4 LOCAL MARKET

ACTIVITY 4.1

PRICING PROBLEM

Class : XI
Time : One period

Read the passages below. They will help you appreciate the problems that craftspersons encounter while pricing their products for sale in different situations.

The True Value of Crafts

Master-craftsmanship cannot be assessed by the cost of materials possessed, their weight or size, nor measured by the mere volume of knowledge acquired.

There is a different force at work where man is creating something beautiful for himself or for the household: purposeful, but non-commercial. It is this that has impelled artists to gain mastery over their workmanship and produce superb things. The joy of creating with single-minded concentration and infinite patience to bring their effort to perfection resulted in the wealth of beauty in their life. Great truths are only sustained through the fine quality in the little everyday things in life.

Handicrafts are valuable not merely as beautiful heritage, but because we need to live with them, touch them, feel them, use them, have intimate communion with them, so that our life is enriched by their grace.

— *KAMLADEVI CHATTOPADHAYA*

In our country most objects made of precious metals were sold traditionally by weight, and often still are. This means that in most cases, the cost of the workmanship was not taken into consideration. The prevailing market rates for silver and gold would be known to both parties, and in settling the price of an object the merchant would include a mutually acceptable profit percentage that varied with the quality of the work.

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Craftspersons selling products at a mela, *Madhya Pradesh*

Even for the best work, for which the charges would clearly be somewhat higher, a very low value was placed on the skills of the gold or silversmith. He was treated in the same way as any other labourer. This is in direct contrast to the West where the costs of workmanship are often greater than the intrinsic value of the material being worked, and where the artistic value of the finished object is reflected in its retail price. Yet, all the same, in India, a great degree of sophistication and a wide range of techniques evolved for fashioning precious metals.

What is the purpose of *a mela*?

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SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR SHORT ASSIGNMENTS

1. While visiting the local market interview different craftspersons on how they get their raw materials and record the interview. This information is crucial for determining its price.
   - How do different craftsmen price their products?
   - How do they calculate the price/value of their own workmanship?
2. Visit a local *haat* or *mela* and document one type of material like clay. Identify the different clay objects found, their form and function and the different prices for each.
3. Discuss the different ideas presented in the passages above in Activity 4.1 and write your opinion on the value of crafts.

ACTIVITY 4.2

FASCINATING WEIGHTS

Class : XI
Time : Two periods

What are the different methods of measuring *ghee*/milk/flowers/cloth?

A visit to the local market may be organised either during the last two periods of the day or after school hours. Before visiting your local market/*mela*/*haat* for survey read the following passage on a few ways of weighing and measuring used by local craftspeople.

Over the centuries we have used different ways of measuring weight in our country. Many of these are most ingenious, especially those that were created to weigh precious metals. In a similar fashion, units of length were traditionally always measured in units that were based on body parts. Many of us are familiar with how a person trading in textiles holds the fabric from the tip of the fingers to the side of the nose to measure a *gaz*, or uses a handspan for measurement.

Ghee *seller, Rajasthan*

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR SHORT ASSIGNMENTS

1. Investigate the different ways objects are weighed and measured in your local market/*mela*/*haat*. Along with your classmates create a display (of charts, photographs, etc.) of these for others in school.
2. Develop alternate ways of weighing and measuring ensuring that the interests of the consumer and the creator are protected.

Flower seller, Tamil Nadu

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ACTIVITY 4.3

MARKET SURVEY

Class : XI
Time : One period

Where do craftspeople get raw materials for their craft?

Read the passage below that describes some of the problems that workers in precious metals have in purchasing and getting their materials.

Purchase of Raw Material

Carved silver box, Eighteenth Century

The silver trade and the supply of precious metals was, and still is, in the hands of bullion dealers (*sarafs* or *mahajans*) without whom its whole structure would collapse. These men distributed precious metals to local markets throughout India, ensuring that all the production centres depended on them for their needs.

There have always been a large number of registered *sarafs* in India and today there are over 12,000. They also serve as moneylenders, normally charging very high rates of interest. These *sarafs* usually had gold and silver smiths working for them on a monthly stipend. As the average worker in precious metals could not afford to invest money in a stock of raw silver or gold, the *saraf* would advance bullion to them. This ensured that the silversmith always was in a state of debt to the *saraf*.

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR SHORT ASSIGNMENTS

1. While visiting the local market interview different craftsmen on how they get their raw materials and what problems they face and record the interview.
2. What is the role of the moneylender? Who are they and what are their terms and conditions in your locality?

