



To What Extent is The Artisanal Crafts Industry Dying in Jaipur?

Myra Bordia and Rehaan Kumar*

Jayshree Periwal International School in Jaipur, India

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Abstract

The question of whether or not Artisanal Crafts are a dying field in Jaipur has been explored before, focusing primarily on the demand of these products. Our study takes a different approach, by examining the production side, specifically the artisans willingness to continue working in this field. This paper investigates the sustainability of artisanal crafts by assessing whether the next generation intends to continue these traditional practices. To gain this information, we have conducted first hand research, i.e. interviews with artisans, discussing their children's career aspirations. Our study included artisans from Neerja International Inc. (specializing in blue pottery), Suvasa Apparel and Furnishing Private Limited (known for handblock printing and woodwork) and those from the work of the husband-and-wife duo, Swati and Sameer Kumar, who have been collaborating with Oona Singh of Suvasa and numerous other firms for over 20 years in efforts to revive hand-block printing, a traditional art form. We have also spoken with pioneering industry figures, such as Oona Singh, Founder and Director of Suvasa, and Dr. Leela Bordia, Founder of Neerja International. This focus on the human element distinguishes our study and offers a more comprehensive understanding of the industry's future.

***Corresponding author:** Rehaan Kumar, Jayshree Periwal International School in Jaipur, India.

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Introduction

Jaipur has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List on July 6, 2019. It is home to a large number of traditional crafts, such as Hand-Block Printing, Blue Pottery, Puppets, Carpets, Jewels, Marble, Leather, and Wood Work. However, these fields have been facing a sharp decline in recent years

For instance, in the last 15 years, the artisans of blue pottery have decreased from around 500 to nearly 50 in the city. One of the major causes of this is that the artisans are not motivating the younger generation in taking up arts such as hand block printing as a profession which may lead to shortage of skilled labour in

near future. Artists are getting older and the new generation does not want to continue with blue pottery as it does not generate money. Also, the demand for these products is reducing as customers prefer cheaper, mechanised alternatives, such as ceramic for blue pottery and screen printing for handblock printing. The decline of these industries is a significant problem due to the dire consequences it will have. There is a sharp reduction in job opportunities, leading to unemployment. There are approximately 4535 hand block-printing units in Jaipur, with each employing around 4-5 people. This leads to direct employment of 20,000 people and indirect employment of 7,000 people, who work in related business ventures. The decline of these industries will result in unemployment for these workers. There is also a decline in Jaipur's cultural heritage, as it is a city known for its traditional crafts. Moreover, Jaipur's appeal as a cultural tourism hub is threatened, with authentic crafts increasingly replaced by mass-produced imitations [9]. The negative impacts of this industry's decline make it a matter of significant concern in Jaipur. "Art is in the most deplorable condition here in our country" claimed Durgesh Doraya, the 10th generation who is carrying forward the traditional craft of pink city - the Jaipur blue pottery [10].



Handblock Printing (Courtesy: Suvasa)



Clay Oven (Courtesy: Neerja International Inc.)



Stringing Beads for Glazing and Baking (Courtesy: Neerja International Inc.)

Research

We conducted research using primary research methods such as interviews, allowing for in-depth information to be collected, flexible questioning and understood non verbal cues. We used a large sample size, around 50 people, working in different firms, both small and large, such as Neerja International, Suvasa Apparel and Furnishing Private Limited. Our sample size was highly varied, with some working in handblock printing, others in woodwork, others in blue pottery, and some in embroidery. The interviewees were of different ages, young and old, of different genders, belonging to different communities, and doing different kinds of work within their specialised fields (their role in the supply chain). Moreover, we have also conducted interviews with the owners and key decision-makers of these firms, to get a second hand perspective. The reliability of our information collection method, coupled with the varied and large sample makes the data collected accurate.

The artisans were asked the following questions:

- What is your Name? What work do you do?
- Are you satisfied with your work?
- What level of education do you have? (if any)
- Do you have any children? If yes, how old are they?
- Are your children studying / have they studied?
- Would you want your children to work in the same field as you? Why / Why not?
- Do you think your kids would want to work in this field? Why / Why not?
- (If no children) Do you have a brother / sister? Are they in the same field? Why / Why not?

Their responses are summarised in the data below:

- Work Satisfaction
- 39 out of 45 people (87%) are happy with their work.
- 6 out of 45 people (13%) are not happy or want to leave their work.

Formal Education

- 38 out of 45 people (84%) have received some formal education (varying from 5th grade to a master's degree).
- 7 out of 45 people (16%) have little or no formal education.

