



PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY HANDICRAFT ARTISANS

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Voice of Research

Volume 6, Issue 1

June 2017

ISSN 2277-7733

Abstract

Handicrafts have a great potential to provide employment opportunities to millions of artisans spread over length and breadth of the country, as most of the artisans have inherent art to be converted in to occupation. Women of Gujarat are very prosperous in the art of 'Needle and Thread'. Generally they are used to do such work for their domestic use. But now a days, such products are demanded everywhere. They require professional touch as per the requirement of demand of the market. Government tries to uplift the art and artisans through various programmes and policies. Despite of various government and non government efforts, the reality is not satisfactory. The handicraft artisans suffer a lot due to being unorganized, lack of education, low capital, poor exposure to new technologies, absence of market intelligence and a poor institutional framework.

Keywords: Problems, Challenges, Artisans, Handicraft

Gujarat is a land of art and craft and a great range of ethnic communities live here. Most of them have still continued maintaining their culture in the form of handicraft including embroidery, bead-work, textile printing, Bandhani (tie-dye), leather work, pottery, woodwork, stonework, etc. The Handicrafts Sector plays a significant role in the economy of India. It provides employment to a vast segment of artisans and generates substantial foreign exchange for the country, while preserving its cultural heritage.

Further, most commercialized craft aims for quick, standardized and low cost replication. This imitates the factory model. The strength of hand craft, artistic vision involved and hand made quality are forgotten. The net result is that even when artisans can earn a living by producing contemporary versions, most do not wish their children to be artisans. (Kala Raksha, Kutch) Surely, some approach must be altered to enable the artisan to be economically and socially powerful so that they can sustain and propagate the Indian cultural heritage from generation to generations till the centuries.

The Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) is the nodal agency in the Government of India for craft and artisan-based activities. It assists in the development, marketing and export of handicrafts, and the promotion of craft forms and skills. The assistance is in the form of technical and financial support, including schematic interventions implemented through its field offices.

The operations of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) are closely linked to other organisations under the Ministry of Textiles beyond, i.e. Metal Handicrafts Service Centre, Moradabad; (statutory/autonomous body); Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation, New Delhi (public sector undertaking); Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), New Delhi; Indian Institute of Carper Technology, Bhadohi (U.P.); and National Center for Design

and Product Development (NCDPD), New Delhi and Moradabad.

Various state level bodies as well as non-government institutions are trying hard to protect the interest of handicraft artisans by providing them financial, marketing, training, and infrastructural assistance. Gujarat State Handloom & Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd., (GSHHDC) Gujarat Khadi Village Industries Board, Gujarat State Rural Industrial Marketing Corporation (GRIMCO), Gujarat Matikam Kalakari & Rural Technology Institute (GMKRTI), Industrial Extension Cottage (INDEXT-C), The Gujarat Rajya Handloom, Handicraft & Audyogic Sahakari Federation Ltd.(GUSICA), etc are the players at Gujarat level to boost the growth and development of the artisans at individual and cluster level.

But the scenario does not seem to be very attractive. Still the handicraft artisans are not able to overcome their weaknesses and hence struggle hard for their existence. Some art have slowly lost relevance with the advent of industrialization and the sector carries the stigma of inferiority and backwardness. Hence, here an attempt has been done to study the weaknesses and challenges faced by such artisans engaged in the most popular craft of Gujarat, i.e. Hand embroidery & bead work.

Methodology

For this research study, the following criteria were kept in mind while selecting sample.

The respondents must be practicing the handicraft as a source of income; The respondents must be Artisan Identity Card holders; They must be of Scheduled Caste; The sample size should be 35 to 50.