Raw material for the lost-wax process being treated

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ACTIVITY 4.4

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Class : XII
Time : One period

Forbidden Luxury

The celebrated Kashmiri *shahtoosh* 'ring shawl' made from the fleece of the wild Himalayan ibex, is so fine that a metre of this woollen shawl can pass through a man's signet ring. Production and sale is banned today for ecological reasons and to prevent the extinction of the ibex. Weaving it was a fine art, wearing it now a forbidden luxury.

What other items, like the *shatoosh* shawl, are banned in order to save wildlife in India?

Migrant Artists

Velu Aasari is a woodcarver with a long lineage of ancestors who were traditional wood carvers for temples. According to Velu Aasari, his ancestors settled in Tanjore and carved images for the temple carts of the temples in the district. When patronage ceased with the end of Maratha rule in Tanjore in the mid-1800s they moved to Karaikudi, a small town to the east of Madurai. There the Nagarathar Chettiars, a merchant community with a vast network of business throughout Southeast Asia were beginning to build huge mansions which required the skills of master carvers and carpenters. Velu's ancestors helped to carve the doors and columns of these houses. The main door was particularly intricate, as it delineated the threshold between the outside public space and the interior sacred, family space. But after Indian Independence the Chettiars closed their business abroad, most losing all their investments, and returned to Chettinad. Velu Aasari's father had to again search for work. To his dismay the only work to be had was the dismantling of the old Chettiar houses for sale of the decorative pieces and the wood. He was employed to convert the beams and rafters into new windows, doors and shelves.

Are old houses in your locality dismantled and the parts sold in the antique market?

In the early 1980s Velu Assari's family moved near Salem to Kallakurichi, one of four villages along with China Salem, Thammampatti and Arumbavoor which were emerging as a new centre for woodcarving. His family was attracted by the fast growing market with agents from all over India coming in search of good carvers for their craft export and domestic market. They also had relatives through marriage alliances there.

Velu Assari is now engaged in the carving of panels of Hindu deities, mainly Ganapathy and Lakshmi for the Chennai and Mumbai markets. The panels decorate walls in middle-class homes. Some are given an antique finish for export. His younger brother, however, has moved to Bangalore and joined a furniture

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manufacturer, carving and ornamenting chairs. He believes that the furniture market has a better future. His wages are higher and his children have better educational opportunities.

Velu Aasari's uncle still remains in Karaikudi. He carves the vahanas and chariots, processional mounts for Hindu deities during festivals. His order book includes contracts with temples in Singapore and America as well as Indian temples.

Velu Aasari is happy in Kallakurichi. However he has ambivalent feelings about the new developments that have been taking place in the village. Many new workshops have sprung up, but they are not owned by members of his Visvakarma community. Instead these workshops are now owned by workers and labourers who had worked earlier in their relatives' workshops. They learned the trade and are now entrepreneur craftsmen in their own right. Another new phenomenon is the quest on the part of some young women from the community to learn wood carving. This he happily supports. Change is the only constant in Velu Aasari's life. He wonders what the future will bring.

– From an interview of Velu Aasari, a woodcarver from Tamil Nadu

DISCUSSION AND ESSAY TOPICS

- Discuss the migration of crafts people in your city.
- Investigate and record the changing needs in society and how the local crafts community has adapted to these new demands.

How are fragile materials transported to the market in your locality?

Banana leaves being transported, Tamil Nadu

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ACTIVITY 4.5

TRANSPORT OF CRAFTS

Class : XII
Time : One period

Before students begin their short assignment and visit the market/shop/*mela/haat* prepare them to ask interesting and relevant questions of the people they will meet there such as producers, traders, consumers, etc.

In the following passage Sathya's father describes the special designs and weaves of different regions of India.

Colours of the Indian Bazaar

Sathya's father had other stories: He travelled all over India to bazaars and melas to sell his sarees and get orders for more. He told Sathya of gold brocaded wedding sarees made in a holy city in the north called Varanasi, on looms with a complicated combination of treadles and shuttles called 'jacquard'; delicate floral patterns called jamdani, and another technique called tanchoi after three brothers who had brought the skill from China many centuries ago. Sathya heard of an incredible skill called ikat: where the yarn was stretched, tied with waxed cotton thread, and dyed in different colour combinations before weaving. As the weft threads were woven into the warp, intricate designs of parrots, fish, elephants and lotus magically appeared in its length. In Andhra these saris were called Pochampallis, and in Orissa, Sambalpuris. In Patan in Gujarat, both the weft and warp yarn was tied and dyed to create a fabric called patola, but now only one family was left who knew this skill. In Chanderi in North India, weavers wove cotton fabric so fine that it rivalled the Dhaka muslins. They had 1800 threads to the warp. Every corner of India, said Sathya's father, had its own special designs and weaves, though Kancheepuram was one of the most famous.

