

## **Empowering the Handicraft Artisans through ODL Mode**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Indian Handicrafts are an integral part of country's rich cultural heritage and play a significant role in the national economy. In India, approximately 69 lakh people are engaged in Handicraft and allied activities. Handicraft is an unorganized cottage industry which faces several problems in the country such as low literacy and education levels, lack of modern/technological skills, and lack of sufficient finance. National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) along with the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, took initiative to train and upgrade the skills of the Handicraft Artisans and their children belonging to scheduled caste category, engaged in the traditional craft of Indian embroidery. The project initiated with the enrolment of 100 learners in the city of Varanasi, (Uttar Pradesh, India) with intensive training workshops in core as well as in the areas of entrepreneurship and communication skills.

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed to take feedback from the learners to measure the effectiveness of the training program. The questionnaire was administered individually to 78 trainee participants, and their feedback was assessed. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to present the findings of the study conducted to understand the socio-economic profile of the enrolled learners, evaluate the effectiveness of the training program and, how it has benefitted the learners with special mention of the success stories of few participants after completion of the training. This study will pave the way for planning further needs based training and programs for the upliftment of Handicraft artisans.

Keywords: Handicraft, Artisans, Embroidery, Traditional Indian Craft

## INTRODUCTION

India has a rich cultural heritage of diverse kinds of Handicrafts, such as embroidery, pottery, weaving, and many others. These unique handicrafts represent the cultural identity of the people who make it. The Indian Handicraft Sector plays a significant role in Indian Economy as about 7 million people are engaged in this unorganized sector. The Handicraft industry is cost-effective because of the low investments required in terms of finance and the great potential for export of the various Handicraft products. The international market for Indian embroidery products is estimated at about rupees 75 billion, with a growth rate of nearly 18% per annum. The major importers of Indian embroidered products include USA, UK, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Hence it is an important foreign exchange earner for our country. (Bennur and Gavai, 2015).

The craft of Indian embroidery has admirers all over the world. Almost every state of India has a distinct style of embroidery based on the cultural history of the region. The beauty of Indian embroidery lies in its fineness, creative patterns, and use of beautiful vibrant colours. These skills have been passed on from generation to generation, and kept evolving with cultural exchanges, change in trends, and experiences. The handicraft sector has challenges of working capital, limited exposure to new technologies, and lack of market intelligence.

Illiteracy of artisans is another crucial factor for leaving their family occupations, as they are not aware of the various policies and strategies of marketing and various artisan programs organized by the state and central government. Kumar & Kumar, (2018) in their research study established that most of artisans have no information about the different schemes of handicrafts. This is the biggest hurdle to the growth and development of the sector. The office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, GoI, is providing a variety of opportunities to the handicraft artisans in terms of domestic marketing platform by organizing Gandhi Shilp Bazaar, Crafts Bazaar, etc. and handicraft exhibitions in prominent shopping malls of the country. International marketing platform is also offered to national awardees through participation in international marketing events. The handicraft awards namely Shilp Guru award, National award, National Merit Certificates and Design Innovation award are given for recognition and encouragement to outstanding craft persons to maintain excellence in craftsmanship and keeping alive our old traditions. The need is to create awareness among the artisans to avail these facilities for their benefit. (Yadav, 2012)

Many of the traditional handicraft artisans are migrating to work as labourers or into other unskilled jobs, mainly due to meagre earnings and exploitation by the middlemen. As Patel et al. (2017) in his research established that middle men take a substantial share of profit, leaving very little for the artisans. The current state of the Indian artisans shows a need for honing the skills of this workforce along with enabling them with entrepreneurial skills. The national plans also support the same and skill development of artisans has been receiving focused attention. This endeavour would familiarize the artisan with the latest technology and designs that will upgrade the product to meet the international standards.

There is a need to tap the immense employment potential of this workforce which forms a key part of the unorganized sector. *Niti Aayog* acknowledges the fact that the unorganized sector that constitutes about 93% of the workforce doesn't have a structured system to support acquiring or upgrading of skills. Training needs in this sector are multi-skill oriented and very diverse (Jadhav, 2013). With an increasing emphasis on quality, the demand for skilled labour has increased. The development of these segments in India is socially significant in terms of creating more employment opportunities, women empowerment, education and eradication of poverty and hardships. Handicraft production, based on traditional skills and with low investment requirements, is one of the few possibilities to help them increase their income.

National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is running a special training program for the Handicraft artisans and their children supported by the Ministry of Textiles, GoI. The main objectives of this program are to register and train learners in the area of Indian Embroidery, improvement of their vocational ability to help them learn and earn better wages and to retain and promote the traditional Indian art of embroidery.

