

# **Empowerment of Women Artisans in Kashmir through Handicrafts: An Overview**

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## **Abstract**

Handicrafts are matchless expressions as they represent and reflect the country's culture, tradition, and heritage. The handicraft activities occupy a significant status and have emerged as an important contributor to the J&K's economy. Being labour intensive and eco-friendly, the sector not only provides employment for the development of economy but also acts as a rational creative approach of self-expression for the artisans. These industries are a major source of income for communities in general and for women artisans in particular. Handicrafts give women a distinct uniqueness of economic independence and the productive roles of women gave her significant identity of being an artisan. Thus, the present study is an endeavour to examine the scene of the economic empowerment of women through handicrafts as the handicraft industry is the largest sector where women find employment. The study is based on the secondary data by exploring repository data sources including, journals, newspapers, published and unpublished research work by using various search engines.

**Key Words:** *Empowerment; Employment; Handicrafts; Women Artisans*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women”*

*Kofi Annan*

Jammu and Kashmir is famous all over the world for its art and craft as the way it is known for its scenic beauty and refreshing climate. Kashmir's rich historical and cultural heritage has supplemented Kashmir's culture with artistic creations, endowments, and blessings. One of the UTs most revenue-generating sectors is tourism and with the rise of tourism, the craft industry is also growing. The Handicrafts of Jammu & Kashmir have acquired worldwide fame and acclamation for their stunning and exquisite refinement and aesthetic elegance and are world-famous for their fine workmanship. These crafts have incredible great diversity and demand (Department of Handicrafts, Jammu & Kashmir, 2017). The handicrafts of Kashmiri society also become the primary means of subsistence standards. It also meets people's everyday requirements and provides work for members of society's households, which in turn contributes to socio-economic growth. The craft industry has always been a priority sector for the J&K government with its vast employment potential, which has undertaken large-scale training programs in various crafts using their inherent abilities and production skills while preserving the past (Singh, 2017). There are some significant Kashmir art and crafts that are

well-known in name and culture with Kashmir. The numerous handicrafts are in tune with its magnificent age-old culture, mastered over hundreds of years. Kashmir's vast cultural and ethnic diversity has enabled and empowered the flourishing of motifs, techniques, and crafts on this soil (Haji, 2017). In Kashmir, almost 2.50 lakhs are directly reliant on handicrafts for their livelihoods, and if markets are extended and demand is augmented, there is still great potential for more jobs to be created in this field. It is also important to consider the complex factors that decide the growth and decline of crafts from an overall livelihood perspective and not just from a limited economic perspective alone (Din and Bhushan, 2014). However, women's contribution to the economic prosperity is worth escalating. The handloom industry is the only manufacturing sector in which a large number of women produce items. An interesting outcome of the handloom industry is that 60% of women manufacture nearly 70% of women's goods (Shazli and Munir, 2014). Presently, as a foreign exchange, the Jammu and Kashmir handicrafts earn around Rs.1700 crores per year (Department of Handicrafts, Jammu & Kashmir, 2017). Thus, the present study is an attempt to highlight the contribution of women to the labour force and the role that handicrafts play in empowering Kashmiri women craftsmen.

### **Handicrafts**

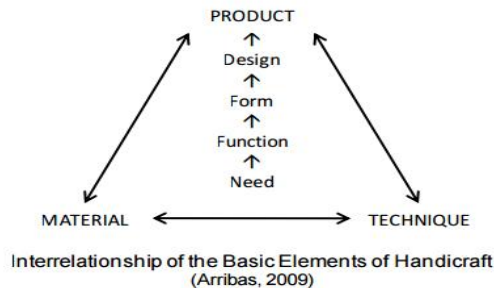
The term 'handicraft' fundamentally involves manually processing raw materials or using simple tools to manufacture valuable or ornamental items that are made by skilled craftsmen (De Silver and Kundu, 2013). It is generally named as conventional method for manufacturing goods. Handicraft is additionally referred to as artisanal handicraft and sometimes referred to as artisanry (Agosto, 2015). The production of an accurate handmade product requires extensive ability, skill, and time, however the individual attention and consideration given to each piece are what makes it so special and unique.

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/Information Technology Community (UNESCO/ITC) in its International Symposium on "Crafts and the International Market: Trade and Customs Codification", Manila, Philippines, October 1997: Handicrafts may be defined as "*Artisanal products are those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. These are produced without restriction in terms of quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant*".

