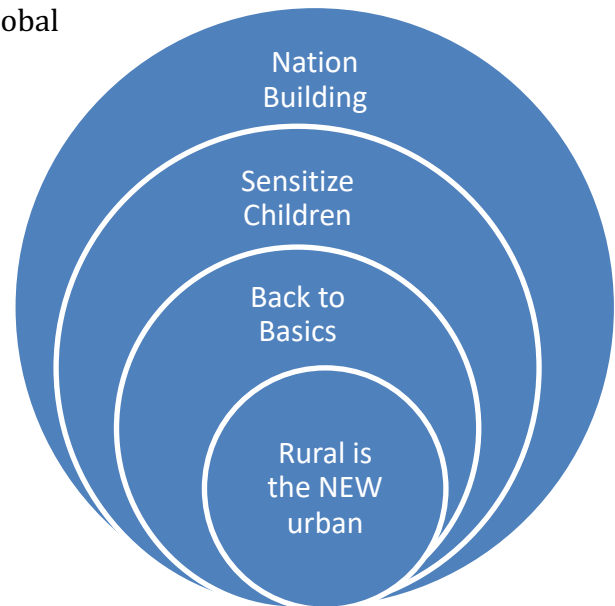
There is a danger of traditional crafts losing their value as the technology occupies more space in the Indian education system. How can traditional crafts be taught in innovative ways to make them attractive to the young generation? After all, this is the generation which has to take forward the rich craft heritage of India. The paper will explore various avenues of bringing younger students into contact with that heritage, including the hand-painted “kalamkari” pictures and narration of stories, keeping in view the “essence” and “fragrance” of craft. Craft education at an early age can stimulate creative thinking and contemporary application. It deserves and requires our support if it is to survive.

*Key Words :* artisans, kalamkari, education, heritage, crafts

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## A Rich Heritage in India

The authors are fortunate to have been born in India, a country rich in traditional textiles and crafts. Every state is rich in some form of textile craft—traditional weaving, block prints, natural dyeing, hand-painted textiles, embroideries, and many other craft techniques. This is the strength of India. Designers in the country have recently revived many traditional techniques and given them global visibility. Yet our millennials are exposed to brand culture and digitization, which has influenced their living styles and overpowered their mind. Craft education brought to school children will help them to be better rooted and understand the rich heritage of India. Designers in India work with craftsmen and have been able to contribute immensely to the ultimate survival of the craft.



However, it is not enough to be buying traditional crafts if we do not also have the knowledge of how they are produced. The buyer needs to understand the process involved in producing a textile material, for example, in order to appreciate its beauty. One also needs to appreciate and understand the emotions attached to it. There are a few brands now educating the consumer with labels which have a small story about the craft. And in the stores there are educational books available which have samples

attached, and where the lives of craftsmen and the process of creation are described in detail.

An estimated 11.65 million Indians were engaged in craft production in 2013. This number is expected to grow to 17.79 million by 2022, making this the second largest employment sector in India after agriculture. Crafts are one of the sustainable industries that is home-based and works with minimum infrastructure.

### **Craft Learning is the Education of the Future**

The paper envisages an attempt to introduce the hand-painted crafts to school children and narrate stories keeping in view the “essence” and “fragrance” of the craft. Craft education introduced at an early age can develop values, stimulate creative thinking, and promote understanding of its relevance in contemporary life. We believe that craft learning is the education of the future and not the past. Traditional crafts not only need to be taught but imbibed from early childhood through sensitizing children toward working with their hands and introducing them to the joy of creating. Traditional crafts have their own age-old value. They represent Indian culture and embody a history that will never lose its significance. It will therefore be beneficial if the children get hands-on crafts experience at a young age. There is a saying to the effect of “catch them young,” and we should act on it.

Yet as noted before, there is a danger of traditional crafts losing their value as technology occupies more space in the education system, especially at school level.

How can one introduce crafts and taught in innovative ways to educate school children and make it interactive? How can we “catch them young”?

To help answer this question, a pilot study was conducted in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh for children age 6 to 12. They were given pictures of animals to see whether these pictures could be used to build short stories through one of the traditional hand-painted crafts called “kalamkari” (a hand-painted picture with natural dyes—“kalam” means “pen” and “kari” means “art”). A competition was held at school level, the children’s animal pictures collected, analyzed, and stories built with these pictures. To create further interest, thermochromic dyes were used along with natural dyes to narrate the stories. Since natural dyes are not very bright, these inks also created additional interest.

