

A STUDY ON WORKING CONDITION OF ARTISANS IN SAHARANPUR WOOD CRAFT INDUSTRY

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Original Article

pui: S238315531700002-6

Received: 08 Oct. 2016

Accepted: 24 Mar. 2017

Revised: 05 May. 2017

Published: 15 Jun. 2017

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ABSTRACT

Human society has always been indebted to artisans. In the ancient time, the artisan has received a valuable place and rewarded for his excellent work in society. The journey of craft from makers to consumers has been very interesting and lively. Artisans are major contributors in the development of India's national economy; however their contribution remains largely unrecognized, due to lack of awareness of quality improvement trainings and advance technologies. Artisans are more disconnected from consumer needs and taste because millions of artisans don't get satisfactory education and they opt this hazardous occupation for earning their livelihood through wood carving, carpet and embroidery work and support their family economically. In this context, Saharanpur is tremendously popular for wood carving industry in the global market. A large number of artisans are engaged in this job and face problems of low wages and health issues. More recently, due to lack of awareness most of artisans are leaving their profession and adopting other occupations like rickshaw-pulling and such other menial jobs. Thus, they are neglected in society. The present study has been carried out in Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh state in India. Saharanpur is a challenging area for artisans. This region was purposively selected for the study because artisans are traditionally skilled in wood carving. The selected area of research is: Khatakheri which is known as a production area of wood carving in Saharanpur. To achieve the objective, the survey method was used and data was collected from the selected sample of 100 respondents. Interview schedules were used as a tool to collect the relevant information. The results indicate that the artisans involved in Saharanpur wood carving industry have principally opted for this occupation for family need rather than their personal interests. The gap between remuneration of the skilled artisan and that of the unskilled artisan is increasing sharply. The purpose of the study is to explain the current condition of artisans in Saharanpur wood craft industry. In addition, this paper also discusses the scope of improvement in the performance of artisans and proposes certain qualitative suggestions like the skill development program and modern creativity which will provide a better work environment.

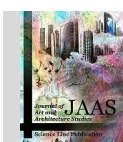
KEYWORDS

Artisans, Saharanpur, Wood Carving Industry, Advance Technology, Modern Creativity

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, craft and craftspeople are considered as a pivotal part of society where artisans are producing tangible forms to express their intangible ideas and feeling with the basic urge for fulfillment of the community. Craft sector is undergoing a radical change and facing enormous pressure to revive and modernize. Gradually, most of the regional crafts which have long historical past are almost on the verge of vanishing due to globalization. Industrialization has badly affected craft sector of India (Leamer, 2012). Availability of cheap replicated mass produced craft products in less time as per the changing needs of consumer trends is the biggest threat to the Indian craft sector. This has also negatively impacted livelihoods of the crafts persons. On the contrary, artisans are known as creators and preservers of culture, but

unfortunately in today's world they are one of the most deprived groups in society. Artisans can be defined as persons who make goods or provide services to others using his or her own skills and labour and their skills are associated with traditional knowledge (Kramrisch, 1958). According to the Hindu mythology, artisans are identified as a special community of "Vishvakarama" who is known as a Hindu presiding deity of all craftsmen. "The Mahabharata pronounce him as The Lord of the arts, executor of a thousand handicrafts, the carpenter of the gods, the most eminent of artisans, the fashioner of all ornaments...and a great and immortal god" (Vishwakarma - Lord of Architecture, December 15, 2014). The sacred Hindu texts also describe that he is worshiped by all craftsmen to increase productivity and gain divine inspiration for creating novel products (Ramaswamy, 2004). Therefore, the position of artisans was very strong and they used to



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Journal homepage: <http://jaas.science-line.com/>

Journal of Art and Architecture Studies (JAAS)



ISSN: 2383-1553

Volume 6, No 1: 12-17.

