

Issues and Challenges of Handloom and Handicraft Industry in Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The handicraft and handloom industry occupies a significant place in the socio-economic and cultural landscape of India, providing employment to millions of artisans, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Despite its rich heritage and potential for inclusive growth, the sector faces numerous issues and challenges that hinder its sustainability and competitiveness in the modern economy. This research paper examines the major problems confronting the handicraft and handloom industry, including lack of access to finance, inadequate technological upgradation, scarcity of raw materials, low productivity, and the declining interest of younger generations in traditional crafts. The paper also emphasizes the need for comprehensive policy interventions, skill development programs, infrastructure support, and effective marketing strategies to revitalize the sector. By addressing these challenges, the handicraft and handloom industry can contribute more effectively to employment generation, cultural preservation, and sustainable economic development.

Key words: Handloom, handicraft, employment.

Introduction:

Woolen handicrafts are deeply rooted in Indian culture, with many regions known for their unique styles and traditions. Woolen handicrafts like embroidery, weaving and felting, are often deeply rooted in local tradition and passed down through generation ensuring the continuation of ancient skills and design. Wool and Woolen crafts can be representing a region or communities' cultural identity, with specific designs, colors and techniques carrying symbolic meaning. Woolen textiles and crafts are sometimes used in religious rituals, ceremonies, and other importance. Woolen handicrafts can empower local communities particularly women, by providing opportunities for supplemental income and social connection. The Woolen handicrafts industries provide employment and opportunities especially in rural areas, contributing the economic development of local communities. Woolly handicrafts can attract tourists and stimulate local markets, creating opportunities for artisans to sell their product and earn income. Woolen handicrafts, such as carpets and textiles, have a vibrant export market, contributing to sustainable economic development and environment consciousness. The handloom sector, which includes woolen handicrafts, is a labor - intensive industry with the potential to create large -scale employment, particularly for rural and unemployment youth. The handloom sector is an important component of rural development in India, providing economics, cultural and social advantage. Promoting local wool value chains and eco-friendly production methods can contribute to sustainable economic development and environment consciousness.

The current study seeks to highlight the gap between government initiatives and their actual implementation at the grassroots level. By identifying key challenges and exploring possible solutions, the study aims to contribute to academic literature as well as provide useful insights for policymakers, planners, and development agencies working towards the sustainable development and revival of the handicraft and handloom industry.

Review of Literature:

According to Jain (2009), Indian handicrafts reflect the vast cultural diversity of the nation. The sector plays an important role in providing non-farm employment in rural areas and is closely associated with traditional knowledge systems and sustainable practices.¹

Chattopadhyay (2010) highlighted that handloom weaving is among the largest sources of rural employment after agriculture in India, engaging over four million weavers. The study emphasized the eco-friendly nature and long-term sustainability of traditional handloom techniques.²

Balaji and Mani (2012) offered an extensive assessment of sustainability within India's handloom sector, pointing out its environmental advantages, decentralized structure, regional variety, and cultural authenticity. However, they also observed that weavers face economic marginalization due to intense competition from power looms.³

Kumudha and Rizwan (2013) examined the promotional strategies of handloom products, with particular reference to handloom weavers' cooperative societies. Their empirical study revealed that although handloom is a traditional cottage industry generating large-scale employment, it is currently experiencing a decline due to multiple challenges. The authors stressed that effective promotion is crucial for revitalizing the sector.⁴

Savithri (2014) studied consumer perceptions of handloom-based interior products in Andhra Pradesh and found that quality of fabric, distinctive designs, and color combinations were the most valued attributes. The study also revealed that word-of-mouth communication was more influential than formal advertising.⁵

Anumula (2015) noted that several studies on customer awareness and satisfaction in the textile sector indicate a decline in the handloom industry due to the rise of power looms and mill-made products. The research emphasized inadequate infrastructure, weak marketing support, poor distribution networks, and low consumer awareness as major challenges, highlighting the need for strong awareness campaigns.⁶

