

The Effect of Pandemic on Shilpgram of Patna, Bihar

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Abstract

Handicraft have always been a vital part of our rich culture incorporating various folklore, locally available raw material, it acts as source of income for a large population of landless and poor. Handicraft sector has seen multiple rise and downfall in market demand and needs through the years. The effect of the recent pandemic has led to a loss in the handicraft sector too. The handicraft development in the country was only significantly improving but the recent pandemic has created a larger gap between the crafts people and the market. The study is based on the effects of pandemic on the craftsmen in Shilpgram, with respect to the procurement of raw material, process, and generation of new designs. The methodology used for the study is based on indirect participative interviews and physical survey of the crafts and their designs available in the Shilpgram in Patna city. The study illustrates that the states like Bihar having a single craft centre in capital city Patna, which was completely shut since the lockdown is leading the craftsmen to discontinue the craft and look for alternative works. The conclusion also discusses various recommendations for the sustenance of the crafts and craftspeople.

I. Introduction

India have witnessed a rich craft diversity based on various social and economical value. Craft sector have always played vital role in rich cultural and heritage values. This got involved with time based on locally available raw material and demand, incorporating all folklore. (Jagatramka & Prasad, 2021) Handicraft sector with evolution have witness numerous numbers of problem from lack of raw material, improper marketing techniques due to lack in design interventions, and lack in process of marketing and many uncertain calamities. A report on the National Skill Development Corporation, by KPMG has estimated that approximately 7.3 million people depend on the handicraft and allied activities for livelihood (NSDC 2013-17, NSDC 2017-22). States like Bihar have large percent of the economy based on agriculture and most of the poor sector and landless people depend on handicrafts industry based on agriculture residue as raw material. The state of Bihar is known for crafts such as madhubani painting, Manjusha painting, Tikuli painting, Sikki craft, paper miche, sujani craft, stone craft, metal craft, and bamboo craft. These crafts are practised in various parts of the state. (KPMG, 2017-2022)