Children and Family

- 34 out of 45 people (76%) have children.
- The average number of children per person with children is approximately 2.4.
- 31 out of 34 people with children (91%) have children who are currently studying.

Career Preferences for Children

- 24 out of 34 people with children (71%) do not want their children to work in artisanal fields.
- 10 out of 34 people with children (29%) want their children to work in the same field or are open to it.

The main reasons children are discouraged from working in the same field are: seasonal risk, low income, hard work, lack of progress, and desire for better opportunities.

Siblings and Work (for those without children)

- 11 out of 45 people (24%) do not have children of these 11, 8 have siblings who are either working or studying.
- 5 out of those 8 siblings (62%) are not working or planning to work in the same field, mainly due to lack of interest or better alternatives.
- 3 siblings are working or planning to work in the same field as the artisan.

The industry experts were asked the following questions:

- In recent years, there has been an exponential increase in alternative methods of production which are computerized with little to no human interference. Do you want to support the traditional method of producing goods or switch to

more efficient and possibly cheaper methods of production? Or do you want a combination of both?

- Are there any initiatives being taken by your business to contribute to social causes in Jaipur, such as women's empowerment, promoting artisans, or similar efforts?

Their responses are summarised in the data below:

Dr. Leela Bordia, Founder of Neerja International Inc. "We prefer a combination of both tradition and modernity. Since our USP is that every product is handmade, we don't want a complete shift to machines. We avoid machines for most of the process because we believe that each product should reflect the artisan behind it. We want enthusiasts of traditional crafts to value the uniqueness and imperfections in every piece, as that's what makes them special. Our goal is to add value to the craft and honor the craftsmen. We don't want this tradition to fade, which is why we've chosen not to fully mechanise. Although, over the years we have made small changes like switching from a wood-fired kiln to a diesel one, and using a machine for grinding instead of doing it manually."

"I helped the artisans move back to their own villages; 99% of Neerja's artisans were originally farmers, and this shift allowed them to continue farming while working with us. Now they have two sources of income. My main goal in starting Neerja was to provide artisans with stable jobs and empower them to become entrepreneurs. They remain masters of their own land and no longer need to sell it."

Oona Singh, Founder and Director of Suvasa Apparel And Furnishing Private Limited

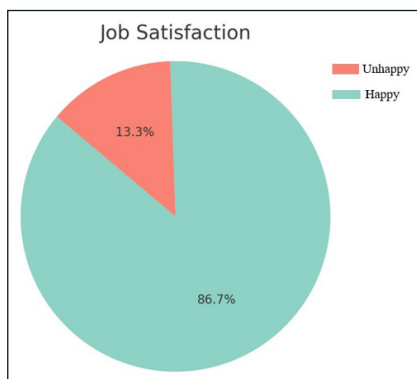
"Supporting Artisans is extremely important to us, and we do so wholeheartedly. We as an organisation are committed to improving the artisan community. However, we have to supplement part of the production with mechanised methods, for commercial purposes. Although we try to keep it as minimal as possible. Our production is leaning more towards the artisans, and less towards the mechanised aspect, approximately around 80 - 20. At the core of our philosophy is the belief that artisans should always remain the heart and soul of every product we create, which we continue to uphold in our design and production."

"We have around 45 women in our factory, so we've

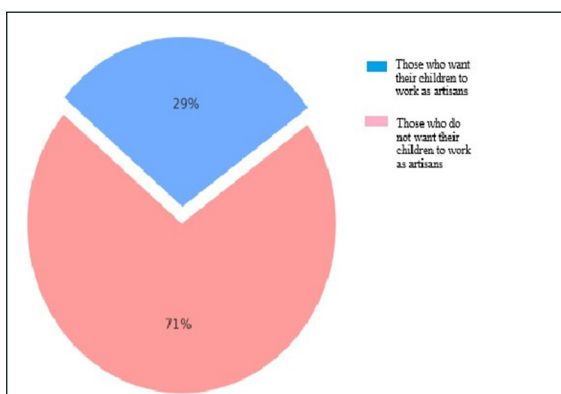
created a home-based work model. We have a person on our payroll who delivers raw materials and samples to women at their homes, many of whom are housewives restricted by family norms. This allows them to earn an income without stepping out of their houses. Some have even started micro-businesses by involving other women. We cover all material costs, though we don't publicize this initiative much. Besides the employment of hundreds of artisans in our units, we also educate young girls. We run several initiatives to support animals, which is a cause close to my heart. We care for stray dogs, cows, monkeys, and more, providing food, veterinary care, and neutering. Many of our karigars have even adopted street dogs.”