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enjoy their reputation in society. With the passage of time, everything has changed with a new vision for development of the nation. Industrialization and modernization have touched every sector of life and created huge challenges through increasing global competition, the mass production of craft goods and shifting trends in fashion, cultural taste and aesthetics (Scrase, 2003; O'Connor, 1996). Although, the artisans are struggling for survival and get their lost respect. They are being exploited and forced to leave their traditional profession and adopt other profession in search of better employment opportunities (Narasaiah & Naidu, 2006). Gradually, their ancestral, challenging profession and skill evolved over thousands of years, is being demoralized. Due to enormous challenges, their progeny are not willing to continue and assume this family tradition. In this concern, Saharanpur is the largest center and trading hub of wood carving where a large section of artisans are engaged in this tedious occupation. Most of the artisan community of this region depend on this traditional craft as a primary source of livelihood and have very little income. Being exploited by traders and very low wages, indebtedness has become a way of their life in which they are not getting elementary facilities. Although the government of India has announced a number of schemes and welfare programs for the artisans and craft sector. However, still it remains a hard fact that due to lack of awareness, most of the artisans of Saharanpur are not getting more and more advantage of these schemes.

1. Objective of the Study

Saharanpur has evolved its unique identity in craft cluster as well as craftsmanship through design, quality, and skilled artisans. However, with the modern technology and dramatic shift of consumer choice, traditional artisans are not able to cope up with increasing pressure and are facing strong challenges. With the changing times, most of them are on the verge to giving up and leaving this tedious profession and opt another livelihood. The basic objective of this paper is to discuss:

- a. To analyze the working condition of artisans in Saharanpur wood craft industry.
- b. To analyze the issues and challenges of artisans which they are facing in Saharanpur wood craft industry

METHODOLOGY

The present study is entirely based on primary data along with secondary data. The primary data has been collected from the artisans working in the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. Whereas the secondary sources mainly include books, articles and journals. The Saharanpur district has been purposively selected for the study under investigation as the district is one of the famous wood carving industry but working conditions of the

workers is not as per the requirement. So it becomes important to examine the working environment of the artisans who have brought this market to the highest level. The first hand information regarding general profile (age, education, occupation) has been collected through the "Survey Method" with the help of questionnaire. Hindi version of questionnaire was framed and used to collect data and information. 100 artisans were covered in this survey and each artisan engaged in wood carving industry, was interviewed.

Afterwards, the data has been analyzed using tabular and graphical representations, as per the objectives of the study.

Study Site

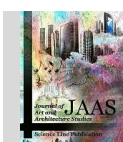
The study was carried out in Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. The region is internationally famous for wood carving industry, which obtains the raw material for production of goods from the Shivalik range. The art of wood carving is about 400 years old, employing about one lakh crafts persons in the district, increasing exports from the city wood carving units. The wood carving units are mainly located in the urban areas of Saharanpur and have dense pockets at Mandi Samiti Road, Industrial area of Delhi Road, Ali Ki Chungi, Menhadi Sarai, Azad Colony, Nadeem Colony, Chilkana Road, Gotes Shah, Khatakheri, Sabri Ka Bagh, Kamela Colony, Ganpat Sarai etc. Most of the industries are located within the range of 15 Km area of Saharanpur town.

General Profile of Respondents

The information have been collected from the artisans with the brief profile of socio-economic conditions of the respondents, including age, caste, marital status, education level, source of livelihood, family income, income from wood craft, health status etc. All the one hundred artisans, surveyed in the Khatakheri area at Saharanpur district were male artisans belonging to the Muslim community.

A) Distribution of Artisans by their Age-Group: The figure 1 clearly signifies that the majority of the respondents (65 percent) are in the age group of 26-40 years followed by 20 percent of respondents from the age group of 18-25 years. Nine percent of the respondents are from the age group of 41-55 years and 6 percent of respondents are from the age group of 56-70 years. Despite a majority of artisans belonging to a young age group, the craft industry is less progressive which further imposes immense pressure on the old age artisans to work hard.

B) Distribution of Artisans by their Educational Qualification: Education is very important step, which effects human efficiency. In this concern, education profile of the artisans has been depicted by (figure 2). It indicates that a majority of 46 percent respondents are illiterate



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which is quite a discouraging phenomenon. The percentage of respondents who have studied up to primary level stands at 40 percent whereas 7 percent of the respondents have studied till matriculation level and 5 percent of them have completed secondary level, only 2 percent of the respondents have studied till college & higher level. While talking to artisans, most of them said they wanted to focus on their education but could not continue it. Because of family responsibility, they left their school. Therefore, with the low education profile, they were not able to find any other job and were forced to adopt this tedious job either as a labor or self-employed artisan.