Tiwari (2015) pointed out that artisans often remain unrecognized and underappreciated within global luxury narratives, despite their generational skills. The study emphasized the need to make artisans more visible as key stakeholders and suggested that brands should actively acknowledge their contribution to ensure sustainable growth.⁷

Jain (2016) emphasized that India's rich cultural heritage is reflected in its regional art forms, including handicrafts and handlooms. However, growing western influence has led to the neglect of traditional crafts, with some techniques nearing extinction. The study stressed the urgent need to preserve these skills and promote them, particularly in urban markets.⁸

Vaishnavi and Nair (2017) suggested that handloom production can be strengthened through effective implementation of government schemes, technological modernization, branding initiatives, and the use of e-commerce platforms. They also emphasized quality assurance, environmental compliance, and targeted promotion to enhance customer loyalty.⁹

Paul and Goowalla (2017) reviewed consumer opinions and preferences regarding handloom-based

interior design products. Their findings showed that while general awareness of handloom products exists, younger consumers are less inclined toward them. Misconceptions regarding design, color, and pricing were identified, indicating the need for consumer education and awareness programs.¹⁰

Singh and Kumar (2018) studied government interventions and awareness levels among handloom weavers in Varanasi. The descriptive study revealed that weavers had relatively high awareness of health-related schemes, while awareness of other initiatives remained limited. Although satisfaction with newer policies was high, outreach levels were comparatively low.¹¹

Sasikala (2019) analyzed the social status of handloom weavers in the Tiruvannamalai district, identifying demographic factors, participation, influence, and prestige as key determinants. The study concluded that improvement in these areas can significantly enhance the social standing of weavers.¹²

Research Gap:

India's traditional handicrafts and handloom sector is not only a symbol of cultural heritage but also a major source of livelihood, especially in rural and hilly areas. Several studies have been conducted over time focusing on the socio-economic conditions of artisans, marketing challenges, and the impact of government schemes. For instance, Das (2016) explored the economic contribution of the sector, Verma (2018) focused on the social conditions of artisans, and Kumar & Rani (2019) addressed issues of marketing and training. However, it has been observed that most of these studies have been concentrated in specific states like Rajasthan, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, whereas Himachal Pradesh—particularly the Rampur region, known for its distinctive wool weaving, wood carving, and traditional crafts—has remained largely underexplored in academic research. Artisans in this region face numerous challenges including limited access to modern designs, technology, and digital marketing, as well as issues related to fair pricing, sustainable markets, and declining interest among the younger generation. Additionally, a lack of awareness about government schemes and insufficient government support at the local level has further hindered the growth of this sector, leaving many artisans unable to access benefits and opportunities. Considering these gaps, there is a strong need to conduct a comprehensive study on the current status, challenges, and potential of the handloom and handicrafts sector in the Rampur region. Therefore, the present study aims to understand the real condition of the handloom and handicrafts industry in Rampur, highlight its key challenges, and identify possible pathways for its development. This research will not only serve as a regional case study but also provide valuable insights to policymakers, planners, and social organizations for designing more effective and inclusive strategies.

Objectives of the Study:

- To analyse the present conditions of the woollen handicraft and handloom industry.
- To identify challenges and obstacles faced by artisans, manufacturers, and stakeholders.

Scope of the Study:

Himachal Pradesh, has a rich tradition of wool production, wool crafts and weaving and handloom especially in the upper region of the State. The cold climate and mountainous region make it ideal for rearing sheep and goats, which produce high-quality wool. Local people especially women are involved in making traditional woollen items such as shawls, socks, caps and mufflers made by handloom industry in the study area i.e., Rampur Bushahr. It is well known for its fine and colorful design especially in Rampur and Kullu style shawls. The present study is limited to the geographical area of Rampur Bushahr,

a region known for its rich tradition of handloom and woolcraft in Himachal Pradesh. The research focuses on identifying and analyzing the key issues and challenges faced by the local stakeholders engaged in these sectors. Data has been collected from a variety of sources including handloom weavers, woolcraft artisans, small- scale producers, shopkeepers, and sellers operating in the local market. The study includes insights into production practices, raw material availability, skill levels, income patterns, marketing problems, and the extent of government or institutional support. This empirical investigation aims to highlight the ground realities of the handloom and woolcraft industry in the region, offering a foundation for further research and policy suggestions. The period for the secondary study has been taken from the session 2009-10 to 2022 -23.

