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Hindrances and challenges faced by traditional Mendh printing artisans of Rajasthan

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Abstract

Rajasthan is famous for traditional hand block printing. Hand block printing industry, like other cottage industries, is an unorganized, decentralized and labour intensive. The beauty of block printing is heavily dependent on water sources thus the business activities spurge near water resources like Sanganer, Bagru, Akola, Barmer etc. At present Mendh craft is practiced by some artisan families in Bagru and Sanganer in Rajasthan. *Mendhkichappai*, is a sparsely known art practiced by *Chippa* community. Some of the strengths of this craft are availability of abundant & cheap labour, use of local resources, low capital investment and unique printing technique. In spite of the strengths, the industry faces a number of problems such as low education level, lack of modern infrastructure, marketing acumen, inadequate finance and lack of awareness about government programs.

Keywords: *Mendhkichappai*, problems of Mendh artisans, suggestions for improvement

1. Introduction

Handloom and Handicrafts have their importance not only as a source of employment to craftsman but perhaps much more due to their capacity to reflect the culture of a civilization, hopes and fear of a generation through artistic expressions. Mendh Printing, *Mendhkichappai*, is a sparsely known art practiced by *Chippa* community. It represents the art history, creativity and cultural heritage of this community but now a days it is limited to a very few groups of traditional artisans in an extensively dispersed location. Bagru and Sanganer in Rajasthan are the centers of this craft which exists among associated groups of families. It is unique type of resist style of printing carried out manually with the help of blocks. All the materials and techniques used in the creation of *Mendhkichappai* are organic.

In present era of globalization, technological advancement and fashion awareness, fashion and mill made products take maximum share in the market that is why it has become difficult to sustain traditional mendh printing craft by the artisans. But only their love and respect for their occupation make it possible to run it parallel with modern society. In this paper an account of their livelihood, socio-economic conditions of mendh artisans, marketing situation, various problems related with this art has been assessed and an attempt regarding solution of problems has been also made.

2. Review of literature

The findings of SRIJANA on “A comparative study and assessment of socio-economic status of trained and untrained handicraft women artisans in Lucknow and Surrounding Districts” indicates the socio-economic status of trained and untrained women handicraft artisans engaged Chikankari and similar art related to embroidery Like Ari- Zardozi, Mukesh, Jali Work, cloth cutting, stitching, printing, final stitching, washing, pressing, etc. in Lucknow and its surrounding districts Barabanki, Sitapur and Unnao revealed that the artisans had very less opportunity to bargain from middlemen and artisans were depending badly on middle man for wage and work. The majorities of the artisans were working at a very low wage rate and did not have any monthly savings. Most of artisans did not have any institutional support in area of forward and backward linkages. Moreover, most of the artisans had got no opportunity to participate in exhibitions organized by various agencies working for the welfare of handicraft. Most of artisans needed money on various junctures of time. They borrowed it from relatives,

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friends, middle man and traders, but there was a little percentage of artisans found who took loan from the bank. Many of the young and energetic artisans wanted to do this work on a larger scale, but they were lacking financial support. The majority of the artisans neither had an artisan card nor a health insurance card. They were not aware about the various government schemes available for them and on the other hand were lagging behind on various development aspects.

Preethi Chamikutty (2003) discussed about the problem facing the crafts sector in India. Some main challenges facing artisans in creating sustainable livelihoods in today's economy were described as follows: Low productivity, Inadequate inputs like *lack of quality raw materials, funding and Design inputs*, Information asymmetry and Fragmented value chain like *lack of market linkages, dominance of middlemen, neglect by central and state governments* and also *lack of interest by second generation*. It aims to demonstrate the different stages in craft production from producers to markets and inputs required at each stage.

Ghose (2012) ^[2] in her article brought to light certain problems faced by the women artisans and people belonging to the weaker sections of the society like marketing problems, financial problems, raw material problem, labour problems and power supply. The researcher also provided helpful suggestions to overcome such difficulties. She opined that the various problems of the handicraft industry can be solved by the mutual cooperation of the Indian government and the handicraft exporters in order to boost and promote the traditional sector.

Amisha (2017) ^[3] also found that the handicraft artisans suffer a lot due to being unorganized, lack of education, low capital, poor exposure to new technologies, absence of market

intelligence and a poor institutional framework. She also suggested professional touch as per the requirement of demand of the market. Government tries to uplift the art and artisans through various programmes and policies. Despite various government and non-government efforts, the reality is not satisfactory. A major problem for this affair is the middlemen who take out a substantial share of profit leaving very little for the artisans.

3. Methodology

This study is primarily empirical. But both primary and secondary source have been effectively used in this study. Secondary data have been collected from various published and unpublished documents which included books, magazine, journals, old research papers, articles as well as internet. Primary data have been collected through the field survey.

