

Livelihood and Socio-economic Development of the Rural Artisans of Rajasthan

Badri Lal Meena¹, Dr. Shweta Bhodiwal²

¹Advisor, Shree Yade Mati Kala Board, Government of Rajasthan

²KKC PG College, Churu, Rajasthan

Abstract

A thorough analysis of the socioeconomic growth of craft artisans in Rajasthan has been done. The area, which is well-known for its rich cultural legacy and traditional craftsmanship, suffers many difficulties, such as poor market accessibility, a lack of funding, and a shortage of contemporary equipment. The industry's viability is in trouble due to these problems and the younger generation's waning interest in traditional crafts. The socioeconomic characteristics, income levels, education, living conditions, and gender dynamics of the artisans are all addressed in this study. It assesses the effects of governmental actions, determines major issues, and looks at ways to make things better.

Keywords: Artisans, Cultural, Rajasthan, Socio-economic, Tradition

Introduction

Rajasthan is renowned for its ancient hill forts and palaces, and is regarded as the ideal location for palace-related tourism. Rajasthan is renowned worldwide for its vintage handicrafts, rich cultural variety, and customs. Traditional handicrafts are gradually losing market share to machine-made products due to their better quality and greater consistency. For a large number of handmade goods, the market has remained devoid of competitors and meaningful alternatives. The term "handicrafts" encompasses a wide variety of items. Social media provides a variety of platforms for communication and information sharing among several parties. The Rajasthani tourism office expressed a desire to use social media. They were also stressing the importance of this line of communication (Rathore et al., 2017).

Sustainability in the context of small businesses refers to changing daily practices, implementing strategies, and striking a balance between social equity, economic growth, and environmental preservation. This means carrying out activities that satisfy current demands without endangering the ability of future generations to satisfy their aspirations (Scoones, 2015; Sridharan, et al., 2023). Small business sustainability is a global issue that is not only an issue in India. Globally, small enterprises use sustainable practices to compete, cut expenses, and satisfy consumer demand for environmentally friendly products (Alvarez ´ Jaramillo et al., 2019). With national and international governmental committees, non-governmental organisations, and enterprising individuals exhibiting and putting diverse plans and ideas into action, the sustainability of handicraft industries has emerged as a global problem (Honnurswamy, 2022). It is crucial to revive and revitalise these fragile sectors since handcraft businesses have the capacity to provide individuals from various rural areas with sustainable livelihood options. A vital part of the local economy and tourism, the handicraft sector faces challenges like poor market access, scarce financial resources, a lack of contemporary tools, and a lack of government support. Furthermore, the survival of traditional crafts is threatened by the younger generation's waning interest in them. Developing measures to improve artists' livelihoods and preserve their craft traditions requires an understanding of these socioeconomic factors.

History of Handicrafts

It is impossible to read the beginnings and growth of India's handicrafts industry in a straight line, but the popularity of small-scale businesses and rural development initiatives at the start of the 1980s predicted a major resurgence of the sector. A new era has been ushered in by the current vibrancy and growing popularity of ethnic clothing as well as the government's "Make in India" (Swadeshi) policy. This is particularly true for the handicrafts and other ethnic artefacts industry, which is a part of rural urbanisation (Reubens, 2016). The strategy is straightforward and involves increasing income and productivity for rural stakeholders and craftsmen (Redzuan and Aref, 2011). The strategy emphasises the utilisation of Indian goods produced by craftsmen, small-scale businesses, and Indians themselves. Both cottage and small-scale enterprises are covered under the sector-specific umbrella definition, which emphasises local and ethnic art as a means of promoting rural development. Homegrown machinery (mechanisms/devices that are not mechanically or technologically advanced) is being developed more quickly for a variety of reasons. This becomes even more crucial when it comes to local artisans' products, which are known to have religious significance, social symbolic meaning, and ethnic significance in addition to their utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, cultural, decorative, functional, and traditional value (Ghouse, 2012). As a result, this approach has greatly simplified things for artisans, but the advantages have not yet materialised.