Sampling:

The present study adopts a simple random sampling design to select respondents for data collection. A total of 150 samples were drawn randomly from the target population of peoples engaged in handloom and handicraft production of Rampur Bushahr. The selected sample size is considered adequate to draw meaningful and generalizable conclusions within the scope of the study.

Methodology:

The present study is based on primary as well as secondary data. The primary data has been collected through personal interview from the peoples engaged in handloom and handicraft production of Rampur Bushahr. The secondary data has been collected from various books, magazine, journals and newspapers etc. The questionnaire was drafted to procure primary data and information.

The collected data and information have been analysed with the help of Statistical methods like mean, Standard deviation, Skewness, Kurtosis, F-Test, Chi square test and ANOVA and mathematical tools like percentage, comparative study and ratios etc. The data has also been analyzed through graphical representations also to present the study more effectively.

Analysis and Interpretation:

Table-1

YEAR WISE HANDLOOM AND HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION-HIMACHAL PRADESH

Year	Handloom Production (lakh sq. m)	Handloom Growth Rate (%)	Handicrafts production (₹crore)	Handicraft Growth Rate (%)	Employment in sector (approx.)	Employment Growth Rate (%)
2009-2010	8.5	-	56	-	22,000	-
2010-2011	8.8	3.53%	58	3.33%	22,500	2.27%
2011-2012	9.1	3.41%	60	3.45%	23,000	2.22%
2012-2013	9.3	2.20%	62	3.33%	23,500	2.17%
2013-2014	9.6	3.23%	65	4.84%	24,000	2.13%
2014-2015	9.9	3.12%	68	4.62%	24,800	3.33%
2015-2016	10.2	3.03%	70	2.94%	25,500	2.82%
2016-2017	10.5	2.94%	73	4.29%	26,000	1.96%
2017-2018	10.8	2.86%	76	4.11%	26,800	1.92%
2018-2019	11.0	1.85%	79	3.95%	27,500	3.77%

2019-2020	11.3	2.73%	81	2.53%	28,000	8.12%
2020-2021	10.0 (covid impact)	-11.50%	70	-13.58%	25,000	-10.71%
2021-2022	11.5	15.00%	85	21.43%	28,500	14.00%
2022-2023	11.8	2.61%	88	3.53%	29,000	1.75%
Compound Growth rate		2.52%		3.56%		2.15%
Mean	10.27	-	78.08	-	28,046	-
SD	0.95	-	9.51	-	2,143.98	-
Coefficient of variance	9.26	-	13.22	-	8.34	-

The above data presents the year-wise trends in handloom and handicraft production along with employment generation in Himachal Pradesh from 2009-10 to 2022-23. The data indicate a gradual and consistent increase in handloom production from 8.5 lakh square meters in 2009-10 to 11.3 lakh square meters in 2019-20, reflecting steady sectoral growth before the pandemic. Handicraft production also showed a continuous upward trend during the same period, rising from ₹56 crore to ₹81 crore, supported by positive annual growth rates. Employment generation in the sector increased steadily, suggesting the labor-intensive nature of handloom and handicrafts.

A sharp decline is observed in 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with negative growth rates in production and employment, highlighting the sector's vulnerability to external shocks. However, a strong recovery is evident in 2021-22, marked by high growth rates in both production and employment, indicating resilience and revival efforts. The compound growth rate shows moderate long-term growth, with handicrafts (3.56%) outperforming handlooms (2.52%) and employment (2.15%). The coefficient of variation suggests relatively stable handloom production compared to handicrafts, which exhibit higher variability. Overall, the table reflects gradual growth, pandemic-induced disruption, and subsequent recovery of the sector in Himachal Pradesh.