Such criteria was satisfied in a workshop, as Centre for Studies in Rural Management, Gujarat Vidyapith, Randheja had organized a Workshop on "Adopting Fair Price System for Artisans of Schedule Caste in Handicraft Sector" during 11th to 13th August, 2016 at Randheja, Gandhinagar. This

workshop was sponsored by Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India under the scheme of Research and Development in which various sessions were designed focusing mainly on Product Design Development, Bank Credit and Loan Facilities, Quality of Products and Marketing Opportunities, Packaging and Pricing, Self Reliance and Entrepreneurship, Government Initiatives, Success Stories of Artisans, etc. 40 female handicraft artisans of scheduled caste had participated in this workshop. They all were engaged in handicrafts like hand embroidery, bead work and coir work. These 40 artisans were selected as respondents of the research work.

For this research study, the required information were collected from both primary and secondary data sources. In secondary sources, books, articles published in books and journals, various websites, census data, NGOs' reports & literature, etc. were used. Besides various reports of the Office of Development Commissioner (Handicraft), Ministry of Textiles and report of Planning Commission were also reviewed.

For collection of primary data, interview schedule, focus group discussion and observation methods were used. The gathered primary data were scrutinized, verified and arranged properly. After coding, computer data entry was done carefully. The data were analyzed with the help of computer programme SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and Excel. Statistical tools such as Frequency Distribution, Measures of Central Tendency, Chi-square test, t-test, Analysis of Variance, etc. were applied to analyze the data.

Objectives

In this paper, an attempt is made to focus mainly on the following objectives: To study the general profile of Handicraft artisans; To study the weaknesses or problems of Handicraft artisans; To study the challenges faced by the Handicraft artisans engaged in hand embroidery activity

Hypothesis

In this paper, the following hypothesis are made to test with the help of Chi-Square test. H_0 : There is no significant difference between the average income of handicraft artisans having membership with any organization/group and artisans not having such membership; H_0 : There is no association between the education level and awareness of the artisans about fair and exhibitions.

Analysis and Findings

Form of Handicraft Activity: Handicraft artisans under the research area seems involved in various handicraft activities like hand embroidery, bead work, wool work and coir work.

All the respondents have been categorized in to four categories: 1) Running own business 2) Doing service in some handicraft unit with fixed salary 3) Doing job work of handicrafts regularly and 4) Potential artisans doing handicraft in their leisure time only.

Table 1 - Form of Handicraft Activity

Form of Handicraft Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Own Business	3	7.5%
Service with Fixed Salary	2	5.0%
Job-Work	14	35.0%
Part-Time Artisans	21	52.5%
Total	40	100.0%

It is noticeable that nearly half of the artisans (52.5%) are part-time artisans who are not currently employed regularly in the field of handicrafts. They are skilled people but not getting regular work of handicrafts. So, such artisans work in their leisure time to earn supplementary income. Some are employed in some other occupations. Thus, only 19 (47.5%) artisans have adopted their art as main occupation or means of earning. Only 3 artisans, i.e. 7.5% are in own handicraft business either established by herself or family. 2 artisans are engaged in service with fixed salary in some other handicraft business. 14 (35%) artisans are doing job-work in this sector and paid wages as per their hand work. It is found during the study that these job workers work according to the needs and instructions of their employers/businessmen/middlemen. Generally, they do not have chance to show their designing talents, as they become just workers/laborers not artists.

Personal and Family background: Average number of family members is found about 4 to 5 and average monthly family income is Rs. 10,375. So, we can say that per person income is near about Rs. 2,506, which is not sufficient to have good standard of life today. 70% of the respondents are having monthly family income below Rs. 10,000. 67.5% respondent have main source of family income is private job, 22.5% have labour work and 10% have own small business. It is further surprising to know that the average monthly income from the handicrafts is found Rs. 1,280, as in most of the cases, it is the subsidiary source of income.