C) Respondents Undergone Training on Wood Carving: Occupational training can be received through two ways such as formal and informal means in which formal training is given through specific training institute such as District Industrial Centre (DIC), Industrial training Institute (ITI) and few others (Dak, 1989). On the other hand, Informal training is considered as an informal way like no institution are involved in this type of training and people get training from their family members, relatives and other persons who are skilled in this profession. In this context, the artisans usually learn the skills of wood carving by just observing and working with the elders in their families or others at an early age. It is also clear from the sample that as 91 percent of respondents have said that they have participated in informal training to become an artisans (Figure 3) under the guidance or supervision of his Ustaaad (master craftsman) or family member, whereas only 9% of the respondents have undergone formal training process of government. There were very less number of artisans who have been trained from formal training institutions.

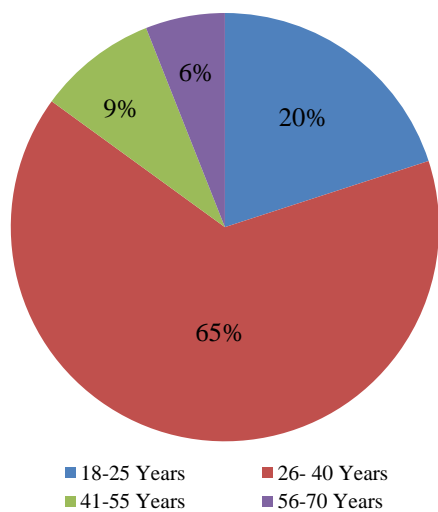


Figure 1: Distribution of respondents' according to age (source: authors' own calculations)

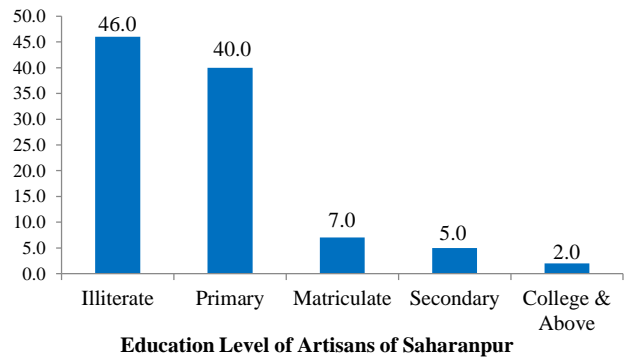


Figure 2: Distribution of respondents according to education level (source: Authors' own calculations)

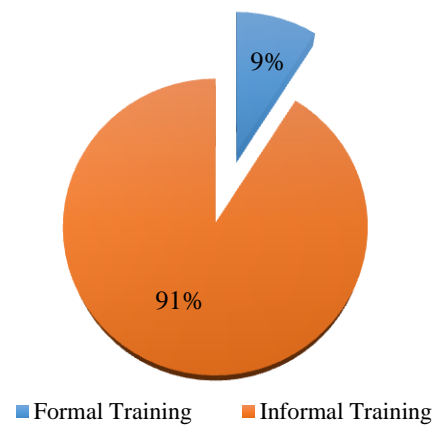
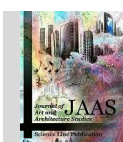


Figure 3: Distribution of artisans according to training taken for wood carving (Source: Authors' own calculations)

2. Socio-economic profile of respondent

This section deals with the brief profile of socio economic conditions of the respondents including wages and health status of artisans.

a. Income from Artisan Activities: Income plays an important role in the socio-economic condition of any person. Distribution of artisans by their level of income is shown in (Figure 4) below. As the figure shows that 45 percent of respondents have worked on Rs. 300 per day and 22 percent of artisans have earned Rs. 250 per day through wood carving profession, whereas 20 percent of respondents have worked for Rs. 150 per day and only 1 percent of respondent have earned Rs. 170 per day through this job. According to the living standard, the wages are not sufficient for fulfilling the basic requirements of people. After doing the work of 8 to 12 hours, they do not get a smart salary and spend their life with lots of trouble which are not enough to survive with unexpected expenses. Most of them said that their family had no savings since their income was spent for their daily expense on food, health, education of children and other expenses. While talking to them, they said that their



