

Empowering Women via Handicrafts

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Abstract:- I founded 'Enchanted Threads,' a small handicraft business that weaves and crafts crochet garments, utilities, and ornamental items. The journey has been incredibly fulfilling and enriching. The venture gave wings to my creative and entrepreneurial expressions and helped me witness a positive transformation in the lives of the women working alongside me.

I never imagined that an initiative spurred by the monotony of the COVID-19 pandemic would not only provide all of us with financial independence and artistic freedom but would also become a precursor to social inclusion and economic empowerment for the lives of numerous young women who work at Enchanted Thread.

This has prompted me to reflect on the influence of the handicraft industry in advancing women's empowerment, as well as the government's initiatives to promote such endeavors and the obstacles that may be encountered. This review paper aims to study the same.

Keywords:- Empowerment, Women, Handicrafts, Govt Policies, Roadblocks.

I. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the Indian women, across the country have been proficient in crafting exquisite handmade clothing, garments, jewelry, furniture, culinary delicacies, home accessories, paintings, decorative items and more. These skills are passed on from one generation to another and are of great economic, social, artistic and cultural importance.

This paper aims to review the economic contribution of the women managed handicraft industry on the GDP of India. What are the government policies around it and how we can help women in this industry, the difficulties they face, and the success stories of those who have found strength and success through their craft.

II. HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY IN INDIA – GROWTH STORY

The term 'handicraft' typically refers to handmade or activities involving manual processing of raw materials or using simple tools for manufacturing valuable ornamental items that skilled craftspeople or artisans make. It is generally called the conventional method for manufacturing goods. Handicraft is additionally referred to as artisanal or artisanry. Painstakingly and meticulously made beautiful articles require practice, time, patience, extensive expertise, skill, and years of hard work and dedication. The individual attention to detail gives each piece a unique identity, making it special and distinctive.

The handicraft industry is vital for the Indian economy, employing more than seven million people. The handicraft industry in India is dominated by female artisans, who make up over 56% of the total artisans. The country has 744 handicraft clusters employing nearly 212,000 artisans and offering over 35,000 products. The significant clusters are Surat, Bareilly, Varanasi, Agra, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Chennai, and Mumbai. Most manufacturing units are in rural and small towns, with enormous market potential in all Indian cities and abroad.¹



Fig 1: Growth of Handicraft Industry In India

¹ (2022). India : <https://www.ibef.org/exports/handicrafts-industry-india#>

The handicrafts market in India achieved a size of US\$ 4,277.5 million in 2023 and is projected to reach US\$ 7,817.8 million by 2032, with a compound annual

growth rate (CAGR) of 6.9% during the period of 2023-2032, according to IMARC Group's forecasts.