Stories were developed around these pictures and shared with children aged 7 to 13. To create further interest, luminous inks were used along with natural dyes to narrate the stories. In Annexes I, II and III, at the conclusion of this paper, the process is explained and short stories presented. Children were extremely happy to read the stories and had many questions about the colors and luminescent inks used. The thermochromic dyes really excited them, they not only wanted to use them in their pictures but wanted to share with other children in their class.

This was only a brief—though promising—attempt to create story books using the natural dyes and painting techniques. There are many other ways in which crafts can be introduced in innovative ways at school level which are cited below.

### **Adopting Innovative Approaches toward Craft Education**

Gaming is the new way of education and not only business schools but design schools as well can experiment, especially at school level. The attention span of students is short, especially for this generation. Therefore this can be easy way of reaching students, making education more entertaining in the digital age. We need to get closer to our students' learning style. Thus craft education can be reconceptualized so as to make it sufficiently interesting that children can learn their Indian heritage on their own.

Creating apps can be one of the choices for educating a technology-driven generation. Most of the traditional crafts require time to be understood and produced, whereas many students lack patience for the same. Using apps allows repetition and ease of working, and the issue of lack of patience can be dealt with. Also, apps allow wider usage and reach a wider audience. One can therefore amalgamate technology with craft to educate about craft in a fun way and make it more appealing.

Creating workbooks in schools can also create awareness about the craft values and heritage that need to be developed. Introducing short stories to explain the process of dyeing, painting, block printing, and embroideries will make it more interesting and attractive for young students to experiment and learn. Designers have been able to conserve the crafts and their intervention has helped craftsmen to survive and enable some of them able to reach new heights along with designers. To inspire the new generation to follow suite, "catch them young." Books can be a valuable asset.

We also feel we should make it compulsory for kids to visit museums and galleries and learn about the same. The rich resources in museums can be useful

to students not only within the country but when students are going for international exchange and international exchange which part of the curriculum

Books in school libraries are important resources, permitting students to relax with the books in their free time. These books should be sufficiently inexpensive that any one interested can also buy them for themselves and build a resource at home. Some of the brands working with traditional textiles in their collection have created basic books to educate consumers in processes such as block printing or creating natural dyes. This creates respect for craftsman who work passionately and improves understanding of the laborious process with which textiles are created by these skilled artisans. These books also contain craft samples, which adds real feel to the final product

Collaborative work in schools as a part of socially productive work will provide a constructive engagement for students so that crafts can be embraced with passion. Projects can be assigned to students to understand the process and skill development can become an essential part of the curriculum in schools. This could focus on Indian textile crafts. This is a great way of imbibing the culture of India, thereby also developing a sense of patriotism and integrity at a young age. Assignments and quizzes can be based on crafts there by integrating it within the syllabi. Such projects create awareness about the craft, inculcating values and heritage of the country.

Visit to craft clusters can also be developed as summer school activities. Seeing the working conditions of the artisans first-hand will inform students about how they have been surviving through the ages, passing their craft knowledge on to each successive generation. Most designers today work at the grass-root level to create

their collections, thus using their skills and giving crafts a contemporary look in order to meet the demand of modern-day consumer. Designers are also educating their clients with tags, which briefly describe the creative process used to produce the craft in question. It is also suggested that when parents take their children for holidays, they can make an effort spend some time observing the crafts of the particular state they are visiting. Thus exposure to crafts can occur not only at school, but also at home.

The rich resources in museums can also be useful to students. I feel we should make it compulsory for the children to museums or galleries. Most schools have included this as a part of their curriculum. The students can get exposure to crafts of other countries as well as India by visiting museums. Documentary films are also a valuable resource for imbibing craft. There are short documentaries available on YouTube, some of which are designed by companies that are working closely with craftsmen. The students can watch these during their free time. A collection of such documentaries can be built in libraries. This could lead to further study of the craft at a later stage and potentially orient the student to follow it into the future.

Interaction with fashion colleges through workshops can help schools to understand crafts at a basic level, including modules on craft documentation. Fashion schools such as the one at which we teach can also initiate workshops intended to educate school children. Our students can inspire younger ones. The exposure gained during craft documentation can reinforce their own learning.

Inviting craftsmen and artisans for workshops during summer vacations is another avenue for education in traditional crafts. The work of craftsmen can be

recognized and their work acknowledged during the interactions. Children would thereby get exposure to design skills, color application and techniques. They can sell small kits to students made by them after the workshop so that the students can practice later. The artisans can also earn in the process, creating a win-win situation for both. In addition, they could put up stalls in school carnivals and parent-teacher meetings featuring these same crafts.

