

## **SWOT analysis of hand block printing cluster of Rajasthan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Artisan can be defined as a skilled worker who creates things manually with use of simple tools. This very definition of an artisan places him in a socially and economically weak position as neither the products made by hand are appreciated by the ignorant masses nor is his hard work. The masses appreciate the machine made products more as they are cheap and come in more variety. Despite the efforts of various government and private sectors to spread awareness about the rich handicrafts of India among the common people and to help the artisan clusters through various schemes, the situation is not very encouraging for the Indian handicrafts. The handicraft cluster faces problems like lack of organization, inadequate exposure to modern technologies, and lack of information about new schemes and poor capital to invest in new ideas which places it in a weak position. The cluster group is unable to identify and benefit from their strengths which further affect their well-being and puts their very survival under threat. Hence a need was felt to carry out a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat) analysis of the artisan cluster of Jaipur engaged in the world famous craft of ornamenting fabric through block printing. The results indicated that if the artisan cluster becomes stronger and works in a unified way, they can overcome a majority of their threats successfully even with a little support from the government and private sectors.

**Key Words :** Artisans, Opportunities, Strengths, Threats, Weaknesses

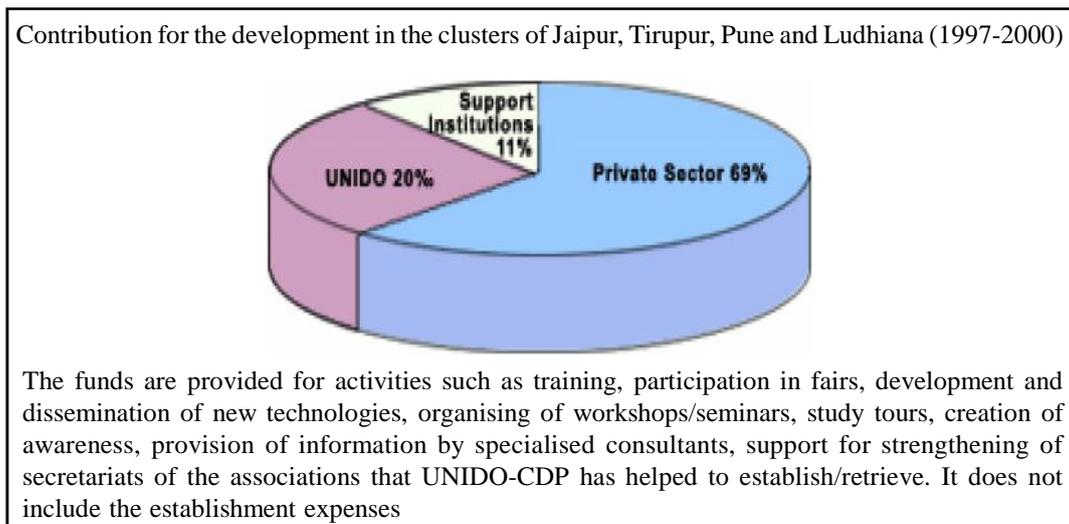
### **INTRODUCTION**

An artisan cluster is defined as geographically concentrated (mostly in villages/townships) household units producing handicraft/handloom products. In a typical cluster, such producers often belong to a traditional community, producing the long-established products for generations (Sarkar and Banerjee, 2018). Rajasthan has a rich history of art and craft and is well-known for the art of hand block printing done by the community of Chippas since generations. According to National Handicraft Policy Report, 2017, by All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA), handicraft has huge potential for economic development of the country and is one of the most significant employment providing industries of India. Employment in this sector increased from 58.50 lakh in 2008-09 to 72.30 lakh in 2011-12 at a growth rate of 7.3%. It was expected to reach 122.91 lakh by 2016-17 (National Handicrafts Policy Report, 2018). Hence, the artisans

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should be encouraged to continue with their hereditary occupation and take it to such height that the new generation finds potential in the business.

From 1997 to 2001, UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation) implemented a cluster development programme (CDP) in the hand block print cluster of Jaipur, Rajasthan with the aim to contribute and assist in the overall performance and collective efficiency of the small and medium enterprise clusters for sustainable development (Dcmsme.gov.in., 2018).