For this study purposive sampling technique was used for selection of samples from Sanganer and Bagru region of Rajasthan. Sanganer is located 15 km away from Jaipur whereas Bagru is 30 km from Jaipur. A sample of 30 artisans who were or are involved in *mendhkichappai* was selected for the study based on their cooperation and willingness to respond. The interview schedule was formulated on the basis of the pre-existing conceptual literature relating to the subject of craft entrepreneurship. It dealt with general background, socio-economic status, hindrances and challenge faced by the artisans of the *mendhkichappai*. Artisans were personally contacted by researcher to collect data.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Personal Profile of Artisans: The personal profile of the 30 artisans as respondents has been given in Table 1.

Table 1: Personal profile of artisans (N=30)

S. No.	Category	Variables	Percentage
	Age		
1		Below 25 years	0
2		25-35 years	10
3		35-45 years	63.33
4		45-55 years	6.66
5		Above 55 years	20
	Sex		
1		Male	60
2		Female	40
	Education		
1		Illiterate	50%
2		Primary school	30%
3		Secondary school	20%
4		Technical training	0%
	Occupation		
1		Primary	60%
2		Secondary	40%
	Membership of any Organization/society		
1		Associations	0
2		Co-operative	30%
3		NGO	0
4		None	70%
	Years of association with the craft		
1		Less than 1 year	0
2		5- 10 years	93.33%
3		10-20 years	6.66%
4		More than 20 years	0
	Monthly household income(In rupees)		
1		< 2000	0
2		2000-5000	20%
3		5000-10000	80%

	Pursuing the craft		
1		For others	86.66%
2		Own	13.33%

Source: field survey

The majority of the artisans (63.33%) are aged between 35-45 years, 20% artisans are in the age bracket of above 55 years, followed by 10% artisans who belong to the age group of 25-35 years. Only 6.66% artisans are in the age group of 45-55 years while none of the respondents are below 25 years in age. The reason may be the fact that due to the languishing nature of crafts in the region, young people are moving to cities after completing education. Out of all the respondents investigated, 60% artisans are male and 40% artisans are female, clearly indicating that printing is done by male community though women help in dyeing and other printing processes.

Out of total artisans, 50% is literate and 50% is illiterate. Though the literacy rate is good, standard of education is not very good. A small number of artisans, only 20% have studied till secondary school; however 30% artisans have studied till primary school. None of the respondents have received any technical training.

Out of total working respondents, most of the (60%) peoples are engaged in Mendh art as primary occupation, whereas 40% are engaged in secondary occupation also such as agriculture, labour work and service. It is clear that majority of people involved in Mendh craft are trying to sustain their traditional craft. Both male and female members actively

participate in pre and after processing, dyeing and printing processes of Mendh craft as the mendh craft is a part of daily rhythm of the village. Most of the respondents are working on their own, not being part of any cooperative or other group (70%), and only (30%) were member of cooperative.

The majority (93.33%) of the respondent's has 5- 10 years' experience. None of the artisans has experience less than 5 years or more than 20 years. Most of younger members even from the artisan's family are no more practicing this craft.

They belong to poor section of society. The level of income is not satisfactory to run their daily life. On an average, the monthly income of a Mendh artisan (80%) is around Rs. 5000 to Rs.10000 and only 20% have Rs. 2000-5000 monthly income and none of them have income below Rs. 2000.

Table 2: Problems faced by mendh artisans

Problems	Percentage
Insufficient income from the craft	100
Tough competition in market(Block Vs Screen)	93.33
Scarcity of resources like raw material, fuel,water	90.00
Inadequate training and access to information	93.33
Role of middlemen in selling products	63.33
Lack of marketing skills	86.66
Lack of fund	90.00

Table 3: Suggestions for improvement

Suggestions	Number of respondents	Percentage
Changes in old printing equipments	25	83.33%
Need of awareness about governmental programs	30	100%
Assistance in marketing, finance and procurement of raw materials	26	86.66%
Own identity to their traditional Mendh printing product	27	90%

Source: Field Survey

4.2 Problems of artisans

It was found that majority of Mendh artisans are dissatisfied with their work. The main reason is that the income from this craft is not satisfactory to run their daily life (100 %). Now day's Mendh printed fabric face stiff competition with synthetic screen printed products (93.33%). The main causes of low income are lack of order, lack of job throughout the year, reluctance to do other jobs, lazy & alcoholic nature of worker. The majority of the family's income is equal to expenditure, thus there is very little savings in their hand and it becomes difficult to meet daily household expenses and other emergency requirements like food, clothing, medical treatment, child's education etc.

Researcher observed during survey that sanitation condition is not satisfactory. It is a difficult situation for women. In rainy season the stagnation of water occurs. It results in growth of mosquito and stomach diseases. The garbage disposal system is not good. It is stored here and there. For drinking water they all depend on hand pumps. When it is out of order, then inhabitants take water from water tankers for which they have to pay money.

