



Digital Dawn: Transforming Lives of Rural Women through Handicrafts

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India has been one of the finest creators of handicrafts in the world. It has been a vital part of the nation's cultural and economic growth for centuries. These handicrafts serve as a source of income and livelihood for millions. It showcases the golden edge of Indian heritage passed down from generation to generation. In rural India, it is a crucial part of income generation that provides great opportunities to rural women. The emergence of digitalization and technology usage has created new opportunities and significantly helped rural women. For many years handicrafts have worked as a primary occupation for most rural families, numerous products exhibit the talent of artisans ranging from intricate textile products and traditional pottery to exquisite jewelry and woodwork. Generally, this art is learned at a very young age and this quality makes them perfectionists in creating unique products. Looking back to the time when women had limited access to formal employment opportunities due to various reasons such as societal norms or geographic isolation, handicrafts worked as good viable and flexible means of earning an income.

According to surveys and various studies, it is found that the handicrafts sector is one of the largest employment generators in India counts about seven million artisans, where most of them are women. This sector not only offers financial independence but also empowers women by giving them a sense of pride and purpose. It contributes to improving living standards, better educational opportunities for their children, and overall development of community welfare. In the financial year 2022-23, India exported handicrafts worth Rs. 30,019 crore (US\$ 3.60 billion). In the previous year, 2021-22, the value of handicraft exports was US\$ 4.35 billion, showing a 25.7% increase from the year before. Over the last three years, the export of handmade items, particularly carpets, has been steadily increasing.

This handicrafts sector is also not free from challenges, the traditional sector has gone through many ups and downs that include limited access to markets, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of financial resources. All of these factors have affected the potential of handicraft workers in rural areas. The middlemen also play an important role although they used to work as a bridge between the handicrafts workers and customers initially their roles have been changed as now most of them work for their own sake and offer meager prices for the products made by artisans. It not only affects the growth of artisans but also exploits their potential. In this context, digitalization plays an important role and emerges as a transformative force that may address such challenges and will help open up new avenues for rural women involved in handicrafts.

The phenomenon called digitalization i.e. the integration of digital technologies into everyday life and business processes has great potential to influence the handicrafts sector and it can revolutionize the handicraft industry. The expansion in the usage of smartphones

and internet connectivity to the remote areas of rural India has impacted the lives of artisans. Nowadays, it is very easy to get connected with global customers to market their handicraft products. Online marketplaces such as Amazon, Etsy, and specialized platforms such as Craftsvilla and Jaypore have provided handicrafts workers with direct access to customers worldwide that, also eliminates the need for middlemen, and this leads to ensuring better prices for their products. It is well-known fact that Indian handicrafts are highly valued in overseas countries and have huge demand for them. For rural people, digitalization is more than just a sales enhancer. It helps in providing new knowledge and tools to uplift their craft work and expand their businesses. With the help of the internet, artisans are following online tutorials and digital training programs on designing, production techniques, and quality control that, enable them to innovate and improve their products according to customer's needs and demands. Social media has also influenced the handicraft industry. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook are becoming powerful marketing tools. Artisans get connected to loyal customers by showcasing their products and personal stories of the hard work behind every handicraft product and building their brands. Such types of platforms increase the visibility of the artisans and customers. The revolution in payment modes has also impacted the handicraft industry. Paytm, Google Pay, and easy bank services have minimized the risk associated with cash security and lessened the other issues too. This financial inclusion is very crucial for rural women, as it provides them greater control over their earnings, and encourages savings and investments in their businesses.

The impact of digitalization on rural women can be illustrated through many success stories nationwide. There are impressive stories that tell about the real empowerment of rural women with the help of digitalization like women artisans from the remote village of Rajasthan properly utilizing the digital platforms and marketing their traditional textiles and jewelry with the support of organizations like the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and digital training initiatives. Now these women can enhance their skills, have access to new markets and most importantly they have significantly increased their incomes. Some other stories can be seen from the northeastern states also, where rural women have utilized e-commerce platforms and sold their hand-woven textiles and bamboo products to customers around the world. There are other stories also where government and non-governmental firms have collaborated with artisans that helped in breaking down social barriers and changing traditional gender roles. Women who used to be indulged in household chores only are now becoming entrepreneurs, participating in decision-making processes, and gaining recognition for their work. Some organizations work with rural artisans, these are as follows:

eBay for Artisans: Platforms like eBay and Etsy have enabled rural artisans to sell their products directly to international customers. There are many success stories from countries like India, where artisans have found buyers across the globe, underscoring the potential of digital marketplaces.

Digital India Initiative: In India, the Digital India initiative has provided rural artisans with access to the internet and digital tools. Training programs under this initiative have helped artisans create digital catalogs and engage in online marketing.

Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation (HHEC): Government and non-government organizations like HHEC have been instrumental in promoting handicrafts through digital means, offering training in digital marketing and e-commerce.

However, we simply cannot deny the challenges associated with digitalization and usage of technology. It can be tedious and full of scams if proper training is not taken by the user. Even though young rural women are working efficiently and dealing with it with great enthusiasm accepting all the challenges associated with it. But still, there is a lot to be done in this area of digitalization. There is a lack of adequate digital infrastructure reliable internet

connectivity and cyber security in rural areas. There are some other issues also like older artisan women are not well served with technology and navigation of online platforms. They face many problems while using it. There is a need to address these challenges. This can be done by constant efforts of government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The Digital India program is one of the remarkable efforts by our government that aims to bridge the gap by providing internet access and digital literacy training to rural people. NGOs and other social enterprises can also come forward to organize workshops and training, and support should be provided by them. The private sector especially e-commerce industries can help and support in developing a user-friendly approach to rural artisans.



The proper interrelation between handicrafts, employment, and digitalization can lead to a promising pathway for empowering and developing a suitable environment for rural women artisans in India. As handicraft is a vital source of income and preservation of own heritage and culture, it is necessary to take some serious steps to enrich this industry at the global level. By using proper digital technologies, rural women can enhance their skills, increase their incomes, and achieve greater social and economic empowerment. Thus we can conclude that the success of this revolution in the field of digitalization depends on the collaborative efforts of all organizations. There is a need to introduce a better infrastructure, literacy enrichment, and finance-related challenges. By ensuring these factors the benefits of digitalization can reach every corner of rural India and with the continuous support, innovation, and pertinent utilization of technology and digitalization, the rich heritage and traditional Indian handicrafts will sprout in the digital age with great prosperity and our rural women artisans will get empowered and live their dream life by contributing to the society.