Source:<http://www.dcmsme.gov.in/clusters/unido/cdp.htm>

Despite the aforesaid concentrated efforts by various government entities there was not much improvement found in the hand block printing cluster of Jaipur as majority of the artisans were still struggling to overcome water woes, pollution problems and reducing open spaces. Evidence of water problems began to emerge three decades ago; in 1980s as Jaipur and its population began to grow and the traditional printers, slowly started moving out of Jaipur, due to lack of space and water (Dcmsme.gov.in., 2018). The aim of the paper was to study the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by the textile artisans of Jaipur in printing and marketing of the hand block products. The working environment and living conditions of these textile artisans were studied in order to appraise their situation.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample selection and locale of study :

Textile artisans belonging to Jaipur district, earning a regular income from the practice of handicraft and holding an Artisan Identity Card were selected. They were identified on the basis of references given by Weavers Service Centre and Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Jaipur. These artisans further referred to other textile block printing artisans in Jaipur district. A total of 60 artisans formed the sample size selected on the basis of snowball sampling techniques.

Both primary and secondary sources of data collection were used for this study. Primary data was collected through interview schedules and observation methods. Focus group discussions were also held where required. Secondary sources included websites and reports of government entities

and NGOs, books and articles published in journals. The information gathered from primary sources was coded carefully and data were analyzed with the help of Excel.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A background study was conducted in order to know the nature of involvement in the craft, their age and education. The textile artisans selected for study were involved in the inherited art of hand block printing of textiles. It was a family occupation where the whole families were involved in the printing activity at some stage or the other. The artisans' dwellings had open spaces which were used to run the printing units in most of the cases. The categories under which the interviewed artisans fall have been shown in Table 1.

It was observed in Table 1 that a majority of the artisans (42%) owned printing units and participated in *haats* to supplement their income. 33% of the respondents were owners of printing units who supplied all over India while 17% were job workers and worked for the owners of printing units/ middle men. These middlemen used to bring work on behalf of other 'parties'. It was observed that neither the middlemen revealed the name of the party they had brought the order for nor were the job workers concerned about it. The job workers worked on piece rates mostly. Some brought the fabrics to be printed to their own setups while some others carried out miscellaneous work related to printing at their employers' unit. The job workers worked strictly as per the instructions given by the owners of the printing units and had no freedom or say in design development. There was a small percentage (8%) of respondents who used to work solely for exports as they did not find potential in the domestic market.

**Table 1 : Nature of involvement in the craft work**

Nature of Involvement in the craft work	f	%
Owner of printing units participating in haats	25	42%
Owners of printing units supplying all over India	20	33%
Job workers	10	17%
Only exporters	5	8%
Total	60	100%

f =Indicates frequency, % = Indicates percentage

Table 2 presents the fact that majority (50%) of the respondents fall under the age group of 30 to 39 years, among which 20% are graduates. Number of respondents falling in age group of 20-29 years are 13% among which 9% are graduates. Respondents in the age group of 40 years and above are 37% among which maximum (17%) have studied up to 9th class. It also evident that in totality, 36% of the respondents are ' graduates or above', 30% have studied up to '10th- 12th class', while 34% dropped out of school by the time they reached the 9th class. Thus it becomes

**Table 2 : Age group and education**

Age -group		Upto9 <sup>th</sup> class	Upto10 <sup>th</sup> - 12 <sup>th</sup> class	Graduation and above	Total
20-29 years	f	1	1	6	8
	%	2%	2%	9%	13%
30-39 years	f	9	9	12	30
	%	15%	15%	20%	50%
40 years and above	f	10	8	4	22
	%	17%	13%	7%	37%

clear that there is a growing trend towards gaining education in the younger generation of artisans. There were two respondents who were post graduates (included in the category ‘graduation and above’) who had gone for higher studies in the hope of getting a good job, but in vain. There were other two in the category of ‘graduation and above’ in age group of 20-29 years who had done professional courses at the graduation level in textile design.