Storytelling can be built around the essence of the craft. Most of the motifs in these stories are developed from everyday life and represent the simple lives of villagers. The simplicity in their life is reflected in their work. This simplicity has also inspired designers over the years and still continues to inspire them. Some of the designers and brands only work with crafts. Stories can represent culture in true sense that will never lose its significance. Students will learn the roots and value of craft by listening to such stories. With the right exposure and interest developed, they might like to know about the craft in greater detail.

## **Conclusion**

Traditional Indian crafts have their own value and relevance in our lives and should not be allowed to disappear. Discussion and interaction with any subject is essential to developing interest towards the same. In our Indian educational and value system, exposure to craft is very limited. Traditional crafts might lose their value because the young generation is becoming more inclined towards technology. Most of the traditional crafts require time to be understood and practiced, whereas many



students lack patience. However, the good news is when something reaches its saturation point, then we can return to our traditional methods.

The issue of teaching Indian traditional crafts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to be handled with sensitivity and responsibility. As technology is constantly being upgraded, adding to our conveniences and grabbing our mental attention in yet further ways, there is a danger of not keeping pace. The

modules or courses devoted to crafts need to be devised in such a way as to adopt these upcoming technologies, while giving ample importance for the traditional crafts to be present in the system. If wisely planned, traditional arts and crafts may find innovative



methodologies to enhance their quality and even propagation. But the responsibility for this lies in the hands of design leaders. They can survey the mindset of the coming generations and their capacity to appreciate the beauty and richness of traditional crafts and ensure that students are allowed to experiment, explore, and enhance these art forms. All students should be guided through this journey, while taking along the technological advances in order to realize the importance of both.

Crafts can be introduced into the curriculum by simplifying them for students to study and understand. Small, simple kits consisting of various tools and building elements can be made available for students to construct 2D or 3D models. For

example, cane and bamboo kits could be provided for weaving or to make their own pencil boxes, even constructing models of cell structure in science. Similarly, a natural dye kit consisting of pens can be provided to students so as to enable them to paint their school logo in their pockets or ties or school uniforms. These and other avenues are available to help students connect with crafts at an everyday level. We should explore them all.

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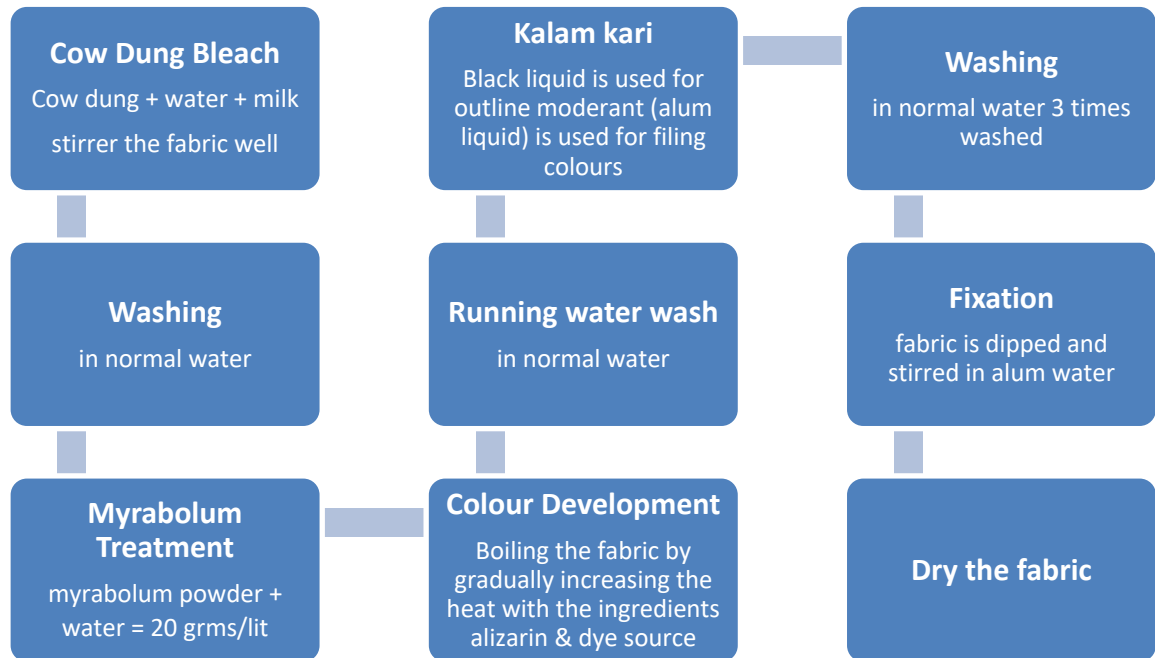
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## Annex I: The Process of Preparing Fabric for Kalamkari



**Annex II : Pictures Collected from School Competitions**









## Annex II, Story 1: Casper and Dona



### BEST FRIENDS: CASPER AND DONA

Kids, you know what, once Dona a giraffe baby and Casper a lion baby, they both got lost in the jungle, you know how?