TABLE-2
TYPES OF WOOLEN PRODUCTS PRODUCED IN RAMPUR BUSHAHR

Types of Woollen Products	No of Respondents	Percentage
Woollen Cloths	88	58.67%
Woollen Carpets	23	15.33%
Woollen Decoratives	16	10.67%
Other Woollen Products	23	15.33%
Total	150	100%

Table 2 reveals that the production of woollen products in Rampur Bushahr is largely dominated by woollen cloths, which are produced by 88 respondents, accounting for 58.67 per cent of the total. This indicates that woollen cloths constitute the primary and most preferred product in the region. Woollen carpets and other woollen products are produced by an equal number of respondents (23 each), representing 15.33 per cent respectively, suggesting moderate engagement in these categories. Woollen Decoratives are produced by 16

respondents (10.67 per cent), reflecting relatively lower involvement. Overall, the data show a clear concentration on woollen cloth production, while other product types play a supplementary role in the local woollen industry.

Table-3

MARKETING CHANNELS FOR PURCHASING RAW MATERIAL IN THE STUDY AREA

Marketing channels	No of people	Percentage
Local markets	105	70%
Direct Producer	24	16%
Middlemen	15	10%
Any other	6	4%
Total	150	100%

The table shows that most respondents purchase raw material from local markets (70%), followed by direct producers (16%). A smaller proportion depends on middlemen (10%) and other sources (4%), indicating the dominance of local markets in the study area.

Table 4

TYPES OF GOVT SUPPORT AVAILED BY THE RESPONDENTS FOR HANDICRAFT/HANDLOOM

Govt. Supports	Frequency	Percentage
Subsidies loans	34	22.67%
Training / Skill Development	41	27.33%
Lands/Sheds	11	7.33%
Access to Raw materials	5	3.33%
Marketing Assistance	4	2.67%
No Support	55	36.67%
Total	150	100%

Table 4 shows that training and skill development is the most commonly availed government support by respondents, accounting for 27.33 per cent. Subsidized loans are the next major form of assistance, utilized by 22.67 per cent of the respondents. This indicates that financial and skill-based support plays an important role in sustaining handicraft and handloom activities. However, access to land or sheds is limited, as only 7.33 per cent have benefited from this facility. Support in the form of access to raw materials is very low at 3.33 per cent. Marketing assistance is the least availed support, with only 2.67 per cent respondents benefiting from it. A noteworthy finding is that 36.67 per cent of respondents have not received any kind of government support. This reflects gaps in the reach and effectiveness of government schemes. The low utilization of marketing and raw material support may affect production and sales. Overall, the data suggest the need for broader and more inclusive government intervention.

Table 5
REASONS FOR NOT AVAILING SUPPORT FOR THE PROMOTION OF
HANDLOOM/HANDICRAFT SECTORS

Reasons	Male	(%)Male	Female	(%)Female
Lack of awareness	5	29.41%	17	44.74%
Complex and Lengthy Process	3	17.65%	9	23.68%
Inaccessibility of credit facilities	2	11.76%	3	7.89%
Any other reason	7	41.18	9	23.68%
Total	17	100%	38	100%

Calculated F-value = 2.91

Level of significance (α) = 0.05

The table shows that lack of awareness is a major reason for not availing government support, particularly among female respondents (44.74%) compared to males (29.41%). Among male respondents, “any other reason” accounts for the highest proportion (41.18%), indicating diverse and unspecified constraints. The complex and lengthy procedure is another important reason for both males (17.65%) and females (23.68%). Inaccessibility of credit facilities is reported by a relatively smaller proportion of respondents in both groups. Overall, the findings suggest that informational gaps and procedural difficulties are the key barriers in availing support across genders.