### **Organisation process in Handicrafts**

Handicraft has three interrelated fundamental elements (Design, Material and Technique) that elucidate its conceptualization. An individual or an artisan cannot produce a handicraft without utilizing all these three components. 'Design' is a concept or arrangement scheme that is represented in a configuration, drawing, model, mould, shape, pattern, plan or specification to work out the object's known type of learning goals and targets. Drawn by an artist, the design will give the object a view and help in visualizing the planned finished product. As an element of handicraft, the 'material' refers to the basic product either in its distinctive, altered, or semi-processed state that is used as a contribution to a production cycle for

ensuing alteration or changes into a completed product. The *'technique'* is simply the methodology and period of creating the article with the materials. The technique to be used will assist in deciding the instruments and equipment to be used. In 2009, Late Professor Lydia Arribas, a craft specialist, explained in the following diagram recognised the relationship of three basic elements.



The diagram indicates that a handicraft product is the apprehension and acknowledgment of design and is most likely produced as a response to a felt need. The material to be used in executing the proposed strategy depends on the object's design and function. The material chosen, in turn, will recommend the technique on how to treat, process and handle the material to transform it into the desired item (Agosto, 2015).

**Role and Significance of Indian Handicraft Industry**

Handicrafts are the matchless appearance of our society and way of life. A significant number of people directly or indirectly rely on handicrafts for their livelihoods. Handicraft industry plays a significant role in portraying the culture and traditions of any country or region. The industry plays an important role in the economy of the countries as it provides jobs in rural & semi-urban areas to a large segment of craftsmen and generates significant foreign exchange while retaining its social legacy. Handicrafts have great potential, as they hold the key for supporting and preserving not only the current array of millions of craftsmen spread across the country's length and breadth, yet additionally for the inexorably huge number of new entrants to the craft industry. However, because of its unorganized existence, the handicraft sector has suffered from the extra constraints of lack of education, low capital and inadequate exposure to emerging technology, lack of market intelligence, an inadequate institutional structure, a lack of funding for infrastructure and technologies, a lack of knowledge of foreign and emerging developments, and inadequate advertising campaigns are some of the industry's weaknesses that need to be addressed. Despite these constraints, the sector has seen a noteworthy development of 3 percent per year (Indian Textile Ministry, September 2008).

Indian handicrafts symbolize the integrity, style, and magnificence of Indian culture. Indian handicrafts are as diverse and rich as Indian history. The crafts from every part of India are novel and special and have been appreciated around the globe for hundreds of years and represent the impact of different Indian realms and periods. Over the centuries, Indian arts and crafts have evolved, and today not only each region but also micro-regions have their own unique traditions (Tarafdar, 2005). India is one of the world's leading producers and suppliers of craft goods. This art and industry were a potential economic advantage for the country before industrialization, but due to its cultural and financial values, the importance of handicrafts has flooded in recent years. The Indian Handicraft Industry shows an annual

constant growth rate of 20 per cent (Bhat and Yadav, 2016). According to the national census of handicrafts, undertaken by the National Council for Applied Economic Research the value of handicrafts produced in the year 2017 were of Rs.26,213 Crore (Indian Handicraft Industry). The Indian Handicraft Industry is a \$100 billion industry worldwide and its contribution to the world economy is 1.2%. The Indian handicrafts industry incorporates around 7 million artisans and 67000 exporters, who embrace and support regional art and craftsmanship in both domestic and global markets. These artisans usually consist of women and others who belong to India's rural area. In other words, this industry employs a number of individuals from the vulnerable sections of the society, who earn their livelihood from their creative pieces of art and, this way India is guiding the preservation of its artisans, its art, and its handicrafts. It is one of India's most notable de-centralized business segments. Low capital investment, cheap and skilled labour, diversified product range, adaptable production are few significant characteristics of the Indian Handicraft Industry. It is also assessed that the Handicraft Industry in India will continue to expand rapidly and contribute its share to economic growth (Gaal and Afrah, 2017).

