

## Madurkatti to pattamadai, stories behind the weaves

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Did you know which part of the banana tree is used for making ropes and twines and how? How about the palmyrah? Which season is suitable for harvesting stems from champa grass?

The exhibition 'Metamorphosis: crafting a green future', conducted by InKo

Centre in association with Crafts Council of India, tells you the stories, celebrating the vital interconnection between craft and nature, a reminder of life before plastic.

The exhibition features mats, baskets and trays made of natural fibres from across the country, with a description of the grass, tree or invasive species they are made of, a map of the states where they can be found and the method of production besides common uses. A video which plays on loop displays the process behind the making of each product.

As for the part of the banana tree used for making ropes, it's the bark, while the palmyra's leaves, stem, fruit and sap are used for making edible pulp, beverages and furniture. The champa is harvested in the driest time of the year.

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Rathi Jafer, director of InKo centre, says she hopes school and college students visit the exhibition and become part of a 'handmade is the future' movement.

"When a woman wanted something for the house, all she had to do was step out with a knife and maybe a needle and cut and fashion the natural fibres into what she needed, be it a container or something to strain rice. And then came plastics," says Gita Ram, chairperson of Crafts Council of India. "But cut to present day, and there is an urgent need to replace plastic. Even major brands are trying to eliminate plastic and it spells good news for artisans and craftsmen."

At first glance, all the mats and baskets might seem similar, from the masland grass mats from Midnapore in West Bengal woven from madurkatti grass and the pattamadai mats from Tamil Nadu woven from finely split Korai grass which grow on the banks of Thamirabarani river, to the plant-based screwpine mats from Kerala. The difference, says curator Lakshmi Vijayaraghavan of the Crafts Council of India, lies in the weaves. "The pattamadai 'payi' has a fine one and was traditionally gifted to newly-weds with the bride's name woven into it, while the screwpine has a coarser weave."

The Thamirabarani source water was believed to be medicinal, and so were the reeds which grew alongside, and the mats made of them. "Every artefact has a story but many such got lost on the way," says Lakshmi. The exhibition also throws light on the environmental benefits of each fibre, how coconut cultivation requires minimal irrigation, for example, or how champa grass roots can prevent soil erosion. "The idea is to show how these products can still be used in today's lifestyle and an urban environment," says Lakshmi.

The exhibition is on at the InKo centre, Adyar Club Gate Road, till August 11.