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## Problems and Prospects of Rural Handicraft Artisans

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### Abstract

Indian handicraft sector represents a rich cultural heritage of nation and Gujarat is one of the most prosperous segments of such treasure. Rural Gujarat is very prosperous in terms of art and craft having various handicraft players residing on this land. Majority of the communities and regions possess some unique characteristics which can be shaped in to small scale or cottage industries.

Though various government and non-government projects, research studies, training programmes and financial/marketing assistance schemes are in practice to protect the interest of artisans involved in preserving such heritage of India in the form of handicrafts, the result is yet not satisfactory. It is general perception that Indian handicrafts are famous worldwide since centuries, but the fact is very bitter and strange, as there is no fame and recognition for poor rural handicraft artists living and starving in some dark corners of the country. Due to various reasons, this great cultural heritage is being threatened by forces both from within and outside. Hence, majority of such artisans now are at saturated position and do not wish their children to continue with such occupation.

The present research study concentrates on the problems and challenges as well as the strength and prospects for the artisans engaged in handicraft sector with special reference to Surendranagar district of Gujarat state. Here an attempt has been made to highlight the opinion of rural handicraft artisans of different eight handicraft categories of Surendranagar district so that their problems and prospects will come to the notice of all. This research work may provide a direction and guideline to the government or non- government players and policy makers to find out various means, methods and efforts to improve the incomes of rural handicraft artisans; to arouse in them awareness and motivation to grab opportunities of national and international market; and to assess the needs of training, capacity building, innovations and institutional support.

**Key Words:** Rural Development, Handicraft Artisans, Sustainable Entrepreneurship, SWOT Analysis

### Introduction

*"I would say that if the village perishes India will perish too. India will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained, there would be no objection to villagers using even the modern machines and tools that they can make and can afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of others."*

-M.K.Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi's ideas about handicrafts and self-sufficiency were directly related to his views on industrialization in society. Gandhiji believed that industrial societies were based on an endless production of commodities and thus encouraging greed which resulted into competition and ultimately into violence and war. Gandhiji wanted to revive the villages, their craft economy and their practices and make them represent a system that was based on the concept of self-sufficiency and self-regulation. He firmly believed that an individual, a village or a country could become independent in true sense, if it becomes self-sufficient. Hence, his concept of rural development was very broad and comprehensive, emphasizing on the economic, political, social, educational, ecological and spiritual dimensions.

To attain such ideal position, Gandhiji's model was evolved around the concept of sustainable development of villages. Gandhiji wanted rural reconstruction and rural upliftment through propagation of village industries from generation to generations for developing rural India in particular. For making Indian economy strong and self-reliant, Gandhiji emphasized on the growth of the rural industries like khadi, handlooms, handicrafts, etc.

According to census 2011, 68.84% of the total population of India lives in villages, therefore any strategy for national development must be associated with the development of its rural areas. Rural Development is a process, which aims at improving the well-being and self-realization of people living in rural areas through collective process. Indian villages have a great number of handicraft artists, as each and every community and region possesses unique characteristics which can be shaped in to small scale or cottage industries.

The term 'Handicraft' encompasses a wide range of artifacts. The Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) offered a workable definition in the Eighth Plan: "Items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools, and generally artistic and/or traditional in nature. They include objects of utility and objects of decoration". Simply, handicrafts are classified into two categories: a) Articles of everyday use and b) Decorative items.

Indian handicraft sector represents a rich cultural heritage of nation and Gujarat is one of the most prosperous segments of such treasure. Rural Gujarat is very prosperous in terms of art and craft having various handicraft players residing on this land. Handicraft of rural Gujarat includes weaving, embroidery, dyeing, printing, Bandhej (Tie-Dye), leather-work, pottery, wood-work, stone-work, bead-work, brass-work, coir-work, etc. Though various government and non-government projects, research studies, training programmes and financial/marketing assistance schemes are in practice to protect the interest of artisans involved in preserving such heritage of India in the form of handicraft, the result is yet not satisfactory.