Bihar

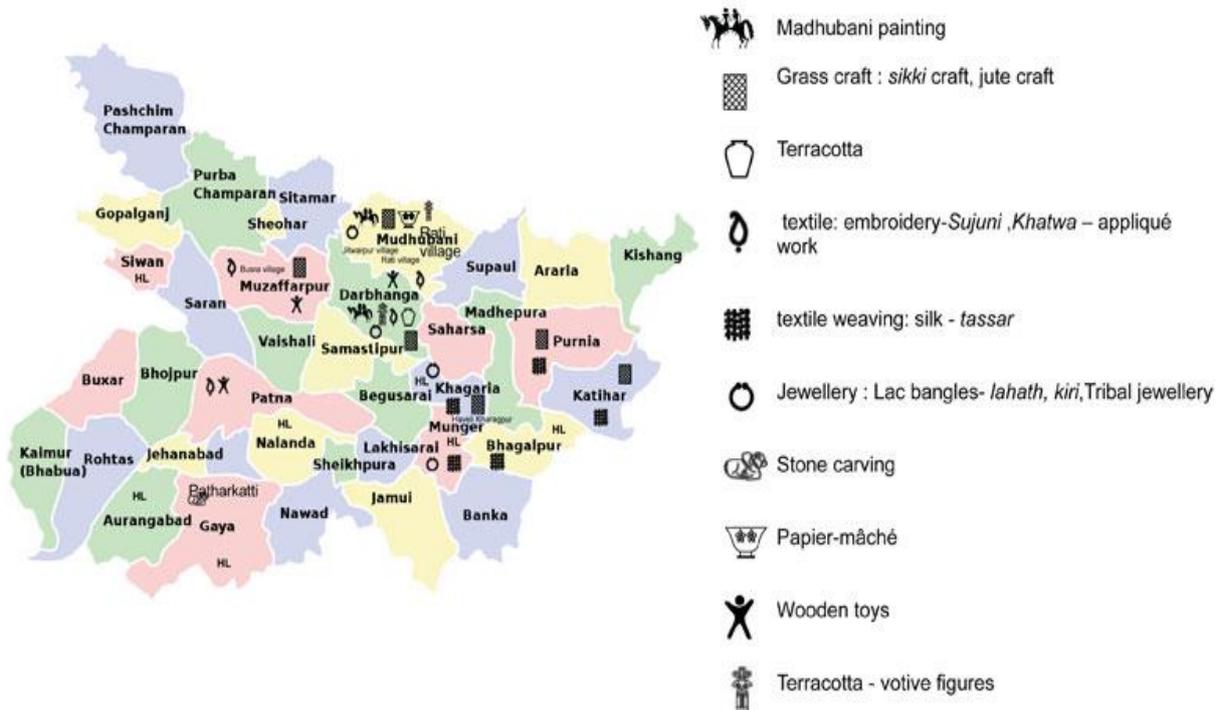


Figure 1. Crafts map of Bihar

Crafts of Bihar have demand across the country, but uncertain pandemic of COVID-19 forced them to make a step back to the past where craft society was emerging into the market. Loss of raw material because of pandemic have reduced the production capacity and facing a lot of challenges about making a network again and spreading it. On a usual time 100 to 150 individuals and traders used to visit handicraft shops, but now it has reduced to zero because of pandemic. (Tanwani, 2021)

II. Aim & Objective of the study

The aim of the study is to understand the present situation of the craftsmen in the shilpgram at Patna city. The study focuses on the procurement and availability of raw material, the process followed and the sources of marketing for the craftspeople at the shilpgram. The study also elaborates the new strategies adapted by the craftspeople for advancement in post pandemic period.

III. Methodology

The methodology of the study is based on physical observation of the crafts in shilpgram. The present status of the procurement of raw material, the design methods and process of the crafts and there marketing opportunities is recorded using one to one direct participative interview, using structured questionnaire.

IV. Crafts at Shilpgram of Patna

As an initiative under the Bihar Livelihood Promotions Society(BRLPS), in the year 2018 the shilpgram Mahila Producer Company Limited, was initiated. The shilpgram is a house to various crafts of Bihar such as Madhubani, Sikki craft, paper miche, Bhojpuri painting and tikuli painting. The crafts are majorly painting based crafts.

Madhubani painting is also known as Mithali painting, the name of the art form is adapted from the region of its practices. It is built of various geometrical patterns, folklore, day to day activities and other mythological context.

The Madhubani painting is usually seen in red, blue, yellow white and black colours. The locals use the paintings on wall, cloth and floors. Sikki craft, is built using grass mostly found in Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. The grass is weaved in different patterns to create various 3d objects such as bowls, ornaments, and lampshades. Tikuli painting is an ancestral art of Patna, it has been a part of the culture since the mayura dynasty. The painting was initially done on the 'bindi'. Tikuli art initially was created using glass which was shaped like a balloon over which gold work was pasted on it. The intensive process of creating tikuli usually took seven to ten days. In ancient times the crafts was usually used by the royal family. With the changing economic background and increasing cost of the raw materials used for the craft, it was transformed to a newer form where the art of tikuli was merged with madhubani and used to make decorative plates, coasters, table mats, etc.



Figure 2. Live demonstration of Tikuli art at art and craft fair (Source: Author)

This development in design led to increase in the scope for creativity for the artists. In the recent years, tikuli painting is practiced over hardboards and mdf pieces cut in round, rectangular or square shapes. Figure 2, shows the craftsmen exhibiting the tikuli art.

Bhojpuri paintings, are known for two different typologies locally called Kohbar and Pidhiya. Kohbar paintings depict love and gratification. This type of painting portrays the marriage of lord shiva and goddess Parvati. The pidhiya craft portrays the bond shared between siblings.