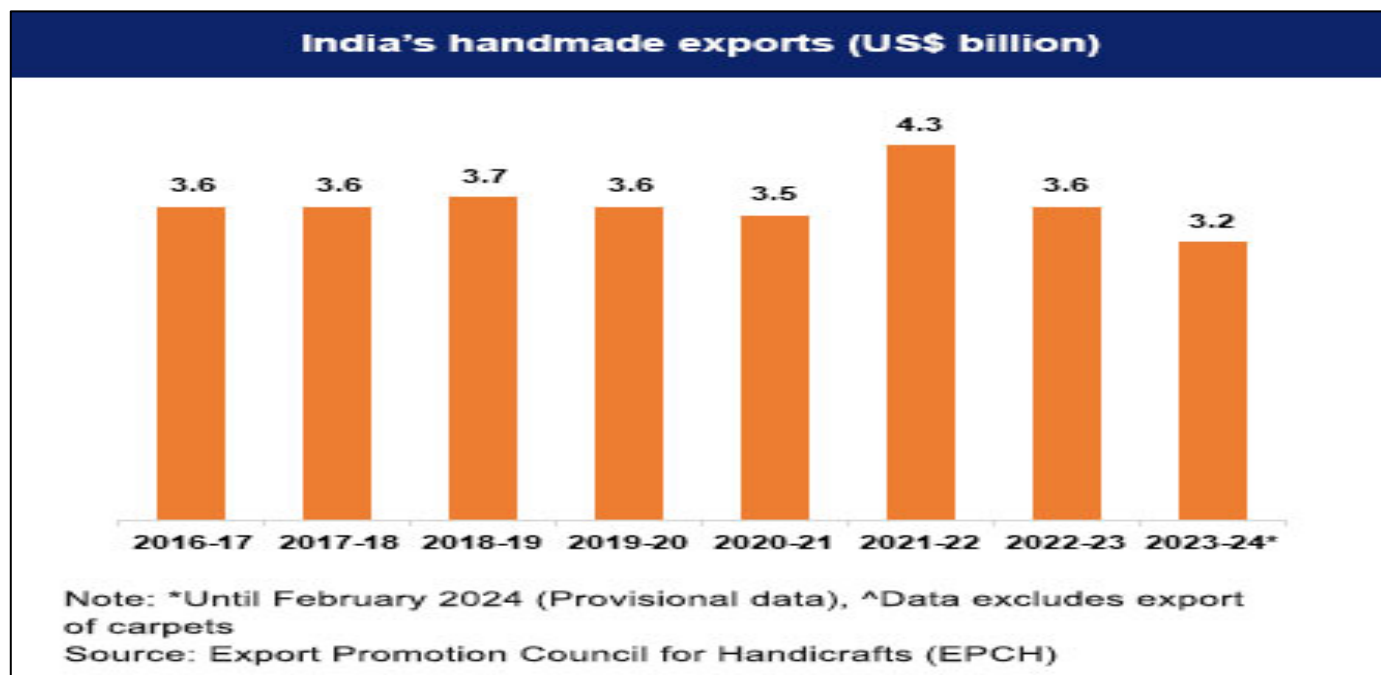


Fig 2: Projections & Actual Growth Figures

In FY23, the total exports of handicrafts stood at Rs. 30,019 crore (US\$ 3.60 billion). In 2021-22, the total exports of Indian handicrafts were valued at US\$ 4.35 billion, a 25.7% increase from the previous year.² Demand for Indian handicraft products in foreign markets has grown manifold and the USA, the UAE, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and France are the major importers.

III. THE IMPACT OF WOMEN ON THE HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY

Handicraft or handloom are terms used to refer to a skilled occupation that necessitates adept use of manual craft and utilizing basic tools to functional, artistic, or traditional goods. Recognizing the need for collection of data on handicrafts, the Sixth Economic Census gathered information on Handicraft & Handloom establishments.

Research shows that there is a pressing need to improve the economic status of societies and nations by empowering women. Reports and studies further state that women should not be treated as a burden or a barrier in the development process but rather as one of the potential assets towards economic welfare of families and communities.³

Empowerment encompasses more than merely involvement in labor or artisans or education; it also teaches and supports the ability of women to make appropriate decisions for themselves and their financial and social matters. Empowering women and girls is the first and foremost matter of human rights and social justice, and the handicraft, small and medium-sized businesses should be given due impetus to create an equitable work force & society.

The patriarchal societal framework has encouraged the gendered division of labor and restricted women's economic independence. The handicrafts sector provides a significant outlay to create social equality and impetus to women's education, skill development, healthcare, self-reliance, and self-esteem. Further, the burgeoning industry contributes to rural economic stability. It helps in the dispersion of income-generating opportunities in agrarian-based rural economies, thereby helping prevent mass migration to already overburdened urban infrastructure.

The Census, used the word "handicraft" to include all hand crafts barring making of Achaar, Papad etc and Items like bricks, bidis, agarbattis, match sticks, firecrackers etc.⁴ According to the Handloom Census 2019-20, about 35,22,512 of Handloom workers India, a staggering 72,29% that is 25,46,285 were Women.

