

Promoting the Indigenous Crafts to Support the Rural Economy

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Abstract

Millions of individuals in India rely on their expertise in traditional crafts to provide for their families. The traditional crafts industry employs a significant portion of India's informal workforce (about 330 million people). It is also important to note the UNESCO/(1997) ITC's definition of handicrafts as follows: 'Artisanal goods are those made by artisans, either fully by hand, or with the assistance of basic tools or even by mechanical methods, as long even as direct manual input of the artist remains the most major component of the completed product. The completed goods are unique because of their specific characteristics, which might be practical, aesthetically pleasing, inventive, culturally rooted, ornamental, useful, traditional, spiritually symbolic, or socially meaningful.

Keywords: Traditional Skills, Handicrafts, Informal Sector, Traditional Crafts, Artisanal Products, Aesthetic, Creative

Introduction

More than 330 million Indians work in the informal economy, with many of them employed in the traditional crafts industry. ' Despite the value and significance of traditional crafts, both the crafts and the artisans who practice them have historically been undervalued. There has never been a comprehensive study of the value of traditional handicrafts to the economies of different nations. It goes without saying that there is a great deal of room for improving traditional handicrafts via research and development, product diversification, quality assurance, and promotion.

Handicrafts Sector - The National Scenario

According to estimates, the traditional handicrafts business is worth about \$2 billion dollars worldwide. And as more and more markets become available, that number will only grow. Exports of Indian handicrafts have been on the rise and are now skyrocketing. Throughout a 6-year period, exports went from Rs.387 crore in 1986–1987 to Rs.8,343 crore in 2002–2003.

A examination of the relevant literature reveals significant gaps, including the absence of any intervention or study aimed at bettering the lives of traditional artisans by developing their human resources so that they may become more innovative and creative in their work.

No one has ever developed a holistic and long-term strategy to improving the lives of craftsmen by investing in their human and technological capital.

There will be a need for craftspeople to reevaluate their practices in light of the sweeping changes occurring on a global scale. To improve their standard of living and their skills, there is an immediate need to investigate this issue from a completely new angle, one that emphasizes invention and creativity. Based on these results, the action research technique may be preferable to the one-and-done studies of the past.

Review of the Conservation of the Crafts

Conservation and resurrection of traditional crafts in India have benefited from the work of several scholars and government bodies. Jena (2007) proposes a number of corrective actions aimed at reinvigorating the handicrafts industry. The need from customers who value diversity is being met in part by providing training to artists in the hopes of raising consciousness, inspiring the development of novel methods and designs, and introducing novel processes. Some academics argue that it is the responsibility of the government to safeguard, promote, and assist the traditional craft industry and the small businesses that comprise it. But, in today's interconnected world, safeguards of this kind are notoriously hard to come by.

The designer will offer a fresh method, or an alternative way of interpreting artisanal ability and knowledge, and share his or her design talents and awareness of global market needs, as described by Wood (2007) in his discussion of the notion of Dastakari Ranthambore. The designer does not force his or her will on the artisan, but rather "unlocks" the potential of the artisan's current ability by modifying it to make it more marketable to customers. Only a targeted intervention strategy can release this latent potential.

Action research was used for this investigation. Lewin (1946) coined the phrase "action research," and he described the process as consisting of three phases: "unfreezing," "changing," and "refreezing." Change is recognized, the problem is defined, other approaches are considered, and, lastly, the new behavior is tested, assessed, and, if shown to be effective, accepted. Action research, in its most basic definition, is an approach to study and inquiry that relies on the active participation of people of the community it aims to improve. The most notable elements of action research, participatory research, and collaborative inquiry are the involvement and participation of a community throughout the whole process, from issue identification to implementation of solutions.

According to Marsick and Watkins (1997), action research is distinct from other types of applied research owing to its emphasis on taking action to effect change inside the organization. Action research and discursive practice are meant to do more than merely describe, comprehend, and explain the world; they are meant to alter it (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001). Schein has stressed the significance of participant interaction at all stages of action research (1995). This is because those who take part in making the change are more invested in seeing it through. Pressure for change occurs from inside after people have recognized a need for change and communicated it broadly. This not only ushers in a new era, but also inspires the artists to think beyond the box. Consequently, the intervention process for human resource development releases the latent need for creative expression and business innovation.