Think, think, okay. I will tell you, how?



Once Casper was playing hide and seek with his cousins,

Casper mom: Casper don't go far away  
Casper: okay mom

Casper hides behind a huge tree and as his cousins took a lot of time, he slept there.  
Casper's mom: Casper's dad where is Casper he is not with other kids.

The whole family got worried and thought Casper might have been eaten by any other wild animal. So Casper's mom and dad and other family members decided to go away from that place so that no other member is in danger



While Dona was with her family playing with her cousin and eating leaves.

Dona mom: be with us Dona, jungle is not safe for you little one to be far from us.

Dona: yes mommy.

While playing she got tired and slept in the bushes for comfy sleep. After some time, when Dona's mom couldn't see Dona around, she got a bit scared.

Dona's mom asked the kids around:  
kids where is Dona?

All of them said, "Mommy, we don't know..."  
Dona's parents got really scared and thought that Dona might have been eaten by some wild animal and there is danger all around. So they left that place.



When Casper woke up from his sleep,  
He looked here and there, on not seeing his family,

He called "mommy! Mommy!"

On not hearing anything, he got really scared  
He wasn't able to understand what to do.  
He was really sad and scared and kept on crying.



When Dona got up from her sleep,  
even she couldn't see her family there.

She called "mommy! Daddy!"  
But no one was there, who could hear her  
"And at that very moment" Miles away she saw something of same skin color.

She said: mommy...  
And ran towards that tree. But when Dona reached there it was Casper,



Dona: "LION" "RUIN"  
But then only she realized that,  
Casper was crying,  
Dona asked Casper: why are you crying?





Casper: my family has gone from here  
and I am lost in the jungle ...  
Dona: "what? Even I am lost..  
Casper: I am missing mommy,  
I am very hungry ..  
Dona looked around



Dona: there are apples there you want  
to eat that?  
Casper: what are apples?  
Dona: try it out they are very yummy..  
"Here have one"  
As Casper was very hungry he ate the apple.



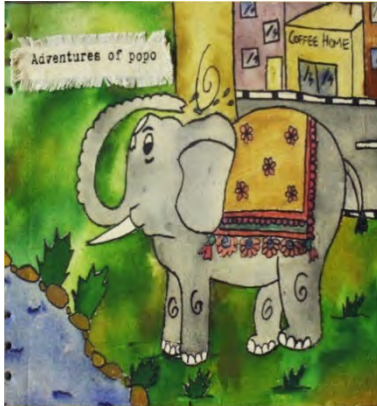
Casper: wow! They are delicious,  
can I have more?  
Dona: told you, Of course, I will pluck  
them for you.  
Casper ate almost all the apples of  
the tree, and Dona was shocked to see  
his appetite.  
Dona: you seem to eat a lot?  
Casper: oh, yes.. I have a biggggggg.. stomach  
Dona: hahahahaha .. casper, it seems  
both of our families have went on their  
way further, lets become friends?

Casper: yha, right... best friends.  
Dona: yes, ofcourse.  
From that day Casper and whisky became  
really good friends. Casper become  
the first vegetarian lion and was friendly to  
all the animals  
in the jungle and he helped and saved other  
animals in times of danger He became the  
most famous among all animals.





## Annex II, Story 2: Elephant in the City



### ADVENTURES OF POPO

Once upon a time there was an Elephant named Popo, he was very naughty and adventurous by nature, by now he is 10 years old and has travelled almost the whole Jungle, he was feeling really bored now, he wasn't getting any new people to Play and meet with new people.



So one day he thought, to go beyond the Jungle boundaries and see and have fun in the outside World. So he started his Journey towards the Jungle end.



After travelling 100s of kilometers he reached a road, where he saw Cars travelling in high speed. At once he got scared and thought of going back, but as he had Travelled the whole lot of distance so he thought to continue and reach the City. After a lot of struggle he managed to walk on the Road towards the city.