² <https://www.ibef.org/exports/handicrafts-industry-india>

³ Setyaningsih, S., Rucita, C., Hani, U., & Rachmania, I. N. (2012). Women Empowerment through Creative Industry: A

Case Study. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 4, 213–222. doi:10.1016/s2212-5671(12)00336-x

⁴ https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/economic-census/sixth_economic_census

Table 1: Table to Show State Wise Distribution of Women in Handicraft Industry

States/UTs	Rural				Total			
	Male	Female	Other	Total	Male	Female	Other	Total
01 - Jammu & Kashmir	30399	9659	337	40395	39311	12745	462	52518
02 - Himachal Pradesh	6372	4786	77	11235	6919	5018	78	12015
03 - Punjab	4199	1581	23	5803	11510	2928	41	14479
04 - Chandigarh	25	0	1	26	232	18	2	252
05 - Uttarakhand	4249	1839	23	6111	6449	2710	31	9190
06 - Haryana	7425	1681	0	9106	13608	2444	0	16052
07 - Delhi	80	8	0	88	7464	1119	32	8615
08 - Rajasthan	60660	7118	105	67883	103455	14767	189	118411
09 - Uttar Pradesh	120474	29573	658	150705	253160	47426	931	301517
10 - Bihar	19153	2461	149	21763	26765	3219	165	30149
11 - Sikkim	308	238	1	547	414	292	1	707
12 - Arunachal Pradesh	30	54	0	84	76	97	0	173
13 - Nagaland	2374	1766	0	4140	2646	2119	0	4765
14 - Manipur	7011	31074	10	38095	11275	45586	17	56878
15 - Mizoram	463	161	2	626	1402	917	3	2322
16 - Tripura	5512	881	0	6393	9445	1143	8	10596
17 - Meghalaya	1414	1646	1	3061	1689	2014	1	3704
18 - Assam	44142	24414	119	68675	59434	29841	146	89421
19 - West Bengal	151237	48776	1022	201035	246402	66821	1317	314540
20 - Jharkhand	9922	1151	152	11225	12406	1579	174	14159
21 - Odisha	109417	17946	340	127703	122912	20129	364	143405
22 - Chhattisgarh	13127	1340	188	14655	18658	2089	210	20957
23 - Madhya Pradesh	26020	3109	121	29250	42475	6311	161	48947
24 - Gujarat	13694	5298	80	19072	45214	16490	379	62083
25 - Daman & Diu	5	0	0	5	16	11	0	27
26 - D & N Haveli	6	1	0	7	46	4	1	51
27 - Maharashtra	28241	5971	302	34514	68258	13257	536	82051
29 - Karnataka	24360	6909	260	31529	47579	12475	510	60564
30 - Goa	237	193	2	432	571	324	6	901
31 - Lakshadweep	3	0	0	3	10	5	0	15
32 - Kerala	6129	8799	22	14950	14153	14943	50	29146
33 - Tamil Nadu	43215	8151	128	51494	104407	18186	250	122843
34 - Puducherry	74	12	0	86	240	85	1	326
35 - A & N islands	69	38	0	107	105	43	0	148
36 - Telangana	20070	4998	74	25142	27368	12183	107	39658
37 - Andhra Pradesh	63493	27001	436	90930	100799	36780	586	138165
All India	823609	258633	4633	1086875	1406873	396118	6759	1809750
%	75.78	23.80	0.43	100.00	77.74	21.89	0.37	100.00

Table Courtesy - www.mospi.gov.in/

In addition, there are around 16,87,534 Women Handicraft artisans registered with Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts). The figures showing the number of women working in the unorganized sector viz. Handlooms and Handicrafts sector of the textile industry, State-wise.

Consequently, the handicrafts sector also plays a crucial role in safeguarding the interests of artistic communities, traditional and tribal arts, and philosophies that exist outside mainstream religious beliefs. This preservation of cultural heritage is an integral part of the sector's contribution to society.

IV. PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN IN HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY.

➤ *The Handicraft Sector because of its Unorganized Existence, has Suffered from the Constraints Such as*

- Lack of education
- Low capital & lack of funding options
- Inadequate exposure to emerging technology
- Lack of market intelligence,
- Inadequate institutional structure
- Poor infrastructure
- Lack of knowledge of foreign and emerging developments
- Poor and inadequate advertising campaigns

➤ *Additionally, Woman Face*

- Gendered Differentiation
- Discriminatory wages
- Patriarchy.
- Concept of motherhood.
- Family responsibilities
- Issues of Safety
- Exploitation

