





**Recognising the Unrecognised, they are Gems, the Traditional Artisans and their Crafts – they are custodians of our culture, the culture of the North East Region, India.**

## **About the North East Region and its Crafts:**

The North-Eastern Region (NER) can be described as a rainbow country, extraordinarily diverse and colourful, mysterious when seen through parted clouds. Flanked by hills and with the mighty river Brahmaputra slashing a central path between its north and south, the NER is potentially one of the richest geographical units of the country. It is a land where tea is an industry, handicrafts a major occupation.

The isolation of the NER began earlier due to British imperialism, when the region was cut off from its traditional

trading partners, such as Bhutan, Myanmar, and Indo-China. The western part of the NER is connected to the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent by a narrow land corridor called the Siliguri Gap, which is 22 km wide. The NER is one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world. Its economy has a distinct identity because of its unique physical, economic, and socio-cultural features. NER covers an area of 2.62 lakh square kilometers, making up 7.9% of the country's total land area. Its population is approximately 57 million, comprising 3.96% of India's



total population. Approximately 98% of the NER's border, spanning 4,500 km, forms international boundaries. Historically, the NER has served as an important physical and cultural bridge between India and Southeast Asia, and it has been a key focus area for archaeology. The tribal population ranges from 19.3% in Assam to 94.5% in Mizoram, with over 70% of residents living in rural areas. The region is home to more than 160 Scheduled Tribes and over 400 sub-tribes. With over 220 ethnic groups and an equal number of dialects, the region is highly diverse. India's Act East Policy has become an important approach for the development of NER. Its significant export potential and strategic location make it an ideal candidate for declaration as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Many of the northeastern states were created to fulfill the ethnic, political, and cultural aspirations of the people; their vividity demanded so. Its major portion of the receipts comes from the Centre, tax revenues are negligible, and the non-Plan revenue expenditure is high. The primary sector economy, due to small land-holding, high cost of inputs, and low

yield rate, is not lucrative. The creation of employment in public organisations has reached a point of saturation, with a very high public servant-to-population ratio. Jobs in the private and service sectors are inadequate. The mismatch in jobs created and job seekers available adds to the problem.

The technological status is low.

The Government of India and the respective State Governments have been working to reduce the mismatch and disparity. To add to their genuine efforts, the community organisations have to come forward with innovative and solutionary ideas. The North East Integration Rally, 2026, is an outcome of the brainstorming of the Knowledge Centre Foundation (KRC Foundation) – a think tank based out of the NER.



## Why identifying the crafts and recognising the artisans:

The complex relation between environment and population dynamics influences the quality of life; it depends on judicious and sustained use of the environment. This approach necessarily has to have a decentralised pattern of development, for this is the most appropriate means to reconcile the contradiction between quality of life and environment. An environmentally friendly pursuit in a decentralised mode is an appropriate tool of development for her.



A paddy husking equipment & spinning wheel, Assam

One of the focuses of the North East Integration Rally, 2026, is to contribute significantly to restoring the age-old rich tradition, culture of the NER, its deep-rooted social fabric, and its crafts. In fact, the North East is a mosaic of amazing crafts, many of which are under stress and may

languish in the near future without our special initiative to document and revive them. We refresh ourselves with Gandhiji's silver lining quotation, "Maidens of lovely Assam weave poems on their looms". And this apparently speaks for the entire Region as a single geographical zone.

Sadly, many of the NER facts do not seem to exist because they are ignored. The blot is yet to be obliterated. We can't accept human ingenuity in any form, be it crafts or anything else, to become extinct from the face of the planet.

We have identified forty languishing crafts in the NER, and as a part of the North East Integration Rally, 2026, the KRC Foundation will mark the beginning of this inspirational initiative. It is dedicated to fostering the preservation, promotion, and advancement of global and traditional craftsmanship, supporting the rich tapestry of worldwide craftsmanship, and preserving languishing crafts from extinction.

Every creation by an artisan is a story waiting to unfold - a story of tradition, skill, expertise, and generations of

culture passing down with the utmost intricacy yet with a grandeur that will leave one spellbound. The hands that carve wood, weave fabric, or mould clay in India have shaped more than just products; they have preserved a cultural heritage deeply embedded in the country's soul. Yet, as the world becomes increasingly automated and fast-paced, the traditional skills of global artisans are at risk of being overshadowed. These artisans stand at a crossroads: they can either watch their ancestral crafts fade into obscurity or embrace the changing times, finding new ways to breathe life into their work.



Let the KRC Foundation, with the support and stewardship of all concerned, the Government, the institutions, and the global organisation like UNESCO, HEI, Universities, Community Organisations, and individuals, is taking a pioneering lead in this. The first step will be to identify the traditional artisans associated with their respective languishing crafts, recognize and honour them, which is long overdue. Followed by this, KRC Foundation seeks to document, support, nurture, and disseminate knowledge of crafts and traditional systems. NER presents a fascinating plethora of vernacular design narratives and traditional knowledge

systems, many languishing. In India, the sector employs more than 11 million artisans; the craft sector is the backbone of the nonfarm rural economy. It is the second-largest source of self-employment after agriculture in India. This is a landmark initiative of the KRC Foundation. We will approach the WCC-AISBL to grant at least one Capital City of the NER the World Craft City status. Recently, Srinagar got it, Mamallapuram (Tamil Nadu), Jaipur (Rajasthan), and Mysore (Karnataka) were added to this category. The local authorities, craftspeople, and communities have to play a key role that culminates in cultural, economic, and social development. The KRC Foundation will be coordinating this.