Women as Change Agents in the Crafts

Women craftsmen from any community are seen as gentle disruptors. The success of increasing the quality of their craft rests only on the desire and dedication of the women artists. This includes raising knowledge about the quality of artifacts, the market, basic health care, cleanliness, literacy, savings, etc.

Identifying select craftsmen within the cluster as change agents is essential for getting the most out of this human resource development. These craftspeople were chosen because of their willingness to take on new challenges, expertise in product creation, passion for art, commitment to quality, and interest in expanding their market and improving their living conditions. The resource people were informed so that help could be made available to complete the tasks in the allotted time frame and according to the established plan.

Innovative Methodology for Craft Promotion

Methods such as formal and informal surveys, as well as a systematic and in-depth assessment of current practices, may be used to pinpoint areas where more training is required. Programs for disseminating the relevant human resource development interventions to the intended audiences must be developed. Local resource people should be included in the development of all of these projects.

Beneficiaries must be included at all stages of project development and delivery. First, the intervention's need must be established in the minds of the involved craftspeople who were acting as change agents. Then and only then could it be applied to the other craftspeople in the cluster. Human resource development is the only way to overcome the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. Certain new ideas, techniques, or approaches for manufacturing of higher quality artifacts emerged from the awareness campaigns, and it was thought that if they were adopted, the development via this action research would be acceptable. This exemplifies the impact their invention has made between then and now. Poor (primitive) furnace design was shown to cause significant energy loss, which in turn increased production times and material costs.

It was generally believed that the home income determinants affecting craftspeople needed to be determined. Reducing manufacturing costs, improving the quality of the artifact, increasing the artifact's worth via inventive design, and keeping the business open longer are all factors that are predicted to contribute to the growth of the artisan community.

Current State of the Craft Industry

The Crafts Council of India said in 2011 that "Handicraft is the second greatest source of employment in the nation, behind agriculture. However India's hand industries are in a crisis of misunderstanding." William Bissel, MD, Fabindia: "The number of Indian craftsmen has declined by 30% over the previous 30 years, suggesting the need to reinvest in artisans to conserve history, culture, and a vital source of income." Indian Handicrafts must contend with the issues of economics, sustainability, marketability, and financial survival (Crafts Council of India-April 2011). There is still one mystery that has not been explained.

Where do Indian crafts and craftspeople stand today? The Indian Crafts industry is massive, and it is very multiethnic and diverse. There are people from over 3,000 different castes, 432 different ethnic tribes, and many different religious traditions coexisting peacefully for millennia. There are more than 1,650 different languages spoken in India. India's planners and policymakers have been tackling a wide range of national issues. They're also talking about artisans' wages and benefits, which is important, but the problem is probably so big and convoluted that it hasn't been solved entirely. (Under the UNESCO Programme on Cultural Industries and Copyright Policy and Partnerships, Gandhi National Centre for the Arts).

Artisans and Handmade Goods Sector

According to Fab India, "an estimated 71% of artisans work as family units, and 76% attribute their profession to having learnt family skills." While crafts received royal and aristocratic patronage in pre-Independence days and played a central role in Gandhi's independence struggle, they have slowly lost relevance with the advent of industrialization and currently carry the stigma of inferiority and backwardness. It's considered irrelevant, esoteric, and a status symbol. The government's view of the handmade goods sector as a dying sector has contributed to the absence of comprehensive measures to safeguard the sector and bolster its workforce. Mass-produced consumer items are often less expensive than those made by hand because of the economies of scale associated with automation. Because of the difficulties inherent in the handmade industry, it is difficult for craftsmen to compete with mass-produced goods. For the sake of mass appeal, it is not uncommon for quality and/or craftsmanship to suffer, resulting in a gradual erosion of expertise over the course of many generations.

Under the conventional model, the maker's immediate family and neighbors are the primary consumers of the handmade goods he or she creates (Cohen, 1983; Graburn, 1976). This domestic market has restricted options. Craftspeople who want to broaden their customer base often start looking beyond the industry as a whole. As a result, they begin making wares that may appeal to populations outside their own. Several new forms of folk art have emerged as a result of interaction with contemporary and external worlds, such as tourist audiences (Cohen, 1983). Hence, the influence of outsiders or an external audience drives creativity and variety in the arts (Cohen, 1993). Crafts are said to undergo "spontaneous commercialization" when they are altered in response to feedback from an unexpected external audience (such as a visitor) (Cohen, 1989a).