Renowned Indian textile art historian Jasleen Dhamija⁵ has thrown light on the prevalence of gender discrimination and has pointed out that there are still "men "specific crafts and skills like stone carvings, glass blowing, bronze casting, and women are only employed for "feminine crafts" such as stitching, embroidery, weaving, and basketry, that are considered as being "domestic" and deemed approved for "mothers" and housewives. Marital and motherhood duties demand and confine women to additional domestic spheres. Also women artisans are in dire need of financial and operational assistance, training, production, and marketing skills. The unorganized nature of the handicraft industry leaves women vulnerable to exploitation in terms of wages, working conditions, and shift schedules. In the competitive, more than half of the women employed in handicrafts belong to Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes, making them doubly marginalized. Therefore, achieving social equality in the sector is not just a goal, but a pressing need. To further corroborate the above I decided to do a case study with women handicraft workers working in crochet industry.

V. CASE STUDY

To highlight the problems of women Handicraft Artisans I carried out a small survey and overview of the socio-economic profile of women working in Crochet Industry and the challenges faced by them.

- **Methodology and Sampling:** For this study, I used purposive sampling to select 50 women respondents involved in crochet industry. They were chosen based on their willingness to participate and their experience with crochet knitting. We created the interview questions based on existing literature about craft entrepreneurship. The questionnaire covered general background, socio-economic status, and challenges faced by crochet artisans in the region of Dehradun & Delhi.
- **Data Collection Method:** - Both primary and secondary data were collected.
- ✓ **Primary Data** - Observations, structured questionnaire and interview of respondent
- ✓ **Secondary Data-** Information collected from articles, journals, books and reports from Government records.
- **Data Table 1:** Socio Economic Profiling

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jasleen_Dhamija

Table 2: Socio Economic Profile of Women Surveyed

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:			
Socio economic profile of Crochet Artisans- Women			
		No. of respondents	Percentage
Age (years)	18-21	15	30%
	21-30	18	36%
	31-40	10	20%
	41-50	5	10%
	51-60	2	4%
Education qualification	Illiterate	5	10%
	Primary	8	16%
	Xth Class	15	30%
	XIIth Class	17	34%
	Graduation	5	10%
Marital status	Married	38	76%
	Unmarried	12	24%
No. of family members	1-3 members	2	4%
	4-6 members	25	50%
	6 and above	23	46%
No of Years of working in Crochet Industry	Less than 5	15	30%
	5-7 Years	20	40%
	8-10 Years	13	26%
	10 and above	7	14%
Earning members in family	Self only	8	16%
	2-3 members	34	68%
	4-5 members	8	16%
Family income (Rs.)	below 5000	2	4%
	5000-10000	8	16%
	10000-15000	12	24%
	15000-20000	14	28%
	Above 20000	14	28%

➤ *Key Findings*

In this study, age has been categorized into five groups.