The ANOVA test was applied to examine whether there is a significant difference between male and female respondents regarding the reasons for not availing government support for the promotion of handloom and handicraft sectors. The calculated F-value is 2.91 at the 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated F-value is lower than the critical value at this level, the difference between male and female respondents is not statistically significant. This indicates that both male and female respondents face broadly similar issues such as lack of awareness, complex procedures, inaccessibility of credit, and other reasons. Therefore, gender does not play a significant role in influencing the reasons for non-utilization of government support schemes in the study area.

Table-6
ATTRIBUTES OF THE RESPONDENTS REGARDING DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF
HANDLOOM/HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY IN THE STUDY AREA

Factors	Excellent (5)	Very good (4)	Good (3)	Bad (2)	Very bad (1)	Total	Mean	SD
Govt. support	—	3 (0.93%)	48 (13.16%)	32 (10.5%)	67 (24.72%)	150 (100)	1.9	0.92
Seasonal profitability	27 (29.03%)	68 (21.12%)	42 (11.52%)	13 (4.5%)	—	150 (100)	3.72	0.86
Availability of	9	77	57	7	—	150 (100)	3.58	0.68

technology	(9.67%)	(23.94%)	(15.63%)	(2.5%)				
Market	—	41	33	51	25	150 (100)	2.59	1.06
Demand		(12.67%)	(9.05%)	(17%)	(9.34)			
Cultural	32	62	43	13	—	150 (100)	3.74	0.89
heritage	(33.87%)	(19.24%)	(11.93%)	(4.5%)				
preservation								
Availability of	26	50	59	11	6 (4)	150 (100)	3.52	0.99
raw material		(15.49%)	(16.04%)	(3.5%)				
Interest of	—	—	18	56	77	150 (100)	1.61	0.69
Youth in			(4.93%)	(18.5%)	(28.02)			
woolen								
/Handicraft								
work								
Role of NGO	—	12	39	63	36	150 (100)	2.18	0.89
And local		(3.75%)	(10.69%)	(21%)	(11.53)			
institution								
Awareness of E-	—	9	26	54	61	150 (100)	1.88	0.90
commerce		(2.81%)	(6.99%)	(18%)	(22.52)			
platforms								

Skewness and Kurtosis of Attributes

Attribute	Skewness	Kurtosis
Govt. Support	0.33	-1.39
Seasonal Profitability	-0.28	-0.53
Availability of Technology	-0.19	-0.14
Market Demand	0.01	-1.25
Cultural Heritage Preservation	-0.24	-0.69
Availability of Raw Material	-0.36	0.00
Interest of Youth in Handicraft Work	0.69	-0.69
Role of NGO and Local Institutions	0.33	-0.64
Awareness of E-commerce Platforms	0.72	-0.37

The above table presents the perceptions of respondents regarding various aspects of the handloom and handicraft industry in the study area. The mean scores indicate that **cultural heritage preservation (3.74)** and **seasonal profitability (3.72)** are viewed most positively, suggesting that respondents strongly associate the sector with traditional value and income generation during peak seasons. **Availability of technology (3.58)** and **raw materials (3.52)** also receive relatively favorable responses, though the standard deviations show some variation in opinions. **Market demand (2.59)** and the **role of NGOs and local institutions (2.18)** are rated at a moderate to low level, reflecting uncertainty and limited institutional

effectiveness. The lowest mean scores are observed for **government support (1.90)**, **awareness of e-commerce platforms (1.88)**, and **interest of youth in handloom/handicraft work (1.61)**, highlighting major concerns in policy outreach, digital integration, and generational continuity. Higher standard deviations in market demand and institutional roles indicate divergent views among respondents. Overall, the findings suggest that while traditional strengths of the sector remain intact, lack of institutional support, weak market linkage, and low youth engagement pose serious challenges to its sustainable development. The skewness values indicate that perceptions regarding **seasonal profitability, availability of technology, cultural heritage preservation, and raw materials** are **negatively skewed**, suggesting a greater concentration of responses towards higher satisfaction levels. In contrast, **government support, interest of youth, role of NGOs, and awareness of e-commerce platforms** show **positive skewness**, reflecting a dominance of lower ratings and general dissatisfaction among respondents. Market demand exhibits nearly zero skewness, indicating a balanced distribution of opinions. The kurtosis values for most attributes are **negative (platykurtic)**, implying flatter distributions with responses spread across categories rather than being highly concentrated. Overall, the results suggest varied perceptions across attributes, with stronger agreement on traditional strengths of the sector and weaker consensus on institutional and modern support mechanisms.

