



Role of Handicraft Industry in J & k Economy

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ABSTRACT

Handicraft activities occupy a significant status in the J&K's economy. Being eco-friendly and more labour intensive and less capital intensive in nature, they provide employment opportunities to the local unemployed youth of the state which in turn boost the standard of living of rural people of the state. J&K handicraft products have won worldwide fame for their attractive designs and high quality craftsmanship. Handicraft sector is also a source for revenue generation of J&K state, earns foreign exchange for the state and ultimately for the country. In spite of various merits, the industry still needs to explore and identify various opportunities and challenges to compete both at national and global level. Therefore, this paper is an Endeavour to find out the major concerns in the handicraft industry in J&K and also the opportunities and challenges which this industry is facing in J&K.

KEYWORDS : Handicraft Industry, Revenue generation, Employment opportunities, Standard of living, Socio-Economic Development.

INTRODUCTION

J&K is a state in northern India, which shares a border with China to the north, with Tibet to the east and with Himachal Pradesh and Punjab to the south and with Pakistan and Afghanistan to the west. This state consists of three regions namely; Jammu region, Kashmir valley and Ladakh region. There are many things about this state to talk about such as its scenic beauty, its temples and its attractiveness in terms of art and craft. Tourism is one of the most revenue generating industries of the state. With the enhancement in the tourism, handicraft industry is also getting boosted.

Handicrafts are mostly referred to the items made by hand, often with use of simple tools and generating artistic and/or traditional in nature. They are also objects of utility and objects of decoration. It provides gainful employment to large number of artisans and craftsman. Though it is labour intensive and environment friendly activity, it increases the standard of living of rural people. But due to absence of organized market infrastructure and huge exploitation of intermediaries, this sector does not show any remarkable growth like as other sectors have shown. Jammu & Kashmir has comparative advantage in producing high quality and world famous fabrics of Pashmina and Kani shawls, silken, woolen and cotton fabrics and crafts like papier-mache, wood work, Tila work, Sozni, Crewel, etc. These products are famous world - over because of their unique craftsmanship. The handicraft sector has, however, suffered due to its unorganized structure, constraints of lack of skilled education, low capital, poor exposure to new technologies, absence of market intelligence, poor infrastructure and institutional framework. It is against this backdrop that the present paper attempts to highlight the problems and prospects of this sector in J&K.

An outline of handicraft industry in J&K

The handicrafts of a society often become the dominant means of standard of livelihood. It also satisfies the daily requirements of the people and provides employment to the members of households of society which in turn leads towards socio-economic development.

The handicraft industry in J&K is an important sector contributing to overall development of the state as well as country by generating revenue and creating employment. It is basically a cottage industry and provides direct and gainful employment to more than 4-5 lakh people and has the potential to facilitate the path of raising the living standard of citizens residing within or outside the boundary of state. The handicraft products have attained fame both at National and Global level.

The Kashmir valley is recognized throughout the world for its art and crafts as well as for its scenic beauty and climate. It is admired all over the world for papier mache, wood work, silk ware, jewellery, floor covering, basketry, metal work, clays and ceramics mat weaving, leathers furs and stone crafting. The Kashmir is famous for the

production of Kashmiri shawls that are in great demand at international market also. Besides, as an export-oriented sector, it is instrumental in foreign exchange earnings worth crores of rupees annually

The Regional specialties of J&K state the production of handicrafts portfolio consists of:

- Jammu - Basholi Painting, Calico Painting, Phoolkari, Temples (carved).
- Kashmir - Carpets, Kashmiri Shawls, Wood carving, Papier mache, Chain stitch, Namda.
- Ladakh - Wood carving and Painting, Clay molding, Ladakh Pashmina weaving, Ladakh carpets, Thanka and Fresha Painting.

For the development and growth of handicraft sector in the state, the J&K Handicrafts Sales & Export Promotion Corporation has been established. This department promotes sale of handicraft goods by organizing exhibitions/craft bazaars within and outside the state and moreover at international level also. During the year 2013-14, the department has organized 4 craft bazaars/exhibitions within and outside the state by the end of Oct, 2013. The handicraft sector engages approximately 3.74 lakh artisans in manufacturing handicraft products in J&K state. Around 8500 persons are trained annually through 553 training centers in the state. During 2013-14, about 9000 persons have been enrolled for training.

Objectives

The main objectives are:

1. To evaluate the growth and performance of handicraft industry.
2. To analysis the growth of employment in the handicraft industry.
3. To highlight the relationship between handicraft industries and socio economic development.
4. To highlight the problems faced by the handicraft sector in the state and suggest measures.

Employment in Handicraft Industries

With its vast potential for employment, the handicraft industry has always been a priority sector for the J&K government which has undertaken large-scale training programmes for the youth in different crafts using their inherent skills in learning and creating while conserving the past. Since 1974-75, over one lakh young artisans have been trained in various craft skills such as papier mashe, wood craving, chain stitch staple embroidery and other art and craft forms of the region. Of these, 40,000 were trained in carpet weaving only. Craft Training Centres have been set up in far-off areas like Gurez, Tulel and Chycholi, Shama, Yougma and Chitken in Ladakh and in the backward areas of Rajouri and Poonch. To rejuvenate the traditional crafts like Kani shawl weaving, making copperware, silverware and Khatum Band (Wood Mosaic Joinery),

the Department has opened training centres specifically for these crafts. At these centres, the training is given for one to two years. Besides popularizing the crafts outside Kashmir Valley, some important Kashmiri handicrafts have also been introduced in training centers in places like Doda. These measures will not only help J&K to continue to hold its significant place in the realm of crafts for long but also spur the growth of its exports in the world market.