For decades, the term "handicraft" has been plagued by a lack of a universally accepted definition. However, in 1997, the UNESCO/ITC international symposium in Manila, Philippines, defined it as "products which are produced either completely by hand or with the help of tools." The use of mechanical tools has been restricted since it is believed that the artisan's handiwork still makes up the majority of the final product (Ghouse, 2012). According to Ghouse, the artisan's handiwork continues to be the most significant element of the final product. With their beautiful designs and widespread acclaim, Indian handicrafts are renowned for showcasing regional expertise and culture (Ghouse, 2012). This description and acceptance resulted from the World Commission on Culture and Development's candid acknowledgement that a number of handicraft-related and locally-oriented development initiatives had failed because to an underestimation of the significance of culture (Jadhav, 2008). India's handicraft sector is characterised as a labour-intensive, decentralised, non-unionized cottage industry that uses traditional manual techniques rather than cutting-edge technology to create a variety of goods. Many artisans from rural and semi-urban areas work in India's handicraft sector (Paul, 2015). 76.5% of artisans and 78.2% of handicraft items produced are from the rural group, with the remaining portion being from the urban segment. These workers identify as members of economically disadvantaged groups, and the majority are women (Shah and Patel, 2016, Grobar, 2019; Saith, 2001). These small-business or artisan-related businesses typically deal with problems including a shortage of trained workers and necessary raw materials, especially of a certain quality. Additional important problems regarding the survival and expansion of these businesses include pricing, the usage of handmade machinery as described by "handicrafts," the availability of funding, and the appropriate advertising and marketing channel (Afroj, 2012). Analysing the handicraft production facilities in Moradabad has shown similar findings (Venkataramanaiah and Nidugala, 2016). The emergence of globalisation has led to a cross-cultural exchange between the "local" and the "global," giving rise to the well recognised "global village." Western consumers have a strong desire for Indian folk arts and crafts, which are essential components of Indian culture and tradition (Kumaj, 2010). It has been said that free trade and mass production are the main issues facing the Indian handicraft sector in the wake of this worldwide explosion. Second, despite quality control, handcrafted goods from other countries, such as China, are discovered to be less expensive. This pricing also has an impact on the quantity and quality of artisans, which in turn influences manufacturing. The majority of other concerns arise when the compensation does not cover the cost of the goods and their laborious efforts. The channel or presenting

platform, where the artwork and articles can be made available to the buyer and the general public, is another problem. A few problems with the Banarasi silk industry's distribution methods have already been covered (Rai and Srivastava, 2015). According to a study, haats are one such medium that is thought to be essential to the preservation of market centres' efficient operation as well as the growth of regional handicrafts and artefacts, particularly in tribal areas.

Overview of Rajasthan's Handicraft Sector:

Rajasthan's handicraft sector, which is well-known for its wide range of crafts such as metalwork, woodworking, leatherwork, textiles, and pottery, plays a significant role in the state's economic and cultural legacy. There is a substantial market for these goods both domestically and abroad. The Government of India's Ministry of fabrics claims that Rajasthan is a top exporter of handicrafts, with products including miniature paintings, block-printed fabrics, and blue pottery in high demand worldwide (Ministry of Textiles, 2021). Particularly famous for its metalware, furniture, and traditional décor, Jodhpur is a centre for handicrafts. A significant percentage of the local workforce is employed in this sector, which is essential to the state's cultural character.

Socio-Economic Conditions of Artisans

Rajasthani artisans frequently deal with difficult socioeconomic circumstances. Even though they play a vital role in maintaining and advancing traditional crafts, many artists are impoverished and may not have access to social security benefits or basic utilities. According to studies, because there are no organised labour institutions in place, craftsmen usually operate in informal settings, receive little pay, and have little negotiating leverage. The educational background and healthcare availability of craftsmen also have an impact on their socioeconomic level. A sizable fraction of craftsmen lack formal education or are illiterate, which hinders their capacity to adjust to emerging technologies and shifting consumer expectations. Their susceptibility is further increased by their inability to obtain healthcare services; as a result of the nature of their jobs, many artisans experience occupational health problems (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2019). In the handicraft sector, gender inequality is also common; female craftspeople frequently earn less than their male colleagues and have less chances to advance their careers and assume leadership positions. In addition to affecting the financial security of female craftsmen, gender inequality impedes the industry's overall growth (Kumar & Singh, 2021).