Key Takeaways

Interview data from 45 artisans in Jaipur suggests that artisanal industries are declining. Regardless of the majority of artisans being happy with their work, as presented in Graphic A,

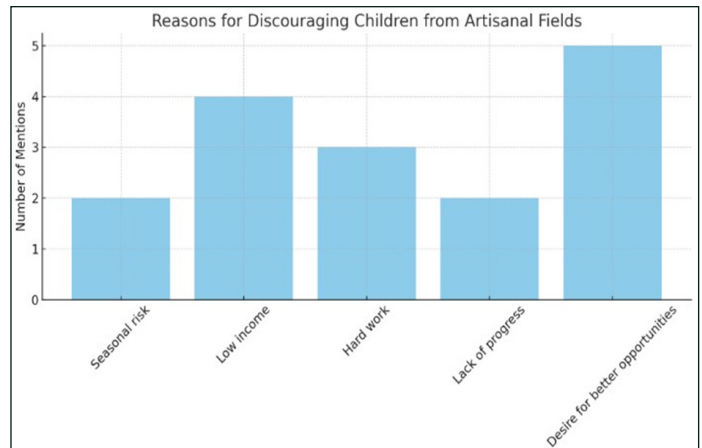


Graphic A, Percentages of Job Satisfaction and the majority having their children educated (proving that they value education), they do not want their children to continue working in the same field. 71% of artisans said that they do not want their children to work in the same field as they are, as presented in Graphic B.



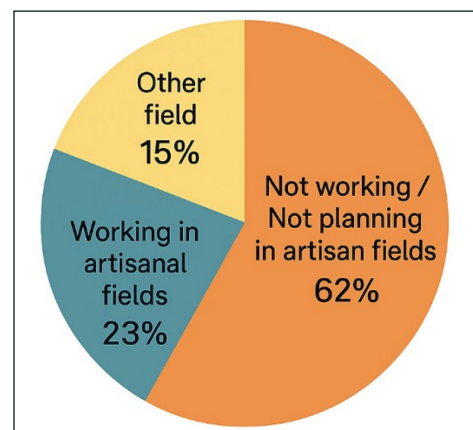
Graphic B, Those Who Want Their Children to Become Artisans VS Those Who Don't

Many artisans expressed a desire for their children to have a better future - one that offers a stable income and involves less physical labour. There are many reasons as to why people may not want their children to work in artisanal fields, as presented in Graphic C.



Graphic C, Reasons for Discouraging Children from Artisanal Fields

62% of Artisans without children claimed that their siblings are not working / not planning on working in artisanal fields, as presented in Graphic D.



Graphic D, Sibling Involvement in Artisanal Fields Among Artisans Without Children

This indicates that the desire for children to avoid working in artisanal fields is common among both artisans with children and those without any. If this trend continues, firms producing traditional craft-based products may struggle to find a stable workforce, potentially leading to a labour shortage.

The data collected from interviews with industry experts proves that businesses prefer to take a more

balanced approach, combining both traditional and modern methods, while focusing on the preservation of artisanal crafts. Also, both businesses have strong social commitment, as they have many initiatives to support animals, women, and artisans, proving a deep rooted commitment to social welfare.

In conclusion, after analysing data from artisans working in these fields, in addition to gaining valuable introspection from industry experts, we have come up with a clear answer to the research question, “To what extent is the artisanal crafts industry dying in Jaipur?” It can be claimed that, **“The artisanal crafts industry in Jaipur is under considerable pressure due to structural and generational challenges.”**



A Hand Block Printing Unit (Courtesy: Gulmohar Jaipur)

Limitations of this research

Geographical limitation: This study is limited to Jaipur. Hence, it may not be generalizable to artisanal communities in Rajasthan or in the rest of India.

Sample size: Although many artisans and companies have been interviewed, it is a small sample size to base a generalization.

Sampling bias: The study participants included people who are largely associated with established companies, which could mean that freelancers or home artisans could not participate. Data from self-reports: The data may be prone to biases of social desirability, recall, and so on, depending on the perceptions of the respondents.

