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Challenges, Changes And Continuity Of Rural Artisans In India And Karnataka: A Literature Review-Based Perspective

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Abstract

Rural artisans in India and Karnataka have played a significant role in the economic and cultural background of the society since ancient times. Handicraft skills like weaving, carpet making, wood carving, clay and metal work have been a source of folk heritage and livelihood. However, modernization, industrialization, globalization and technology-based modern production methods have posed many challenges to their lives and businesses. Shortage of raw materials, lack of direct access to the market, over-prevalence of middlemen, financial difficulties, lack of interest of the younger generation and lack of institutional support are the major challenges. This study analyzes the available literature on the change, continuity and revival efforts of rural artisans in India and Karnataka. The diversity of these professions and the severity of the problems they face are evident through the examples from different states. The study also examines the effectiveness of projects undertaken by researchers and policymakers to preserve and revitalize these professions in the present era. The focus of this study is on the belief that the innovative power of rural artisans, combining the skills, creativity, and heritage of rural artisans with modern technology and marketing, can pave the way for building a sustainable rural economy.

Keywords: Rural Artisans, Traditional Professions, Modernization and Renewal, Market Challenges, Economic Situation, Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage, Impact Of Globalization, Cooperation and Support System, Career Continuity and Change.

1. THE BACKGROUND

India has a rich culture and history of various arts and crafts. India is home to tribal and traditional folk arts. The making of folk arts and crafts has been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years. Nowadays, arts in India are a highly respected and very important part of Indian culture. But due to westernization and industrialization, lack of attention and interest among consumers and lack of materials for making, these traditional art forms are disappearing. People in villages and towns used to depend on each other for the services provided by artisans like carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, weavers, bamboo weavers etc. It is very sad and unfortunate that these precious stones and crafts which were an integral part of our daily life and culture in the old days are disappearing fast. Indigo dyeing, natural block printing, red sandalwood carved idol making, wooden toys, JT clay pottery, stone carvings, these are also disappearing. In this essay we review the literature that discusses some of the issues related to traditional artisans and their work in India and Karnataka.

Mishra et al. (2012) describe the decline in handicraft production in India due to lack of demand and raw materials. The Kumapata crafts of Udaipur district of Rajasthan have been on the decline, the potters of Bhuj Kath region of Gujarat, and the mat makers of Patta Madi in Tamil Nadu have been struggling to maintain their traditional occupations. The researchers have highlighted the difficulties faced by the artisans in maintaining their traditional occupations. The long distance between the artisans and the raw material sources and the market areas has led to the increasing number of middlemen, making it difficult for the artisans to make a profit. The article states that the leather, which used to be available through the Jajumani system in rural areas, is now being sourced from far-flung areas like Delhi, Khanapur and Kolkata, which has led to the artisans bringing leather from urban areas.

2.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are ;

- To identify the economic, cultural and technology-based challenges faced by rural artisans in India and Karnataka.
- To analyze the changes, continuity and revival efforts taking place in traditional handicraft industries based on literature review.

3. DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

This study is mainly based on secondary data. It is a literature review based study. Articles already published in various journals, research papers, government reports, survey reports and articles from various sources on the subject of change, challenges and continuity of rural artisans have been used as source data. Survey studies, case studies, and empirical research articles have been collected and categorized to analyze the situation of rural artisans from a holistic perspective.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a descriptive analysis of the literature on the challenges, changes and continuity of rural artisans in India and Karnataka

4.1. Challenges, Changes And Continuity of Rural Artisans in India

Abhirami et al. (2017) also provides a picture of early handicrafts in India and the problems faced by artisans and suggestions for their solutions. Each state in India is famous for its handicrafts. These are in international demand and provide employment to people, especially women.

Menon (2010) has studied rural handicrafts in Kerala and found that the artisans and their families are completely dependent on local middlemen. The study shows that artisans here are completely oblivious to the demands of the customers and the market conditions and are unable to get the right price for their products as they produce monotonous products to make a quick buck. Their study shows that traditional handicrafts are declining due to lack of facilities, lack of coordination and lack of awareness.