Table 7
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF HANDICRAFT/HANDLOOM SECTOR FOR MALE AND FEMALE

Challenges /Issues	Males	Percentage	Females	Percentage
Competition	33	17.36%	13	14.44%
Wages and unstable income	37	19.47%	10	11.11%
Marketing technique	19	10%	8	8.88%
Raw material availability	20	10.52%	7	7.77%
Exploitation by middlemen	13	6.84%	2	2.22%
Pressure to be primary earner	14	7.36%	0	0%
Restriction due to work load at home	2	1.05%	14	15.55%
Seasonal Income/ demand	33	17.36%	9	10%
Social Restriction	15	7.89%	12	13.33%
Lack of guideness opportunities	4	2.10%	15	16.66%
Total	190	100%	90	100%

[Calculated F value = 3.18, Tabulated $F_{0.005}$ value = 10.06]

The table highlights the major issues and challenges faced by male and female workers in the handicraft and handloom sector. Male respondents primarily report **wages and unstable income (19.47%)**, **competition (17.36%)**, and **seasonal income or demand (17.36%)** as their key challenges, reflecting economic and market-related pressures. In contrast, female respondents are more affected by **lack of guidance and opportunities (16.66%)**, **restriction due to workload at home (15.55%)**, and **social restrictions (13.33%)**, indicating socio-cultural constraints. Competition and marketing techniques are common challenges for both genders, though reported at slightly higher levels by males. The calculated **F-value of 3.18** is lower than the **tabulated F-value of 10.06 at the 0.005 level of significance**, indicating that the difference in challenges faced by males and females is **not statistically significant**. This suggests that although the nature of challenges varies by gender, overall both male and female workers encounter broadly similar difficulties in the sector.

Table 8
SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTION AND GROWTH FOR HANDLOOM\HANDICRAFT SECTOR

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
Government Schemes Awareness	102	68%
Fixed MSP for Woolen products	47	31.33%
Skill development workshops	92	61.33%
Digital marketing support	84	56%
Tourism integration	35	23.33%
Financial assistance	110	73.33%
Export promotion	81	54%
Raw material banks	38	25.33%
Geographical indication tag	23	15.33%
Public private partnership	41	27.33%
Mobile van services	21	14%
Brand building	22	14.66%
Weaver identity card	11	7.33%
Packaging and labelling improvements	67	44.67%
Local exhibition and craft fairs	92	61.33%

Note: Most of the Respondents have responded more than one suggestions.

The table presents the key suggestions put forward by respondents for the promotion and growth of the handloom and handicraft sector. The most strongly emphasized suggestion is **financial assistance**, supported by 73.33 per cent of respondents, highlighting the urgent need for credit support and subsidies.

Awareness of government schemes (68%) and **skill development workshops (61.33%)** also emerge as crucial measures, indicating that both information dissemination and capacity building are essential for sectoral growth. An equal proportion of respondents (61.33%) stress the importance of **local exhibitions and craft fairs**, reflecting the need for better marketing and direct market access. **Digital marketing support (56%)** and **export promotion (54%)** further underline the growing relevance of modern and global market linkages. Improvements in **packaging and labelling (44.67%)** are suggested to enhance product appeal and competitiveness. Moderate support is observed for **fixed MSP for woolen products, public-private partnerships, raw material banks, and tourism integration**, suggesting these as supportive but secondary measures. Suggestions such as **GI tagging, brand building, mobile van services, and weaver identity cards** receive comparatively lower responses, yet they remain important for long-term recognition and social security. Overall, the findings indicate that a combined approach focusing on financial support, awareness creation, skill enhancement, and strengthened marketing channels would be the most effective strategy for sustainable growth of the handloom and handicraft sector.

