

CONTINUITY OF CULTURE AND TRADITIONS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF WOMEN ARTISANS IN JAMMU REGION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between the women artisans of rural areas and various art and craft forms in order to have a sustainable development vis-à-vis to protect the culture and traditions of the region. The two major art and craft forms are Handicraft and Handloom. Both these categories can help in preserving the cultural heritage and when encouraged, is able to promote sustainable trade and increase the local market. Thus, the practice of handicrafts is directly related the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN). The paper will try to understand that how the women artisans of local folk communities are engaged in making local handicrafts and handlooms in continuity of traditions as well as for livelihoods. For the present study, the area of the study is Jammu region where three districts Reasi, Kathua and Samba have been taken where multistage stage cluster sampling and purposive sampling have been used for data collection. The research design is consisted of Qualitative methods and techniques of data collection such as narrative inquiries, case studies, face-to-face interviews and focused group discussion (FGDs) have been used. These women artisans are facing problems and challenges in terms of not getting enough help and resources for making a craft. This paper will try to understand the significant role playing by the women artisans and what difficulties and roadblocks they have been facing and how these problems can be solved. Addressing these issues are the foremost priority and proper awareness campaign with the help of local people, family members and local governance is the way forward to achieve sustainable development goals.

Keywords: - *Women Artisans, Handicraft, Handloom, Cultural heritage, Sustainable development, Jammu region.*

Introduction

Empowering women through handicraft and handloom has become a popular approach to promoting gender equality and supporting sustainable development. By providing women with

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Volume 1 Oct 2024

the necessary skills, resources, and market access, these two forms can offer them a pathway to financial independence, social inclusion, and creative expression.

Women artisans can contribute significantly to sustainable development by economic growth, poverty reduction, community development, cultural preservation and local economy. One such section of women is rural women artisans who live in rural areas. These rural women artisans are coming forward in large numbers in order to be self-reliant or independent as well as they are working hard and putting efforts to preserve their culture and traditions simultaneously.

The present study is divided into two sections where the role of rural women artisans is divided into two parts. One in cultural preservation of the region and the second part is focusing on sustainable development. Besides this, these rural women artisans of Jammu region are participating in various schemes and programmes provided by the government of India, where the state turned Union Territory(UT) Jammu-Kashmir(J&K) and central government are working together for the empowerment of these rural women and upliftment of their status and lifestyle. The Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom of Jammu division are working in the sectors of Handloom and handicraft separately where the major art and craft forms are Calico Printing, Chabhari-Binna and Basohli Pashmina. These craft forms are the integral part of the cultural heritage of the region which was almost degraded or dying day by day and due to that the local communities have also lost their cultural identity. Now after a long period of time, these artifacts are taking cultural roots with the help of the local artisans who are coming forward to revive and promote them so that not only the present generation but also the future generation can sustain on these art and craft forms and get the earnings out of it.

Literature review

“The Sustainable Development Goals set forth by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 were developed to build a sustainable future. These goals, which include gender equality, zero hunger and no poverty, provide a standard for developed and developing countries to reach collaboratively (UNDP, n.d.). One goal recently has been of greater focus because of its broad-reaching impacts: gender equality and women empowerment (Madsen, 2018). Prior research has investigated the roles of women found within industries in the informal sector, such as agriculture, construction, household labor, tailoring, seasonal workers, petty goods and service