After Travelling for whole day and night he reached a point from where he could see the city cross Road, but since it was a very busy road and no car was ready to stop, it was really hard to cross the Road. So Popo thought to just Run and cross the road, as soon as he got a chance he Ran and reached the City.



He got really excited on reaching the City and was very Happy to see the city Life.



But as he was really tired he sat under the Tree for some Rest. And while sitting he was remembering the incidents of what had happened in the past few days and he was also missing his Family a lot.





Next morning he went on the trip of the City and saw how People here are so busy in earning Money and in their own lives. By now he was really tired and was very Hungry but wasn't getting anything to eat. Suddenly a boy named Ram saw Popo, he was very happy seeing him but, but he saw popo was unhappy



He asked Popo: "what happened why you are sad? And how did you come here?"

Popo said: I am very Hungry! And I have come from a nearby Jungle to see how people live in the City.

On realizing popo was hungry Ram ran back home and got him some Fruits to eat.

Ram: Here, eat these you will feel Good



From this day they both became really good friends they used to play together eat together and popo also became a part of ram's family. One day when ram was with his mom and dad, popo became very sad, as he was missing his family, and suddenly he wanted to go back to his family, his home. He sat under the tree and was crying, as he was really missing family, but he even didn't want to leave his best friend.



When ram saw popo crying, he asked: "what happened popo, why are you crying?" Popo: "I am missing my mom and dad, and to go back home, but..." On seeing popo so sad, ram called his dad and said: "please send popo to his parents and to his home where there are his people"



On hearing Ram, his dad took both of them to the same road that leads to Jungle and showed popo the way back.

Ram was very sad; he hugged popo and asked him to go to his family.



Popo left the city and went back home, he was very happy being back to his family, he played a lot with his cousins and family, but he missed his friend ram a lot.



### Annex III, Craftsman's Perspective : Craftsman to Schools

Sudheer anna, a famous kalamkari artist, who left his job of teaching just to pursue his passion kalamkari, one day on getting upset on his society norms , related to not teaching children , not pursuing kalamkari as it was not so much profitable went on doing other jobs, because of all this anna started an NGO where he used to teach girls and house wife and later on being trained used to give them work, so that they can earn form this initiative and make their girls study more and be in power in front of man in the society.



Anna also wanted to take this craft up in schools, so as to make children understand the importance of it, and so that children from that age only would start understanding the value and importance of crafts in our heritage and culture. Anna started going to schools and talking to principals about implementing such courses in curriculum, but initially he didn't get any good response, but he never left hope and still kept on going repeatedly that someday someone will listen. Then one fine day the principal got agitated and asked:  
Why do you want to implement?  
How do you think its going to help the children?

Anna smiled and replied: Ma'am, I am glad that you are ready to listen –  
ma'am kalamkari is not just a hand painting done  
by natural colors and kalam it is far more than that, if you want to  
what children will learn then I would tell you on learning kalamkari a  
person becomes more focused and it makes our mind work faster and  
calculative, the smell of natural substances makes the immune system of  
children better and it gives a much  
much better understanding of the crafts to the children and tells  
them what makes this craft add up to the culture and heritage of  
the country and by this we will also put a foot forward in preserving  
this craft for the upcoming generations.  
Ma'am I hope this answered all your questions?

The principal smiled and replied: you may join from tomorrow only,  
let's not delay any more time.

Anna: Thank you so much ma'am, for understanding.

After this Anna  
slowly started connecting to all the schools and soon kalamkari and  
many others crafts were added into the curriculum in most of the  
schools.