The present study, based on the feedback of the trainees of the first batch of the program, reveals that there is a dire need for designing relevant training programs for the artisans to help them update their skills and keep pace with the changing market trends. The study indicated a high satisfaction rate of learners about the delivery of this program, and most of the learners were highly motivated due to the exciting design of course curriculum and proper conduct of classes with appropriate monitoring and evaluation.

**Objectives of the study are to:**

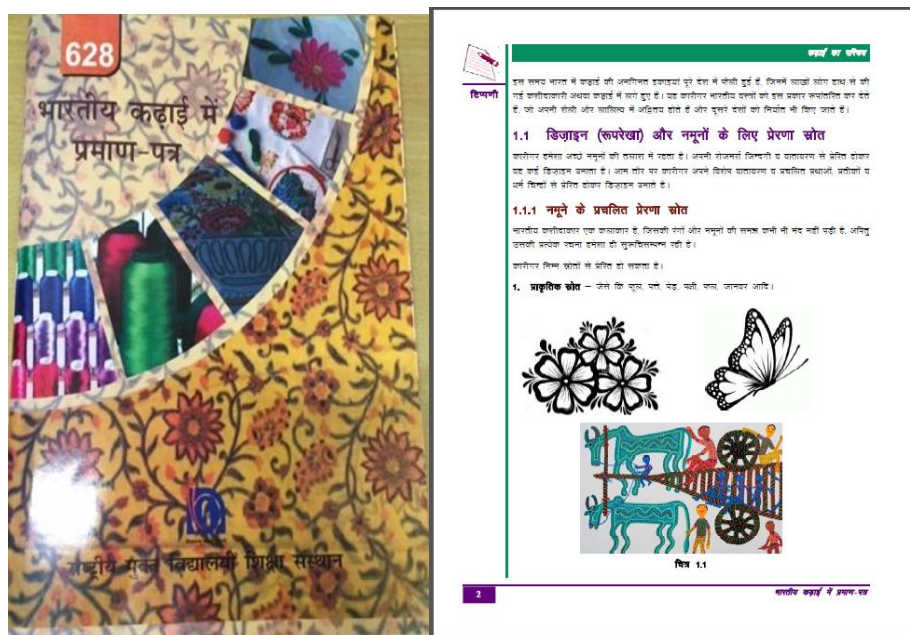
- study the socio – economic conditions of the Handicraft Artisans.
- evaluate the effectiveness of the training program.
- know about the satisfaction levels of the learners after the training.
- receive feedback from the trainees to improve the program.

**BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT:**

The project was taken up by NIOS in collaboration with the Ministry of Textiles, GOI, to train 1500 artisans belonging to scheduled caste category in the traditional craft of Indian Embroidery. It was decided to initiate the project in the city of Varanasi as this being one of the clusters of Handicraft artisans. Preliminary survey and discussions with the practitioners, trainers, grassroot level workers, and potential employers revealed the poor qualification status and the training needs of these artisans. The curriculum was designed by a committee of experts having representation from Textile Sector Skill Council, Ministry of Textiles, trainers, employers and teachers. Each region of India is famous for its unique embroidery technique, like *Phulkari* of Punjab, *Kantha* of Bengal, *Zardozi*, and *Chikankari* of Uttar Pradesh or mirror work of Rajasthan. An effort was made to cover the traditional embroideries of different states in the curriculum of this course, and the self learning material was developed.

**Course Structure:**

- A. Course Development: The development of the course material started with the assessment of needs of the learners followed by the development of curriculum having specific, measurable, and time bound learning outcomes for each topic. The course was made as per National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) guidelines and was compliant to job role “Hand Embroiderer” at level 4. The Self Learning Material was developed in Hindi language as this is the local language of Varanasi. The book was made colourful and a lot of graphics were given to explain concepts, and to make it interesting. (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Images showing book cover and a sample page of the course book

B. Course Duration: The total course duration is of 240 hours, which includes:

1. Personal Contact Programs: 150 hours (5 hours @30 days)
  - Theory - 45 hours
  - Practical- 105 hours
2. Self-study : 90 hours
3. Final Examination: Theory - 1.5 hours
  - Practical- 3 hours

The learners had to attend face to face classes for 150 hours including both theory and practical. An outcome-based day-wise training schedule was developed to ensure the quality and uniformity of the training in different centres/batches. Apart from the core skills in embroidery techniques, the learners were also given training on various aspects of entrepreneurship, as use of technology in their business, keeping financial records, banking transactions, resource management and information about various schemes of the government. Communication skills including basic language skills, oral communication, marketing and sales promotions, etc. were also covered during the training.