Many studies have considered the direct impact of tourism on historic and cultural landscapes (Cohen, 1993; Graburn, 1976; Popelka & Littrell, 1991). The impact of mass travel is reflected in the production of miniature and oversized works of art (Mc Kercher, 2008). As a result of tourists' expectations, the arts may be streamlined (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Revilla & Dodd, 2003). According to Graburn (1976), the aesthetic needs of the dominant world may be met by "tourist art" or "airport art" created by artists in the Fourth World⁴. For this external community, many indigenous arts and crafts have evolved from "traditional and sacred arts" (Graburn, 1976) to "useful art and fine art" (Parezo, 1981). The most popular mementos are those that are either novel or hybrid crafts⁵ (Graburn, 2008). The business motivations of modern artisans provide a useful lens through which to examine the field. The economic dynamics of the tourist sector may have a profound effect on a craft, redefining its significance for both the maker and the buyer. Artisans begin labeling their

wares as either commercial, traditional, rustic, or exquisite (Cant, 2012). As a result, construction methods, decorative themes, color schemes, and primary resources all range widely.

The Way Forward for the Crafts

In order to keep their wares competitive, craftspeople now must include some contemporary touches. Craftspeople often try new things with their wares before they hit the market (Ballengee-Morris, 2002). Hence, commercialized arts are part of a "transitional" (Cohen 1983) dynamic, since they are always changing and adapting (Tung, 2012).

The region's economy relies heavily on the preservation and continuation of its historic artisan traditions. There are several manifestations of the commercialization of this legacy. Even in places where making things is not a family tradition, craft production may be an integral component of daily life (Roux, 2006). Nature, culture, and other resources may motivate societies to develop new goods when given the chance. Similar to South and Southeast Asia, tourism in India has had a direct impact on the commercialization of traditional arts and crafts. Pipli, in the Indian state of Odisha, has long been a popular tourist destination thanks in large part to the exquisite appliquéés that are made there. The evolution of this formerly functional art form into commercial art has been facilitated by the direct interaction of visitors with the artists who create it (Mohapatra, 2005). Wall hangings and cushion coverings have replaced the traditional "Pasapali" or dice mat. In an effort to corner the market on a single product and increase their earnings, artisans often come up with innovative designs on the spot (Mohapatra, 2005). Products have become more varied due to direct interaction with visitors (Mohapatra, 2008).

According to Cohen's thesis, middlemen drive change in the craft industry by dictating parameters like finished product size, shape, form, design, and color to individual artists. Several traditional art forms have been revitalized thanks to the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies (government agencies), individual designers (designers), and agents (agents). Examples of such resurrected arts and crafts are Jamdani, Kantha, and Madhubani paintings. When it comes to helping craftspeople break into new markets, intermediaries like governments and Nonprofits often play just a supporting role. Nonetheless, there are many instances when the lines between organic and sponsored marketing blur. This occurs when a craftsperson's ingenuity inspires new forms of expression. Even if the artisan is following the directions of intermediaries or using indirect machinery to reach the market, this might happen. The manufacturer turns to the middleman because of barriers to entry, such as a lack of ready customers. In this case, the intermediary's role is that of a sales representative, not a catalyst for transformation.

Conclusion

According to the United Nations document, "It is truly sad, whereas in Europe and North America, the view is being taken that the future must be handmade (for economic, environmental and social reasons). India is yet to articulate a craft future in a realistic, practical way that respects not just the issue of cultural identity but equally the force of Indian craft in the economy." It's important to remember that evolution is intrinsic to the practice of any art form. Each traditional craft has its own unique and difficult set of challenges when it comes to developing its future. The whole process of

manufacturing traditional handicrafts, from concept to execution, is imprinted in the legacy of the artisans. In today's worldwide world, fostering innovation and creativity at their roots calls for an intentional, rigorous, and long-term intervention strategy.

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