Table 2 - Age and Level of Education

Age and Level of Education		Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduation	Total
20 Years or Less	Count	0	0	3	1	1	5
	%	0%	0%	7.5%	2.5%	2.5%	12.5%
21 to 30 Years	Count	0	0	4	3	1	8
	%	0%	0%	10.0%	7.5%	2.5%	20.0%
31 to 40 Years	Count	1	1	13	1	1	17
	%	2.5%	2.5%	32.5%	2.5%	2.5%	42.5%
41 to 50 Years	Count	0	2	4	2	1	9
	%	0%	5.0%	10.0%	5.0%	2.5%	22.5%
51 Years or More	Count	0	1	0	0	0	1
	%	0%	2.5%	0%	0%	0%	2.5%
Total	Count	1	4	24	7	4	40
	%	2.5%	10.0%	60.0%	17.5%	10.0%	100.0%

It is clear from the above table that majority of the artisans fall under the age group of 31 to 40 years, i.e. 17 (42.5%), among which 13 have studied till secondary standards. Number of artisans falling in age group 21-30 and 41-50 years are 8 (20%) and 9(22.5%) respectively. Only 6 artisans are in extreme age



categories, i.e. 5 (12.5%) are below the age of 21 years, whereas only one artisan is found in elderly group, i.e. more than 50 years. It seems that 85% of total respondents come under the category of 21 to 50 years. The average age is nearly 35 (Mean-34.5) years.

It also seems that 60% respondents have got education up to secondary standard, only 17.5% have studied up to higher secondary standard while only 10% are graduates. One artisan has been found illiterate in this study. Thus, the level of education is not at the satisfactory level. But 13 (32.5%) respondents are under the age of 30 and some of them are students too. So, It provides a hopeful picture of the situation. Thus, in spite of various governmental efforts to boost the female education, the fact is not very pleasant, as various economical, social, cultural and personal hindrances are responsible for this scenario.

Reasons to join the Handicraft

Table 3 - Reasons to join the Handicraft

Reasons to join the Handicraft	Frequency	Percentage
Easy	7	17.5%
Less Investment	4	10.0%
Utilization of Free Time	26	65.0%
Govt. Help	2	5.0%
No Option	6	15.0%

It has been found that majority of the artisans, i.e., 26 (65%) have joined this handicraft activity to utilize free time. Thus, such activity can be helpful to women artisans to utilize their leisure time in some creative and productive work which can add supplement income to their family income. 7 (17.5%) respondents said that being easy to learn and to do, they have accepted such handicrafts, while 6 (15%) had no other option than handicrafts. Only 5% respondents have been inspired to come in this field by the government efforts and help. Thus, the reach of government initiatives seems weak and must be focused more. Being less investment demanding activity, 10% people have been motivated to start it.

Membership in any Group/SHG/NGO, etc

Table 4 - Membership in any Group/SHG/NGO, etc.

Membership in any Group/SHG/NGO, etc.	Frequency	Percentage
Nandanvan Coco craft	1	2.5%
SEWA	9	22.5%
SHG	10	25.0%
No Membership	20	50%
	40	100.0%

It is clear from the above table that half of the respondents have membership in any non profit organization/ group/ self help group; while the rest 50% does not have such membership but operate at individual level. 25% of the artisans are member of some Self-help-groups, while 22.5% are members of Self Employed Women’s Association. Only one respondent is registered with Nandanvan Coco Craft group engaged in making coir handicraft products at Ahmedabad. It is found from the discussion that the membership gives them training, marketing and financial assistance as and when required.

Weaknesses of Handicraft artisans

Table 5 - Weaknesses of Handicraft artisans

No.	Weaknesses	Frequency	Percentage	Priority
1.	Lack of modern managerial skills	14	35.0%	6
2.	Problems due to less education	33	82.5%	3
3.	Scarcity of Working capital / Financial problems	31	77.5%	4
4.	Less information about Market and Marketing	29	72.5%	5
5.	Lack of information about government aid/credit facilities	35	87.5%	1
6.	Lack of knowledge about latest designs/current market demands	29	72.5%	5
7.	Do not know how to use advanced machines and equipment	33	82.5%	3
8.	Lack of organized identity	34	85.0%	2
9.	No information about exports	33	82.5%	3

The above table shows the weaknesses of handicraft artisans and the problems faced by them therefore. Despite various governmental and non-government efforts to develop handicraft industry and protect the interest of artisans, the artisans still have to face many problems. It is observed that 87.5% of respondents gave their opinion that they do not have proper information about government programmes, schemes or credit facilities. Hence, ‘Lack of information about government aid/ credit facilities’ is at the first place. It indicates that government must focus on awareness programmes in this regards.