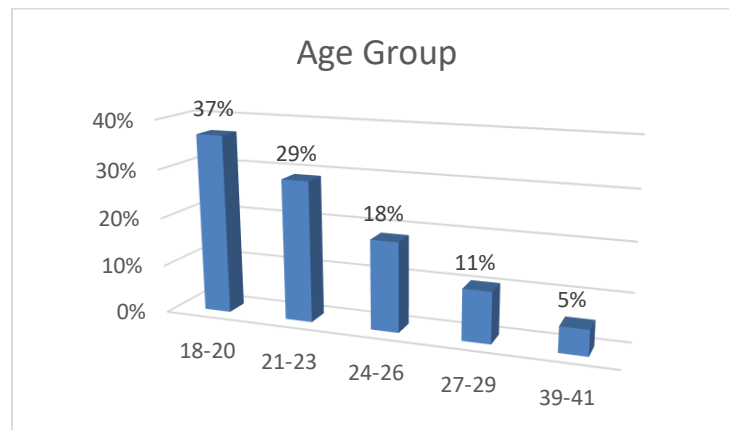
The examination scheme was planned to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the learner. The evaluation had three components, including (a) theory, (b) practical and (c) internal assessment. The internal assessment of hundred marks included weightage for attendance, projects, class interaction, and behaviour/punctuality. The learners had to complete five projects during the training and include them in their portfolios as a part of internal assessment.

### TRAINING PROGRAM:

The first phase of training started with a batch of hundred trainees belonging to SC category in the city of Varanasi, which is famous for the *zari zardozi* craft of embroidery. The Handicraft Service Centre (HSC), Varanasi under the Ministry of Textiles was granted accreditation as the Accredited Vocational Institute (AVI) for the implementation of this program. The learners were divided in to four batches of 25 learners each. The Ministry of Textiles, GoI, funded the entire training wherein the trainee artisans were also provided with per day wage compensation to ensure better attendance. Payments were made directly to the account of the beneficiaries after the completion of the training to avoid any delays and ensure transparency. NIOS Regional Centre, Allahabad closely monitored the training as Varanasi comes under its region. A Whatsapp group of study centre coordinator, NIOS Regional Director, Allahabad, and concerned officials from the NIOS headquarter was created to facilitate the monitoring of the training conducted in the different batches. The study centre had to submit daily attendance sheets along with pictures on this group (Figure



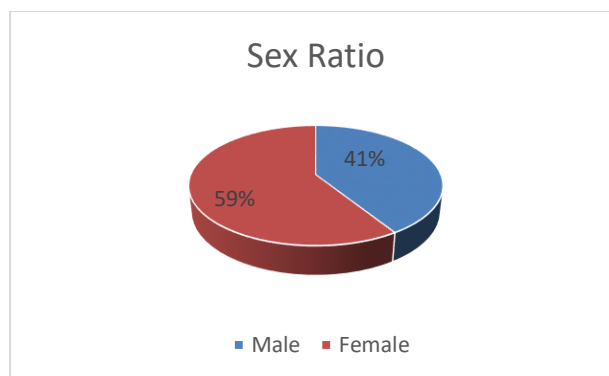
## 1. Age Group



*Figure 3: Graph showing the age profile of the learners*

Majority of the learners, i.e., 37% belonged to the age group of 18 to 20 years, and another 29% were from 21-23 years age group, as shown in *Figure 3*. The participation decreased with the increase in age as 18% were from 24-26 years age group followed by 11% from 27-29 years and only 5% from 39-41 years age group respectively. This trend of enrolment reflects a greater interest of the youth towards learning and working on their skills in this traditional art. However, there were participants from the older age group as well who wanted to update their knowledge and learn more about marketing. Kaware, (2017) also emphasizes that it is not only the growing young workforce that needs to be trained with the marketing skills but also the middle-aged who lack the required competency to move up the ladder of growth.