Challenges Faced by Artisans

According to Bhati and Singh, (2018), one of the biggest obstacles facing Rajasthani artisans is their inability to obtain finance, which restricts their ability to invest in marketing and materials. When paired with middlemen's exploitation, this financial limitation reduces income and productivity. Saxena (2017) emphasizes the need for better market connections and support by pointing out that artisans' customer base and income stability are restricted by limited market access and reliance on local fairs. Rajasthani artisans confront major financial obstacles that impede their socioeconomic advancement. The erratic and frequently inadequate revenue resulting from the seasonality of handicraft demand is a significant problem. Because of this uncertainty, craftsmen find it challenging to generate a consistent living, which results in financial instability. Additionally, the high cost of raw materials, exacerbated by inflation and supply chain disruptions, further reduces their profit margins (Kumar, 2021). Limited access to affordable credit and financial services also hampers their ability to invest in expanding their businesses or improving their craft (Mehta, 2020). As a result, many artisans remain trapped in a cycle of poverty, unable to break free and achieve economic stability.

Rajasthani artisans face social challenges such as prejudice and marginalisation, which restrict their prospects for advancement (Sharma, 2019). Innovation is stifled by a lack of knowledge and practical training, which forces craftspeople to use antiquated techniques. Additionally, gender inequality still exists, affecting industry development since female artisans are paid less and receive less respect (Gupta 2020). Rajasthani artisans face technological obstacles, as they lack access to contemporary tools and training (Patel, 2021). Their market reach and dependence on unscrupulous middlemen are constrained by this disparity, which is exacerbated by poor infrastructure and restricted digital access (Jain, 2020). Improving the global competitiveness of craftsmen requires addressing these problems.

Market Access

Handicraft artisans in Rajasthan face significant challenges in accessing markets, including limited market reach, poor infrastructure, and connectivity, especially in rural areas. Many artisans lack awareness and skills in branding and marketing, which prevents them from reaching larger, national, or international markets. They are often exploited by middlemen, who buy their products at low prices and sell them at higher rates, leaving artisans with unfair compensation. Additionally, competition from mass-produced goods and inconsistent product quality further hinders their ability to compete. Lack of access to capital, unreliable supply chains for raw materials, and social barriers also restrict their economic mobility. Many artisans are unaware of e-commerce platforms and face difficulties navigating them due to technological and logistical challenges. Furthermore, seasonal demand fluctuations, a lack of skill development opportunities, and insufficient government support make it harder for artisans to sustain their businesses and livelihoods. These interconnected issues require a comprehensive approach to improve market access, financial support, and infrastructure for Rajasthan's handicraft sector.

Government Initiatives and Policies

The revival of the ancient crafts industry is emphasised in the Rajasthan Budget 2024, with special attention paid to Rajasthani artists. This area is well-known for its extensive handicraft tradition. Significant amounts have been set aside in the budget to improve the socioeconomic circumstances of craftsmen through a number of initiatives. The creation of an extensive Artisans Welfare Fund is one of the main features. The purpose of this fund is to give artisans and their families financial assistance for social security, healthcare, and education. The budget also establishes an Artisan Credit Scheme, which provides craftspeople with low-interest loans to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in the craft industry. Additionally, the government has suggested starting a project called Craft Villages, where traditional crafts will be marketed as tourist attractions. This initiative is expected to boost tourism and provide a stable source of income for artisans. The budget also focuses on skill development programs tailored to the needs of young artisans, ensuring the preservation and evolution of traditional crafts in the contemporary market. The Shri Vishwakarma Kaushal Vikas Board focus on skill development for young artisans, while the Shree Yade Mati Kala Board help market handicrafts, especially through the new Craft Villages initiative. The Rajasthan Handloom Development Corporation **and** Rajasthan Khadi and Village Industries Board promote innovation and entrepreneurship among handloom and khadi artisans, providing them with financial support via the Artisan Credit Scheme. RUDA aid in developing infrastructure for Craft Villages, and Rajasthan serve as a key platform for showcasing Rajasthani handicrafts. Together, these initiatives aim to uplift artisans, promote tourism, and preserve traditional crafts in Rajasthan.

Both the central and state governments have started programs to help Rajasthani craftspeople. The Ministry of Textiles provides design, technological, and marketing assistance through the National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP) (NHDP, 2017). Women artisans can receive financial assistance through the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY). The Rajasthan Handloom, Handicraft and Khadi Board

promotes crafts through fairs and exhibitions, while the Mukhyamantri Kaushal Anudan Yojana concentrates on skill development at the state level (RHDC 2022).