As a part of the North East Integration Rally, 2026, the KRC Foundation plans to release the Award of Excellence honouring mastery and innovation, recognising their work, traditional ideas, cultures, and sustainable policies, craft authenticity - protecting and preserving the craft excellence. This will be a most significant regional craft movement, uniting our artisans, mostly women, at the bottom of the pyramid, living in less visible landscapes across 8 States. In this way, they are empowered through craft and community. Craft is not a trend. It is tradition, culture, economy, and survival. These artisans built not



just an organisation, but a strong movement even many years later, shaping history and inspiring the future. We want to make it that none of our crafts go to the Red List of endangered crafts. We strive to ensure that artisans' skills are valued in our culture and their potential is recognised.

We all can do our bit, remembering that every handmade item carries hours of labour, years of learning, and

generations of traditions. Craft is more a history than a product, an ingenuity, and the soul of an artisan. When we bargain, we unknowingly undervalue that heritage and make artisans feel their craft is not worth it. Let's shift our mindset. We are not just customers; we are custodians of culture and patrons of tradition. Let us support the crafts with pride, for when artisans are valued, their children see a future in their craft.



Handspun, handwoven Textile, Gado or Mirisim, Mising Tribe, Majuli, Assam



Sheetal Paati (Cool mat), woven in Barak Valley, Assam – a legacy languishing



# British Council Report, 2023, on Crafts in India:

The British Council Report, Oct 2023, on Crafts titled Climate Resilience through Craft: A path to Sustainable Fashion in India says:

- Every artisan is a Climate activist.
- An overwhelming number of craft workers in India, 200 million, women 56.13%, face varying degrees of risk from climate change, directly or indirectly.
- What we have understood from our work is that we have climate-resilient ideas. We have traditional practices that we need to brand, as well as solutions we have.
- We have 1000 years of circular economy running in our villages. The women are so connected to nature.
- It is important to look back at IKS and the community.

This report on India truly echoes the reality of crafts in the NER, the Ashtalakshmi, a term coined affectionately by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, inaugurating the Ashtalakshmi Mahotsav in New Delhi (PIB Delhi, 06.12.2024). The KRC Foundation is committed to guiding and supporting the craft landscape in the North East Region, in line with this report, as a follow-up to the North East Integration Rally, 2026. The crafts that are on the verge of extinction are more climate resilient, and the traditional craftsmen are aware of how to take care of Mother Earth while creating artefacts.

## The Theme:

- Connecting the unconnected.
- Recognise them, honour them from the craft community who truly deserve it.
- Documentation of Languishing Crafts



## The components:

- Identifying the artisan connected with the crafts, especially the Languishing Crafts.
- Create a brief document on the Crafts and the journey of the traditional crafts, the generational journey, and about the artisans.
- To create a video/documentation in advance to show at the event at the corresponding State and/or at the conclusion ceremony.
- To recognise and honour publicly.
- Issue citation, certificate, medal/award.
- Conferring an appropriate Title upon the selected artisan.
- Inviting all these award-winning artisans to remain present at the conclusion ceremony.



Traditional pottery practiced at Nandan Nagar, Tripura



## Execution:

The selection of the artisans to confer the title, the award, and citation will be done in a logical way based on laid-down parameters worked out with necessary details. For this, the KRC Foundation will approach the State/ Central Government Departments/ Institutes /Organisations working in the crafts domain in the respective state. Community Leaders, Universities, HEIs, and prominent personalities in the field will be consulted if needed. This initiative has to start at least three months ahead of the event, the North East Integration Rally, 2026, takes off. The KRC Foundation will devise a modality. A local committee or person will be given this responsibility.



## Organising Structure and Governance:

A sub-committee will be constituted to work under the Steering Committee, chaired by the KRC Foundation, as provided in the proposal of the Foundation for the North East Integration Rally, 2026. The sub-committee will be constituted that will liaise with the respective State Government, Crafts fraternity, Community organisations, and institutions. These events will be organised in complete alignment with the Rally and its programme/event schedules.



## Inspirations:

Storytelling is our inspiration. A story of Documentation and Languishing Craft Revival in the year 2021 in Arunachal Pradesh goes as follows:

The Yuisum village, Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, where pottery craft was practiced for centuries. Today, the lone traditional pottery artisan, Mr. Lham Tsering, lives in forlorn hope to pass on this craft to his next generation. This is an example of a languishing craft from the hinterland tribal state of Arunachal Pradesh. Shri Lham Tsering was identified in 2020 when he was 65 years old. Below is his photo with Dr Sukamal Deb at the Government

Circuit House, Tawang, on 26-12-2020. Mr. Sang Phuntsok, Deputy Commissioner, Tawang, helped in identifying this senior citizen, who is the only traditional potter of the Monpa Community in Arunachal Pradesh. Mr. Lham Tsering has been preserving and continuing the art of pot making, an ancient tradition of Monpa culture. Yuisum is one of India's smallest villages with a total population of 96 (male 44 and female 52) as per the Census, 2011.

An Editorial book published by the Assam (Central) University, Silchar, in the year 2024, has captured this story in the book.



Mr. Lham Tsering, Languished Potter, Tawang, A.P.



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Delhi | Kolkata | Agartala | Guwahati | Imphal | Haflong | Silchar | Dimapur

H.O: H.No 15, Old Kalibari Road,  
Malugram, Silchar. 788002. Assam.

Tel: 03842-358656, 8721838313, 09330830083  
E: [info@krcfoundation.org](mailto:info@krcfoundation.org)

[www.krcfoundation.org](http://www.krcfoundation.org) | [www.northeastintegrationrally.in](http://www.northeastintegrationrally.in) | [www.krctimes.com](http://www.krctimes.com)