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traders (Eapen, 2001; Lecoutere, 2017). Workers found within the informal sector have lower wages, lack of access to social benefits and unsafe work conditions (Bargain and Kwenda, 2014; Silva-Peñaherrera et al., 2022; U.N. Women, 2015). Much of the previous literature focused on agriculture and savings cooperatives, but the artisan sector employs large percentages of women working in informal economies, particularly in rural areas (Dooley et al., 2020; Dol and Odame, 2013; Ferguson and Kepe, 2011; Lecoutere, 2017). Women artisan entrepreneurs participate in collaborative production networks to meet production demands or to challenge contract constraints (Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Dol and Odame, 2013). Many of these artisan groups started naturally because women gathered to create products that reflected their social and cultural heritage (Atalay, 2015; Dol and Odame, 2013). Pret and Cogan (2019) noted that much of the research on artisan entrepreneurship was focused on Western cultures, indicating a need to research other geographic areas and cultural contexts, particularly because developing countries have a comparative advantage in the artisan sector (Indego Africa, n.d.). Developing countries have culturally rich heritages deeply interconnected to the artisan industry. These cultural ties are passed along to each generation, making products that reflect culture but are also beautiful and valuable. The artisan sector is deeply rooted within these communities, which have then tried to market these products (Indego Africa, n.d.). The social connections that are formed between women can still be limiting if social connections are not expanded outside their own network (Dol and Odame, 2013). Horizontal networks, or social connections with other artisans, enhance their craft because culture shapes the designs and processes, and artisans can take advantage of this cultural heritage (Alberti and Giusti, 2012; Florida, 2002; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; McAdam et al., 2014; Ratten and Ferreira, 2017). Artisan entrepreneurs and cooperatives benefit from structural holes found within their groups, as those holes may provide an incentive to expand outside their immediate environment (Bhagavatula et al., 2010). However, suppose local artisans do not have the skills or knowledge to expand their social networks outside their local communities. In that case, they have limited potential to expand markets and skills and increase economic viability. Social media or product marketing may expand their crafts to other markets (Drummond et al., 2018), but for many in the developing world, there is a lack of understanding of how to use these tools. Women who are members of cooperatives grow their agency or ability to make decisions for their own lives. Through economic enterprises, women gain access to resources, training, funding and the

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Volume 1 Oct 2024

ability to transform society (Dooley *et al.*, 2020; Ferguson and Kepe, 2011; Lecoutere, 2017). (<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJGE-03-2023-0076/full/html>)

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To highlight the women artisans in the sector of handloom and handicraft.
2. To study the government's schemes and programmes for women artisans.
3. To explore the roadblocks and challenges faced by the women artisans.

Method

For data collection, the study was conducted in the Jammu region where three districts namely Kathua, Samba and Reasi have been chosen. The rationale behind choosing these three districts is that in each of these district majorities of the artisans were women who lives in rural areas or villages. These rural women were illiterate and unemployed, living a poor life style and busy in domestic household works in the domain of Patriarchal social structure .In each district, clusters have been setup at each block level, having concentration of handlooms and handicrafts. Depending upon that, the total no. of respondents is 120 (sample size) where 40 women artisans selected from each chosen district. However, one or more cluster has been taken depending upon the availability of the respondents. So, for that matter, purposive sampling method along with snow-ball sampling method was used in order to locate them. A qualitative research strategy and a semi-structured interview schedule with open ended questions was used for data collection where face-to- face interviews and narrative inquiries of the women artisans have been done. Besides it, focused group discussion (FGDs), have also conducted where 8-10 women artisan in each group discussed their problems and other related things. Moreover, for secondary data sources such as books, journals, research articles and sources or data from the government officials have also been concerned.

Socio-economic profile of the respondents

The Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents is that majority of the respondents are rural women artisans who is above 18 years or so(age is no bar) can

apply for learning and making the handicrafts and handlooms. The women artisans are largely in the age group of 30-60years. However, there are few no. of women artisans who are very old almost 70-80 years old. Most of the women artisans were Hindus and from lower caste group. Majority of them are educated up to secondary level or matriculate while very small percentages were graduates and rest are illiterate. As per the government rules and regulations, only those women can register in training centres that are not going to any educational institution and not working anywhere else. Those who are illiterate or jobless can easily apply for learning the crafts. Besides, majority of the women artisans are married and having 2 or more kids and living in a joint families.

Findings

Handicrafts and Handloom: Cultural Heritage of Jammu region

Jammu region has a rich and diverse heritage in handicrafts and handloom. Both the sectors have huge potential both in terms of employment and income. These sectors have a unique place in our economy and they have been sustained by transferring skills from one generation to another. The strength of these two sectors lies in its uniqueness, flexibility of production, openness to innovations, adaptability to the supplier's requirement and the wealth of its tradition. The handicraft and handloom Artisans from Kathua, Samba and Reasi districts are known for their attractive designs and high quality of craftsmanship. Calico printing, Bamboo crafts or Chabhari-Binna and Basohli Pashmina are few such crafts being practiced by local artisans of these districts of Jammu region.