The second most hindrance is ‘Lack of organized identity’, as 85% artisans are opined that. They told that there is no unity in fixing prices, deciding quality standards, etc. Hence, competition among artisans ultimately leads to lower profit margin, inferior quality and price war. Therefore, there must be organized identity to protect interest of artisans ensuring transparency and cooperation in administration.

It is also noticeable that more than 80% people face problems due to less education, inability to use advanced machines and equipments and lack of information about exports. Scarcity of working capital or financial problems are found at the forth place, as comparatively low investment is required for such handicraft business; yet 77.5% respondents face such problems. 14 (35%) artisans told that they are lacking modern managerial skills.

Challenges faced by Handicraft artisans:

Table 6 - Challenges faced by Handicraft artisans

No	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage	Priority
1.	Decreasing demand due to change in the taste & interest of people.	32	80.0%	5
2.	Handicraft is losing its original form due to changes in lifestyle and culture.	27	67.5%	7
3.	Competition with latest machine made products of large industries	38	95.0%	2
4.	Problems of quality and durability due to handmade.	33	82.5%	4
5.	Gain is less as compared to hard work.	39	97.5%	1
6.	Middlemen earn huge profit	35	87.5%	3
7.	New generation is not interested in handicrafts	31	77.5%	6
8.	Lack of infrastructural facilities	33	82.5%	4
9.	Improper implementation of government schemes/programmes	38	95.0%	2
10.	Irregularity in employment	33	82.5%	4



The artisans shared their own experiences when asked for the challenges faced by them in this field. Mostly all except one told that there is less gain as compared to hard work. They feel that it is a laborious work not having social status, as gain is very less as compared to time spent and energy invested in it. The challenges ‘Competition with latest machine made products of large industries’ and ‘Improper implementation of government schemes/programmes’ are in second position, as stated by 95% respondents. They told that they have to face competition from latest machine made products produced on large scale in big industries, as they are cheap, identical and fast to be produced; besides such artisans feel that there is improper implementation of government schemes and programmes though such programmes seem attractive at planning and policy level.

87.5% respondents felt that middlemen earn huge profit not artisans. Artisans do not possess knowledge about market, selling techniques, advertising, modern means of promotion, publicity, etc. Though they are very efficient artists, they have mastery in production but not in marketing. Hence, they have to rely on traders, wholesaler or businessmen who exploit the artisans being scattered, unorganized, ignorant and helpless. It is true that Indian Handicrafts have been globalized today but not artisans.

82.5% artisans opined that lack of infrastructural facilities hinder the growth of such sector and the same number of respondents have to face complaints from the customers about quality and durability of hand crafted products. 80% artisans told that the demand of their products is decreasing due to change in the taste & interest of people. Here it should be noticed that change is the law of nature and today’s era is fast changing era. Hence, those who can accept change with time can survive in market. Market demands innovations and modification today. Hence, the artisans must be trained to produce newly designed innovative products according to the demand and preferences of the customers. The artisans must be taught to be open to change and modifications in conventional products to reap the benefits of modern markets.

77.5% respondents believed that new generation is not interested in handicraft due to lack of recognition and monetary value, laborious work, availability of alternative labour work in industries, etc. Most of the artisans are found reluctant to have their children in to such handicraft, as they don’t visualize a bright future in this line. It has also been found that with the increase of educational base, the unwillingness towards such work increases. This may be one of the very serious causes for the languishing crafts and occupational shift.

