



## Lace industry in India: An Overview

Dr. D.M.Neeraja, Reader,  
Dept. of Commerce, SKSD Mahila Kalasala, Tanuku, W.G.Dt, AP

**Abstract:** There has been a consistent annual growth rate of more than 15 per cent over a 10 year period, from 3.6% to a respectable 10% share in global handicraft exports. In 2005-06 the exports of Indian handicrafts has shown an increase of US\$ 298.87 million. India's largest lace industry concentrated in Andhra Pradesh in general and occupied main place in both West and East Godavari districts. It is important to note that due to lack of demand and for lace product from advanced countries, now the industry and women lace makers are in dire straits. Unless the government formulates a proper policy to streamline the industry and brings it under the organised sector, Andhra Pradesh's 225-year-old lace business with annual exports of Rs 150 crore which is expected to increase twofold if nourished properly with state patronage. This paper gives an overview on lace industry India.

**Key words:** Small and cottage industries, human skill. Rural development

### Introduction

A rewarding feature of economic development in India has been the impressive emphasis of small and cottage industries. The small enterprises have by now established their competence to manufacture a wide variety of sophisticated goods in different product lines requiring a high degree of skill and precision. The cottage and small scale industries play a key role in the industrialization of developing country. This is because they provide immediate mass employment and have a comparatively higher labor-capital ratio. The cottage and small business is the seed of entrepreneurial dreams. Today the entrepreneur remains the back bone of the society.

### Importance of small and cottage industries

The small and cottage industries are important segment of the India economy, accounts for 95 per cent of the industrial units, 40 per cent of output of the manufacturing sector. 35 per cent of the

total export and provides employment to around 18 million persons. The sector covers a wide spectrum of industries. In fact, it encompasses the continuum of the artisans/handicrafts units at one end and modern production units with significant investment on the other producing a wide range of products.

Artisans or units engaged in small industrial activities (manufacturing processing and servicing) in village and small towns' often involving utilization of locally available natural resources for human skill. Rural development did not receive any significance before independence of India. The reason is not difficult to seek. The British government encouraged imports and discouraged development of indigenous industries. Rural industries started getting importance only after the independence. This got expressions in the major policy pronouncements on development in India. The industrial policy resolution, 1948 emphasized the utilization of local self-sufficiency in respect of certain essential -consumer goods" as the suitable



characteristics of cottage and small industries. There was no looking back since then the first five year plan followed the same approach but the development of rural industries was conceived largely in isolation of the rest of the economy. To quote, the first five year plan stressed the development of agriculture, industry, infrastructure and social services, but all this in a manner that maximum feasible additional employment opportunities were created to raise the standard of living of the people in the rural areas.

### **Importance of Lace Industry in International Trade**

The constant drive to make clothing more attractive is responsible for the creation of the finest and most costly trimming we now call classic lace. Those first steps were taken in the land of the Pharaohs, who used flax cloth decorated with colored threads and worked them in geometric designs. The ancient Greeks and Romans would ornament their togas with colors or gold. A new garment needed no ornament about the immediate edge, but as it became worn and frayed, the threads had to be twisted and stitched together. Lace is derived from the twisting techniques used in decoration of the fringe ends of woven fabric. In Flanders, lace is called "kant" meaning border or edge. The birthplaces of lacemaking are generally recognized as Flanders and Italy.

The Italians could afford to wear the expensive Flemish linen cloth. Against this backdrop, it is understandable that a strong demand developed for laces as clothing embellishments and later on also for the

fabric of lace itself. The demand was promptly filled in these two important geographic locations. The Church became wealthier by collecting large sums to compensate for sins and to avoid the plague. The Church became the foremost and principal customer and user of lace during the centuries to follow.

Italian lace makers used a single thread technique with help of the needle, whereas in Flanders, the threads were wound on wooden shuttles or bobbins which were used altogether on a pillow to twist & cross multiple threads and create the desired effect on a loom of pins. This is bobbin lace and was initially known as pinwork. From 1480 to 1590 was the Geometric or Gothic period, without brides; when the lace became heavier, between 1590 to 1630, we see more floral motifs and the various filling stitches were called modes. Between 1630 to 1670 the motifs developed constantly and incorporated not only floral designs but also heads, figures, scenes and birds on a net or meshed background. From 1720 to 1780, little bouquets, sprigs, sprays, flowers, leaves, buds and dots were freely scattered over grounds, creating an exquisite beauty of ornament that reached such perfection that it could not be improved on. Due to these political and economic ties between Italy and Flanders, it is clear that the birth and development of lace making cannot be pinpointed to one specific location. Rather, its creation may be attributed to the union of two cultures. And this culture has been spread over to India also in the latter period.