Handicrafts are unique expressions of a particular culture or community through local craftsmanship and materials. The handicraft sector was primarily run by generations and the need is to expand it further. The focus must be on changing the manufacturing process, ensuring durability, adapting innovations and earning livelihood. On the other hand, the handlooms are characterized by an infinite variety of weaves, textures and designs spun on the handloom, ranging from the finest muslins to heavy bedspreads, from delicate pastels to earthy hues and from appealingly simple to intricate, from exquisite fabrics, which take months to weave, to popular items of mass production for daily use.

To start with District Samba, popularly known as 'city of sheets', was famous for its calico printing on hand woven cotton sheets. Jammu province had at one time a fairly prosperous

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A Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal ISSN Number 3048-6963 (Online)

Volume 1 Oct 2024

cotton weaving cottage industry. Samba being the best known centre. Weavers of Samba have kept the legacy of weaving alive till date. There are several rooms set up in the district by the traditional weavers who are still pulling the wraps to make a living.

In Kathua district, there is a small hill town popularly known as Basohli, situated on the right bank of river Ravi. This place is very famous since time immemorial in terms of Art, Craft and Culture. One such craft of pure warmth and elegance known as Basohli Pashmina.

Basohli Pashmina weaving is the traditional craft in Kathua district. This craft is linked with the cultural heritage of the people of Basohli since ancient times. The Raw material (Raw Pashmina) was firstly introduced at Basohli by traders from Ladakh. The weavers of Basohli are already trained in Handloom weaving but with wool as a raw material. By the introduction of raw Pashmina at Basohli around 17th Century, the weavers start weaving Pashmina products and thereafter the art travel from generation to generation. The whole process like sorting, combing, carding, spinning, weaving and finishing was manually done by the Artisans of Basohli keeping intact the traditional Art and Culture. The same practice is still going on. The finished Basohli Pashmina products pass through many skilled hands for making a masterpiece.

In Reasi District, 'Nari ki Pehchaan' A cluster level federation is working hard to empower the rural women artisans who are engaged in making traditional handicrafts such as Chabhari and Binna. Chabhari and Binna are made up of grass and palm leaves. Chabhari is a traditional tray or container that are used to store and serve things to guests and family members. Binna was in past used by home members to sit on, in the traditional way. This craft is used for making coasters, wall decorations, pen stands, roti box, jewellery box and laundry bags. This initiative is eco-friendly and is supporting women artisans who are also the Self help group (SHG) members and their economy and livelihood. Traditional grass handicrafts are considered to be major avenue of the cultural heritage in the rural areas of Jammu region, transferred from one generation to the other. It is an artistic work where useful and decorative products are made completely manually, like grass, palm leaves which are easily available. Many SHG women were involved in this work in an unorganized way and generally used to make them for domestic use and if at all sold at a very low rate. However, with increased demand of eco-friendly products, they fetch higher prices now.

So from the above discussion, it is understood that these three districts (Samba, Kathua and Reasi) are the hub or core of cultural heritage in Jammu region. Many lost old traditions have been reviving in these areas with the help of local or rural women artisans. These women

artisans are interested in reviving and promoting their cultural heritage because they believe that with these artifacts and crafts, they can maintain their cultural identity and sense of Well-being. Since, these rural women are much more aware and conscious about their rights and beliefs, morals, customs, traditions, folk culture etc as compared to the women who live in urban areas or cities. Due to the modernization, people are forgetting their roots and identities which lead them to forget their cultural heritage too. This kind of attitude and perception will be more dangerous and a matter of concern for the old folk societies and their culture and heritage which would be ultimately a great loss or threat not to the region but also to the nation.

Sustainable present and future: Roadblocks and Challenges

The vocal for local initiative has proved as a platform for creating and enhancing sustainable livelihoods for rural women artisans to earn a better living with dignity in the rural areas of Jammu region. Under this movement, the successful process of capacity building and inclusion of women in various aspects of empowerment through local art and craft or where we can support local products which can help women in many ways. “With this, women get opportunities, exposure, support system and motivational trainings they can be the breadwinners, trendsetters, and change agents. They now speak against discrimination, inequalities and motivate themselves to have a greater participation in decision-making, access to information to develop life skills and confidence to inculcate leadership, self-respect and self-reliance” (Ojha, J. K., & Mishra, B. 2016).

The practice of handicraft and handloom is directly related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN).