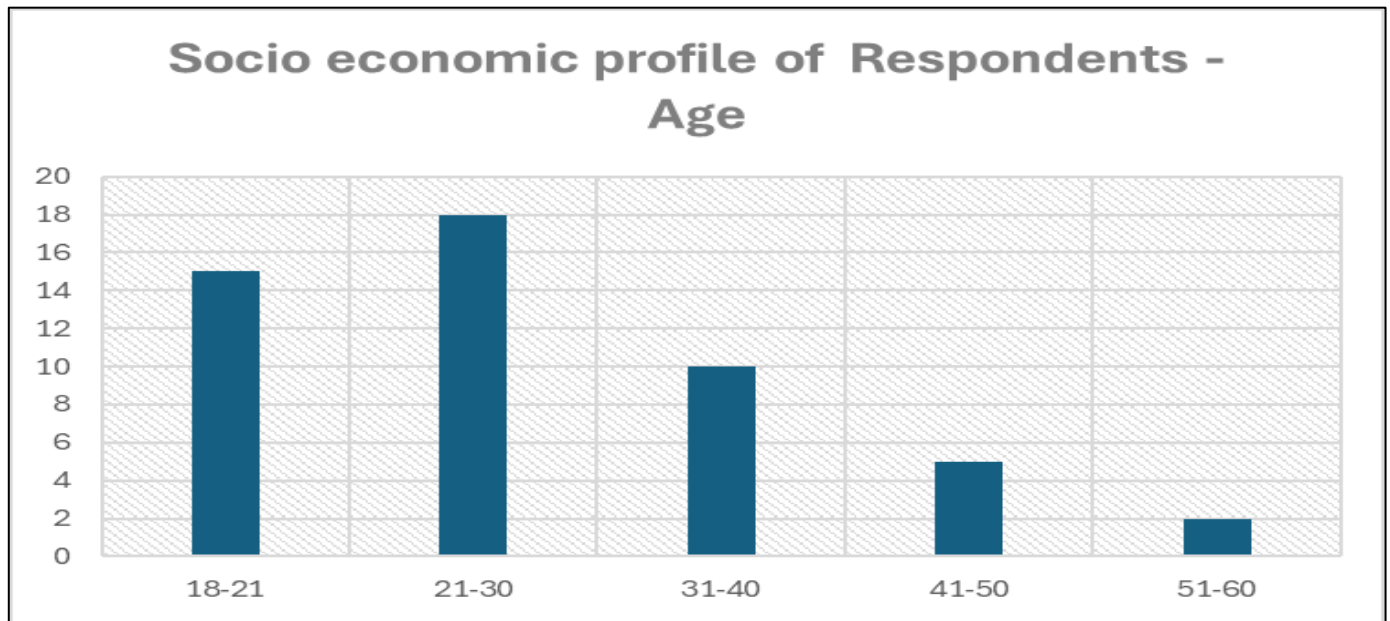


Fig 3: Age – Profiling of the Respondents

Majority of the respondents consisting of 36% women belonged to the age group of 21-30 years, 30 % of the women were of 18-21 years, suggesting that if encouraged or given

opportunities women can productively contribute from a young age.

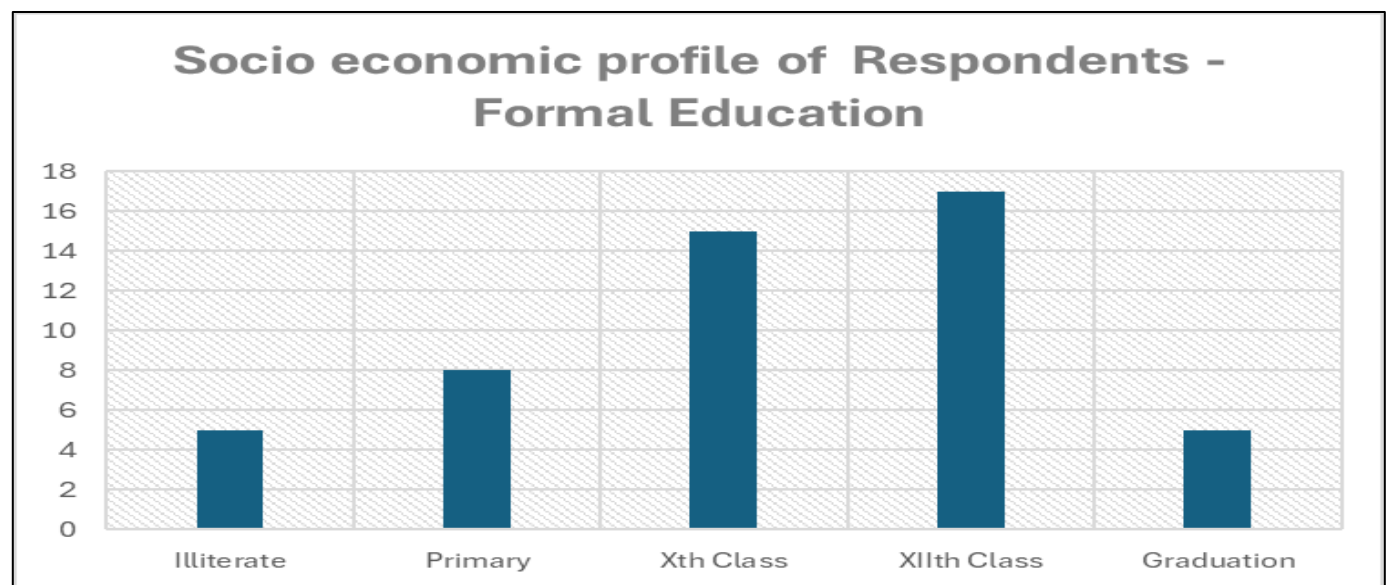


Fig 4: Education – Profiling of the Respondents

10 % women had not received any formal education and could not read or write, while a good 64% had completed High school. .and 76% were married, some as young as 18. More than 40% of the women have been working in the industry for more than 5 years or so.