Shops selling sarees from different regions of India

ACTIVITIES

Make a list of crafts objects found in the market you visited.

- Indicate on a map of India/world where they came from.
- How were they transported to your locality?

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ACTIVITY 4.6

NEW IDEAS

Class : XII
Time : One period

Read the following passages and do the activities suggested at the end of the passages.

Terracotta plaque made by a student

In one of his notebooks, Sanko Chaudhary, noted sculptor and collector of art and craft wrote, "The time has come to ask ourselves what we want to do with the potential talent of the artisan sector." His collection was a reminder that the strength of a craft lies in a synthesis of function with form, rather than today's mindless production of over-ornamented, repetitive bric-a-brac. Even kitchen implements once had both style and utility. Creativity and imaginative design transformed a sewain press into a magical horse, a sindur box into a harmonious amalgam of fish and peacock.

New Surfaces

Community art is now adjusting to presenting itself in different ways for commercial activity. There are interesting examples of how different traditional art forms can be adapted to new surfaces and on to three-dimensional products which can be sold.

According to Western criteria art should be permanent. A painting should be permanent and framed rather than washed off for the next season.

All these new developments have led to creativity of a new kind. Paintings traditionally applied to walls are now done on boxes or trays or fabrics of different kinds. Some have even used traditional folk painting to illustrate story books or make animation films.

Wall painting, Bihar

An important aspect of appreciating the cultural heritage and art forms of different societies and communities is to learn that adaptations must not distort the art form so that its origins and meaning are lost.

An appreciation of the culture, the meanings and significance of particular motifs, and a basic respect should be the foundation for adaptability.

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SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Choose a craft item from home that has been adapted to new uses. Present the object in class and argue whether it is a successful adaptation of form, function and new usage.
2. Discuss in class: Should art be permanent?
3. Find examples in the local market to illustrate the following idea. *An appreciation of the culture, the meaning and significance of particular motifs, and a basic respect should be the foundation for adaptability.*
4. Explore how adaptation of a craft to new surfaces has led to creativity of a new kind.
5. Find examples of adaptation that have distorted the art form so that its origins and meaning are lost.
6. Investigate local examples in the market of permanent and impermanent craft forms.
7. What effect does transformation of a craft in new ways, have on the craft, the craftspersons and their skills?
8. When crafts adapt to market forces, is this an example of adaptability, creativity or the dilution of a tradition?

Handcrafted umbrellas for different purposes

Permanent and impermanent art forms, Tamil Nadu

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ACTIVITY 4.7

HANDLOOM TO MACHINE

Class : XII
Time : One period

Arrange a visit to any well-known handloom centre near your town/city. Try to visit a family of weavers as a group with friends/class from school. Take a teacher or a parent along. Find out how the weavers work; how men and women share the labour; how cotton/silk are turned into beautiful cloth. What are the problems that weavers face? How many of them have access to schools and colleges? Write an essay on what you have learnt.

Similarly, in a group, visit a modern cloth mill in your vicinity. Find out how the basic weaving techniques of the handloom weavers are done by machines. Who owns the mill? Who owns and controls mills in general? Do people from the weaving community own cloth-making factories? Why not? Who works in these mills? Do only people belonging to the weaving community work here? If traditional weavers do work in the mill, what role do they play?

Cotton weaving on a handloom, Assam

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Making pottery without using the wheel, Assam

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ACTIVITY 4.8

THE GENDER OF CRAFTS

Class : XII
Time : One period

In several professions, men and women share tasks equally. Among the weavers, women are equally involved. The gender division of labour is largely a result of patriarchy — a system where fathers or male members in a family or society tend to dominate and control the means of production.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Students can study a single craft and the different roles of men and women in its production, sale, etc.
- Which crafts in your neighbourhood are specifically associated with men and which ones are associated with women?
- Collect information on the difference in payments to men and women practising the same craft.

