RESTORING ARTISAN ESTEEM: 'ÂTM SAMMĀN' (Hindi)

Author

Ms. Suruchi Banerjee Dhasmana, Assistant Professor, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Mumbai, India

Email: suruchi.dhasmana@nift.ac.in

Keywords

Artisan Psychographics, Repositioning, Self-Esteem, Social Media, Entrepreneurship

Abstract

The history of culture is often studied through the kaleidoscope of the crafts that represent the visual, social or structural embodiment of any given era. Craft is intrinsically self-evolutionary amidst all socio-economic and geo-political changes that affect the society they thrive in.

Historically, in most Eastern cultures, the monarchs and their courtiers played a pivotal role in promoting and fostering crafts. This uninterrupted series of patronage for indigenous crafts has dwindled since the seventeenth century as technological advancements of the western Industrial Revolution gained impetus and craftsmanship became a rarity across the globe. Since then, formally dedicated as well as tribal artisan communities have been shrinking and there are documented case studies of how their skillsets are being lost or diluted.

As the world has been painfully waking up to the unsustainable course of rampant industrialisation, the fashion industry has been responding to the trend by making gradual changes to business and marketing strategies. Even though the "Slow Fashion" Movement desperately tries to revive the lost interest in hand-crafted products amongst consumers, it is ironic that beyond monetary and infrastructural resuscitations, the artisans receive very little incentive to practise and pass on their knowledge to the next generation.

This research aims to look deeper into the psyche behind the commonly listed reasons for the poor morale amidst the Artisans, especially in the Indian subcontinent. Analysing secondary research on the psychographics of Artisan communities in conjunction with primary research summaries help identify the most common factors that are affecting such communities. Micro level analyses are made to document issues amongst artisan communities around their self-image, establishing identity and their vision for a future.

Furthermore, to find some pathways to achieve a sustainable growth, this research traces out of history, the reasons behind Artisans thriving before the Industrial Revolution.

This provides markers to strategically redesign the social and commercial structure within the framework of which the artisans could prosper and crafts could flourish once more.

While valuable lessons can be drawn from the past, the future is full of possibilities. An attempt to use technology, the internet and social media is discussed to revamp the image of an artisan. Tools like the formalisation of training and apprenticeship could be effectively combined with coaching artisans in entrepreneurship and using social media and branding techniques without any added cost or effort.

Beyond expansion of market for indigenous craft and felicitation of a selected few, more power and knowledge needs to be given to artisan communities so that they may take charge of their future and that of their crafts with confidence and pride. Apprentices too would thus aspire to train under great masters of their crafts and elite customers would throng to commission and own their masterpieces. The change in scenario will, however, come from within when the artisans find their voices and realise that geographic or linguistic borders need no longer hold them back.

> “Don't be satisfied with stories, how things have gone with others. Unfold your own myth.” Rumi, The Essential Rumi

Introduction

Human civilization has had a special place for artisans and craftsmen as they were the designers, innovators, engineers and skilled tradesmen that kept the society functional and pleasant. They toiled with pride for their craftsmanship and passed on their knowledge within their community.

The past two centuries have placed the livelihood and self-esteem of artisans in jeopardy. Industrialisation of the West and colonisation in the East reduced the indigenous crafts to mere tourist memorabilia (Dhasmana, 2018). This has had a deep impact on the psyche of the artisans invested in their crafts for generations. Their progeny is hesitant to pick up their parents’ tools.

More work is needed to change the mindset and many lessons need to be learnt from the past that can be used to revamp the existing model of craft sector. New technology and methodologies should be employed to give artisans a psychological makeover that would hopefully percolate into their trade practices as well as community perception.

To examine the genesis of deteriorating morale and image may find its root in how western concepts regarding ‘artist’ and ‘artisan’ were superimposed on eastern societies that relied on the artisan communities for artistic inputs as well as their core functional value.

Artist and Artisan

Art and craft have both been fields engaging the most creative of human minds since time immemorial. Yet the eastern and western societies have divergent views on distinctions between artists and artisans.

The western world has seen the artist and artisan as separate entities. Michelangelo was a celebrated sculptor but was cajoled into painting on the ceiling of what is now known as the 'Sistine Chapel.' While his masterpiece has been celebrated since its first public viewing in 1512 (Hoskin, 2017), attention is rarely drawn to an intricate layout of mosaic on the floor with to precision cut stones forming swirls and patterns that looks up at that very ceiling,. The Cosmatesque style of geometrical decorative inlay stonework or mosaic had adorned the floor long before paintings above it stole the limelight. Yet, there is a rare discussion about the key seven members of the Roman Cosmati family, who, over four generations, were skillful sculptors, architects and workers designing and constructing decorative geometric mosaic, mostly for church floors and sometimes walls and instituted the very style named after them (Coleman, 1908).

