

Original Article

# Women, Livelihood Practices and Traditional Craftsmanship: A Gendered Perspective

Tapan Sahoo<sup>1</sup>, Manosmita Mahapatra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Social Work, N C Autonomous College, Jajpur, Odisha, India.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, India.

Corresponding Author : [sahoo.sociology1996@gmail.com](mailto:sahoo.sociology1996@gmail.com)

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**Abstract** - Handicrafts have a great potential to provide empowerment opportunities to millions of artisans spread across the length and breadth of the country, as most of the artisans have inherited the art to be converted into an occupation. However, such products are in demand everywhere. The sociological dimensions of handicraft provide insights into how these crafts influence and are influenced by society, tradition, culture, and modernization. Handicrafts are deeply embedded in the culture of India and Odisha. They symbolize the identity of communities, representing their heritage, beliefs, and traditions. Puri is known as Jagannath Dham of Odisha, and most of the people believe in Lord Jagannath. So there are various kinds of Artisans doing different works. So Puri is known as the Handicraft Capital of Odisha. Basically, the researcher has taken Raghurajpur Village of Puri District, where the researcher conducted the research. Most of the people depend upon handicraft work for their livelihood. In the present study, the researcher has taken 107 respondents from Ragurajpur Village of Puri District and focused on understanding handicraft as their livelihood. The researcher found that most of the SC & ST female workers are engaged in this work. Because their family income is not sufficient for them, they are engaged in handicrafts and do this work at home. They also face various problems like headache, joint pain, high blood pressure, and eye problems. They mostly belong to the rural area, and there is no technology to be used in their work in the present era. They face various problems in their daily life, such as a shortage of labor power, difficulties in selling their products, health problems, etc. They do not get the proper value of the products due to the lack of proper marketing facilities. As a result, the intermediaries enjoy the value of the products. They are highly qualified, and the rich artisan only gets facilities, but the small artisan does not get those facilities. Because they have no other source of income to maintain their family, this becomes their only source of livelihood.

**Keywords** - Handicrafts, Livelihood, Women Empowerment, Craftsmanship. Artisans.

## 1. Introduction

Handicrafts have a great potential to provide empowerment opportunities. It plays a significant role in the economy of India. It provides employment to a vast segment of artisans and generates foreign exchange for the country while preserving its cultural heritage. The handicraft industry not only depicts the production and consumption basis but also symbolizes the pattern of social relations, like identity formation, patriarchy, relation of exploitation, preserving cultural heritage, and marginalization of women's labor.

In Odisha, many ethnic communities live here, and most of them continue to maintain their culture in the form of crafts, including embroidery, beadwork, pottery, woodwork, stone work, etc. However, nowadays, the interest of the artisans is becoming low because sometimes they are not able to earn enough, and they think that they are not socially powerful. Artisans have an unorganized production base, lacking an understanding of funding, market needs, quality of raw materials, and credit facilities. Therefore, in Odisha, there is a clear lack of production, training, and design, such as craftwise documentation,

quality control, training camps, design registration, etc. (Dash & Mishra, 2021). A similar study conducted by Agasty and Senapati (2015) in Odisha shows there has been a sharp decline in new handicrafts units in and around the decade, nearer to 2013, where marketing of the products was the main bottleneck, followed by availability of labor and raw materials. As a result, various Government and non-government organizations are working hard to oppose the interest. Women play a great role in the craft, but generally, they do it for domestic purposes.

The Government tries to uplift the art and artisans through various programs and policies, whose results are unsatisfactory. Artisans face challenges to get loans from banks and have acute financial challenges, improper marketing strategy, low profit margin, work using traditional equipment, being rural, digitally unconnected, lack training facilities, and face the difficulties of the informal sector. A proper competitive marketing strategy using digital media and a transparent policy framework is necessary (Rai, 2017).



### **1.1. A Gendered Dimension**

Although women are heavily involved in handicraft production, their contribution is often marginalized. Women's craftwork is often portrayed as leisure-time work, poverty, and gender labor market marginalization (Wilkinson Weber, 2004). Women artisans are faced with many problems, some of which result specifically from their gender. Women lack access to credit facilities and are overwhelmed by the complex loaning procedure of financial institutions. Traditionally and culturally, women are thought of as responsible for looking after the household. Therefore, their attempts at work are not looked upon favorably. Women artisans and entrepreneurs lack access to data and content. Because they are isolated from wider society, they are encouraged to stay at home. They mostly face market isolation, resource dependency, and vulnerability to exploitation, limiting opportunities for conventional economic ventures. (Naik & Panda, 2023). Their limited access led them to a lack of knowledge of the market and related field experience. They are not properly trained compared to men. Women often have to deal with poor infrastructure and are hard-pressed to solve these problems. They face difficulties in accessing raw materials and also face much risk in hiring appropriate personnel, management, and marketing, which also present problems for them as they are not properly trained. Meher et al. (2024) reveal determinants of poverty among handloom weavers in Odisha, where weavers are multi-dimensionally poor and are deprived in 40% of the multi-dimensional poverty index. Moreover, digital integration and cultural heritage of traditional handicrafts preservation are the most essential issues to address the declining demand and supply of rural artisans (Ray, 2025).