It is general perception that Indian handicrafts are famous worldwide since centuries, but the fact is very bitter and strange, as there is no fame and recognition for poor

rural handicraft artists living and starving in some dark corners of the country. There is not statistical data available about the exact and true number of such artisans. Due to various reasons, this great cultural heritage is being threatened by forces both from within and outside.

There are many handicraft artisans working in small or micro scale in Surendranagar district. But they are less focused, not much recognized and under privileged in terms of economic and social benefits resulting in to occupational shift. Their art and skills are dying due to various reasons and they are not in the position to sustain for a long time. Tangaliya weaving, Patola weaving, stone carving, pottery/mud-work, brass-work, leather-work, embroidery, crochet-work, bead-work, tie & dye, etc. are the prominent handicrafts of this region. But only a few are recognized and rests are languishing resulting in to pessimistic perception and negative attitude of artisans associated with them. It is observed that there are two extremes in the artisanal communities; some have become famous artists, while remaining mass is starving poor. Despite of various government and non-government efforts, the reality is not satisfactory. Hence, majority of such artisans now are at saturated position and do not wish their children to continue with such occupation.

☞ **Objective of the Research Study:**

Observing the situation at grass-root level, the researchers felt that there must be proper means, methods and efforts to highlight the latent potential and hidden wealth of creativity through a scientific research work. Hence this study is a justifiable attempt carried on with the objective to examine the opinion of rural handicraft artisans about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats towards the handicraft sector.

☞ **Research Study Area and Methodology**

The research work has been done in the Surendranagar district of Gujarat state. The study covers the rural artisans engaged in handicraft sector. Eight handicraft categories were identified at the first stage from various handicraft activities carried on in the villages of Surendranagar district. They were as follows:

- |                           |                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) Weaving and Tangaliya  | 5) Tie and Dye                 |
| 2) Patola                 | 6) Embroidery and Crochet-work |
| 3) Stone Carving          | 7) Bead-work                   |
| 4) Mud-work and Wood-work | 8) Other Handicrafts           |

400 rural handicraft artisans were selected as respondents through stratified random sampling method, who were either self-employed or wage earners. From each of the 10 Talukas, artisans were selected and interviewed so that there can be the representation of all the Talukas of Surendranagar district. It must be noticed that some particular handicrafts were concentrated in certain regions of the district only. Here, all the eight handicraft categories included 50 artisans in each.

To collect the primary information, 400 artisans directly involved in handicraft

activities were selected as respondents. Besides 40 experts such as Government officials, NGO workers, designers, handicraft experts and representatives of village/Taluka/district level institutions were also contacted and interviewed to have authenticated qualitative as well as quantitative data and guidance for designing data collection tool in the form of Interview Schedule.

For seeking opinion of artisans about Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges towards Handicrafts, five point Likert Scale has been used, in which point '5' represents the opinion as Strongly Agree; '4' as Agree; '3' as Neutral; '2' as Disagree and '1' represents the opinion as Strongly Disagree. The received data has been processed through SPSS software and statistical tools such as measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion have been used for analysis and interpretation of the data and finding the results.

☞ **Opinion of Artisans about the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges towards Handicrafts**

SWOT analysis (also known as SWOC analysis) is a very useful technique for understanding our strengths and weaknesses as well as for identifying the opportunities available to us and challenges we face. Hence SWOT analysis represents the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats/Challenges towards a particular subject area.

For sustainability of handicraft, it becomes necessary to find out the strengths, to remove the weaknesses, to grab the opportunities and to be prepared well for facing the challenges by converting them in to new opportunities as well. With the consultation of various experts working in this field and references of secondary data, the opinion of respondents about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges have been gathered so that their perception can be studied well. Here, the objective is to examine the problems and challenges faced by rural artisans and subsequently the prospects of handicraft industry so that it can be useful in strategic planning and decision-making in suggesting appropriate policy implications to strengthen the position of rural artisans engaged in handicraft. The following are the statements representing the Strengths of Handicraft sector:

Table: 1 Statistics on Strengths of Handicraft Sector

Sr. No.	Strengths of Handicraft Sector	Mean	Std. Deviation	C.V.
1	Hereditary features play important role in handicraft skills	3.7	1.541	41.65
2	Low investment and use of insight	4.24	0.943	22.24
3	Proper use of leisure time	4.43	0.804	18.15
4	Good profit as compared to investment	2.86	1.113	38.92
5	Utilization of available raw material and resources	3.87	1.161	30.00
6	Gives pleasure of creation, feeling of pride and satisfaction	3.99	1.017	25.49
7	Promotes and preserves cultural values	4.54	0.693	15.26

The table shows that among all the statements representing the ‘Strengths’ of handicraft sector, “Handicraft promotes and preserves cultural values” is preferred the most having the highest Mean value of 4.54 followed by “Proper use of leisure time” with 4.43 Mean value and “Low investment and use of insight” (Mean is 4.24).

Majority of the artisans told that they are the true protector and propagator of the Indian cultural values. Therefore, they must be given a special place in promotion policy so that they can be motivated to propagate this cultural heritage to their next generation. Majority of female artisans (engaged in Embroidery/Crochet-work, Bead-work and Bandhej Tying work) under study told that they keep themselves busy with such handicraft activity and hence earn some sort of subsidiary income to their family. Even the respondents, who have another source of income like agriculture or labour, told that handicraft provides employment to them in summer particularly in this area where rain-fed agriculture system is widely in practice. Opposite to this, some artisans are fully involved in handicraft working more than ten hours a day. Hence, there is no question of leisure time for such artisans.

Handicraft sector is skill based industry which requires the art of using insight, creativity and proficiency rather than huge capital investment. Therefore, an artisan even without huge infrastructure facilities and physical resources can employ himself/herself in handicraft using own talents and inherent qualities as artist.

While the statement “Good profit as compared to investment” has the least mean value 2.86 followed by the statement “Hereditary features play important role in handicraft skills” with Mean value 3.7.

It is generally believed that handicraft offers a good amount of profit as compared to investment. But on discussing this issue, majority answered that the profit margin is not so high for them, as they operate at rural level. They have to rely upon various sources of distribution for selling their artifacts if they want to spread their market base. It is true that handicraft products are sold at a high price in elite market, but the actual creator working at rural level has nothing to do with it just getting a very small pie of profit. Further more majority of artisans of all the categories except Stone Carving and Tie & Dye agreed strongly about the importance of hereditary features in handicrafts.

Looking at the Co-efficient of Variation, the statement “Hereditary features play important role in handicraft skills” has the highest C.V. (41.65), followed by “Good profit as compared to investment” which shows the more variability and less consistency of responses. The statement “Handicraft promotes and preserves cultural values” has the highest consistency among all statements showing the strength of handicraft followed by “Proper use of leisure time” as the C.V. are 15.26 and 18.15 respectively.

There are some statements representing the Weaknesses of handicraft sector. They are

as follows:

**Table: 2 Statistics on Weaknesses of Handicraft Sector**

Sr. No.	Weaknesses of Handicraft Sector	Mean	Std. Deviation	C.V.
1	Lack of modern managerial skills	4.45	0.854	19.19
2	Problems due to less education	4.64	0.828	17.84
3	Scarcity of working capital / financial problems	4.65	0.666	14.32
4	Less information about market and marketing	4.52	0.875	19.36
5	Lack of information about government aid/credit facilities	4.83	0.566	11.72
6	Lack of knowledge about latest designs/current market demands	3.96	1.165	29.49
7	Do not know how to use advanced machines and equipment	3.63	1.333	36.72
8	Lack of organized identity	4.69	0.652	13.90
9	No information about exports	4.94	0.282	5.71

The table shows that among all the statements showing the ‘Weaknesses’ of Handicraft sector, “No information about exports” has the highest Mean value of 4.94 followed by “Lack of information about Government aid/credit facilities” with 4.83 Mean value and “Lack of organized identity” (Mean is 4.69). It means that these are the very strong weaknesses, as identified by majority of the artisans. Such weaknesses hinder the growth of handicraft sector, hence it is very important to find them out and try to remove them as early as possible to open the doors of development.