In the selected sample an overwhelming 96 % of the respondents were having large families of more than 3 members in the family and 68% had 2-3 families working.

However, only 28% had a family income above Rs. 20,000 a month and another 28% between Rs. 15,000- Rs. 20,000 indicating low wages and living standard, especially in the Delhi Metro. Women working in Delhi additionally complained of high cost of living and rentals.

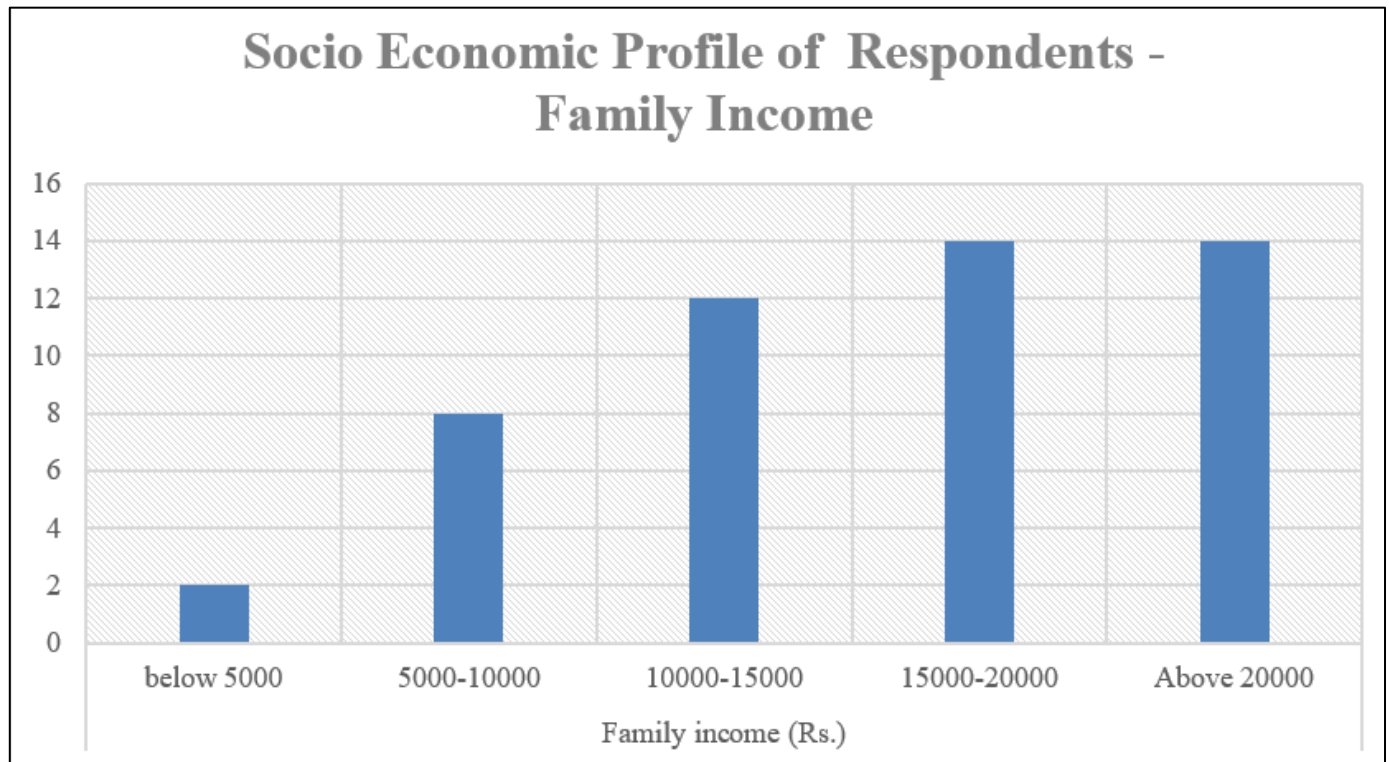


Fig 5: Socio Economic Profile - Family

According to statistics amongst the 92 crore adults (aged 20 and above) in India, the average annual income in 2022-23 is less than Rs. 20,000 per month⁶ or Rs. 800 per day (assuming 25 working days per month). However, this average is misleading as most Indians earn significantly less. For instance, someone earning Rs. 24,000 per month earns more than 90% of the population, meaning that 82 crore adults earn less than Rs. 2.9 lakh per year. The sample survey confirms to the same.

A. Data Table- 3 – Hindrances Faced by Women

Table 3: Hindrances Faced by Respondents

Hindrances faced by Respondents		
Hindrances	Number	Percentage
Lack of education	26	52%
Lack of technology	40	80%
lack of capital	38	76%
Competition	27	54%
Gendered Differentiation	40	80%
Motherhood	33	66%
Family Responsibilities	45	90%
Safety & Exploitation	39	78%
Poor Infrastructure	25	50%
Lack of Advertising	30	60%
Poor Product Knowledge	5	10%
Discriminatory Wages	39	78%

⁶<https://sabrangindia.in/the-growing-divide-a-deep-dive-into-indias-inequality-crisis/>