According to Bakshi (2023), Indian handicrafts are deeply rooted and encompass diverse traditions, nurtured by countless skilled artisans across the country. But their unskilled hands weave exquisite wealth. From textiles and jewellery to pottery and woodcarvings, they have been reborn. Low wages, limited market space and difficulties in obtaining credit haunt Indian artisans at every stage. The onslaught of globalisation has eroded traditional skills and knowledge, forcing artisans to surrender to modern production techniques. In parallel, government agencies have launched initiatives to help them. The Ambedkar Hasta Shilpa Vikas Yojana in association with the Dastkar Sashastikaran Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Kaushal Samman Yojana (PMVIKAS) stand as a testament to these efforts. Support is being extended to artisans for infrastructure, technology and human resource development. By mobilizing artisans into self-help groups and societies, these projects aim to unleash the power of mass production and harness economies of scale in sourcing raw materials. Through design and technology upgrades, workshops and training programmes, artisans are equipped with commercial market intelligence, new techniques and original designs in line with the preferences of contemporary markets. Investing in the skills and talents of Indian artisans goes beyond mere preservation. It paves the way for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the authors opine.

Jena's (2008) in his study study provides an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic role of rural artisans in the Indian economy. The research emphasizes that rural artisans constitute a crucial segment of the unorganized sector, preserving traditional crafts and providing livelihood opportunities to millions in rural India. The study points out that despite their contribution, these artisans are often excluded from mainstream development policies. Key challenges identified include lack of access to modern tools and technologies, limited availability of credit, poor infrastructure, and lack of direct market linkages. Jena advocates for integrated policy frameworks that promote rural artisans through financial inclusion, skill development, and

market access. His work underscores the urgent need to treat artisans not merely as cultural symbols but as vital economic agents in rural development.

Das (2011) in his study explores the condition of rural artisans within the larger context of micro and small enterprises (MSEs) during India's post-liberalization economic reforms. The study reveals that while economic reforms have fostered competition and innovation in urban sectors, they have had an adverse impact on rural traditional industries and artisans. With the influx of cheap machine-made goods, handmade products by rural artisans lost their market value, resulting in a decline in income and employment. Das stresses that artisan-based industries, like weaving, pottery, leather work, and wood carving, need special attention in policy. He recommends the formation of artisan clusters, access to common facility centers, and the incorporation of traditional artisan skills into vocational education to revive the sector.

Sarkar (2016) in his study is grounded in empirical research conducted in selected villages of West Bengal. It highlights the precarious livelihood conditions of rural artisans, especially in handloom and terracotta sectors. Artisans face seasonal demand, exploitation by middlemen, lack of branding, and absence of collective bargaining. Female artisans, in particular, face additional socio-cultural constraints, limited mobility, and wage disparities. The study recommends a multi-pronged approach involving the creation of self-help groups (SHGs), direct market interventions (such as fairs and exhibitions), financial literacy training, and the promotion of artisan products through government and NGO platforms. Sarkar also suggests that artisans should be included in poverty alleviation and rural employment programs like MGNREGA.

Kamat (2020) in his study analyzed the reasons for the decline in rural artisanal professions across India. Urbanization, globalization, and a shift in consumer preferences toward modern and synthetic products have significantly reduced demand for traditional crafts. Younger generations of artisans are moving to urban jobs due to the lack of profitability in their ancestral trades. The study calls for a "craft renaissance" led by governmental policy, where crafts are integrated with tourism (craft tourism), cultural heritage campaigns, and education. Kamat recommends measures such as establishing rural artisan hubs, tax exemptions, craft documentation, and integrating crafts into the national skill development mission. His work emphasizes the need to preserve and promote India's intangible cultural heritage while ensuring sustainable livelihoods.

Singh & Kumari (2023) in their study focused on the transformation of rural artisan enterprises through digital inclusion. Based on fieldwork in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, the authors found that artisans who accessed e-commerce platforms like Amazon Karigar, India Handmade, and Flipkart Samarth could directly reach national and international customers, leading to better profits and independence from middlemen. The study acknowledges the digital divide, noting that many artisans lack the skills, infrastructure, and literacy required to take advantage of digital tools. The researchers advocate for targeted digital literacy programs, subsidized smartphones and internet access, training in product photography and description writing, and partnerships with NGOs and private platforms to create a digital ecosystem for artisans.

A recent study conducted in Mahendragarh district (Yadav, 2025) examined the socio-economic conditions of rural artisans in villages like Jadupura, God and Bhojas. The findings revealed that although many artisans are engaged in traditional occupations, they are facing declining market demand and financial insecurity. The study emphasized the need for improved marketing strategies and government intervention to sustain rural handicrafts.

4.2. Challenges, Changes and Continuity of Rural Artisans in Karnataka

The article also highlights the shortage of raw materials faced by the wooden doll makers of Karnataka, the sandalwood and sheesham wood handicraft makers of Mysore, and the bamboo craft makers of Nagaland. Since there is no proper information in any official government records about the contribution of handicrafts to national production, the researchers have suggested undertaking a comprehensive survey to get a complete picture of them. Network Indian Cultural Enterprises (2022) This article also reveals that Terracotta by Saati is an effort to save the endangered terracotta potteries of India. Saachi Tripathi has succeeded in bringing together traditional potters and has tried to increase their skills and strength. The mission is involved in promoting the introduction and trade of these materials through e-marketplaces. Such efforts can be successful in helping revive traditional crafts.