Figure 3: Bhojpuri painting (Source: Author)

In the recent years the Sarjana Nyas community in Bihar is working towards increasing the reach of the art to the masses to revive the craft. Figure 3 shows the form of Bhojpuri painting. The other crafts such as paper miche, wood carving and bamboo craft are also widely practised in the shilpgram.

V. Effect of pandemic on craftspeople in Shilpgram

The crafts under the pandemic period have had different outcomes in both the progressive lockdowns. Since crafts majorly are a part of the non-essential sector, the lockdown period was of struggle for most of the craftspeople. The change of environment initially led to the loss of recognition to the crafts which during the second lockdown period was led towards revival through 'vocal for local' impact. The number of craftspeople surveyed for the study in the shilpgram were 30 craftspeople at apprentice and master craftsmen level. The various crafts that were surveyed were paper miche, bamboo craft, madhubani painting, Bhojpuri painting, stone craft and wood craft. The crafts at the shilpgram were flourishing before the pandemic period. The craftsmen received bulk orders from international as well as the local markets, which helped them survive their needs. As the pandemic came with an initial lockdown of 68 days, all the items prepared for the pre orders were stocked with no transaction. The craftspeople faced rejection from all sources. There were no government schemes or initiatives that focused on the survival of the crafts. (British Council, 2021) (Ahmad, 2020)

The impact of covid-19 on the craft and craft organisation, shilpgram of Patna was based on the one-to-one interview with the crafts people and organisation members. There were almost 60% of the craftspeople who had to deal with deadstock, 25% artisans faced lost of employment, 70% of the income was reduced, 80% of the craftspeople faced issues with payments from the buyers, 85% of the craftspeople faced issues in procurement of raw material for building the craft, 58% face cancellation of orders from the buyers, 78% of the craftsmen felt that their work was impacted negatively and 85% of the craftspeople were non accessible to micro finances (Figure 4).

The crafts have faced a setback due to the pandemic. Initiative such a 'vocal for local' and 'Atamnirbhar bharat' are promoting local crafts and helping them gain the similar recognition as the earlier stages. The pandemic has led to multiple negative impacts on the

crafts at the shilpgram, however it has pushed them for few positive aspects such as using natural dyes since the chemical dyes were not available. The craftspeople while at home had the younger generation with raised inquisitiveness to create the craft and learn more about it.

The initial opening of the lockdown gave opportunity to the craftspeople to interact with various influencers of social media which helped create awareness and acknowledge the basics of living an indigenous lifestyle through crafts.