It has been found during the study that majority of the artisans don’t have knowledge about exporting their products. Here no exporter has been observed amongst the respondents under study. Most of them even don’t have knowledge about international market and export procedures and prospects. About 5% told that they have some knowledge but have never tried to export. However, some of the Tangaliya and Patola artisans told during the discussion that many times NRIs visit their place or come in to contact during exhibitions or fairs. They purchase the handmade products and take with them abroad. Sometimes NGOs help the artisans to sell their products out of country. Thus, artisans get indirect opportunity to come across the foreign buyers but such artisans are found very rare in this area.

Despite various government and non-government measures and schemes to assist the needy artisans, the result has not been observed satisfactory. A few artisans have availed financial assistance, as they are the members of some formal association or groups. Among them majority have availed the benefit of saving facilities only. Actually most of the artisans in this area have not even the heard the names of government schemes or credit programmes. A common perception has been observed that they are keenly interested to know about financial benefits offered by government

but hesitate to put trust in availing it due to deep rooted misconception and mistrust.

Further, it should be noticed here that handicraft is an unorganized sector generally run in small or tiny size units. Hence, such units don't have organized identity at individual level. Only 28.5% artisans are associated with some of the formal organizations such as Self-Help Groups, Co-operative Societies or NGOs working in this area. It shows that majority of the artisans (71.5%) have never experienced any type of formal membership with any group or association. Majority of the artisans told that there is no unity and sense of cooperation among artisans. They are highly dispersed and not ready to work under one umbrella. This is one of the most important reasons for their exploitation and vulnerable condition economically and socially.

The statement "Do not know how to use advanced machines and equipment" has the least mean value 3.63 followed by the statement "Lack of knowledge about latest designs/current market demands" with Mean value 3.96. It means that such weaknesses have been given comparatively less consideration in the opinion of the handicraft artisans covered under present research study.

Majority of the artisans covered under study were observed using traditional methods of production, simple tools and conventional techniques. However, minor changes and transformations have been naturally introduced with the passage of time. Some senior artisans told that they are comfortable with traditional tools and showed their inability to cope up with the change but younger generation seems quite enthusiastic and open to introduce modern machinery. Yet majority told that they are not in position to purchase modern machinery and advanced technology, as their financial condition don't allow them to invest in it. Some of the artisans boldly told that it is not their unwillingness or inability that stops them adopting improved technology but their financial backwardness and failure to avail financial assistance under government schemes.

However some artisans of Stone carving category told that the locally available stone of Dhrangadhra is rough and hard in texture, hence it breaks the machine blades. This is the main reason for not using machines on such stone. But marbles and red stone of Rajasthan are quite soft and smooth so cutting machines can be used on such stones. During the discussion, some of the artisans of Weaving/Tangaliya and Patola categories pointed out that they are ready to adopt new technology but it requires use of electricity. In fact they are not allowed to use electricity in hand-loom production, as it is considered as power-loom. Hence, even though they are capable to use latest machines and advanced technology, they seem afraid of overruling the 'Handicraft/Hand-loom Criteria'. However, many artisans have started using machines to lighten the unnecessary burden of manual labour in Mud-work/Pottery, Wood-work, Stone carving, Bandhej dying and Jewellery making.

The 'Workers' group of artisans produces the articles according to the orders of the clients, employers or traders. Hence they are 'mere workers' rather than 'creative

artists', who seldom get chance to exhibit their creativity and novel designing. It has been observed during the research work that some of the powerful pockets have captured the market, who have established good contact with the traders or showroom owners in cities. So, such people work as intermediaries between these two extreme ends. Hence, rural artisans are habituated to produce only what is demanded by them. They hardly bother to add innovations to their regular work.

Some of the Patola, Tangaliya and Stone carving artisans shared their experience of working in a project of National Institute of Fashion Technology in 2005, in which they were trained to make changes in designs, colour schemes, quality of material, etc. But majority of the artisans in this craft categories told that the traditional designs are demanded more in market, as they are popular and having unique image in the market. However keeping in view the tastes of customers and prevailing market trend they make necessary changes implying their own experience and insight. However, some artists have been come across during the research study, who have been awarded for their distinct handicraft work and innovations.

