

Socio-Economic Conditions of Folk Artists: A Case Study of Abhaneri Folk Festival, Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

Fairs and festivals are integral to society, representing cultural expressions that have evolved from early traditions of celebrating harvests and regional milestones. They play a crucial role in promoting social harmony by bringing communities together and fostering a sense of unity and belonging. Additionally, such events act as important platforms for preserving and showcasing traditional customs, beliefs, and artistic practices. The Abhaneri Festival, initiated by Rajasthan Tourism in 2008, has emerged as a significant cultural event in northern Rajasthan. It highlights the rich heritage of the region while attracting tourists and supporting local livelihoods. The present study focuses on examining the socio-economic conditions of folk artists, shopkeepers, and local residents during the Abhaneri Folk Festival, aiming to understand its impact on community development and economic well-being.

Keywords: Folk Artists, Abhaneri folk festival, Rajasthan tourism

INTRODUCTION

Today, fairs and festivals are not only seen as cultural expressions but also as important components of the tourism industry. They enhance the overall travel experience by offering visitors opportunities to engage with diverse cultures, while also encouraging creativity and innovation. India, often referred to as the land of fairs and festivals, celebrates each event with unique significance (Singh, 2012). These celebrations contribute to economic prosperity, improve community life, and help build a positive image of destinations. Moreover, the organization of fairs involves collaboration between local governments, host communities, sponsors, and regional stakeholders, which strengthens relationships and supports the cultural identity of the host region.

Folk fairs act as important platforms for preserving traditional art forms in a rapidly modernizing world (UNESCO, 2003). They provide space for cultural

performances, display handmade crafts, and create markets for folk art products. These fairs play a crucial role in sustaining cultural heritage. Their socio-economic impact is visible at the grassroots level, as they promote local development. Artisans gain access to markets, which leads to increased income, greater tourist inflow, and a stronger sense of cultural identity. Thus, folk fairs significantly influence India's socio-economic structure by preserving heritage, supporting livelihoods, and fostering community development.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of the present study is to examine the socio-economic conditions of folk artists, shopkeepers, and local residents during the Abhaneri Folk Festival.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary data Primary data

has been collected through direct interaction using the schedule method. The study primarily uses quantitative methods to collect numerical data. Techniques such as bar graphs, diagrams are used to present data visually. This helps in better understanding and easy comparison. Appropriate statistical tools are applied to derive meaningful insights. For example, percentages are calculated for variables such as literacy rates and sex ratios.

Study Area:

Abhaneri is a historically rich village located in the Dausa district of Rajasthan, India. It lies between the city of Bandikui and the town of Sikandra on the Jaipur-Agra Highway. The village is situated about 95 km from Jaipur and around 210 km south of Delhi. It is also close to State Highway 25, with the Banganga River flowing nearby. Its strategic location and proximity to important landmarks add to its cultural importance. Abhaneri is known for two significant monuments that highlight ancient Indian architectural excellence. The first is Chand Baori, one of the oldest, deepest, and largest step wells in Rajasthan, famous for its intricate design (ASI, 2019). The second is the Harshad Mata Temple, dedicated to Goddess Harshad Mata, which further enhances the cultural richness of the village.

Abhaneri Festival:

The Abhaneri Festival was initiated by Rajasthan Tourism in 2008 and has since become an important cultural event in northern Rajasthan (Rajasthan Tourism Department, 2023). The village of Abhaneri, dating back to the 9th century, holds historical and social significance. It is home to the famous Chand Baori stepwell and Harshad Mata Temple, representing the heritage of post-Gupta and medieval periods. Sculptures from Abhaneri are displayed in museums across the world.

The festival is usually held between Kajli Teej and the Marwar Festival of Jodhpur, typically in September or October. In 2023, it was celebrated on 16–17 October.

Events at the Abhaneri Festival:

Kachhi Ghodi Dance:

A popular folk dance of Rajasthan performed by male dancers riding dummy horses. The dancers carry swords and sing songs about the bravery of Bavaria bandits from the Shekhawati region. The performance often includes daring acts such as playing with fire,

accompanied by energetic drum beats (Fig. 1).