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income and expenditure are equivalent. All the respondents were not satisfied with their wages and they were not able to save. It was found that only 12 percent of respondents earn Rs. 500 as daily wage.

b. Health Status of Artisans: Out of the 100 respondents, 87 percent respondents have faced health issues in which the highest 43 percent of respondents were suffering from back pain because of continuous sitting posture at the time of work. Only 13 percent artisans do not have health issues. The second highest number of respondents at 11 percent are those facing eye and back pain problem and 8 percent were suffering from various breathing and eye problems due to unhygienic environment. According to table, 4 percent of artisans were suffering from breathing and nasal problems respectively, 5 percent were facing breathing, eye and back pain in all, while allergic issues were faced by 3 percent of the artisans. Two percent of artisans were found to be facing eye problem while 1 percent together faced breathing and nasal problems simultaneously (Table 5).

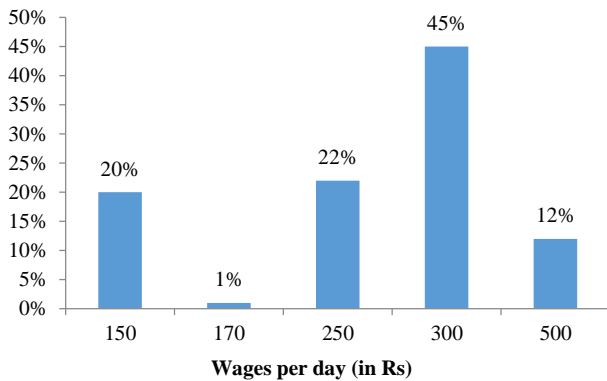


Figure 4: Distribution of artisans by wages per day
Source: Authors' own calculations

Figure 5: Distribution of artisans according to health status (source: Authors' own calculations)

Health Status of Artisans	Percentage of Respondents
Breathing Problem	4%
Eye Problem	2%
Allergy Problem	3%
Nasal Problem	4%
Back Pain	43%
Breathing + Eye Problem	8%
Breathing + Nasal Problem	1%
Breathing + Back Pain	4%
Eye + Back Pain Problem	11%
Allergy + Back Pain Problem	2%
Breathing+ Eye+ Back Pain	5%
No health Problem	13%

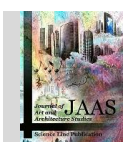
Some Insights on Issues and Challenges of Artisans in Saharanpur

The present study highlights the discussion on artisans who are known as a common people, with many of them living below the poverty line. Most of them have very less income from their work. In this regard, in the past few years Saharanpur has faced the upheavals of shortages of artisans and incidents of communal violence. The economic slowdown had affected many industries and businesses in Saharanpur and have resulted into huge losses. Based on the survey of artisans, their skill, and their way of life are in unsatisfactory condition and they are facing challenges like lack of information, disconnection from consumers, low income, and others.

a. Lack of Education: Education is the elementary requirement of human being which help the people reduce poverty, increase income and increase awareness in every sector. It can be said that education is the first doorstep towards personality development; next steps are communication skills and other life skills. In this context, the literacy rates of artisans in Saharanpur are very low. Due to lack of education artisans are not able to access government schemes and market information and few others. Low education level is the major problem among them because all the challenges are associated with education level.

b. Low Wages and Remuneration: Income plays a vital role in the socio-economic condition of any person. A majority of artisans are just living on a subsistence level and the economic condition of the artisans is not satisfactory (Jain, 2000). Because of very less earning, they are very far from basic facilities till now and want to shift to alternative sources of earning. Thus, artisans of wood carving industry are struggling with their poor financial power. Most of them are surviving on loan and residing in rental houses. Apart from this, some of them are self-employed with their own workshop on rental basis where a group of artisans work together. Herein, they have family responsibility too. Due to family responsibility and lack of no other earning source in the family, a large group of artisans have adopted this laborious profession. According to the field survey of the production units in the city, the skilled artisans get Rs.150- 500 per day depending upon their expertise and experience. As a result, the financial condition of artisans is very pathetic.