### **Handicraft Sector in Kashmir**

The handloom industry in Jammu Kashmir, known for its advanced fabric weaving, is centuries old and plays an important role in the socio-economic conditions of Jammu Kashmir. These products are also exhibited at various local, national, and international promotional and marketing exhibitions. The J&K Handicrafts Sales & Export Promotion Corporation has been formed for the growth and development of the handicraft industry in Jammu and Kashmir. By organizing exhibitions/craft bazaars in and outside Kashmir and even abroad, this department promotes sales of handicraft products. During the year 2013-14, the department has organized 4 craft bazaars/exhibitions within and outside by the end of Oct 2013. Approximately 3.74 lakh craftsmen are engaged in the manufacture of handicraft items in the J&K as far as handicraft industry is concerned. Through 553 training centres, about 8500 individuals have trained annually and approximately 9000 individuals were enrolled for training throughout 2013-14 (Singh, 2017). According to the sixth economic census conducted by the Government of India under the Ministry of Statistics and the Human Resource Implementation Program supported by the State Government, 507372 establishments were in Jammu and Kashmir and it excluded crop production, administration, protection and compulsory social security services activities. This demonstrates the scale of Jammu Kashmir state's handloom Sector. In addition, the proportion of the total number of establishments in Jammu Kashmir excluding crop production, plantation administration, defence and compulsory activities in the field of social security services is 0.87% at all levels of India. At all India level, the share of the total number of handicraft/handloom establishments in Jammu and Kashmir is 2.75 per cent which is too low. This shows that the institutions of the handicraft / handloom sector need not only to be changed but to be checked (Haji, 2017). The production and export of different handicraft items is given below:

Production and Export of Handicrafts Goods					(Rs. in Crore)
Year	Carpet	Woolen Shawls	Papier Machhie	Other items	Total
<b>Production</b>					
2014-15	717.75	674.25	152.25	630.75	2175.00
2015-16	709.45	698.05	139.52	687.13	2234.15
2016-17	821.50	874.50	164.30	789.70	2650.00
2017-18	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Exports</b>					
2014-15	492.18	368.20	71.70	354.96	1287.04
2015-16	293.29	376.79	24.85	364.48	1059.41
2016-17	369.81	304.05	50.36	426.90	1151.12
2017-18 (Ending 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter)	196.95	126.74	6.82	183.69	514.20

*Source: Jammu and Kashmir Economic Survey (2017)*

**2. BACKGROUND**

In 2001, *Basne* conducted a study on ‘Women in handicraft production of Kathmandu city in Nepal’. The research findings have shown that working women feel more gratified that they are independent, self-reliant, and financially sound in helping the family and being a co-partner in household management along with their male counterparts. Being on the traditional stage and progressing into that of modernity and with high educational and career ambitions among urban homemakers could likewise be the purpose behind such life contentment among working women. This leads to women's greater mental satisfaction and possibly to higher job success in turn.

*Setyaningsih, Rucita and Rachmania* in 2012 carried out a Research on ‘Women empowerment through creative industry: a case study’. The study indicated that the need to improve the economic status of society is to empower women. The study further stated that women should not be treated as a burden or a barrier in the development process, but rather as one of the potential assets under construction. Furthermore, small and medium-sized businesses should be created to absorb the labour of unemployed women in order to minimize the unemployment rate and increase their knowledge or skills.

*Le Mare* in 2012 on ‘Show the world to women and they can do it’: Southern Fair-Trade Enterprises as agents of empowerment states that in order to examine empowerment processes, the research builds on studies with women handicraft producers in Bangladesh. The research investigates the traditions and social interactions rooted in the operations of four Southern Fair-Trade Enterprises (SFTEs). The study indicates that SFTEs play an important role in fostering additional benefits and resources that lead to empowerment processes and provide realistic models for other modes of jobs that are socially responsible. In this study, the Fair-Trade craft manufacturers have reported substantial changes to their positions, improvements in their status, greater participation in decisions, and appreciation of their skills. The respondents also mentioned being economically motivated in the workplace,

learning valuable information, and being treated with dignity, improved their confidence and well-being.