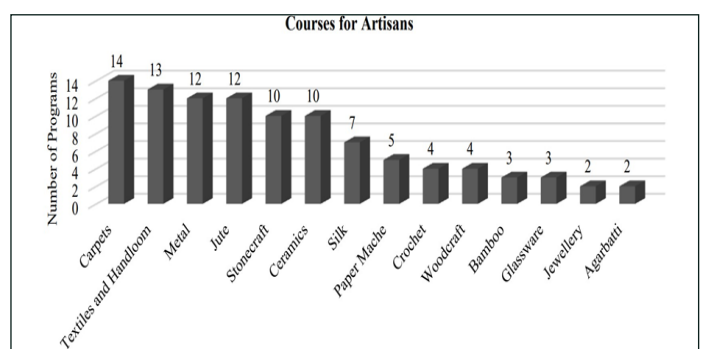
Time-bound data: Results will represent the posi-

tion at a given point in time, which could differ as a result of changes in the economy or policies.

Solutions

Creative and practical strategies must be developed to make artisanal work more attractive to the younger generation, in order to address the growing disinterest of traditional crafts. One important step is to offer more career options within the artisanal field. Young people can be trained; not just as artisans but also as designers, marketers, business managers, researchers or even content creators who promote crafts online. This will help add variety to the work. Also, professionals who understand science and technology are needed to help solve problems that artisans may not be able to fix on their own. For instance, figuring out how to make blue pottery jars airtight or improving dye techniques in hand block printing. Another idea is to start an “Artisan Startup” fund that gives young people the tools, materials, and training they need to start their own craft based businesses. This would give them more independence and help turn old crafts into successful modern businesses. Moreover, giving degrees or certificates to skilled artisans after years of experience or formal learning would make them feel more valued and respected, helping to raise the status of traditional craftwork in society.

Besides the aforementioned ideas, there are some initiatives already being taken to promote traditional craft. Firstly, there are many formal courses now available for artisans, which can help them enhance their skills, and encourage more people to take up these crafts as a career. There are around 101 different courses for around 14 different trades related to handlooms and handicrafts, as shown in Graphic E. The trade that is apparently not seen to be covered is leather handicrafts.



Graphic E, Courses for Artisans

Jaipur offers a variety of courses and workshops to teach artisanal crafts. These workshops provide a hands-on experience that encompasses every aspect of the block printing process, from the intricate art of carving wooden blocks to the vibrant application of natural dyes.

Secondly, many educational institutes have included traditional crafts as a part of their syllabus.

Millions of students will read the biography of the father of blue pottery, Padma Shri Kripal Singh Shekhawat, as it is included in the 10th grade course. MLA Deependra Singh Shekhawat said that “millions of students of the region will now be inspired by reading the biography of this great personality.” The state government has included the biography of Shekhawat in the "Great Personalities" section of the Class 10 textbook History and Culture of Rajasthan, published by the Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education [15]. Also, CBSE has now made Blue Pottery a subject for children to take up as a life choice. This is part of an effort to implement the changes proposed in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which aims to integrate vocational skills with mainstream education [17].



Skill Development Material; Blue Pottery Book CBSE

Lastly, there are many organisations that are taking initiatives to promote traditional arts. This includes the Princess Diya Kumari Foundation (PDFK) who promotes and revives heritage crafts of Rajasthan by working with disadvantaged women in the areas of skill building and livelihoods. A key part of the foundation's programme is promoting traditional crafts, allowing women artisans to gain financial independence by helping market and sell their work to a global audience through the PDFK Store. Other organi-

sations such as Sanskriti Foundation have announced their new facility of a textile block printing unit to impart practical knowledge of traditional hand block printing technique of Rajasthan. Also, Asha Handicrafts Association partners with the Chippa community, promoting their craft, and focusing on creating long term sustainable relationships for the last 4 decades [21]. These initiatives are part of broader efforts to promote and sustain traditional crafts across Jaipur, Rajasthan, and throughout India.

About us

Rehaan Kumar

Student at Jayshree Periwai International School in Jaipur, Rajasthan, currently studying under the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. “What began as a casual interest soon turned into a deep desire to understand why so many were turning away from these traditional crafts. I realised that the problem wasn't just about demand, it was about recognition, opportunity, and change. This led me to speak with artisans, document their experiences, and explore how cultural heritage can adapt to survive.”

Myra Bordia

Student at the Jayshree Periwai International School in Jaipur, Rajasthan, currently pursuing the IB curriculum. “I am proud to be the granddaughter of Dr. Leela Bordia, the founder of Neerja International Inc. From a young age, I have been surrounded by the vibrant colours and intricate patterns of the timeless craft, that is blue pottery. Over the years, it has become a passion of mine; and as I grew older, I began to realise that this beautiful tradition, once a symbol of our culture, is slowly dying. This understanding inspired me to take action and work towards preserving the legacy of Blue Pottery for future generations, which I strive to do in the future.”

Acknowledgments

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