

Lepakshi: Empowering the Artisans

Written by Nina Rai

Tuesday, 17 August 2010 12:43



The year 1982 saw the inception of Andhra Pradesh Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd (APHDCL) under the trade name 'Lepakshi'. At that point in time the Andhra Pradesh Govt.'s share capital investment in it was to the tune of Rs. 150.36 lakhs. With the Indian Govt. chipping in with Rs. 50 lakhs towards promotion, development and marketing of handicrafts in addition to implementing various schemes for the benefit of the artisans, the Corporation today employs around 181 people at its production unit 'Nirmal Industry' in Hyderabad.

In all there are 12 'Lepakshi' Showrooms in Andhra Pradesh, one in Delhi and one in Kolkata. The Corporation markets the produce of over 2 lakh artisans through its network of the above 14 sales emporia.

Vision of Lepakshi

Lepakshi has a long term vision of "An Empowered Artisan Community Thriving in an 'Enabling' Environment". Its basic social objectives is to develop and promote handicrafts, undertake marketing of handicrafts, promote and establish showrooms, organize exhibitions, cause wide publicity of handicrafts and undertake welfare activities for the benefit of the artisans. By and large Lepakshi markets its wares through its retail showrooms, craft bazaars, exhibitions, craft 'melas' and EXPOs held in different cities of the country, via participation in domestic & international trade fairs, opening of new sales outlets etc, through quid pro quo arrangements with other State handicrafts development bodies. It invites artisans and crafts persons in different craft media to demonstrate and sell their products directly to the customers in these events.

As of 2008-09 Lepakshi achieved a sales target of Rs.55 Crores as against the sales figure of Rs. 51 Crores in 2007-08. The Corporation also regularly procures the wares of the local craftsmen at fair prices after examining the skills and quality of products.

Promotion and Developmental activities:

Lepakshi promotes and develops its activities through various training programmes. It provides training to artisans for upgrading their skills and helps to increase the production base and revive the languishing crafts. Training is given in selected crafts such as Brass Art Metal Ware, Nirmal painting, Batik painting, Silver Filigree and Chreriyala painting.

Annually around hundred craft persons benefit from such training programmes. Common Facility Service Centres (CFSCs) have been set up at Hyderabad and one at Bobbili is in progress. It provides infrastructural facilities such as tools & machinery & design inputs to the artisans, conducts design and technical workshops so that the artisans gain inputs on the same and thus benefit from it. Moreover it takes steps to give extensive publicity through Electronic and Print Media, Brochures, Hoardings, Ad. Films, Website, etc.

Welfare measures for artisans:

In order to promote the welfare of artisans various measures are undertaken. Old & economically backward artisans above 60 years are sanctioned pensions from out of internal resources. (So far it has sanctioned Rs.500 per month to each of 67 such artisans and plans are on the anvil to extend similar facility to other deserving artisans as well). State Level Excellence Awards are bestowed on outstanding artisans, and financial assistance is extended by Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India, New Delhi, for construction of house-cum-work-sheds for the artisans.

Lepakshi Exhibition

Lepakshi exhibitions are held in prominent locales all over the country to promote the priceless traditional handicrafts and also help the artisans to increase their earnings via sales in these exhibitions

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K V Subbanna, Manager, Lepakshi Handicrafts Emporium says “The main objective of the exhibition is to improve the condition of artisans. Speaking about the artisans he said “There are no middlemen involved in the transactions and the proceeds go directly to the artisans. Most of the artisans here are from Andhra Pradesh and particularly those selling leather lamp shades and puppets, terracotta pottery and decorative items etc belong to poorer segments of the society. We have taken care of their traveling expenses, lodging and boarding and food,” he informed.

The exhibition-cum-sale was indeed a great platform for the artisans to display their unique wares, as there were no middle men involved and thus the artisans themselves were the real beneficiaries in terms of profit and satisfaction.