**Importance of lace industry in India :**  
Generally considered a cottage industry, Indian Handicrafts and Gifts Industry



has outgrown its image to evolve into a rapid growing industry with a turnover from US \$ 1.2 million to US\$ 1.9 billion in the last decade. There has been a consistent annual growth rate of more than 15 per cent over a 10 year period, from 3.6% to a respectable 10% share in global handicraft exports. In 2005-06 the exports of Indian handicrafts has shown an increase of US\$ 298.87 million, i.e., the exports increases by 10.02% over the similar period during 2004-2005. Though India's share in international handicrafts market is just about 2%, the world handicrafts market is estimated to be of the order of US \$235 billion. (Economic survey 2009). The industry tripled its export turnover to Rs.39,000 crore by 2009-10 and Rs.42,500 crores in 2013-14 and further created around 20 lakh new job opportunities.

#### **Lace industry in Andhra Pradesh**

India's largest lace industry concentrated in Andhra Pradesh in general and occupied main place in both West and East Godavari districts. It is important to note that due to lack of demand and for lace product from advanced countries, now the industry and women lace makers are in dire straits. Unless the government formulates a proper policy to streamline the industry and brings it under the organised sector, Andhra Pradesh's 225-year-old lace business with annual exports of Rs 150 crore which is expected to increase twofold if nourished properly with state patronage. Hand-crochets, bed linens, tableware, curtains, and telephone-covers are some of the products that are being made by the five-lakh lace artisans in the twin Godavari districts particularly in the towns of Narsapur, Palakol,

Bheemavaram and Rajahmundry. And despite all odds the artisans and exporters are managing a business of nearly Rs 150 crore annually. There are five lakh artisans and 25 exporters who account for more than Rs 100 crore business annually here. Even for a business of this magnitude, the manufacturers do not possess an imported automatised machine for lace trimming. The region, in fact, has a business potential of more than Rs 1,500 crore annually," he said.

When compared to the patronage that the businessmen in China receive from their government, Indian businessmen receive a pittance, he added. Also, the self-defeating practices of the lace exporters have only aggravated the problem, he said. Andhra Pradesh has five lakh artisans, as compared to 2,000 artisans each in Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Most of the artisans are in the unorganized sector and the exporters are indulging in self-defeating exercises to grab the overseas business. The exporters are reportedly adopting dubious methods to offer a competitive price, including means such as 'courier tapping' on their rival businessmen. As a result, the prices of linen products are declining making them non-remunerative. This is leading to a decline in the quality of the products also.

There is a great demand for the lace products, particularly interior-home-linens, from United States and European countries. However, due to the poor patronage from the government only a handful of exporters are able to compete with their international counterparts of China, Japan, Thailand and other European countries. Of the 25 lace



exporting companies in the twin Godavari districts, only two are equipped with the required machinery including tailoring and ironing unit.

Most of the artisans in the unorganized sector are thus, able to make only lace doilies and cushion covers and not bed linens, tableware or curtains. The raw material used for the lace is fine cotton yarn, which the textile and composite spinning mills supply to the traders. The cost of quality yarn per kg is from Rs 70 to Rs 150. There are also some small spinning mills that supply the yarn at a price of Rs 70 to Rs 80 a kg. Unless the central and state governments recognize the business potential and bring the industry into the organised sector, the lace business in Andhra Pradesh would die a slow death, the lace exporter said.

#### **Lace craft in the twin Godavari districts, Andhra Pradesh**

Lace craft was introduced in the twin Godavari districts in 1780 by the Dutch missionaries and lace park in Narsapur. It was taught only to the church believers making it an exclusive domain of the Christian community. Even today, majority of the artisans hail from the same community. Godavari Delta Women Lace Artisans Co-op Society situated in a small town called Narsapur which is on the west bank of river Godavari in West Godavari dt. The river ends here and mingles in the sea the Bay of Bengal. Narsapur is famous for lace making which is noted around the globe for more than 100 years. Most of the rural and semi urban women who belong to the poor communities are making out their livelihood by this profession.