Strengths can be defined as intangible or tangible positive internal characteristics of an entity/ unit/ cluster which are within its control (Table 3). An entity/ unit/ cluster should be aware of its strengths to use them positively to expand the business opportunities. 72% of the respondents stated that the next generation was taking a keen interest in education and then joining the family business. Some were even taking formal professional training in textile design courses from reputed institutes. This was a great blessing for the growth of family business as these young professionals experimented with new ideas and skills. Their unique craftsmanship was one of the major strengths as cited by 67% of the respondents. Some of the strengths of the handicraft sector include availability of cheap labor, use of local resources, and unique craftsmanship in the manufacturing of products along with increasing appreciation by international consumers (Hashmi, 2012). 63% respondents believed that Jaipur district had a good infrastructure which encouraged both Indian and foreign tourists to visit the city. It was well-connected with railways, roadways and airways making it easy to reach the interiors of the district. Sanganer and Bagru, the two prominent places of printing in Jaipur district, are about 10 and 35 kilometers from Jaipur, respectively. These are also well connected to the city through various means of transport like government and private buses, private taxis and autos. There were good hotels and lodges where tourists could stay and it was also a major tourist attraction due to its great historical past. Hence there was no dearth of tourists, majority of whom ended up purchasing the beautiful traditional textiles. 60% of the respondents identified another trait as their strength *i.e.* ‘adaptability to the changing environment’. This meant that the respondents had learnt to change with times as they knew it was crucial for their survival. They had adopted short-cuts to the traditional way of printing, leading to a compromise on the quality though. Hereditary work (53%) was identified as another major strength of the cluster. The respondents stated that as Sanganer and Bagru were well known for the art of traditional block printing for centuries, it was easier for them to get orders. There were reputed families of artisans who had been carrying on the traditional printing work since 3-4 generations and had good credibility among the buyers.

**Table 3 : Strengths of textile artisans**

Sr. No.	Strengths	f	%	Ranking
1.	Unique craftsmanship	40	67%	2
2.	New generations’ bent towards the family business	43	72%	1
3.	Educated ‘gen- next’	43	72%	1
4.	Well-developed infrastructure	38	63%	3
5.	Hereditary work	32	53%	5
6.	Adaptability to the changing environment	36	60%	4

The artisan cluster is still struggling to overcome many weaknesses (Table 4) despite various steps taken by various organizations to support the textile handicraft sector. 82% of the respondents stated that they lacked the requisite communication and entrepreneurial skills to build up contacts conducive for the growth in business. This made them lag behind their successful counterparts. The weakness that came second on the priority list was the lack of finances for experimenting with

designs (67%) which forced them to do routine work popular in the market. They also copied the work of designers and other famous brands as it was a safe bet. Lack of original ideas for design development was stated to be one of the weaknesses by 58% of the respondents which showed that they needed hand holding and guidance to develop compatible designs for the modern needs. Lack of capabilities to match up the skilled designers and laid-back attitude to work was cited as a weakness by 50 % of the respondents. They felt that their knowledge about block printing fell short before the designers' education and skill. Designers are thus an interface between tradition and modernity, helping match craft production to the needs of modern living (Craftrevival.org, 2005). Their easy going attitude was also hampering their growth to some extent as they were not keen to come out of their comfort zone and try new things. 45% of the respondents stated that there was no unity in the cluster. Most of the artisans were undercutting each other for maximum gains. It was also observed that 35% of the respondents identify 'creating low quality products for easy money' and 'deadlines and work pressure' as major weaknesses. According to them, some artisans make low quality products to earn easy money thus tarnishing the image of the whole community. Meeting deadlines and work pressure led to long working hours hence affecting their health and quality of work. 'Lack of information about government schemes and policies' clocked at 25% and the reasons cited were that the schemes were made more for eye wash than for the benefit of artisans.

**Table 4 : Weaknesses of textile artisans**

Sr. No.	Weaknesses	f	%	Ranking
1.	Lack of information about government schemes and policies	15	25%	7
2.	Lack of communication and entrepreneurial skills	49	82%	1
3.	Laid-back attitude to work	30	50%	4
4.	Lack of cluster association	27	45%	5
5.	Creating low quality products for easy money	21	35%	6
6.	Lack of original ideas for design development	35	58%	3
7.	Low finances for design experiment	40	67%	2
8.	Lack of capabilities to match up the skilled designers	30	50%	4
9.	Deadlines and work pressure	21	35%	6

It was observed in Table 5 that there were many new opportunities available to the artisans in the modern times which were not available to them even a decade before. Development in information technology like easy plans available for Wi-Fi internet, affordable smart phones which support a complete messaging app called Whatsapp has changed the way business was being done before its creation. Majority of the respondents (90%) consider 'Whatsapp' a boon to conduct their business activities as it easily connects them to people across the world. Although only 42% of the respondents were participating in haats presently, but about 75% of them agreed that urban *haats* offered a great opportunity to sell their creations and make fruitful contacts. The other artisans who did not participate in fairs held in haats at present, had been a part of such events at some point of time in the past. Entry of entrepreneurs into e-commerce of handicrafts and private brands like Anokhi and Fab India played a pivotal role in providing orders as per 67% of the respondents. They said that although these brands did not approach them directly, but they got good amount of work from these brands. Though 53% respondents stated that global influences and exports was a great opportunity, but as per Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), problems related to refund of goods and services tax (GST) and slow demand in global markets would impact exports