Socio Economic development and Handicraft Industries

The skill of the Kashmiri crafts persons, along with their capacity for intricate workmanship is one of the most important yet most invisible resources. It is to be perceived with concern and with a precise understanding of its values and once lost nothing can replace it.

Handicrafts have a special socio-economic significance in J&K. Keeping in view the vast potential in handicrafts for economic activities like generation of employment and revenue, the State Government has launched various measures to encourage the growth of the handicrafts industry. Against an allocation of a mere Rs. 19.50 crore in 1974-75, the budgetary allocation for this sector has been increased to Rs. 24 crore during 1998-99. Production of handicrafts crossed the Rs. 400 crore marks during 1998-99. There has also been a notable growth in the State's exports in recent years. The traditional woollen shawls, papier-mashe goods, wood-carvings and carpets have all survived the onslaughts of many centuries of socio-economic evolution only because the craft objects of Kashmir are ingrained in the socio-economic ethos of the people. The State government has introduced two insurance schemes for the benefit of artisans. Schemes like Health & Group Insurance provide the facility of treatment and replacement of any defective organ of the artisan and Rs. 10,000 in case of death to the next of kin. Artisans have been brought within an ambit of Cooperative Movement and as many as 873 craft cooperatives engaging over nine thousand crafts persons have been launched throughout the State

Challenges faced by the handicraft workers in the state

- 1. Still old techniques prevail:** Modern technology acts as an hurdle in improving the quality of handicrafts, the use of which is required to reduce the cost of production and to survive in the competitive world.
- 2. Underdeveloped infrastructure:** Inadequate power supply and raw material which is the pre-requisite for the handicraft is also the important problem of this sector which needs special consideration.
- 3. Unorganised sector:** Another important constraints for the growth of handicraft sector in the lack of organised sector, as no attention is paid towards this aspect, which performs leading role in the growth of any sector.
- 4. Low wage structure in handicrafts:** The wage structure in handicraft is low as compared to the other sectors which discourage the people to join this sector as adequate wages to the artisans is necessary activity for increasing the production and productivity of handicrafts.
- 5. Inefficient skilled labour:** As this activity is confined mostly to rural areas, so they are not that much aware about the upgraded techniques used for handicrafts. Moreover, youth is also less interested to handicraft industry as his career.
- 6. Market appeal of handicrafts:** There is low appeal of the art and crafts. Handicraft products cannot compete with machine made products because of they lack marketing, management and sales expertise. Moreover people are also interested to have machine made products rather than handicraft products.

Major steps taken by Government for handicrafts

Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) under Ministry of Textiles organizes various Market Promotional activities all over the country for extending Marketing Support to the Artisans and to develop the sector as a whole.

- J&K Small Scale Industries Development Corporation (SICOP) was established in 1975 as a wholly owned company of the Government of J&K. It has been entrusted with a variety of roles for the development of small scale industries in state
- The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) organizes award function every year to honour the exporters of the country for their outstanding contribution to handicraft sector. Last year, 3 papier- machine and shawl exporters from Kashmir among 68 companies from all over India were awarded by the Union Government.
- The artisans are now provided with Artisan Credit Cards which gives immunity to the artisans of getting exploited by the money lenders, agents and middlemen.
- J&K Ministry of Affairs is putting insights for imbiber the culture of handicrafts in order to enhance the veracity of handlooms and handicrafts products.
- Exhibitions contents/revelation by the Government ensures the handicrafts to display their talent in terms of price.
- Technology Up gradation Fund Scheme run by the Ministry of Textiles, which provides subsidy to the artisans for purchasing improved modern tools, factory building and renovation of existing factory building.

Recommendations

- The role of women in handicraft industry is largely unacknowledged. So, women workers should be recognized as contributors and be included in various schemes/programmes in their own individual capacities.
- Social welfare schemes should be strengthened for ensuring better living conditions for weavers and artisans.
- Government should set up well organized handicraft marketing system so that both producers and consumers would reap more and more benefits. In the absence of well organized market both are exploited.
- Government should exempt or at least the sales tax on handicrafts which will result in the price of handicraft products and thereby increases the sales.
- For the sustainable growth of handicraft industry advertisement both at national and international level should be undertaken. Exhibitions, printing of brochures and participation in fairs will help in boosting this traditional industry.
- The consumers are not fully aware of the qualities of handicraft products. There is a need to generate awareness in customer's mind about all the advantages that can be got from handicraft product use.
- Train and develop new and existing skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manpower in order to update them for flexible business environment.
- Hiring skilled manpower, provide training and awareness about latest tools and market trends.
- Uniformity in prices is also an important tool for the growth of this industry. The customers feel that they were exploited and get harassed when they purchase the same handicraft product from two shops at different prices.
- Government should take various new initiatives to encourage youth to find career in high potential handicraft sector.

Conclusion

The handicraft sector of J&K helps in improving the social and economic conditions of J&K. From societal point of view it is mostly preferred sector after agriculture because of suitable conditions in term of topography of state. It provides opportunities to the citizens to enhance their standard of living and helps them to meet their social and psychological requirements of a sustainable life. In economic terms it helps in generation of aggregate employment and raising per capita income of the state and hence contributes to State Gross Domestic Product in particular and National income in general. But the state of J&K and in particular the Kashmir valley has been suffered severe economic setbacks due to terrorism and political issues which affects the every sector of the economy.

Nevertheless, the J&K's art and crafts have enjoyed worldwide fame and name. In order to explore the handicraft industry, Government should provide both incentives and assistance. Both state and central Government must take steps to increase the wages and improve the working conditions of the artisans and others who are involved in this handmade industry.

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