### **1.2. Background of the Study**

This research paper identifies different problems associated with artisans engaged in producing handicrafts in the state of Odisha, India. Odisha has a distinguished craft heritage. The principal handicrafts of Odisha incorporate applique, metal and metal work for ringers, silver filigree, and stone carvings. Different structures incorporate finish, piper machine, and ancestral brushes, hand looms, and customary wood and stone carvings. The craftsmanship of the arts and crafts embodies traditions that live in the creative imagination of the artists of the state. The women from the targeted area are very much dependent on their family members, though they have contributed their labor towards the artisan, like the male craftsmanship, including their household chores. In the Raghurajpur village in Puri, Odisha, people follow the traditional and cultural values in their village. Due to the excessive labor work, they have faced various kinds of health issues like joint pain, eye pain, skin problems, spinal cord issues, etc.

Handicraft in Odisha promotes traditional artisans, showcases distinct expressions of art and culture, and creates jobs and incomes. It generates employment, growth of rural regions, tourist attractions, balance of modern and traditional needs, exporting commodities, etc. (Kanungo et

al, 2020). The artisanal sector also fosters and develops regional identity through the use of indigenous sustainable skills, which promotes economic opportunities and livelihoods of women. However, the weavers in Odisha face certain challenges like marketing strategies, administrative failures, lack of technological competence, inadequate infrastructure, and the financial benefit of the intermediaries (Das and Paltasingh, 2023). The financial issues significantly affect the efficiency and possibilities of the craft women, and also the growth of the craft women in comparison to the artisans. A subjective perception of self among the marginalized workers was formed by significant narratives of craftswomen in Odisha in understanding the multiple roles of craftswomen facing marginalization, constructed by local gendered ideology and handling workspace inequalities (Jotirmayee, 2003). The market services of weavers in Odisha can be improved by a low-cost technology-based solution (Mahapatra and Raha, 2012).

## **2. Materials and Method**

The researcher utilized a descriptive and exploratory research design in this study. The explanatory design refers to how an external source causes a change in the dependent variable. It makes an attempt to explain why the phenomenon occurs. The portrayal of an accurate event in a setting is what descriptive design is all about. It allows for modifications to be made before the data collection process begins. Descriptive research, on the other hand, should be viewed as a means to an aim rather than an end in itself. The field chosen is the Puri district, which is very famous in Odisha for handicraft works. The districts consist of 11 blocks and a tahashil. Puri is the district of Odisha with the largest population. This will select the Raghurajpur village and take a random sample for this study. The researcher takes only one village in the Puri district. The researcher used a random sample in this study. The researcher takes 107 samples out of the total households. The objectives undertaken in the study include: To find out the skills and training adopted by the women crafts artisans. To identify the issues and challenges faced by the women crafts artisans and to explore the women's economic empowerment indicators. The tools used for the data collection are an interview schedule, and data analysis is done by using SPSS for descriptive statistical analysis.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

The respondents in the study show that the majority of them belong to the age group of 18 to 30 years and mostly to the Hindu community. More than half of the respondents are married, followed by one-fourth of the respondents who are single in marital status. The majority (45.79) are educated till the secondary level of education, followed by (35.51) primary level education. More than half of the respondents (59.81) belong to the OBC category, and very few in SC and ST. Their economic category shows they are below the poverty line. 62 out of 107 respondents belong to a nuclear family. The monthly income of more than half of the respondents (53.27) lies

between Rs 2000 and 4500, followed by nearly one-fourth between Rs 5000 and 8500. Woman artisans of the study area are engaged in different types of handicraft work. From the Raghurajpur village of women artisans, a majority, 45.79 percent of women artisans, are engaged in making photo painting handicrafts. 38.31 percent of respondents are engaged in wood carving work, 9.34 percent of respondents are engaged themselves in producing palm tree art handicrafts, and the rest, i.e., only 5.54 percent of respondents, have replied that they have engaged themselves in making terracotta crafts. Among the women artisan group, they are having new work experiences in making bottle painting, kettle painting, coconut painting, bucket painting, and golden grass work.

So the women are engaged in various types of handicrafts in the Raghurajpur village. Nearly half of the respondents say their family, especially their husband (35.61%), is the source of their skill learning and knowledge of the craftsmanship. 71.02 percent of women have received training from the various organizations for their crafts, followed by 28.97 percent of women who have not taken any training. For most respondents, the duration of training is around a year or only a few months. Such training also involves innovative skills in handicrafts, where studies show the consumer acceptance of innovation is reduced with technological innovation, as handicrafts are a traditional heritage of culture (Shafi, 2021).

**Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents as per the Problems in the Handicrafts Sector**

<b>Handicrafts Work.</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Paper mache	21	19.62
Kettle painting	18	16.82
Bottle painting	17	15.88
Coconut work	31	28.97
Bucket painting	12	11.21
Golden grass	08	7.47
	107	100

The distribution of respondents on the basis of hours they devote to making handicrafts shows that the majority, 52.33 percent, of women artisans said that they are spending 3 to 5 hours a day in handicraft making, followed by 20.56 percent spending 6 to 8 hours a day. The women artisans in the majority (43.92 percent) prefer to work in the afternoon. Most of the artisans collected their raw materials from different places in Odisha, and a few of them are buying them from outside of Odisha, like Maharashtra, Delhi, and Kolkata. More than half of the cases of respondents, husbands of women artisans sell their products in the market, or any other place, followed by 20.56 percent of brothers of women artisans sell their craft products, and 18.69 percent of fathers of women artisans sell their products. It is found that there is no autonomy for women artisans over their products in the market. Moreover, the majority of the husbands sell their products in the market. There is gender discrimination with women artisans, and it's similar in line with the findings of Deshmukh (2024), where women artisans are seen to play the mere role of assistants to their husband artisans for finishing, designing, and garlanding the product, and receive lower wages compared to their counterparts.

Among the majority of women artisans (53.27 percent), respondents sell their products through an intermediary. It is followed by 17.75 percent of the respondents who replied that they sell their product at the Exhibition. Moreover, 9.34 percent of respondents have replied that they sell their products in the direct market. Moreover, 10.28 percent of respondents have replied that they sell their products to Government handicraft outlets, i.e., locally named as "Utkalika". Moreover, only 9.34 percent of respondents said that they sell their products at

their own village shops. 76.63 percent of women artisans said that they did not take any government support for the work. Marketing becomes an important issue where, generally, it is seen that there is a lack of standardization in raw materials compared to branded products; having product design, market monitoring, and market research with the involvement of local self-government becomes essential (Singh, 2005). So it is very clear that the majority of women artisans did not take any government support, and they are unaware of the government policy and programs. And a few of them are taking government support for their work.

The distribution of respondents on the basis of their problems faced during the making of handicrafts and overall in the development of the handicraft sector. The majority (21.49 percent) of respondents have replied that it is due to a lack of financial assistance from the Government. They are not able to grow in the handicraft sector. 17.75 percent of respondents have replied that due to a lack of good marketing facilities, they are facing problems in marketing their products. 19.62 percent of respondents answered that they are faced with various health problems at the time of crafts making. The increasing cost of raw materials is the cause of the problems, and it was answered by 9.34 percent of respondents, followed by 10.28 percent of women who replied that they face a lack of skill and design development training. Moreover, 21.49 percent of respondents have replied that they face all the given problems, like a lack of skill and design development training, and a lack of financial assistance from the Government. increasing cost of raw materials, lack of marketing facilities, various health problems, etc.

The analysis of the above data indicates that the biggest problem faced by women artisans in the handicraft sector is a lack of financial assistance. Moreover, the second biggest problem is the lack of marketing facilities, which is addressed by women artisans. Women artisans gave the third problem in the handicraft sector is a lack of skill and design development training program from the

government side, whereas the women artisans want more intensive training for their skill development. So the Government and the policy makers have to focus more light on the above areas of handicraft development. So that the problems can be solved and women artisans can grow properly in this sector.

**Table 2. Distribution of the Respondents as per the Problems in the Handicrafts Sector**

Major Types of Handicrafts Problems	No. Of Respondents	Percentage
Health Problems	21	19.62
Marketing Problem	19	17.75
Increasing Cost of Raw Materials	10	9.34
like lack of skill and design development training	11	10.28
Lack of financial assistance from the Government	23	21.49
Above all	23	21.49
Total	107	100

In relation to the usage of technology among the women artisans, the majority, 86.91 percent of respondents, said they have not used any technology in handicraft making, whereas only 13.8 percent of respondents answered that they are using advanced technology in handicraft making. So it is very clear that nowadays most of the women artisans do not use any technology in handicraft making because they are faced with only financial problems in day-to-day life. In recent modern Indian tradition, everything will be changed, but the women artisans cannot change their making process. Only a few of them use technology in handicrafts making because they are financially strong. Moreover, the intermediaries create big problems for artisans because the middleman buys the craft products from the women artisans at a very low price, whereas the artisans cannot get more profit from the intermediary. So they did not get the profit of his labor, as they could not take it out for sale. The responses on the basis of problems faced during collecting raw material show that among women artisans, only 30.84 percent of the respondents have replied that 'yes' they are facing problems while collecting the raw materials. 69.15 percent of respondents have replied that they have not faced any problems while collecting the raw materials. It is in line with the findings of (Vas et al, 2023), the need for a balanced approach that integrates traditional wisdom with contemporary methods for the sustainable development of traditional crafts. Even though there was a difference observed in the elderly traditional artisans and the younger ones, as the former had to learn and accept basic tools and technology by understanding the market scenario (Sharma, 2024), so in this discussion, it is seen that a few of the women artisans are facing problems regarding getting the raw materials, but majority of women artisans collect the raw materials easily.