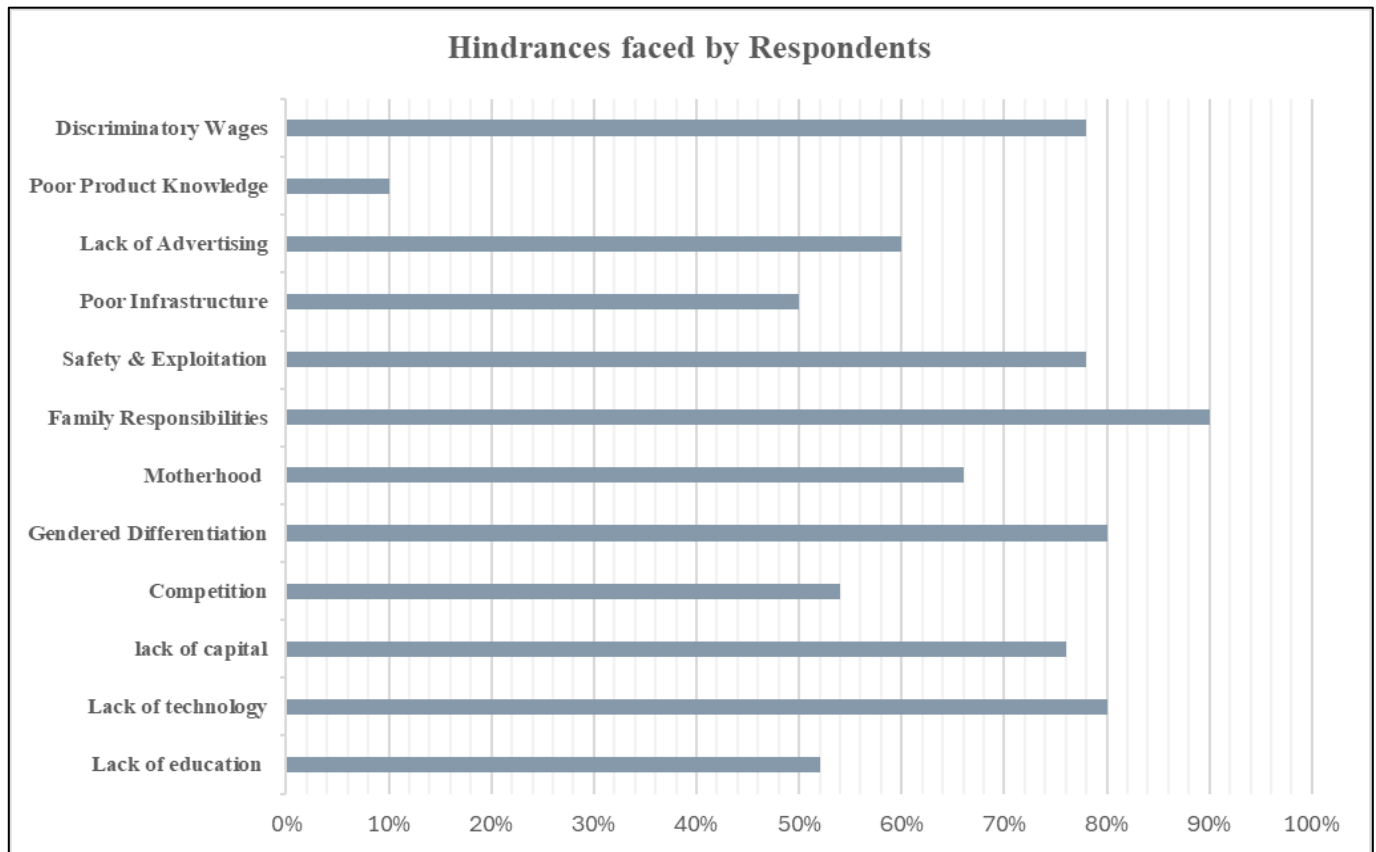


Fig 6: Hindrances Faced by Respondents

➤ Key Findings

It is clear from Table 2 that, chief hindrances faced by women artisans was lack of technological advancements, family encouragement, insufficient own capital, gendered differentiation were the chief concern amongst women. The women admitted to getting paid lesser for the same amount of work as their counterpart.

Travel time, lack of basic infrastructure such as toilets, fans and proper sheds were some of the genuine problems that women faced, especially during menstrual time.

Also women had zero or no concept of maternity leaves or creches at work place.

Women also felt that lack of financial resources lead them to work anywhere and accept any kind of wages. They were evaluating and finding ways to enhance their income and develop a sustainable livelihood. However, they had very low awareness of Govt. Schemes and bodies that provided information and financial assistance for crochet or handloom industry women workers. They all expressed the need for more pertinent and liberal financial assistance to artisans based on their skills.

The sustained and coordinated effort from all dimensions would help the women to move into entrepreneurial activities thus providing social and economic development of the family members and subsequently achieving equality and equal importance for themselves.

B. Limitations of this Study:

The major limitation is the small sample size and limited location used for the data analysis. Both the locations were metro locations and a survey in a rural location may yield different results in education and other socio-economic dimensions. However, as it is a preliminary investigation; it provides a roadmap for further investigation in this area. Respondents were not highly enthusiastic and instead were pessimistic about any outcome, much less any help coming to them from our government agencies

VI. CONCLUSION

Despite women's significant contributions to the handicraft industry, barriers such as lack of resources, education, training, gender-based discrimination, and cultural stereotypes hinder their full participation.