Impact of schemes & policies

The socioeconomic advancement of Rajasthani craft artisans has been positively impacted by initiatives and schemes. By enabling craftsmen to invest in high-quality materials, cutting-edge equipment, and marketing techniques, financial support programs like the Artisan Credit Scheme and PMMY have increased economic stability and raised productivity and profitability. Young artisans are now prepared to satisfy current tastes because to skill development initiatives like the Mukhyamantri Kaushal Anudan Yojana, which has preserved ancient crafts while embracing modern designs. The local economy has benefited from the promotion of craft villages as tourist destinations since it has created cultural exchange and consistent income. But there are still issues, such as low knowledge and difficulty accessing schemes, especially in rural areas. Despite the help that is offered, many craftsmen, like as those in the handloom and blue pottery industries in Jaipur and Udaipur, struggle with a lack of market access and infrastructure. Corruption and complicated application procedures further reduce these projects' efficacy. Training programs frequently lack the infrastructure and organisation they need, which reduces their efficacy. Furthermore, due to a lack of proper advertising assistance, craftsmen find it difficult to sell outside of their local marketplaces. The long-term viability of these initiatives depends on ongoing oversight, focused communication, and assistance.

Recommendations:

- i. **Create Artisan Cooperatives:** Establish cooperative societies to reduce artisans' dependence on middlemen. These cooperatives can offer collective bargaining power, reduce production costs, and improve access to better market opportunities, including bulk selling and group marketing efforts.
- ii. **Implement E-commerce Platforms:** Develop partnerships with e-commerce platforms to help artisans access broader markets. Online platforms can provide a global reach, allowing artisans to sell directly to consumers, increase their visibility, and improve their income.
- iii. **Offer Financial Support and Microloans:** Provide low-interest loans, grants, and subsidies specifically designed for artisans. This can help them purchase raw materials, upgrade tools, or expand their businesses. Additionally, financial literacy programs can be introduced to help artisans manage and grow their finances effectively.
- iv. **Organize Skill Development Programs:** Offer training and workshops that combine traditional craft techniques with modern business skills. These programs can focus on design innovation, branding, marketing, and financial management to help artisans compete in the contemporary market while preserving their cultural heritage.
- v. **Introduce Biometric Attendance Systems:** Implement biometric attendance systems to track artisans' participation in training programs, workshops, and government schemes. This would streamline access to benefits, ensure efficient distribution of resources, and provide data to assess the effectiveness of support programs.
- vi. **Establish Centres of Excellence (CoE):** Set up dedicated Centres of Excellence that focus on nurturing artisanal skills and fostering innovation. These centres can serve as hubs for artisans to receive advanced training, technical support, and access to modern tools and technologies. They can also collaborate with academic institutions, design experts, and businesses to help artisans create high-quality, market-ready products while preserving traditional craftsmanship.

- vii. **Increase Outreach and Financial Support for Awardee Artisans in Rural Areas:** Organize local exhibitions, roadshows, and media campaigns to promote award-winning artisans while providing financial support for their projects. Collaborate with local leaders and influencers to raise awareness and offer grants or incentives to help them grow.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a complex blend of tradition, creativity, and difficulties can be seen in the socioeconomic development of Rajasthani craft workers. This study emphasises how important artisans are to the region's cultural and economic environments. Despite their important contributions, artisans face many challenges that restrict their ability to develop and remain viable. The results highlight the necessity of focused interventions and support systems to improve the livelihoods of artisans and maintain their trade. Policymakers could create cooperative societies to lessen dependency on middlemen and improve financial support systems like low-interest loans and grants in order to address these issues. Entire educational and training programs are necessary to give artisans the abilities they need to succeed in contemporary corporate settings by fusing old methods with modern approaches. It is essential to increase market access through e-commerce platforms, improved infrastructure, and effective marketing techniques. Artisans can greatly benefit from efficient policy implementation, streamlined administrative procedures, and greater knowledge of available assistance. The creativity and marketability of artisans can be further increased by fostering innovation through design workshops and the creation of innovation hubs.

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