are involved in such work, which leads to the health problem, and 30.84 percent of the women artisans have said that they have not involved themselves in any handicraft work, which will lead to some health problems. So it is clear that health problems seem to be the main barrier for the handicrafts sector. Whereas some women artisans are very young and do many types of handicrafts, but they do not face any problems. After that, when they get older, health problems will come to them. The researcher found that the respondents are suffering from gastric problems, high blood pressure, joint pain, skin problems, eye problems, and heart problems. About women artisans, the majority, 41.12 percent of women artisans, said that they have faced joint pain, followed by 25.23 percent of women who replied that they faced skin problems after engaging in this craft work. 12.14 percent of women artisans have faced high blood pressure, and the same percentage of women artisans have also faced eye problems. 8.41 percent of women artisans have faced gastric issues due to working in a sitting position. Moreover, finally, the researcher found that only 0.93 percent of women have faced heart problems. The women artisans are facing health problems. Health is an important part of the social development of women. If a woman is free from health problems, then both her productivity and her social status will be very high.

Respondents involved in various handicrafts work lead to various health problems. In response to the question, 69.15 percent of tribal respondents have agreed that they

It is essential to understand the working conditions of the craftswomen. So, the majority of women artisans (68.22 percent) have replied that they have more places in their homes to do work. Only 31.77 percent of women said that there is no place in their home to do work. So many places are required for this craft work because many ingredients are necessary for making a product. In relation to economic empowerment of women, 28.97 percent of respondents said that they have earned money from the craft work worth Rs 4000-6000 in a month, followed by 11.21 percent of artisans who are also now earning money of Rs 7000-9000 in a month. Also, 11 percent of women

artisans have replied that they have a bank account in various banks, followed by only 15.88 percent of women artisans who said that they do not have any bank account. After the marriage, the artisans also engage in crafts because their family also depends upon this work. Craftwork is the major occupation for their livelihood, whereas most of the family members are engaged in this work. The researcher also found in the village of Raghurajpur that most of the people depend upon this work, so most of the women artisans are doing this work as a secondary occupation because the primary work is household work. Most of the women artisans do not decide the price of the product. Because in a family, the husband or father-in-law is the head of the family. In relation to the level of autonomy of the respondents to make a decision regarding selling their products. Women artisans said that they do not have autonomy to sell their handmade products, and only 21.49 percent of respondents said they have the right to autonomy to sell their products at their own will. Therefore, it also reflects the level of political and social empowerment of women artisans in the handicraft sector of Orissa.

#### 4. Conclusion

The significance of handicrafts has been noticed because of their cultural and economic values. The small-scale industries, handicrafts, and cottage industries can play a crucial role in the country-wide development. Handloom and handicrafts quarter is the biggest economic activity after agriculture, providing direct and indirect employment to more than 30lakhs weavers. Handicrafts enterprise is a major source of income for both rural and urban communities. It gives employment to six million

artisans, together with a large number of women and those belonging to the weaker sections of society. The handicrafts sector is a rather innovative area and a woman-friendly profession that produces a wide range of crafts, but the lack of a secure database for these artisans becomes an issue (Deshmukh, 2024). Institutional marketing with more regular contact and linkage, and creating franchised outlets, would lead to local marketing entrepreneurship development in the handicraft sector (Singh, 2000). They face challenges like women artisans have replied they do not have autonomy to do many things for their work, and they do not have get proper training facility for their work and they do not have proper marketing facilities, working condition is not because of the shortage of the place at their home and they are given more for a single work but they do not get profit from this work. This craft work is basically hereditary work for their family, and this work creates earning facilities for the women. However, many unique places of handicrafts remain unnoticed to the larger audience, where uploading on websites can promote more consumerism, as a study conducted by Gupta (2025) finds “Sanskriti” App to have a vast target audience with an impact on the lives of artisans and the public. It is a paradox of modern-day India that Women wield power and maintain positions at the topmost ranks, but a massive section of women are some of the most underprivileged. Moreover, AI adoption tools and digital platforms would help female artisan entrepreneurs to efficiently track and manage their use of natural resources and the growth of eco-conscious enterprises for green businesses (Yadav, 2025). Thus, craftwork is the main family occupation of women respondents, and the whole family depends upon this work for their livelihood.

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