One way to overcome these barriers is through initiatives and programs that are specifically targeted to provide support to women in the handicraft industry. Initiatives such as microfinance programs, training & skill development programs, handicraft fairs that provide mentorship programs are some more ways to encourage women.

Addressing gender biases, exploitation and other societal norms can help women evolve further. Providing clean toilets, drinking water, Creches, vaccination campaigns can help women function better. raising awareness about the importance of gender equality and challenging cultural stereotypes that limit women's opportunities.

Additionally, collaborating with policymakers to establish supportive economic empowerment policies and safeguard women's rights is integral to this endeavor.

- **Conflict of Interest:** The study is for pure academic purposes and there is no conflict of interest whatsoever. There were no sponsors or influencers involved. The author is a young entrepreneur working in the field and merely wants to understand the problems faced by women in the field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank all the women who participated in the survey and for privacy purposes their identification will not be revealed.

I would also like to thank Mr. Rohit Gupta CFO of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd who mentored me throughout my journey and also helped me with the research paper. Mr Gupta has no conflict of interest with this.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY

The author is a graduate from Delhi University, BSc Math (H) and is a young entrepreneur who has been constantly supporting women artisans through her venture-Enchanted threads. She has herself ensured good infrastructure, fair wages and equal participation in business for all her workers. As a student entrepreneur, she attributes her success to her mother and her trusted team of women who have always conceptualized and delivered her designs on time.

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