Further, looking at the Co-efficient of Variation, the statement "Do not know how to use advanced machines and equipment" has the highest C.V. (36.72), followed by "Lack of knowledge about latest designs/current market demands" (C.V.=29.49), which shows the more variability and less consistency of responses. The statement "No information about exports" has the most consistency of responses among all statements showing the weakness of handicraft followed by "Lack of information about government aid/credit facilities" as the C.V. are 5.71 and 11.72 respectively.

There are some statements representing the Opportunities to the handicraft sector. They are as follows:

Table: 3 Statistics on the Opportunities for Handicraft Sector

Sr. No.	Opportunities to Handicraft Sector	Mean	Std. Deviation	C.V.
1	Provides employment to even rural illiterate	4.8	0.55	11.46
2	Increasing demand at domestic and international markets	2.57	1.33	51.75
3	Government has introduced various schemes to promote handicrafts	1.82	0.975	53.57
4	Easy availability of financial assistance	1.7	0.849	49.94
5	Opportunity to develop craft by participating in fairs and exhibitions	1.72	1.101	64.01
6	Various NGOs are working in this field.	1.89	1.019	53.92
7	Increasing marketing opportunities due to mobiles and Internet	3.31	1.112	33.60

The above table shows that among all the statements, showing the 'Opportunities' of Handicraft sector, "Provides employment to even rural illiterate" has the highest

Mean value of 4.8 followed by “Increasing marketing opportunities due to mobiles and Internet” with 3.31 Mean value. It means that these are the strongest opportunities amongst all, as identified by majority of the artisans.

Most of the artisans told that it is not necessarily compulsory to be highly educated to learn the handicraft, as the handicraft requires skills, practice and dedication towards work not bookish knowledge and degrees. Some of the artisans quoted the examples of their ancestors who were great artists and did not know to write even their names.

However some threw light on the ironical fact that “Once a person starts getting education, he/she will lose interest in such handicraft demanding hard-work and patience but offering very little rewards in terms of income generation.” Further the artisans accepted the fact that education can make them economically and socially empowered and make them capable to earn more reaping the benefits of expanded market opportunities and technological advancements.

It has been revealed that nearly 99% (395) of the families under study use mobile phones, 31.5% (126) families have smart phones too. Generally younger generation is found enthusiastic and eager to have smart phones. But on asking about the use of smart phones, most of the people told that they use it for taking photographs, listening to music, watching videos, etc. Very few people were found having much knowledge about the commercial use it. It is amazing to know that only 59 respondents use Internet in their smart phone. But still majority of them were positive in their opinion about the above statement as the communication has become quite easy as compared to earlier for them. About 30.8% artisans were neutral in their opinion about the above statement of opportunity since they were dissatisfied about the network and connectivity problems in rural area.

However in coming years, as the presence of Internet increases in rural areas, rural India will yield more E-commerce business. This situation can be viewed as positive environment providing e-commerce opportunities to the rural handicrafts artisans. E-commerce is one of the most promising channels in today’s marketing scenario for selling handicrafts through 1) B2B - Fashion industry, Real estate business, Home decorators and Interior designers; 2) B2C - Local and Global customers and 3) B2G - Government organizations, etc.

While the statement “Easy availability of financial assistance” has the least mean value 1.7 followed by the statement “Opportunity to develop craft by participating in fairs and exhibitions” with Mean value 1.72. It means that such statements have been given comparatively less positive consideration in the opinion of the handicraft artisans covered under present research study.

On asking about the availability of financial assistance, most of the people shared their bitter experiences and hurdles in availing financial assistance and loan from government departments. It was also observed during the field visit that there is an

environment of negative perception about banking procedures, honesty of government officials and mistrust about bureaucrats. Instead of availing bank loan, most of them still trust on unorganized source of credit and fulfill their financial requirements by taking credits from relatives, friends or money lenders at village level. Majority of the artisans told that lack of adequate and easy availability of financial assistance is one of the most powerful factors obstructing the growth and development of rural handicraft artisans and hence of handicrafts; as their creativity and talents remain unshaped due to financial crisis.