Source : Collected by the Author during Survey

Fig. 1 : Kachhi Ghodi Dance:

Langa Singing:

A traditional musical performance by the Manganiyar community. The songs narrate stories of kings, queens, and historical figures. The performance includes instruments like sarangi, percussion, and ghungroos, and often invokes blessings of Lord Krishna.

Puppet Show:

A traditional Rajasthani art form where puppets are used to tell stories through expressive movements and gestures, entertaining audiences of all ages (Table 2).



Source : Collected by the Author during Survey

Fig. 2 : Puppet Show

Camel Cart Rides:

Decorated camel carts take visitors around the village and festival grounds, offering a unique cultural

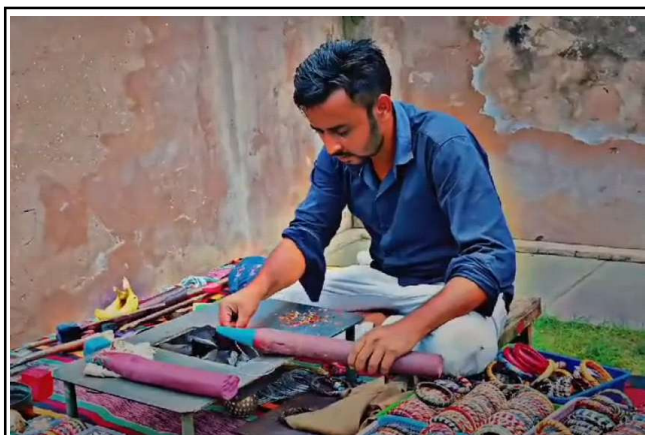
experience.

Magic Show:

Magicians perform entertaining tricks, adding excitement and wonder to the festival atmosphere.

Lakh Bangles Making Shop:

Visitors can observe craftsmen making traditional lakh bangles. They may also get an opportunity to participate in the process and create their own designs (Fig. 3).



Source : Collected by the Author during Survey

Fig. 3 : Lakh Bangles Making Shop

Socio-Economic Conditions of the Sampled Population:

The Socio-economic conditions of Abhaneri village, as revealed through the survey, provide valuable insights into the structure and dynamics of the community. This analysis focuses on key aspects such as age distribution, gender composition, caste structure, educational status, and occupational patterns, offering a comprehensive understanding of the village’s socio-economic profile.

Age and Gender Composition:

The surveyed population of Abhaneri village exhibits distinct patterns in terms of age and gender. A notable feature is the predominance of male-headed households, reflecting a strong patriarchal structure within the community. All 122 surveyed households reported male heads, indicating limited female participation in decision-making roles.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of the population (65.57%) falls within the 40–60 years age group, suggesting a mature and economically active

demographic. The 20–40 years age group constitutes 18.85%, representing the younger and more dynamic segment of the population. Meanwhile, individuals aged 60 years and above account for 15.57%, highlighting the presence of a significant elderly population.

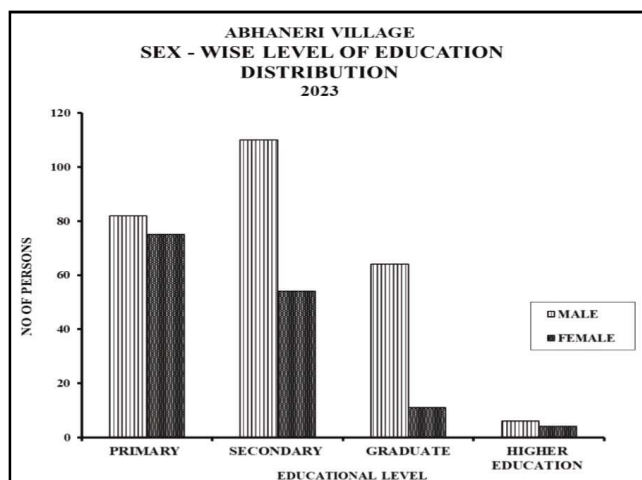
Caste Composition:

The caste composition of Abhaneri village reflects considerable social diversity. The survey indicates that 47.54% of the population belongs to Other Backward Classes (OBC), making it the largest group. The General caste accounts for 40.98% of the population, while Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) represent 4.92% and 5.73%, respectively. A small proportion (0.83%) falls under the ‘Others’ category.