of handicrafts and may lead to decline in shipments by about 3.5 per cent in the current fiscal year (Handicraft exports likely to dip in 2017-18). Today the marketing opportunities have increased manifold (50%), despite the loss of traditional market, the clientele is really wide from Indian nationals to foreign tourists. 47% of the respondents felt that initiatives by the government to promote handicrafts through Central Cottage and Industries Emporium, newly launched 'India Handmade Bazar, an online portal which will provide direct market access facility to hand loom weavers and handicraft artisans and 'The Handicrafts and Handloom Export Corporation of India Ltd.' were commendable.

**Table 5 : Opportunities for textile artisans**

Sr. No.	Opportunities	f	%	Order
1.	Development in technology like internet, smart phones and Whatsapp	54	90%	1
2.	Wider target markets	30	50%	5
3.	Global influences and exports	32	53%	4
4.	Entry of entrepreneurs into e-commerce of handicrafts	40	67%	3
5.	Opening of urban haats	45	75%	2
6.	Brands like Anokhi, Fab India, Good Things bring orders	40	67%	3
7.	Government Initiatives to provide state and center support to promote handicrafts	28	47%	6

Threats can be defined as external elements that are not within the control of an entity which can put its business into jeopardy, unless responded with effective problem-solving approach. One of the major threats identified for the artisan group was competition with modern machine made products produced in large quantities and thus available at lower rates (93%). As per a report by Hand Block Printed Textile (HBPT) Cluster of Jaipur this age-old production process got disturbed with mechanised production of textiles, with cheaper outputs remarkably similar to block-printed ones, depriving the artisans of much of the utility market (Anonymous, 2018). 87% respondents stated that income was less compared to their hours of manual work which led to an increased use of screen printing which gave faster results in less amount of labor. 82% of the respondents felt that customers had high expectations in terms of design as a variety of designs were easily available either on the online stores especially catering to traditional textiles or the designer stores and brands in malls. Contemporary crafts people create articles for lifestyles isolated from their own, and sell them in unfamiliar and extremely demanding markets (Hashmi, 2012). Another threat was 'Lack of consumer awareness' (75%). The respondents stated that hand printing was a laborious and time consuming work but majority of the people considered it inferior. The handmade products were not considered at-par to the machine made ones and hence were not accepted at higher prices. 67% of the respondents felt 'emergence of e-commerce as an alternative market' a threat. The 'designer artisans' who had brisk business at their retail stores before the launch of online portals like Jaypore, Gaatha etc., suffered losses after their entry into the market. Earlier studies also show that there has been a significant drop in the turnover of retailers due to online shopping in the recent years (Saha, 2015). Modern lifestyle and culture were leading to loss of originality of handicrafts (67%) as the demand was always for newness in products. 55% of the respondents felt that pollution charges, reducing open spaces and water scarcity are a threat to the artisans' survival as the block printing business is suffering a setback due to these.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations :**

Hand block printing cluster of Jaipur needs to focus on the strengths and make best use of

opportunities that come its way. The artisans who make use of their strengths and avail the opportunities are thriving and well-ahead of their counterparts. The artisans who failed to bank upon these chances lagged behind as they were always caught in a web of their weaknesses and fearful to face the threats. Threats like ‘development of e-commerce’ can very well be used as an opportunity as the entrepreneurs involved are dependent on the artisans for product development. On one hand these online brands are responsible for generating work for the artisans, but on the other hand, some artisans were negatively affected due to them. The consumers’ lack of awareness can be handled through distribution of pamphlets or leaflets or showing interesting documentaries of the arduous craft processes in the markets selling traditional textiles. For this, the government and private sector needs to make focused and joint efforts and come forward. The artisans need to overcome their weaknesses and fear of communicating by taking initiatives themselves to enroll for government training programmes. Their laid back attitude works as a major hindrance in their growth. They need self-motivation and unity among the cluster so that each artisan can work to strengthen the other instead of undercutting and competing with each other. If the group dynamics is strong, no external factors would be able to threaten them. They need to come together as a unit and solve their own problems with some support from government and private sectors. The younger generations of artisans is more educated than their fathers and forefathers and should take strong measures to handle the situation collectively.

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