A 2013 study by *Chakraborty* on 'Rationale of handicraft on women employment in rural area: A case study on Jari workers of Bhagawangola-II block, Murshidabad district, West Bengal' aimed at assessing the socio-economic conditions of women associated with jari kari, evaluating their position, recognizing the variables constraining karigars to such activities and issues acclimated. After evaluating the data with descriptive statistical methods, it shows that the participation of local women in this operation is solely influenced by the restricted scope of jobs and unpredictable agricultural activities resulting from vulnerability to the riverine threat. It helps to create job opportunities and thus to effectively increase the empowerment of female persons. The attachment to Jari Kari allowed women to promote family income and thus creates a space for better empowerment of women by ensuring that women are unequivocally more involved in family decision-making processes. Although the development of embroidery crafts is subject to the cottage base industry, female folk from conservative families have openly engaged in such occupations. For these women, the Jari kari industry has emerged as an effective means of subsistence. Despite the backwardness of the district, this exotic art craft adds some momentum to people's socio-economic growth. The study found that the majority, i.e. 82.67 percent of respondents, take jari kari as a primary source of employment, while 17.33 percent of respondents have it as an additional source of employment.

A study led by *Bayeh* in 2016 on 'The role of empowering women and achieving gender equality to the sustainable development of Ethiopia' inferred that by acknowledging the presence of only men's participation in social, economic and environmental areas, the country cannot achieve sustainable growth until and unless women are empowered and gender equality is achieved so that women can play their role in all these areas. The study additionally calls for the government's firm commitment to empowering women and using the country's full capacity to bring about sustainable growth.

*Islam* in 2016 carried out a study titled 'Women economic empowerment with Handicraft activities: A study on Karupannya Rangpur Limited'. The research was an effort to examine the real scenario of women's economic empowerment through involvement in handicraft activities in Bangladesh. The study revealed that women's engagement in the craft industry plays a significant role in making way to economic empowerment for women. By applying multiple regression tools, the study also found that women have been significantly empowered in the economic arena, especially in the field of family relations, resource accessibility, owner of assets, national-level activities, and industry level activities.

### 3. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study's broader objective is to examine the scenario of the economic empowerment of women and the role of the handicraft industry in providing employment to women artisans. The present study is theoretical in nature. This research paper is based on the secondary data explored by using various secondary data resources including books, journals, newspapers, published and unpublished research work, various search engines, etc. The up to date quantitative data has been collected from the official websites of the Indian handicraft industry as well as J&K handicrafts.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Empowerment does not necessarily mean the involvement in the labour force or the pursuit of advanced education but it is inherently about the ability to make wise use of one's assets and abilities in decision-making. Empowering women and girls are the first and foremost matter of human rights and social justice. It is also a wise step towards inclusive and resilient societies, poverty alleviation, sustainable economic growth, peace, and security (Sartori, 2017). Empowering women is a widely cited aim of development policies in most countries and a key to resolving gender inequality. Improving women's economic status across the globe has a positive influence on social, economic and political growth. In productive and reproductive lives, full participation and cooperation between women and men is required, including shared responsibility for the care and nurturing of children and the maintenance of the household. Accomplishing the objective of fair involvement of women and men in decision-making would provide a balance that represents the structure of society more adequately and is important for democracy to be improved and its proper functioning to be promoted (UNFPA, 1994).

The concept of women's empowerment encompasses three main components: Power, Autonomy, and Subjectivity. First, three alternatives 'power' outlets improve the capacity of women to make dynamic decisions in their lives: "power with," "power to," and "power within". The community or collective-based power to transform social institutions is "power with." "Power to" alludes to an individual's inherent ability to shape his or her life. "Power within" (inner power) is more people-centered; however, it could be settled in a group, institution, or association. Such sources of power help build fairer gender relationships (Vene Klasen and Miller, 2002). Second, the empowerment of women has an accentuation on 'autonomy. 'Autonomy' works to shield women from being adversely influenced by top-down decision-making and relationships of oppression. Women can organize themselves and achieve transformation collectively by performing from their own organization or act independently in their reserved lives to improve their settings and those of their children. Women are thus freed from mistreatment – sexism as well as, other forms of persecution dependent on class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and so forth (Moser, 1993). Third, 'Subjectivity' refers to the growth of personal cognizance among women to be empowered. This infers that women can only improve their own capacity and capability to challenge the power structure if they are aware of and choose to defy the appalling and malleable attributes of existing gender inequalities (Kesby, 2005).

