

E-biz reaches out to rural artisans

VIJAY C ROYIN CHANDIGARH

■ Patiala-based Arun Kumar Bajaj never knew his paintings, made out of thread, will catch the attention of an e-retailer. He has sold his paintings across India through exhibitions. But now he sells his wares sitting at home: a company has offered him an online platform to take heritage legacy to consumers.

■ Ludhiana-based Rajiv Gupta sells phulkart made by village women in Punjab to the entire country through an e-commerce player. He is now less dependent on local markets.

There are many more such success stories of rural artisans. E-commerce companies are reaching out, educating and engaging artisans from remote corners of India. The size of the Indian handicrafts industry is estimated about \$5 billion per annum, according to industry experts.

"The e-commerce boom in India has not only helped the consumers, but also given many opportunities to the sellers. An example is the Dharaai silks in Mumbai. The silm dwellers sold leather products for many years. Today, their business has gone up substantially because they are able to sell," says Sahil Chopra, CEO and



Aparna Chahlu, founder of Crafts Bazar, with rural artisans.

founder, iCubesWire. As per figures in the 12th Five Year Plan 2012-17 document, there are 10 crore rural artisans in the country. While online retailers benefit from major e-commerce players by putting up their products online, rural craftsmen and artisans are left behind. Brokers and middlemen take away their profits.

In recent years, e-retailers have come to the rescue of the artisans. They assist them in manufacturing, packing and marketing online. Platforms such as Crafts Bazar, Trendyhamt.com, Farida Gupta, GoCoop etc. are working with rural artisans.

"Superior artistic products produced by Indian artisans are losing out to the mediocre in the absence of technology. So, currently we are not only selling the products of rural artisans to the Indian market but also serving overseas markets such as in the US, UK, Germany, France and the Middle East," says Aparna, Chahlu, founder, CraftsBazar.

"The current retail market is largely unorganized. The lack of exposure and channels of supply has led to a stunted growth of the sector. So, the digital market can change the situation," says Varinder Singh Joswada, founder and

CEO of Trendyhamt.com.

His company has created a special curated collections corner for the products from the local artisans for foreign buyers.

Also, Parisa Gupta's women apparel business is committed to bringing together a varied range of traditional crafts and techniques. The group has successfully built its online presence, resulting in an increase of 40% year-on-year profitability.

Reaching out to rural artisans is difficult in the early stages. "Initial challenges lie in convincing the artisans that we were not going to cheat them and that we are going to stay. At times we had to make payments before they manufactured products," says Aparna. Persuading every rural artisan is difficult as most of them have been owned by those who promised to sell their products, but never returned.

Another challenge is there are no smartphones in rural areas. So at times retailers have to educate the people and even upload pictures on their behalf. Thus, many artisans do not have bank accounts. E-tailers assist them with it, convincing them about self-sufficiency and identity formation.

Besides, there are several advance landing grounds, which are largely unpaired strips located in remote areas in the north and the north-east for beefing logistic support to forward areas. There are 39 disused airfields with the IAF of which 24 have been identified for operational utilisation such as deployment of long-range vectors, radars, weapon storage areas and emergency recovery for helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.

The highway stretches used for aircraft operations have to be specially built with a thicker surfacing and underlying concrete support base. These should also be easily accessible to the required flying support infrastructure that has to be put in place at a short notice.

"Aircraft taking off from, let's say, a base in central or south India, would require refuelling and other technical support and this is where highway strips can come in," an IAF officer said.

Testing the flying machines

The Aeronautical Test Range (ATR), a first-of-its-kind facility in the country mandated to flight test and evaluate indigenously developed flying machines and aeronautical systems, became fully functional at Varavoo Kaval in Chitradurga district of Karnataka.

Spread over 4,000 acres and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation at a cost of Rs 1,300 crore, its facilities include a runway with taxi tracks, two hangars with an annex for integration of unmanned aerial vehicles, primary and secondary radars for surveillance, air traffic control, telemetry and audio-video communication facilities.

Though the range was partially functional since December 2010, the ATR was formally inaugurated by the Minister for Defence and Finance, Arun Jaitley on May 28, 2017. It will enable DRDO to test its products such as the naval and trainer versions of the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft, Buston II and II UAVs and the airborne early warning and control systems, air-to-ground weapons, parachutes and aerostats, etc.



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Valley to be normal soon: Army Chief

Army Chief General Bipin Rawat said that the situation in the Valley is improving and it is expected to be normal soon. He said that the army is working hard to restore peace and stability in the region.

Cong leader alleges scam

Says it got favours, causing huge loss to sugar mills

Opposition leader in Congress, Shashi Tharoor, has alleged that the government is involved in a scam that has caused a huge loss to sugar mills. He said that the government has been giving favours to certain companies, which has led to a significant loss of revenue for the sugar mills.

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Admission Starts From 19th July 2017