Conclusions:

The handloom and woolen handicraft sector in Rampur Bushahr remains a vital pillar of rural livelihood, cultural identity, and traditional knowledge, yet it is currently facing multifaceted challenges. While the sector retains strong traditional foundations and seasonal income potential, it is increasingly constrained by weak institutional support, inadequate market access, limited technological integration, and declining youth interest. The gap between government policy formulation and grassroots-level implementation is evident, resulting in low utilization of available schemes.

Despite moderate production growth and post-pandemic recovery, the sector's long-term sustainability is threatened by lack of modernization, insufficient digital presence, and socio-economic constraints, especially for women artisans. The findings suggest that without immediate and coordinated intervention, traditional woolen crafts may gradually lose relevance among younger generations. However, the strong cultural value, export potential, and environmental sustainability of woolen handicrafts provide a solid foundation for revival if appropriate policy, market, and institutional support is ensured.

Findings of the Study:

The study reveals that the handloom and woolen handicraft sector in Himachal Pradesh has shown a steady long-term growth in production and employment from 2009–10 to 2019–20, reflecting its economic significance and labor-intensive nature. However, the sector suffered a severe setback during the COVID-19 period, followed by a strong recovery in 2021–22, indicating resilience but also vulnerability to external shocks. Woolen cloth production dominates the product mix in Rampur Bushahr, while carpets, decoratives, and other products play a supplementary role.

Local markets are the primary source of raw material procurement, highlighting limited integration with organized supply chains. Government support in the form of training and subsidized loans has reached some artisans, but a large proportion remains excluded, mainly due to lack of awareness and procedural complexity. Statistical analysis confirms that gender does not significantly influence reasons for non-availment of government support, though the nature of challenges differs between men and women.

Perception analysis shows that cultural heritage preservation, seasonal profitability, availability of technology, and raw materials are positively viewed aspects of the sector. In contrast, government support,

awareness of e-commerce platforms, and youth participation received the lowest mean scores, indicating serious structural and future sustainability concerns. The skewness and kurtosis results further confirm dissatisfaction regarding institutional and modern support systems.

The study also finds that male artisans are more affected by economic challenges such as unstable income and competition, whereas female artisans face social restrictions, domestic workload, and lack of guidance, though overall challenges are statistically similar across genders. Respondents strongly emphasized financial assistance, awareness of schemes, skill development, digital marketing, and exhibitions as key growth strategies.

Suggestions:

The findings of the study clearly indicate the need for a comprehensive and coordinated policy approach to strengthen the handloom and handicraft sector in the study area. First, greater emphasis should be placed on improving financial assistance mechanisms by simplifying loan procedures, enhancing subsidy coverage, and ensuring timely credit availability through local institutions and cooperative societies. There is an urgent need to enhance awareness of government schemes through systematic outreach programs, training camps, and the use of local media so that artisans can fully utilize the benefits intended for them. Skill development and capacity-building initiatives should be regularly organized to upgrade traditional skills with modern designs, quality standards, and innovative production techniques, thereby increasing product competitiveness.

Furthermore, policies should promote digital integration and market expansion by providing training in e-commerce platforms, digital marketing, and online payment systems, enabling artisans to access wider national and international markets. Strengthening marketing infrastructure through local exhibitions, craft fairs, tourism linkage, and export promotion can help artisans achieve better price realization and reduce dependence on middlemen. The role of NGOs, cooperatives, and local institutions must be reinforced to act as effective intermediaries between artisans, markets, and government agencies. Special attention should be given to youth and women artisans by introducing incentive-based programs, entrepreneurship development initiatives, and flexible work support systems to address social and economic constraints. Finally, policy measures should encourage sustainable and eco-friendly production practices, regional branding, and geographical indication tagging to preserve cultural heritage while ensuring long-term economic viability of the handloom and handicraft sector.

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