ACTIVITY 4.9

THE STATUS OF CRAFTS

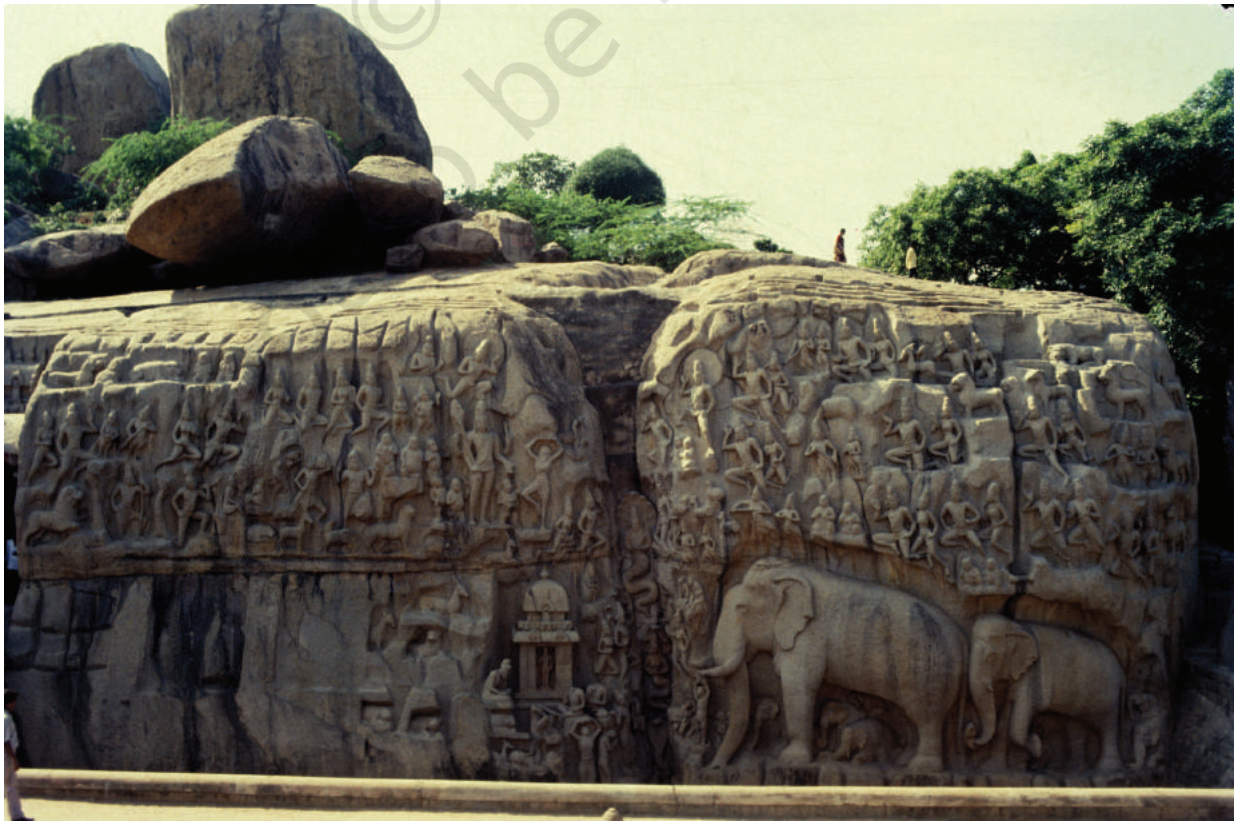
Class : XII
Time : One period

Conversation with a Sthapati

*In Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, there is a small but very sprightly temple dedicated to Vishnu. The temple's traditional history (*sthala purana*) claims that it dates back to an earlier yuga, but its architecture betrays that it is of recent origin – not earlier than the eighteenth century. In all probability, it was built by Brahmins from present-day Andhra and Karnataka who happened to live in the street facing the temple. These Brahmins have long since vanished from the scene, leaving behind a minuscule and an impecunious remnant. The locals control the temple now and it is presently undergoing a vigorous restoration led by a duo comprising a devout bachelor and a dedicated Government official who makes no bones about proclaiming that he is a non-believer. This unlikely pair want to erect a five-storied* gopuram *at the entrance of the temple. The road leading to the temple is choked with the detritus of this grand vision, but the residents do not seem to complain. The pathway surrounding the temple is strewn with huge stones that will form the base for the* gopuram.

The Sthapati *(master builder) supervising the building activities is tall and garrulous. His tallness is accentuated by a slight limp. His garrulousness is softened by a sing-song voice.*

Descent of Ganga in granite, Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu



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His face looks fresh, uncreased by age. I mention this to him and he laughs "I have struggled very hard, sir, to reach where I am. I am a Sthapati of more than twenty years of experience. And I am not a Visvakarma. I am a Chettiar by birth".

The last remark comes as a surprise. As 'sacred' construction in the South is totally monopolised by the community of Visvakarma. The architectural wisdom is handed down from one generation to another and kept strictly within the confines of this close-knit community. That this method of transmitting knowledge has not resulted in any grievous architectural loss is evident from the riot of temples in the South, temples dating back to the sixth century.