67.5% artisans felt that the handicraft is losing its original form due to changes in lifestyle and culture. People have started demanded new products in traditional form. So, the originality is not found now. Utilitarian products have become decorative products only. So, some artisans have started using cheap and inferior material and making compromises with quality of products.

Testing of Hypothesis:

1) H_0 : There is no significant difference between the average income of handicraft artisans having membership with any organization/group and artisans not having such membership.

For testing the above null hypothesis, t test was applied with the following result in SPSS.

Table 7 - Group Statistics

Monthly Income from Handicrafts Activities	Membership in any Group/SHG/NGO, etc.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	NO	20	1610.00	1476.268	330.104
	YES	20	950.00	796.869	178.185

Table 8 - Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Income	Equal variances assumed	5.016	.031	1.759	38	.087	660.000	375.125
	Equal variances not assumed			1.759	29.206	.089	660.000	375.125

It is clear from the above table that the average monthly income of the artisans having membership in any Group/SHG/NGO is 950; where as it is Rs. 1610 in the case not having such membership. The standard deviation is 797 and 1476 respectively. Such figures are surprising. By applying t test for equality of means, the calculated t value is 1.759 which is less than the table value, i.e 2.045 at 29 degree of freedom. Here, p value is 0.089 which is more than 0.05. Hence, H_0 is not rejected at 5% level of significance. It must be noted that the variances between two groups are significantly different (Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances). Hence, the value has been considered assuming no equal variances. Thus, it can be found out that the membership doesn’t make any difference in income of the respondents.

H_0 : There is no association between the education level and awareness of the artisans about fairs and exhibitions.

For testing this hypothesis, Chi-Square test has been used with the help of SPSS and the following results were found.

Table 9 - Level of Education and Awareness about Fairs and Exhibitions

Level of Education		Awareness about fair and exhibitions		
		No	Yes	Total
Up to standard 9	Count	6	11	17
	% of Total	15.0%	27.5%	42.5%
Up to 10th	Count	6	6	12
	% of Total	15.0%	15.0%	30.0%
11 to college	Count	5	6	11
	% of Total	12.5%	15.0%	27.5%
Total	Count	17	23	40
	% of Total	42.5%	57.5%	100.0%



Table 10 - Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.677	2	.713
Likelihood Ratio	.680	2	.712
Linear-by-Linear Association	.354	1	.552
N of Valid Cases	40		

By comparing the above two variables with Chi-Square test, P value arrived at 0.713. Hence, H_0 is not rejected again at 5% level of significance. Further, the Chi-Square value is 0.677 which is less than the tabulated value 5.991 (df. 2). Hence, it is found that there is no significant association between the education level and the awareness of the artisans about fairs and exhibition opportunities offered by government as well as private players in this field. Most of the artisans opined that participation in such exhibitions becomes very costly for them at individual level. Hence, in most of the cases, such opportunities are grabbed by big giants having heavy turnover in the market, as it provides a good platform for publicity and recognition not for sales.

Conclusion

The term ‘Handicraft’ encompasses a wide range of artifacts. The informal sector, which includes handicrafts has been described by the international Labour Organization (ILO) as a part of economic activity characterized by certain features like reliance on local available resources and skills, family ownership, small scale operations, labour intensity, traditional technology, skills generally acquired outside the formal school system, unregulated and competitive markets.

Artisans mostly work in traditional and unorganized sector in which they are vulnerable to exploitation and low wages. They fall in lower strata of the hierarchy both socially and economically. These people are mostly engaged in household or cottage industries in which they work hard but do not get enough to maintain a minimum standard of living. A major problem for this affair is the middlemen who take out a substantial share of profit leaving very little for the artisans. Traditionally, the artisans had been the backbone of the Indian society, yet today they are the most valuable character for the development. Thus, in this paper an attempt has been made to study the weaknesses and challenges faced by the Handicraft artisans.

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