Hegde, M. (2005) in his study presented a detailed account of the socio-economic conditions of rural artisans in northern Karnataka, particularly in districts like Dharwad, Belagavi, and Haveri. The study found that most artisans belonged to traditionally marginalized communities and were engaged in occupations like blacksmithing, weaving, pottery, and carpentry. Despite their historical importance, these artisans faced a steep decline in demand due to modernization and the influx of machine-made goods. Lack of institutional support, irregular income, and absence of formal training were major issues. Hegde suggested community-based cooperative models, financial subsidies, and skill upgradation programs to revive these dying traditional crafts.

Gowda (2010) in his study focused on the pottery craft in Channapatna town of Ramanagara district, famous for its wooden toys and craft traditions. The study highlights the decline of the pottery profession due to several factors: urban migration, limited raw material availability, lack of innovation, and competition from plastic and ceramic goods. The younger generation was shown to be uninterested in pursuing traditional craft due to low returns. Gowda emphasizes the need for government-sponsored design training programs, revival schemes, and marketing platforms to ensure sustainability of traditional rural crafts.

Patil (2015) in his research investigated the identity crisis faced by traditional artisan communities such as the Vishwakarma (carpenters and blacksmiths), Madars (cobblers), and Kurubas (weavers) in rural parts of Karnataka. With the onset of modernization, many artisans have shifted to non-traditional occupations like daily wage labor, construction work, or small business. This occupational shift has resulted in socio-cultural disintegration and economic vulnerability. The study also explores the gendered impact, where women

artisans are doubly marginalized. Patil recommends introducing artisanal content in local curriculum, expanding artisan credit schemes, and organizing regular exhibitions and craft melas at the taluka level.

Kumari & Rao (2019) in their study examined the condition of Ilkal saree weavers in Bagalkot district. Although Ilkal sarees are renowned across the state, the weavers face fluctuating incomes, rising raw material costs, and middlemen exploitation. The study observes that government initiatives like GI (Geographical Indication) tagging and schemes like "Nekar Samman Yojane" have helped partially. However, awareness of such schemes remains low. The authors recommend digital literacy training, direct-to-customer e-commerce platforms, and strengthening of primary weavers' cooperative societies as sustainable solutions.

Shantala (2022) recent work provides gender-focused insights into women artisans working in crafts like embroidery, basket-making, doll-making, and handloom weaving in districts such as Gadag and Koppal. The study highlights that despite playing a vital role in household economies, women artisans lack recognition, face wage disparities, and have limited mobility and market access. The study underscores the success of some Self Help Groups (SHGs) in improving their bargaining power and income through collective production and marketing. It recommends more SHG-based enterprise training, access to microcredit, and regular participation in state-level exhibitions like "Santhe" to empower rural women artisans.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The forgoing analysis reveals that the various studies have shown the importance of traditional crafts in India. They showcase our art traditions and skills to the outside world. These are in great demand both nationally and internationally, but their survival remains a question in the modern world. There is a need for diversification in the production of handicrafts in line with the times. Governments need to take action to overcome the shortage of raw materials, create awareness of the market and provide financial facilities and empower jobs. This can lead to the next generation continuing our art, culture and traditions as economic activities. Traditional arts and crafts should not be seen as just a means of earning money but should be preserved for their intrinsic value.

It is clear that modernization is having a negative impact on the sustainability of the livelihoods of artisans. Based on the overview and descriptive analysis of this study, several important measures can be recommended for the conservation and promotion of traditional handicrafts. Firstly, there is a need to provide training in modern technology, equipment and related skills to enhance the production capacity and quality of artisans. Secondly, the government and the private sector should provide financial and marketing support to artisans through easy credit, subsidy facilities and e-marketing platforms on a partnership basis. It is also important to reduce dependence on middlemen by ensuring easy availability of raw materials. Craftsmen should be allowed to expand their products in the global market through the use of e-commerce platforms. Cultural programs and fairs will be very useful in reviving traditional art forms. In addition, awareness campaigns, training camps and incentive policies are needed to attract the youth towards these professions. If

all these measures are not implemented in time, the possibility of destruction of our cultural heritage and traditional knowledge will increase. Government, private sector, policymakers and various sectors of society need to take coordinated and bold decisions to provide stability and respect for craft professions in the growth of the modern economy.

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