Surprisingly only about 9% respondents covered under the present study have participated in fairs and exhibitions organized for promoting handicrafts at district, state and/or national level; among them artisans of 'Other Handicrafts' categories are found the highest in number followed by Weaving/Tangaliya artisans; whereas no artisan from Stone carving category has been found in this class as they all are involved in service based work. Thus, 91 % artisans have never participated in any kind of fairs or exhibitions at all.

It has come to the notice during the discussion with the artisan mass that many of the artisans themselves do not participate in the fairs/exhibitions but send their products through some of the recognized artisans in their contact on mutual terms and conditions.

Many of the artisans told that the deposits and all other expenditure are not affordable for the artisans working on small scale, as they are not in the position to stock more. Additionally artisans also told that they do not get much sell during such exhibitions, but they get opportunities of making good contacts and earn fame and recognition. Hence, participation in such events is beyond the reach of small and tiny entrepreneurs.

Further, looking at the Co-efficient of Variation, the statement "Opportunity to develop craft by participating in fairs and exhibitions" has the highest C.V. (64.01), followed by "Various NGOs are working in this field" (C.V.=53.92) which shows the more variability and less consistency of responses. The statement "Provides employment to even rural illiterate" has the highest consistency among all statements representing opportunities of handicraft followed by "Increasing marketing opportunities due to mobiles and Internet" as their C.V. are 11.46 and 33.60 respectively.

Surprisingly only 8.25% (33) artisans agreed upon the statement indicating the 'Opportunity' available to rural handicraft artisans that "Various NGOs are working in this field". The main reason for such opinion is that only 52 (13%) artisans are directly or indirectly in contact with NGOs or institutions working in this area like Self Employed Women Association (SEWA), Ahmedabad; SATH, Ahmedabad; National Institute of Fashion Technology, Gandhinagar; Tangaliya Hastkala Association; Mahila Samakhya, Surendranagar; Vardhman Gruhudyog, Wadhwan;

Jagat Bharti Trust, Sayla; Gujarat Khadi and Gramodhyog Trust, Dhandhuka; Gram Vikas Vanat Gram Trust, Karol; Darshak Gramin Vikas Trust, Patdi; Aashirvad Trust, Sayla; Udyog Bharti, Gondal, etc.

But very few out of such artisans have availed any type of benefit or assistance such as financial assistance, marketing/selling assistance or training. Many of them argued that the artisans living in the lower strata of social and economic hierarchy and residing in the small villages far from cities are less focused by the NGOs. It was quite surprising to know that majority of the respondents had never heard about such NGOs and hence they did not visualize any opportunity in them.

There are some statements representing the Threats/Challenges against the handicraft sector. They are as follows:

Table: 4 Statistics on the Threats/Challenges against Handicraft Sector

Sr. No.	Threats/Challenges Against Handicraft Sector	Mean	Std. Deviation	C.V.
1	Decreasing demand due to change in the taste & interest of people	3.54	1.541	43.53
2	Handicraft is losing its original form due to changes in lifestyle and culture	3.57	1.51	42.30
3	Competition with latest machine made products of large industries	3.56	1.512	42.47
4	Problems of quality and durability due to handmade	1.8	0.967	53.72
5	Less gain as compared to hard work	4.87	0.408	8.38
6	Middlemen earn huge profit	4.69	0.795	16.95
7	New generation is not interested in handicrafts	4.06	1.275	31.40
8	Lack of infrastructural facilities	4.62	0.539	11.67
9	Improper implementation of government schemes/programmes	4.88	0.373	7.64
10	Heavy irregularities in employment	4.74	0.652	13.76

The above table represents various Threats or Challenges towards the handicraft sector. It is clear from the above statistics that amongst all above statements, “Improper implementation of government schemes/programmes” has the highest Mean value of 4.88 followed by “Less gain as compared to hard work” with 4.87 Mean value and “Heavy irregularities in employment” (Mean is 4.74). It means that these are the very strong challenges perceived by majority of the artisans.