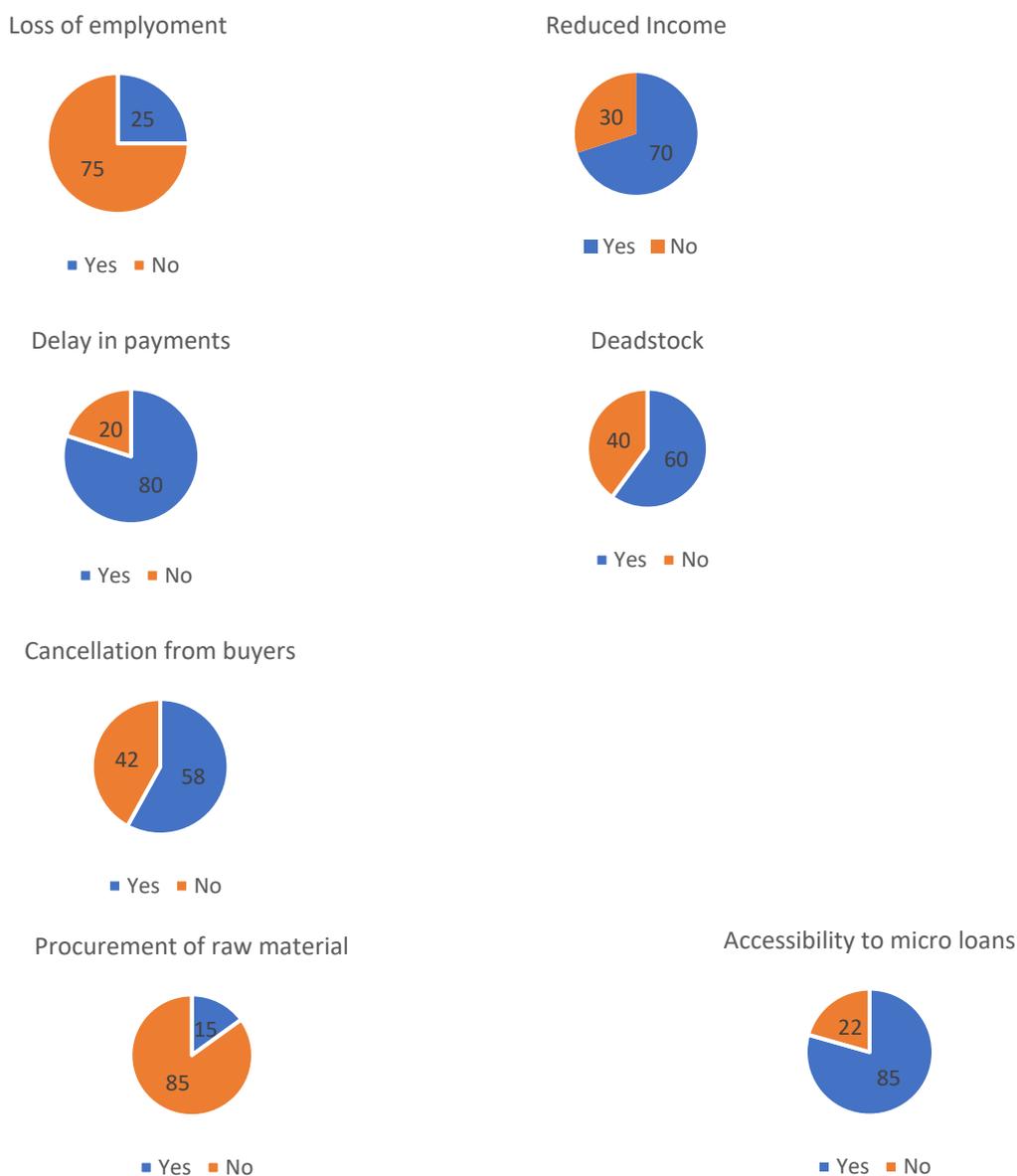


Figure 4: Charts showing impact of covid 19 on the craftspeople

i. Issues identified by the craftspeople

The crafts at the shilpgram were faced with certain issues during the lockdown. These issues have been faced by the craftspeople and craft organisation. The issues have been identified through interviews and physical observation of the shilpgram.

ii. Procurement of raw material

The closed markets and facility centres disconnected the craftspeople from procuring the raw material. In few cases the craftsmen were not able to get the chemical colours and hence were forced to go back to the basics of creating natural dyes and using them for their production. However few craftsmen were unable to create products due to the unavailability of materials.

iii. *Reduced income for the craftspeople*

The various initiatives by the government and the NGOs, along with the continuous efforts of the craftspeople the craft industry has started to flourish, the enforcement of lockdown due to the covid -19 has led to decline in the income as the orders were either cancelled or delayed.

iv. *Delay in payments*

The pandemic situation led to cancellation and delay in payments from the buyers to the craftspeople. As the products were also lying in the as deadstock at the shilpram.

v. *Accessibility of funds*

The pandemic situation led to inaccessible funds, as the government and other NGO funds were not provided during the lockdown, where one could survive the losses and take care of the family. Simultaneously, there was no provision of micro loan financing for the craftspeople.

vi. *Lack of development*

The rapid changes in the lifestyle and the market looking at only essential needs in the initial period of covid 19, the craftspeople were unable to create a efficient designs or new designs to match the present situation.