Women's empowerment is an inevitable process to pursue the holistic empowerment of the country as it includes social, political, and economic aspects. Undeniably, women are important accomplices in the nation's economy, so for the overall growth and development of the economy is concerned women empowerment is necessary (Bargotra and Bhardwaj, 2017). Owing to unequal economic opportunities, women represent 70 percent of the world's poor. Valuing women's work in this respect is helpful in saving women from a life of poverty so that they can contribute to the economic development of the country. It is notable that the failure to respect women's work is one substantial factor impeding poverty reduction and economic development in the developing world (OECD, 2008).

In recent times, empowerment as a deputation of authority to others has become a tool for upgrading the standard of women's personal and working lives. Higher education and jobs are

powerful resources for women's empowerment, but in this relationship, the role of culture and ingenuity cannot be denied (Setyaningsih, Rucita and Rachmania, 2012).

### **Empowering Women through Handicrafts**

Handicraft plays a vital role in invigorating cultural identity, preserving the heritage, and contributing to the overall growth of the national economy, thus providing opportunities for entrepreneurs, creating employment for workers, promoting exports to bring foreign currency to the domestic country and, generating demand for artisans in general and women artisans in particular. Handicrafts and women, both the terms have their distinct uniqueness and the productive union of both gives them a more significant identity. These industries are a major source of income for rural communities in general and for rural women artisans in particular. Women's empowerment in the handicraft industry offers tremendous economic prosperity, self-organization, and expertise in capacity building, and plays a significant role in improving the financial position of women for peace and security. The handicraft industry is mostly environment-friendly and does not need much energy for consumption and consciousness. It is one of the promising sectors of the economy and employment as it is one of the largest employment generators after agriculture, the sector constitutes an important segment of the Indian economy. The sector, directly and indirectly, employs about 7 million people, including a significant number of women and people who belong to the poorer sections of society. The handicraft sector is the most acceptable and appropriate sector for a large number of people in society especially women, people with disabilities, and elderly people, as it carries a large number of employments and makes their life satisfactory. It is the handicraft sector where there are part-time and seasonal jobs and in free time these artisans often earn their livelihoods. The economic empowerment of women increases the rights of women and gives them greater leverage over their lives, their families and their societies. In addition, the increased involvement of women in the economy brings universal benefits, and research also shows that the money women earn is invested back in their families, providing them a helping hand on the one hand and becoming empowered on the other hand. The production of women artisans has flourished since handicraft goods provide distinct advantages for those with restricted access to the cash economy, such as wages, and, more significantly, unlike many other types of labour, artisans may benefit from the degree of independence of labour. It also provides auxiliary revenue, helps to allocate the workers, enhances the living standard of the working section, and increases the use of local raw materials to promote and encourage the women artisans' creative talent.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

Empowering women has become one of the major issues of the 21st century, not just at the national and international level, but also at the State level. The role of women is not only confined to home wives in present-day world, but they also extend their role and responsibilities to society as well as to the economic sector. Indeed, in today's business system, women play a wonderful role in its growth and development. They separately take on micro, small and medium-sized businesses and play a key role in economic decisions. The constructive shifts in the world view of women and their contribution to the growth and the changing trends in international globalization have shown that women are equally capable of running their own businesses competently and strongly. There is now a gradual challenge to the conventional idea of women being a servitude to the household of childbearing, child-



rearing, and domestic miscellany. It has accelerated the process of liberation from age-old male supremacy in women's lives and social limitations put on her from time to time thus elevating her from domestic chores (Basnet, 2001). Several measures have been taken up at various levels in the form of different policies and schemes that are inclined towards guaranteeing gender equality and the empowerment of women. Many of these measures and projects were taken up by the Government also against gender inequality and provide women with equal opportunities at all levels. Some of these initiatives are 'Swayam Sidha'-the main emphasis of this policy is Self Help Groups for Women, J&K Department of Social Welfare inclined to improve women's vocational skills, Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Teenage Girls Empowerment, etc (Bargotra and Bhardwaj, 2017). Amid all these developments, the status of women has not been completely enhanced. The modern women have to wage a prolonged struggle within their own family and together with others in a broader social structure, thus eventually entering into all fields to emancipate themselves from the conventional bonds. In the process of struggle, she has made a major contribution to the systemic shifts that stun the very foundations of society at large (Basnet, 2001). The aptitude of women to beat poverty, adapt to stuns and boost their well-being is integral to economic empowerment. When women understand and appreciate their economic goals, whether it's growing a business, civilizing their home or financing in training or education, they are more determined and enthusiastic to provide for themselves and for their families.

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