c. Lack of Basic Facilities: In the discourse of basic need, every human has a right to fulfill their basic need with satisfactory manner. In the context of artisans, they were avoiding their health issues and forced to themselves to work for many more hours for extra remuneration. Because of exposure to saw-dust, toxic fumes of varnishes and constant sitting for several hours, their health and work



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performance are affected. Back pain, breathing, malnutrition, pulmonary disease, allergy and eye ailments are common among them. Despite these diseases, they have access to private health care facilities in slum area because they preferred temporary doctor who provide medicines on cheapest price with speedy recovery. A healthy environment is the necessity for artisans which in turn will help them excel in their field.

d. Lack of Awareness of Contemporary Marketing Techniques and New Technologies:

In current scenario, everything has changed with a new outlook and as per the growing need of market culture. In today's time, a large number of marketing techniques and advance technologies have been evolved in market for promotion and advancement of business which give benefits and growth from maker to consumer (Solanki, 2008). With the arrival of new technologies, new range of products with improved quality and design can be made for customer. Regarding this, it was found in the present survey that artisans are poor in awareness about the new trends of market and taste of consumers. Due to lack of information, a majority of artisans are not able to access these facilities and most of them are not aware of smart phone application, social media, and internet. They do not know that how to access internet for design advancement, to make new prototypes and to learn new techniques for wood craft.

e. Lack of Awareness of Government Schemes Related to Artisans and Skill Development and Technology Up gradation Program:

Since the last few decades of the 20th century, the young generation has followed western culture with the rapid pace of technological shifts. A large pattern of young generation are using imported items like clothes, household items and few others which is the cause of crisis for craft sector. In this context, due to colonial policies, the crisis affected artisans and these policies caused isolation of the artisans from the modernization process (Qureshi, 1990). Therefore, craft sector is almost on the verge of vanishing but innovative thinking, new skills, more comprehensive efforts can make the craft sector more interesting and cost effective. Though central and state government have introduced several schemes from time to time for advancement and revival of handicraft but lack of awareness is a major issue for artisans which does not allow them to take benefit from these facilities and they remain empty handed. In this concern, while talking to artisans, it was found that a majority of the artisans have not received any formal training at any institution for skill development and design upgradation program which was the major requirement of the artisans, whereas, training is crucial for enlarging the production of goods and

also for increasing employment opportunities. As a result, mostly artisans have disconnected from consumer need and it becomes difficult for artisans to understand his/her aesthetic and socio-cultural needs.

SUGGESTIONS

Despite the wide-range of opportunities, the artisans remain socially isolated because of the absence of upliftment of artisans. The suggestions proposed will be beneficial for the artisans by improving their employment prospects with more comprehensive efforts, innovative thinking, and new skills. The demand for both the quantity and the quality of skilled artisans will grow worldwide.

1. Income generation project should be developed in which women should be trained as artisans. In Saharanpur wood craft industry, women artisans were not involved in wood carving, chiseling, engraving etc. they were engaged in very small and less work like priming (fill the gaps and defects of goods) which is done before polishing. Whereas, they can also be involved in polishing, inlay and outlay work.

2. There should be specialized and advanced programme for the artisans in which various issues would be addressed separately.

3. The artisans should be brought under the protective cover of the social security programmes.

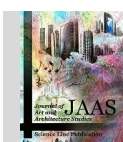
4. There should be awareness programmes for the artisans which would educate them about technological advancements, the changing trend of consumers' tastes, and facilitate their participations in national trade fairs.

5. Promotional events and reward system should be implemented on different level like town, city, state, National and International level so that the new generation of artisans will be exposed in craft sector and the art will remain relevant and alive.

6. A social interaction platform should be provided to artisans where they meet their consumer face to face and understand their need. For this stalls, shops, and traditional market-places must be set up where craftsmen can themselves sell their products which should be rent free (Jaitly, 1989).

CONCLUSION

To conclude this, it is clearly visible that the status of the artisans were not in pleasing condition and belong to poor background with low education level which create a long distance between artisans and modern technology. They need a new direction for enhance their skill and work efficiency through training and awareness. The government needs to provide much more support and opportunities to the artisans to sustain the culture through promoting their products in the market. If better resources are provided by the government, they can get recognition and respect both in the national and



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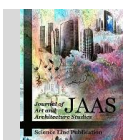
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international levels and their socio-economic status will increase in the society.

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