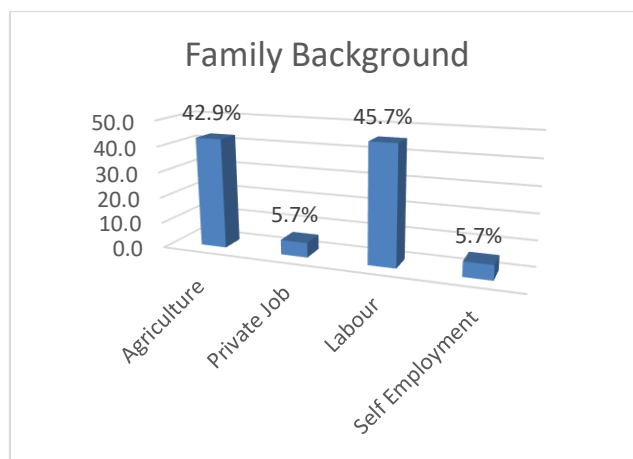
## 2. Gender distribution



*Figure 4: Pie chart showing the gender distribution of the learners*

59% of the participants were females as compared to 41% males. Women form a very huge chunk of workers in this sector and produce delicate Handicrafts and embroidery work. Larger participation of females in this program, where they are being compensated for the loss of wages, indicates their interest in improving their skills. Also this profession requires low capital investment and can be started from home seems to be an attraction for the women. It is anticipated that more such training programs with provision of wage compensation and which can be setup from home, can help bring in more female learners thereby helping them in improving their skills, earn better livelihood and take better care of family.

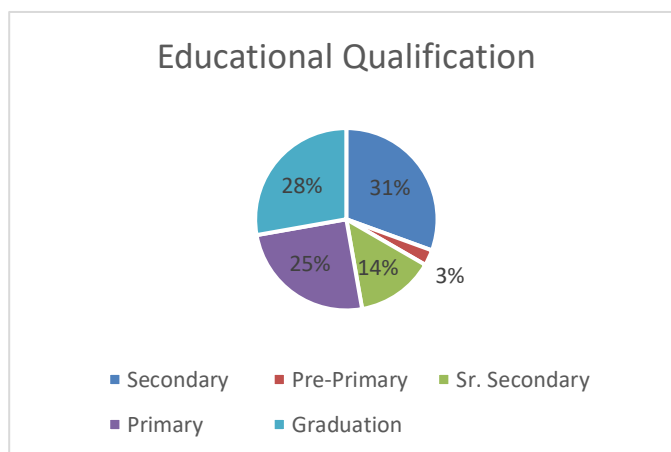
## 3. Family Background



**Figure 5:** Graph showing family background based on the occupation

While 42.9% of the parents of the participants were working in the agriculture sector, other 45.7% were working as labourers (Figure 5). A small number of the parents, 5.7% were self-employed, and another 5.7% were working in the private sector. According to Jadhav, (2013) due to the low wages, lack of credit facilities, the uncertainty of workload throughout the year and inability to sustain a basic lifestyle, the artisans take up a variety of alternate occupations. However, participation in such training program also indicate that the artisans were willing to take up this profession on full time basis with the hope that enhanced skills and better exposure to markets will help them to earn better livelihoods.

#### 4. Educational Qualification:



**Figure 6:** Pie chart showing the educational qualification of the learners

The interesting finding that came out was the better educational background of these learners as 28% have studied till graduation, 14% till Senior Secondary, and 31% till Secondary (Figure 6). While the artisans are becoming aware of the value of education, they equally are becoming conscious of the importance of the traditional craft that offers tremendous opportunities for growth.

The good educational background of the trainees was very encouraging however as the participants were from the urban and semi urban areas could be the reason for this. As NIOS has been assigned to conduct training for 1500 artisans in total under this project, a comprehensive study of the social, economic and educational profile of these learners will give a good insight into the educational status of artisans which in turn can help in the designing of future training programs for them.

#### 5. Background of the learners:

All the trainees were living in urban and semi-urban areas of Varanasi.

## B. Feedback on Training Program

### 1. Quality of Training:



*Figure 7: Graph showing training feedback as given by the learners*

The quality of the training was tested on various parameters as shown in *Figure 7*. It shows that 95% of the trainees were highly satisfied with the overall conduct of the training program and the quality of the training. 97.50% felt that the time allocation to the theory and practical classes was sufficient, and 97.50% believed that this training had helped them in improving their employability. The efforts put in by NIOS also ensured the highest standards of training quality. Master craftsman trainer was a national award winner. Detailed daily tracking of program with respect to attendance and daily outcomes also ensure good quality of program.

### 2. Benefits from Training

The learners were highly satisfied with the training program. They learned about the various embroidery crafts practiced in different states of India, apart from the *zari-zardozi* work they were familiar with. The modules on the entrepreneurship helped them learn more about business and e-marketing in particular. The components of functional Hindi helped to build their self-confidence and prepared them to present themselves and their work in various forums. The trainees felt that they now have better knowledge and understanding of designs, creative use of colors and stitches. Almost all of them said that the training program had helped them to know about various government schemes, taking bank loans, entrepreneurship, and also the use of technology in their business.