### **Annex III, Craftsman to His Own Family**

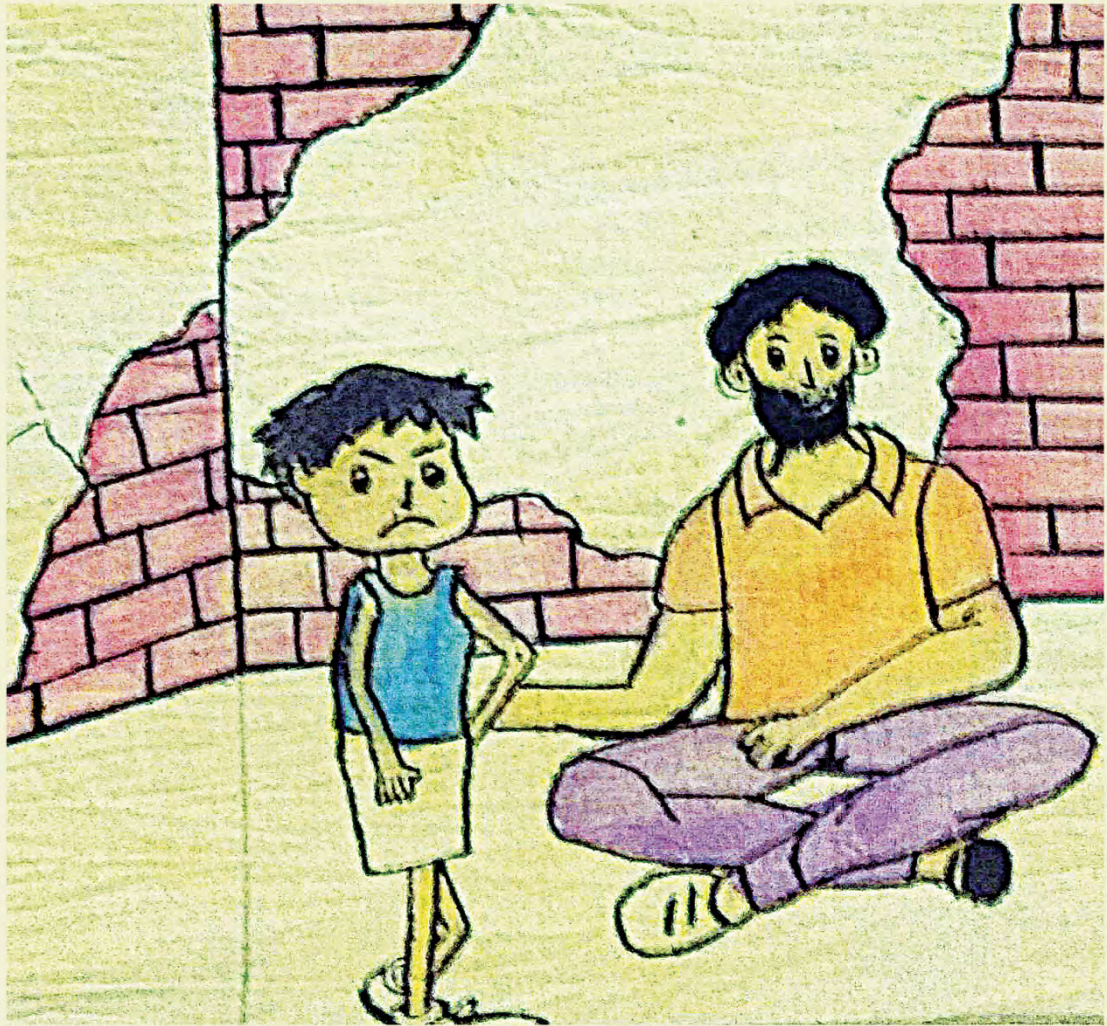


APPA! APPA!

My vacations have started lets go for a holiday, all my friends are going around for a few days, let's go! Let's go!

APPA: Son, right now I have a lot of work, I can't take leave from it.

SON: Appa you always do this to me, I don't understand what work is this that you do, it is all smelly things, and it's such a long process and people even don't give you the amount that you deserve. So, why do you do this?



APPA: Son, it's not like this, things you are saying smelly and disgusting are the most amazing smells for me, these smells drives me to do this more, I don't do kalamkari for money or to show people, I do it because it's my passion, it gives me inner peace and satisfaction to do this craft.

On seeing his son still not satisfied with his answer, he continued.

Son, this craft was taught to me by my father, so, whenever I make it, I feel connected to him, and it feels like he is giving blessings to me from heaven for keeping the art in me still alive.

Son: come and sit here.

You know what?

It's been 25 years that I have been doing this and now this craft has become the part of me and my life and I cannot leave it. On seeing that his son is showing some interest, he added:

You know what is the most interesting part of this craft?

SON: what appa?

APPA: This has been an age old craft started by our fore fathers, more than a craft it the pride of our country, the rich heritage , which needs to survive for many more years to come, so that the world can appreciate it and want to have it. So, we should not stop doing this, rather we should contribute our part in making it survive for years and years to come.

SON: Appa, I am sorry I didn't know that kalamkari has such importance; it is so amazing to know that it adds up to the heritage and culture of our country and we should respect it. Appa will you teach me kalamkari? Please, even I want to be a proud citizen and synthesize the feeling of doing it?

APPA: Of course son, come I will tell you.

From that day the kid started to learn how to do kalamkari and later pursued it as his career and also used to tell his friends and others the importance of the craft.