VI. Responsive measures taken by the craftspeople

The pandemic came along with a lot of issues and problems for the craftspeople and the crafts. Although there were many problems that led to the fall of the crafts in various instances, there was a change in the perception and approach of the craftspeople to develop products and act in concurrence with the ongoing pandemic.

vii. *Introduction of new products*

The prevailing covid 19, led to the use of face masks. This was seen as an opportunity by the craftspeople, where masks with madhubani paintings were introduced and sold in the market (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Face mask with madhubani art.

i. New art form of the madhubani art

The new covid lifestyle has led the craftspeople to use the present daily routine activities to depict in their art form. These art forms were also used for awareness campaign by multiple authorities. Figure 6 & 7 shows samples of such art works.



Figure 6. Lady washing hands in Madhubani painting



Figure 7. Market scene with covid appropriate behaviour depicted in madhubani painting

ii. Adapting to indigenous methods

The limitation of availability of raw material led the craftspeople to adapt to the indigenous methods for creating the crafts. The limitation of the materials is also led to new styles of craft creation.

iii. Awareness to the younger generation

The craftspeople while working from home were able to inspire and educated the younger generation about their craft and create enthusiasm where in some cases the younger generation has learnt the basis of the craft.

VII. Conclusion

Artisans and craftspeople are third in the list of poor communities in India as most of the artifacts and crafts items are categorized under non- essential products. The call of “Vocal for local” and “Atmanirbhar Bharat” and Government Expo and emporiums has provided a little visibility to the crafts sector, but they leave most of the rural craftspeople unrecognised and unaided. The scenario of recent Covid 19 pandemic lockdown was even more challenging as the artisans and craftspeople of Bihar struggled to find any business and stayed out of work for almost 3 months. The orders placed prior to lockdown accumulated as the buyer failed to collect order due to several reasons. This increased the financial burden on the artisans and craftspeople to a large extent. Most of them remained unemployed in the subsequent lockdown period. The situation even worsened when there was little or no help from government and other communities to support them. Unemployment, restricted finance, and reduced demand from consumers ceased the procurement of new raw materials by the craftspeople. This generated a need to take some adaptive measures by the craftspeople to sustain the period. New products in the form of Madhubani masks, new Madhubani paintings and organic khadi items

were developed to grab the attention of consumers. Post lockdown strategies like modern marketing and advertisements, local distribution network and online business were implemented for vending of unsold inventory and to increase the demand. Further lack of raw material led to adopt older method of obtaining natural dye from flowers. This helped the artisans and craftspeople to some extent, but there is a certain need for policy level intervention for upliftment of this dying community.

There is a certain requirement for development of an institutional framework at local level for providing them with the infrastructural assistance, training, and financial assistance in form of microloans. The sector is placed under MSME, where there is a need to provide job security to this community by formalizing the job tenure and fixing periodic remuneration. This will provide them with social security and help in the overall upliftment of the activity. There should be provision of regular workshops and training at the shilp gram to enhance the quality of products and exposure of craftspeople. They should be educated about the modern marketing strategies, presentation of their works at various platforms and various selling modes available. The shilp gram should also work on intervention and innovation in art and craft sector through various development programmes. Cluster partnership and collaboration is one of such measure to increase the coordinated activities and innovation in the sector.

The state Nodal Agency should create a mechanism for the provision of revolving fund to take care of operation and maintenance of various infrastructural assets in the shilp gram. The artisans and craftspeople should be considered as a prime stakeholder and should participate in any decision-making process for the shilp gram. There should be periodic reviews of these shilp grams by the constituted technical committee to monitor their activities and infrastructural requirements. This will increase the accountability of the shilp gram. Further inspirations from ongoing craft development models from other states such as “One District One Product” scheme of Uttar Pradesh which aims to encourage such indigenous and specialized products and crafts can be studied to understand its strength and applicability in Bihar as well. There is a need to create an ecosystem for development and upliftment of art and craft with an aim to preserve and promote craftspeople and artisans of India.

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