This first batch of learners appeared in the examination conducted in the month of April-May 2019 and the results of the same have been declared in the end of July 2019. All the artisans have informed that they have been able to enhance their knowledge and skills with this training program though it is too early to see the actual impact of the training on their income generation. Another feedback from these learners will be taken after six months to have more inputs on the ways they were able to enhance their income.

The training program had proved beneficial to all the participants, but two of them, Aashiqui Kumari and Manasi needs special mention as both the sisters have been able to open their own boutique after the completion of the training program. Kumari was also one of the five candidates who received a certificate for improved toolkit from honourable prime minister of India; Shri Narendra Modi, during the Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas organized in Varanasi in January 2019. They have been able to use their embroidery skills learned in this program to earn their livelihood.



Similarly, another candidate of the training program, Aradhana, who is 25 years old, has been able to open up her own boutique at her home and is providing embroidery and stitching services to her neighborhood clients.

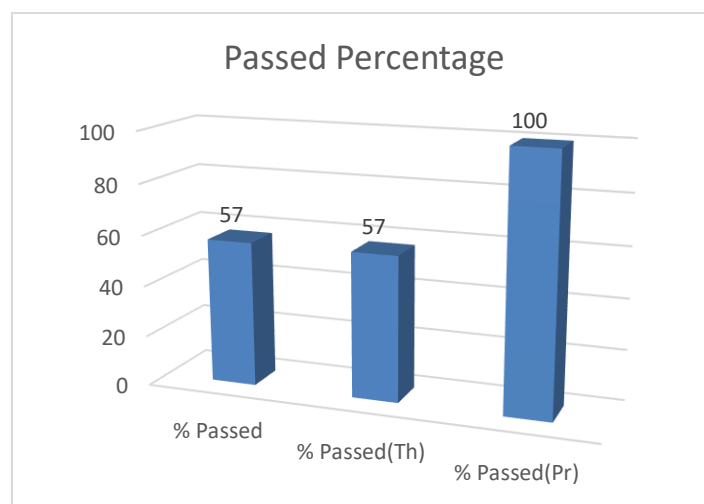
All the three learners were immensely benefited by the exposure that training program provided about different government financing schemes and infrastructure setup along with the enhancement of skill and confidence to believe in themselves and take the initiative and stand on their own feet.

### 3. Suggested Improvements in training:

Regarding the improvements required in the training, mixed responses were received. Some of the trainees suggested that the training should be of longer duration so that they get mastery of the skills. Secondly, they wanted the final examination for both theory and practical should be conducted immediately after the training program of 30 days, while NIOS conducts its examination for vocational courses after every six months.

This course is NSQF compliant as per job role Hand Embroiderer of 240 hours duration, with a face-to-face training of 150 hours including theory and practical. The provision of on-demand examination for vocational courses may be taken into consideration so that the learners are able to appear in the exam as soon as they complete the compulsory face-to-face training and mandatory hours of the course.

### C. Examination Results



*Figure 8: Graph showing pass percentage of the learners*

Out of the 98 learners, who appeared in exam, 57% have passed the examination. However, 27 learners did not appear in the theory exam although they cleared the practical examination held earlier. 15 of the learners have failed in their theory exam. For both the absentees and the failed candidates, the marks in the Practical exam and Internal Assessment will be carried forward and they have the option to reappear in the next public examination conducted by NIOS.

### CONCLUSION:

The data reveals that most of the trainees and their parents were engaged in agricultural activities. More number of females as compared to males participated in the training program, which is very encouraging. The study revealed that most of the participants were educated till secondary level or above. The learners were satisfied with the overall conduct of the training program, including infrastructural facilities and the quality of training amongst others.

### WAY FORWARD

The enrolment of learners for the second phase of the training has already been initiated. A list of 350 learners from the districts of Varanasi, Chandauli and Jaunpur has already been submitted to NIOS by the Handicraft Service Centre, Varanasi. The training will be initiated after the sanction of budget from the ministry and the other formalities.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is suggested that a follow up survey study may be done to see how the training has helped the learners to improve their employability.
- It is suggested that the system of on demand examination in the Vocational Courses may also be explored.
- It is suggested that wider publicity should be given to these schemes both by NIOS and MoT so that it reaches the artisans in need and they may avail the benefit.
- It is suggested that a job portal can be initiated by NIOS/ MoT with the location and trade wise availability of skilled workforce with their contact details so that the prospective employers can employ them and similarly trainees could also look for openings of their interest.

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