At last in 1983 we started our first business with Trade Aid, Christian Church, New Zealand, who were pleased to place an initial order for supplying handmade cotton lace goods worth Rs.8,750/- giving full amount in advance. They continued to co-operate with us placing the orders regularly. Our business gradually increased and we located another Alternative Trading Organization – Ofam Trading in Bicester, UK. They started placing orders with us and are continuing to do so. On account of their help our society is now able to do our business and our artisan members will never forget the help rendered by them.

Our being a coastal area we are subjected to frequent calamities like cyclone, gales, floods, heavy rains and also occasional tidal waves. During the unprecedented floods of August 1986 or area was completely inundated b the floodwaters of Godavari River. Most of our area was under a sheet of water for many days. There were much causality, not to speak of the loss of crops, cattle and collapse of houses. Our women artisans lost everything in the floods. Ever since the above floods, there have been successive cyclones, which are hitting us, very hard. The artisans have not so far recovered from the above loss. Our appeals to several charitable and philanthropic organizations have not yielded any fruitful results. Women are looked down in the society as sub-human beings. There are certain taboos and customs, which are hindering the growth of women. Generally a male is treated as superior to female. People are illiterate and are very dogmatic. It is taboo to educate a girl. It is also taboo to arrange



a marriage for her after attaining puberty. The evil of dowry system is rife and rampant in this area.

Lace making was first introduced by a lady namely Mrs. Macro of Scotland. Unfortunately as the time proceeds the lace artisans were exploited by the middle men, who are interested in money making and not in the lace making. The artisans were paid low wages and there amassed large amounts by exporting them to overseas. Even then there was no certainty that the women artisan would have work round the year. Employing at then women the way dependent on the orders they get from their buyers. These women artisans were deprived at this work whenever the middle men exporters were not getting the orders as their main interest was to among wealth. The middlemen had a monopoly in the entire lace business and exploited the poor artisans. The wages paid on the middlemen were meager and not at all sufficient for their family maintenance

Metal lace describes a type of lace made from metal or metallic threads, such as gold, silver, or copper. The designs can be worked on a textile ground, or the lace can completely be made from metallic threads. It is mainly used as an embellishment for military uniforms, fashionable, ceremonial and theatrical dress, and ecclesiastical textiles. Lace made using gold wire has been produced since antiquity, with examples of gold netting found in Egyptian and Assyrian tombs from 1500-1000 BCE. It was mainly produced as an embellishment for religious vestments and high status garments. Metal lace, including gold and silver point de Venise, was produced in

Italy until the 15th century, when high taxation and sumptuary laws led to textile threads such as linen replacing the use of metal. To avoid these costs, the production of metal lace moved to France, where a high demand by royalty and the French aristocracy led to Arras, Aurillac and other locations becoming renowned for gold lace production. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century on, most metal lace was a combination of metal and textile threads, rather than made of pure metal. Gold lace and braiding was a popular option for military uniforms because it resisted tarnish, unlike other metal laces. Contemporary gold lace usually has a high silver percentage, which can be as high as 90%, with the actual gold content as low as 3%. Much modern gold (and other metal) lace is now manufactured in India. Modern Indian "pure gold lace" is technically made from silver that has been electroplated with gold.

### Conclusion

Generally considered a cottage industry, Indian Handicrafts and Gifts Industry has outgrown its image to evolve into a rapid growing industry with a turnover from US \$ 1.2 million to US\$ 1.9 billion in the last decade. Lace making was first introduced by a lady namely Mrs. Macro of Scotland. Unfortunately as the time proceeds the lace artisans were exploited by the middle men, who are interested in money making and not in the lace making. The artisans were paid low wages and there amassed large amounts by exporting them to overseas. Even then there was no certainty that the women artisan would have work round the year. Employing at then women the way dependent on the orders they get from their buyers. These



women artisans were deprived at this work whenever the middle men exporters were not getting the orders as their main interest was to amass wealth. Thus there is a need of hour to study the performance of lace industry in India.\

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