Almost all the artisans have been found with negative perception and mistrust about the implementation of government programmes and many shared their worst experiences dealing with it. Hence, there is a negative environment among rural handicraft artisans blaming government for their vulnerable economic condition and social degradation. There is an environment of negative perception about banking

procedures, honesty of government officials and mistrust about bureaucrats. People think that implementing agencies are interested only in paper work not in transparent dealing and hence, hesitate to put trust in such schemes. They further sighed that government may have launched various schemes for promoting handicraft artisans but such funds go in waste, as no proper implementation is ensured. Mere imparting training is not enough, but the government should arrange for logistic support after training to set up manufacturing units and follow up. Training programmes should be designed in such a way that it improves the earning capacity of artisans and are beneficial to them for uplifting their living standard by providing regular employment. Many artisans, in focus group discussion, pointed their finger towards the malpractices and corruptions prevailing in this field.

It was felt during the field visit that despite various programmes designed under various government schemes, the productive result has not been observed in these villages of Surendranagar district. Some artisans complained that only export oriented units and big players of handicrafts were provided with benefits of several schemes, while rural artists operating at micro level have still been continuing the age old conventional methods of managing their business affairs.

Majority of artisans gave affirmative response on asking about their view about the statement “Gain is less as compared to hard work”. Such response is quite obvious observing the data of income from handicrafts.

Majority of Bead-work, Embroidery/Crochet-work and Bandhej tiers have considered this craft as their side activity or hobby, as they earn only Rs.1,000 or less from handicraft activity per month per family. Only 15% families earn more than Rs.15,000 per month from handicrafts. While all others fall under the category of Rs.1,000 to 15,000. It must be further noticed that per artisan handicraft income per month is below Rs.5,000 in total 66.5% families; while 27% families earn Rs.5,001 to Rs.10,000 (per artisans) from handicraft in a month. Only 7% household told that their per artisan income is more than Rs.10,000. This is the main reason why most of the artisans don't want their children to continue with this occupation.

While the statement “Problems of quality and durability due to handmade” has the least mean value 1.8. It means that it has been given comparatively less consideration as challenge in the opinion of the handicraft artisans covered under present research study.

Majority of the artisans from all the handicraft categories did not agree that handicraft products have problems of quality and durability. Instead majority of the artisans told that hand-made products were more durable as compared to machine made products produced in bulk. Additionally they pointed out that the quality depends on the expertise of artisans and use of hands and hand tools impart individuality and uniqueness to each item.

Further, looking at the Co-efficient of Variation, the statement “Problems of quality and durability due to handmade” has the highest C.V. (53.72), followed by “Decreasing demand due to change in the taste & interest of people” (C.V. is 43.53) which shows that the responses about such statements are less consistent and more dispersed. The responses towards the statement “Improper implementation of government schemes/programmes” has the highest consistency among all statements showing the threats/challenges towards handicraft followed by “Less gain as compared to hard work” as the C.V. are 7.64 and 8.38 respectively.

Majority of the artisans involved in Stone carving, Bead-work, Embroidery/Crochet-work and Weaving/Tangaliya work have been found believing that the demand is decreasing due to change in the taste & interest of people. It indicates that it is the time to introduce new product designs and innovative articles according to the taste, preference and demand of the market otherwise the sustainability of such handicrafts are in danger and gradually such handicrafts will be vanished. As against that majority of Tie & Dye and Patola artisans told that traditional pattern and style were more demanded in the market; as such products have unique identity. At the same time they accepted the fact that artisans must adopt changes according to the demand of market, as market has become quality conscious and demanding novelties in handicrafts maintaining traditional touch.

☞ Conclusion:

The present research study concentrates on the problems and challenges as well as the strength and prospects for the artisans engaged in handicraft sector with special reference to Surendranagar district of Gujarat state. Here an attempt has been made to highlight the opinion of rural handicraft artisans of different eight handicraft categories of Surendranagar district who have been less focused till today so that their problems and prospects will come to the notice of all. This research work may provide a direction and guideline to the government or non- government players and policy makers to find out various means, methods and efforts to improve the incomes of rural handicraft artisans; to arouse in them awareness and motivation to grab opportunities of national and international market; and to assess the needs of training, capacity building, innovations and institutional support.

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