"I had to struggle hard to reach this level, sir. My grandmaster was initially reluctant to teach me the secrets of the art. I was originally consigned to the furnace to learn the lowly technique of chisel-making. It took a long time for me to come out of the mouth of fire and convince my master that I would make an ideal disciple."

He adds, "Now, I am his principal disciple. I have worked in many legendary temples. In Sri Rangam, in Palani, I have learnt this art the hard way."

"What about the books on the subject?"

"Books? What books? The knowledge comes from practice, sir. And years of apprenticeship. My only regret is that I haven't been able to convince my master that I am good enough to learn the Sanskrit texts. The Shilpa Shastra texts."

"Does your master know Sanskrit?"

"Yes, he does. But Sanskrit is only for the Visvakarma boys. I am after all a lowly Chettiar. Not a pedigreed Chettiar either."

"Are you upset with your master?"

"Why should I be upset? He is my God. It is my fault that I haven't measured up to his expectations. I want my son to master the Shilpa Shastra texts. I shall train him early." He adds wistfully, "And find a Sanskrit tutor for him."

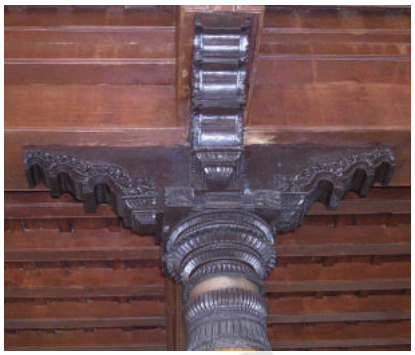
The backyard of the temple is a hub of activity with stonemasons working on huge blocks of granite.

"Are they Visvakarmas?"

"No, no", he laughs. "They all come from two villages near the town of Karaikudi. The chiselling of these stones requires special skills, which only these villagers possess."

"Would anyone of them become a master builder? Would you train one, if one of them was willing and was as earnest as you were?"

What is the function of a bracket?



Brackets made of different materials, from different regions

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"That may not happen in my lifetime. Maybe, my son or my grandson would get a diligent stonemason as his disciple. It takes time."

The edifice of caste, I realise, is as hardy as the outcrop of granite from which these stone blocks have been chiselled away. Ordinary people have been looking for, and finding, novel tools to chisel down the edifice. They know that the task is difficult and time-consuming. They are not in a hurry. They are prepared to chisel. Block by block.

The skilled community of potters — known in most parts of northern India as kumhars*, in Telugu as* kummar *and Tamil as* kushvar *— came to be regarded as a 'lowly' caste in the post-Vedic period. Most castes working with mud, soil and clay were thought to be dealing with 'impurities'. Castes associated with any kind of productive skills have, therefore, been considered lowly.*

In India, the weaving community, despite its scientific knowledge base and artisan skills, has been regarded as 'low' caste, and suffered from lack of dignity in the social and spiritual spheres — even though weavers, like farmers, potters and leatherworkers, were path-breakers in science and technology.

Today, weavers continue to remain poor. In several states weavers are committing suicide, unable to repay the loans they are forced to take. Such a community, in order to modernise and survive in this era of globalisation, must have access to the best education and employment opportunities.

— P. ANANTHAKRISHNAN, The Pioneer, *15 March, 2009*

Creating a Data Bank

...we would need to undertake detailed and comprehensive surveys of every kind of art and craft practice, documenting their forms and functions, materials and techniques, variations in practice and the specialities of each. The main intention of these surveys will be to build a resource bank of information in their regard, supplemented by museum collections of exemplary specimens and the materials and tools that went into use, adequate enough to give a full picture of these to future generations even if their practice died out or was abandoned or changed out of shape. This could work as a seed bank that holds out the promise of their revival or refurbishment in the time to come if such a need arose. The picture they present may also

Large-pot maker, Maharashtra

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Pottery workshop, Maharashtra

re-educate both the (listless) practitioner and the (apathetic) public of our time into realising their true value and responding to their niceties. And, on the top of this, attract the attention of a new tribe of non-traditional aspirants, or artist craftsmen, in urban society.

— K.G. SUBRAMANYAN,
The Magic of Making: Essays on Art and Culture

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR SHORT ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss why the status of craftspeople is so low.
2. Undertake a study of a crafts community in your neighbourhood to understand whether there has been any social/economic change in the last 20 years.
3. Study one crafts community and comment on its access to education, health, diet, resources and facilities.
4. Develop a scheme of three actions that can be taken by society/*panchayat/nagar palika* to improve the well-being of the crafts community in your region.

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