They live in poor housing condition. Inter house space is very little. It is also unhealthy in environment. There is no house yard and house wall. Cooking place is also attached with lane. For dyeing and printing of Mendh *pharad*, various traditional sources of fuel are used viz. wood, coal and cow dung cakes. Fuel wood from nearby forest is easily accessible and it is free

of cost. Out of thirty respondents, 10% artisans used only fuel coal and mostly (90%) used wood and cow dung cake as fuel. Among mendh artisans society a variety of health problems are seen. Sometimes accidents also happen at the time of production process like falling of red hot wax on hands and legs, burning by fire etc. It handicaps the organ. There are some members with mark of such physical disorders. Visual problem, particularly lower vision is another major problem. They are using traditional sources of fuel such as wood, coal. Smoke, dust, fire cause this physical disorder. Besides, working for long period in heat and exposure to wax fumes smell causes headache. Moreover, staying for long duration in heat, wax fumes, smoke and the habit of alcohol consumption are the main causes of T.B., breathing problem, asthma, cold etc. For any health problem, they go to *Guskara* for medical checkup. Sometimes, they go to *Ojha* to get recovery from health troubles. They also believe in *jhar-fuk* etc. which is locally famous.

Marketing is another problem for mendh artisans. It is well known that profit depends on good marketing system. Many of them (63.33%) were printing for orders only which is placed by the middleman and 13.33% are selling it while participating in various exhibitions, with 23.33% for weekly Hatt/ local market in a city and none were printing it for selling it from home, which clearly indicates mendh printed products are no more used by common people and therefore has no local demand in villages. Rainy season and heavy

summer are the off-season in which production is not generally done. They do not export their product. One reason is quality; another is that for export of products heavy packaging is required. Packaging and transport cost goes to the artisans.

The other challenges faced by mendh artisans are inadequate training and access to information for standing in competitive market (93.33%). As supply is less, so is the demand of the traditional Mendh printed fabric, as it is expensive, being highly laborious and time consuming process. All the respondents (100%) felt that at present income from this traditional craft is not sufficient to meet their basic requirements. They (83.33%) would like to make changes in their old printing equipments, fabric and also need some support or assistance from Government and non- Government bodies for raw material, marketing linkages and financial assistance for sustaining this craft. 86.66% artisan need some assistance in marketing, financially and also in procurement of raw materials for betterment of *Mendhkichappai*.

Current socio economic conditions of artisans are very poor. Mendh printing generate livelihood to meet their basic needs, which is supported by self-cultivated vegetables and subsidized food from the government. Their children are not interested in learning the traditional skills. The government funded schemes like (PMKVY) should provide other training to generate other opportunities. There were no schemes for providing seed capital to a new entrant. Artisans should be encouraged to form self-help group and save money with support of the members. Local money lender/ Seth gave them loan as and when required on higher interest. The money was most often repaid in forms of the fabrics. The existence of the only one or two banks in the region had given them monopolistic status. Although most of the artisans had bank account in the local Gramin Bank branch, they were dissatisfied with the working, as the officials of the bank were transferred frequently and there was no clarity about banking norms.

There was almost negligible intervention in mendh printing sector from the government side. Some of the artisans received loans from the government schemes and most of them had repaid back through monthly installments. The government polices do not assist artisans for design innovation and good marketing linkages. These policies have to be relooked into.

The traditional Mendh artisans (90%) want to give their own identity to their traditional mendh printing product. There was very little awareness amongst the stakeholders in the region like dyers, printers and middlemen with regard to branding, packaging, Government schemes, marketing or Intellectual Property Right (IPR) related issues. Language and poor communication skills, lack of soft skills and social media or unpleasant previous experience in Metro cities were other hindrance in their marketing practices.

5. Suggestions and Conclusion

The study sought to assess the problems faced by Mendh artisans practicing Mendhkichappai in Sanganer and Bagru region of Rajasthan. The intent was to find ways to enhance their income and develop a sustainable livelihood. Various types of assistance are offered like information and financial assistance but better solution will be in terms of offering more pertinent financial assistance to artisans based on their business size and revenue earning capacity. Financial assistance to the Mendh artisans should be liberalized and increased so as to develop the society.

The sustained and coordinated effort from all dimensions would help the Mendh artisans in Rajasthan which will be solved by some remedial measures: A ware-house should be constructed for storing the products and for exhibition cum selling in a cooperative manner. There is need for free health checkup camp, training should be arranged by Government and non- Government bodies and by educational institution for skill development of Mendh artisans and young generation. Also loan at lower interest should be arranged; they need arrangement of exhibition & good advertisement system. Health and manufacture insurance must be popularized.

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