This diverse caste structure highlights the need for inclusive development strategies that address the specific socio-economic challenges faced by different groups, particularly marginalized communities.

Educational Status and Literacy:

Literacy, defined as the ability to read and write with understanding, is a key indicator of socio-economic development. According to the survey, the literacy rate in Abhaneri village stands at 76.31% among individuals aged 7 years and above. A gender-wise analysis reveals that the male literacy rate is higher at 78.91%, compared to 72% for females, indicating a gender gap in education. Out of 406 literate individuals, 262 are male and 144 are female (Fig. 4).



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of sampled data

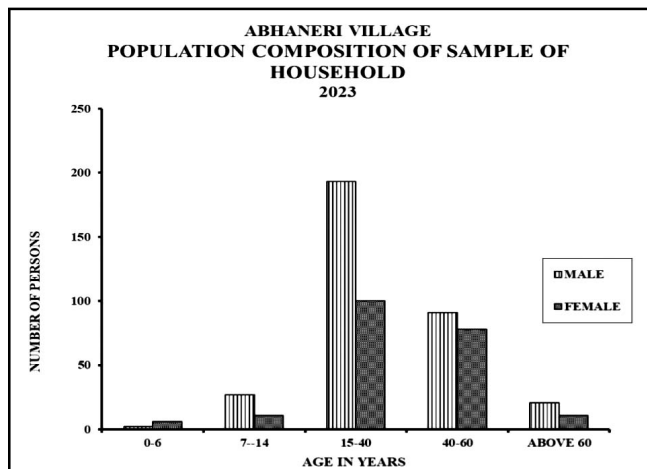
Fig. 4 : Abhaneri Village Sex-wise Level of Education Distribution

The survey also suggests varying levels of educational attainment, including below lower-secondary, upper-secondary, and tertiary education. Understanding these levels is crucial for designing targeted educational programs aimed at reducing disparities and promoting inclusive growth.

Population Composition and Dependency:

The population composition further reinforces the patriarchal nature of the village, with all households led by males. The concentration of individuals in the 40–60 years age group indicates a stable and experienced workforce contributing significantly to the village economy.

However, gender disparities are evident. A large proportion of women, particularly in the 40–60 age group, have limited economic participation and are often dependent on male family members. Younger females (below 14 years) and elderly women also exhibit high dependency levels (Fig. 5).



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of sampled data

Fig. 5 : Abhaneri Village Population Composition of Sample of Household

Addressing these disparities is essential for achieving balanced development. Enhancing access to education and employment opportunities for women, along with improving care systems for the elderly, can significantly

contribute to social equity and community well-being.

Occupational Structure:

The occupational structure of Abhaneri village is predominantly agrarian. The survey reveals that 75.68% of the population is engaged in the primary sector, mainly agriculture, which forms the backbone of the local economy. The secondary sector employs 11.47% of the population, indicating some involvement in industrial or manufacturing activities. Meanwhile, 9.8% are engaged in the tertiary sector, including services such as transport, real estate, and social work. The heavy reliance on agriculture highlights both the strength and vulnerability of the village economy. While it reflects traditional expertise, it also underscores the need for diversification. Promoting skill development and expanding opportunities in secondary and tertiary sectors can enhance economic resilience and sustainability.

Conclusion:

The socio-economic profile of Abhaneri village reveals a community rooted in traditional structures, with a strong dependence on agriculture and a pronounced patriarchal system. While the literacy rate is relatively encouraging, gender disparities persist in both education and economic participation. For sustainable development, it is essential to promote gender equality, improve educational access, diversify occupational opportunities, and address the needs of dependent groups. A balanced and inclusive approach will help enhance the overall quality of life and ensure long-term socio-economic progress in the village.

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