“SDG number 5 is about gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women to ensure their own rights. For this reason, this objective is directly related to handicrafts as this is a predominantly female activity. In Brazil, for example, according to the IBGE, there are more than 8.5 million artisans, 87% of whom are women. Since the post Industrial Revolution, with domestic restrictions, maternity and obstacles to entering and remaining in the traditional productive environment, artisans competed with the market and the techniques of production by machines, for example, working with handicrafts has been a resource to help women’s emancipation for nearly 200 years. Unfortunately, this fact is also one of the historical reasons why handicrafts are still undervalued by our society.

NWISA JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY

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Volume 1 Oct 2024

Therefore, handmade products are still is a way through which the economic and social emancipation of women find a way to grow, principally in development countries. In addition to encouraging and restoring centuries-old traditions, buying handicrafts directly from the artisan helps the fifth objective listed by the UN.” (<https://briselier.com/en/handicrafts-and-the-sdgs/>)

The present study indicates that the women artisans of Jammu region can be self-sufficient and empowered by providing them right platform and opportunities. But unfortunately some women artisans who are still unaware about such movements and initiatives. These women are so innocent and helpless. In spite of the fact that these women have enough talent and skills in their hands but they are somewhere unable to find the right path. There are many reasons like illiteracy, unemployment, low or no confidence, low self-esteem and lack of support, patriarchal mind set and so on. Another issue noticed while studying that there is a rivalry among the women artisans. For making any piece of art or craft, a team work is very necessary where they can make the products in large quantities and sell them in the market and earn profit out of it, but unfortunately, many women artisans are not coordinating and cooperating with each other. Sometimes it becomes very difficult for the trainer or in charge to make them sit or work together with peace and harmony.

One women artisan narrated that *“first I have to complete my domestic work , send the children to school , cook food for the husband and after that if time permit I can go out for my job as an artisan”* Another women artisans stated that *“ because of the paucity of the time and resources I am unable to give my best or much time to my craft”* therefore from the above narratives one can understand that the women are still struggling in order to make earnings from the local handicrafts and handlooms.

Therefore, from the above narratives, it could be understand that there is demand for local art and craft which are more eco-friendly and bio-degradable. These women artisans are making the products with no use of plastic and other harmful chemical. The women artisans are more aware about the environment and its protection. They are making these products in huge quantities with lot of efforts and hand work. Some very old women who are above 60 Or70 years, are also engaging in making handicrafts and handloom and earning very well. But due to their old age and other health related issues like weak or low eye sight and joint pains etc,

become hurdles in their work life which is again very challenging. Therefore, they also need medical and other related facilities time to time.

From the present study women artisans who want to become an entrepreneurs are facing various challenges such as unawareness, no direct contact with the supplier, exploitation by the middle man or some powerful people, less familial support and less profit. The results show that the younger generation is unwilling to continue their culture and traditions given by their ancestors due to confronted obstacles.

Role of Government: Schemes and Programme

Various steps have been taken for the revival and revitalization of these two sectors, the Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom, of each district of Jammu region has adopted a multi-pronged and holistic strategy. Various steps for the revival of craft forms have been taken like organizing workshops and awareness camps in schools, colleges and youth clubs making to motivate the young people towards the importance of these crafts and its linked to the culture and heritage of the Jammu region.

Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan is the mission started by the Government of India on 13th May 2020, towards making India Self-reliant. The aim is to make the country and its citizens independent and self-reliant in all senses. Moreover, the 'Vocal for Local' initiative by the National Institute for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) is intended to promote women's empowerment and sustainable growth by showcasing indigenous products and encouraging self-reliance. The initiative aims to bolster local economies and grassroots entrepreneurship. It also aims to encourage "Make in India" and promote the manufacturing and production of goods and services in India to increase income and employment. The initiative is relevant to women's empowerment because many local products are controlled by women. Some reasons to support local female artisans include; Greater female workforce participation, bridging the gap between art and technology, Enforcing gender equality and Livelihood concerns.

The present study explored that in the Jammu region, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, Department of Industry and Commerce, J&K and Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom, in all districts including Reasi, Samba and Kathua, have provided an opportunity to unemployed youth to avail the benefit of various Departmental Schemes and make themselves

self-reliant/Aatamnirbhar. The Government has been following a policy of promoting and encouraging the handloom sector through a number of programmes and schemes. Due to various marketing initiative and schemes interventions like cluster approach, aggressive marketing initiative and social welfare measures , the handloom sector has been showing positive growth with a notable increase in the income of weavers.

First, the artisans have to get registered themselves through single window system in their respective area of interest in handicraft and handloom sectors from where the training can be sought. The duration of the training by the trainers in different training centres for a period of one year in elementary course and two years for advance course. Also, the artisans are getting stipend monthly. These centres are mobile in nature moving from one place to another. The schemes of the department are;

1. Credit Card Scheme
2. Training Scheme
3. Financial Support Scheme
4. Karkhandar Scheme
5. Education Scheme
6. 10% Special Rebate Scheme
7. Promotion and Marketing Scheme
8. Pradhanmantri Weaver Mudra Scheme

Apart from these schemes, these departments with the help of the artisans are working for the revival of the languishing crafts and to preserve the traditional identity of the Jammu region.

In Reasi, the government is running a scheme known as Umeed under Jammu Kashmir Rural Livelihood Mission (JKRLM) intends to revive the old tradition and modernise the craft, so that it's usable and useful. After identifying the scope of this livelihood activity" Chabhari and Binna(Aasan), surveys were conducted by JKRLM to identify the women artisans and after identification, grass handicrafts workshops were conducted in the rural villages, like Kheral, Malair and Saloon in the district of Reasi, Identified SHG members were trained on this traditional handicraft, many skill development trainings were imparted to support and increase their capacities, many initiatives have been taken by JKRLM and District administration Reasi,

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A Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal ISSN Number 3048-6963 (Online)

Volume 1 Oct 2024

for the purpose of empowering women and create alternate source of income for them. This has in turn promoted premium grass handicraft product for the market, expansion of production base for utility based, life style and mass production handicrafts products. This initiative supports the preservation and protection of traditional languishing craft 100 SHG members of “Naari Ki Pehchaan Cluster level federation are involved in the activity and financial support for training and raw material is being provided by JKRLM. The intervention faced several challenges. There was lack of identity among the artisans of grass handicrafts, as the artisans were not getting their due recognition and lot of efforts went to organize them into a Cluster. The hurdles such as, low financial returns from the products as A compared to the labour, lack of information about the market and marketing, latest market demand, competition with machine made products, lack of infrastructural facilities and lack of interest amongst the new generation towards this craft were addressed. Many workshops are organized at rural and urban level that enhanced the skills and also the knowledge of the SHG members. Skill showcase, design education, creative and product development workshops followed by the pricing, marketing, branding and micro financing etc were organized for the women to make them equipped to do business successfully. They were also made to understand promotional strategies for the modern market and understand space of their products in the market and fixing of price according to that. They were made updated and trained to adopt strategies to mix old and new designs to strike a balance. The SHG women were sensitized to adopt this livelihood as a supplementary source of income. Handholding support was provided to increase interaction with the online shopping sites and government departments for sale of the products, which also helped the SHG members to know about the consumer preferences. JKRLM Initiated awareness programme to create collaboration between the artisans and urban designer to promote it as a brand together and explore opportunities.

This venture has played a key role in empowering SHG women who are now confident of their skill and have become financially independent. The response to the products from the market has been overwhelming and the group has delivered orders to many Government departments.

Some suggestions

1. There should be no discrimination towards any community. All the communities on the basis of gender or caste, majority or minority should be equal.

2. There should be harmonious co-existence among all the communities of artisans or women artisans.
3. There should be proper balance in terms of sustainable development.
4. The government should make such policies related to education and training facilities for women artisan to keep their art and craft alive.

Conclusion

The study led to the conclusion that women artisan are playing a very significant role not only in sustainable development but also in the preservation of the cultural heritage of the region. The women artisans despite of challenges and difficulties at individual level or societal level, they are not less than anybody is performing their artistic role in different sectors. The study also indicates that women artisan from rural areas are more self- sufficient and much capable in running their homes and be a source of bread and butter. There is no doubt that the government is helping these women artisans to uplift their social and economic status but there are many things which needs to be looked upon and there are some scope of improvement or change in the policies and programmes so that each and every women can take the benefit of the scheme and get a respectful life. These women artisans are quite skilful and talented in making art and craft and after giving them proper training they became more self-sufficient and experts in their respective field.

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