Figure 1. East side of the Chapel, from the altar end. (Courtesy: Toni Hoskin)

Figure 2. Mosaic floor (Courtesy of: http://employees.oneonta.edu/)

The disparity of accolades and acclaim given to the artist and artisan community is evident historically in western cultures. The Cambridge Dictionary in English illustrates the difference between artist and artisan:

> **artist:** noun [c]. *someone who paints, draws, or makes sculptures*
>
> **artisan:** noun [c]. *someone who does skilled work with their hands*
>
> Synonym: *craftsman*

Western schools of arts are heavily influenced in their perception of artists and artisans based on mediaeval concepts. Art appreciation teachers continue to glorify an artist as a person engages in a variety of creative arts but remains dedicated exclusively to the creative side, creating aesthetically work only for the pleasure and appreciation of the viewer or patrons, but without any functional value. Yet, the artist is revered as a visionary who could create a change in society.

Figure 3. Artist portrayed as visionaries and designers: Michelangelo Buonarroti (left), and Francesco Ferrucci designing the fortification of the city of Florence. (Illustration by Guglielmo De Sanctis)

Whereas, an artisan or craftsman is characterised as a manual worker (using limited mechanised tools) who learns, practises and specialises in a trade or a craft. During the Middle Ages, artisans organised themselves into guilds, each of which had a specialisation or trade. For example, carvers, shoemakers, carpenters, weavers, glass workers, masons, armourers, weapon makers, and so on. This construct of society valued them merely as skilled labour even if their products embody ingenuity, imaginative expression and story-telling.

Figure 4. Historical Depiction of artisan (Blacksmith, tailor) in the Middle Ages as a service class of skilled manual labour.

In reality, Artisans frequently persevere and endeavour for artistic excellence and use their craft for self-expression. In her article, 'Picasso Gets a Sewing Machine: Current Trends in Rabari Textiles' Judy Frater has recorded how women of the Rabari community in Kutch are creatively inspired (Tyabji, 2007, pp. 5 -17). Even without any formal schooling or literacy, girls in their teens would sit together to practise their stitching, "intent on learning the elements that comprise the unique Rabari style." They learnt outlining and developed the repertoire of accent stitches with characteristic combination of colours, patterns and motifs. Traditionally, the Rabari girls pursued excellence and have been intensely competitive amongst their peers. At one point, their efforts were so intensive that by the time their embroidered masterpieces were ready as their dowries, many of the girls were well into their thirties. The social situation was so badly affected that the *Nath*, a group of male Elders of the Rabari Community, decided to ban the use of traditionally intricate stitches so the women would not be allowed to persevere to create the most exquisite and intricately embroidered '*Ludi.'*

Figure 5. A Rabari artisan, Lachhuben, proudly displays her composition of Design and embroidery.
(Photo courtesy of Siddharth Das in 'Threads and Voices')

Primary research documentation around Luang Prabang, Phonsavan and Vientiane (Lao Textile Museum) continues to reaffirm the same sentiment of self-expression and creativity in the works of women handloom weavers who weave borders of sin in traditional geometric patterns but approach them with their own whimsical sensitivities to create a personal style.

Figure 6. Display of Whimsical Patterns hand-woven by Lao Weavers

Figure 7. Stilted homes are still common in Sub-urban and Rural Laos. The stilted spaces below the homes are used to keep livestock, two-wheeler vehicles and hand-looms for women to weave in spare times.

Historically, in most eastern cultures, the pioneers in the disciplines of art, design and craft were seldom distinguished and were treated at par. Artisans functioned as communities and supplied or built whatever the society or royalty needed or demanded. Art and knowledge belonged to communities dedicating generations, and not just a lifetime, to perfect their crafts. Some amongst them may turn into additionally gifted artists and could in turn be termed so. Even then, they were encouraged to collaborate and work as a team. Most societies, in the eastern cultures formed a social structure where artisan communities were formed and fostered by the elites. In the Indian and other Asian cultures, these communities came to be the defining characteristic of their progeny and ancestry. Social structures evolved that understood that the craftspeople, artisans as well as artists, were essential technicians, manufacturers, inventors and cultural identity markers.

> “Meanwhile, artisans such as painters, crafters, poets, and potters were employed by the government or by the gentry. Thus, they also usually had a larger income than their agricultural counterparts.” Social structure based on Confucian philosophy.

This demonstrates how the Chinese culture perceived artisans and artists as a homogeneous entities and valued them above other working peasants. The merchant classes were richer and yet considered beneath them due to their characterisation as opportunist, corrupt and materialistic.

Figure 8. Qing Dynasty Social Structure & Hierarchy (Courtesy: Totally History)

India too has specific communities with designated family names that demarcate their association with creation of specific crafts. The ‘Julaha’ community of weavers get their name from the Persian word ‘julah’, which means a ball of thread. Although members of this community have been weaving for many generations whilst settled in different parts of India and have varied religious associations, most Julahas are followers of a sufi saint and poet, Kabir.

Figure 9. A 1825 Painting of Kabir weaving. The teachings of the fifteenth-century Indian mystic poet and saint are still idealised by weaving communities of India. His poetry inspires pragmatism, ardour, sense of duty, righteousness and seeking the truth within.

Super specialisation was instilled in certain communities. For instance, specialised silk weavers of Rajasthan and Gujrat known as the ‘Salvis’ are renowned for their yarn-stage resist dyed technique of weaving Ikat Patolas.

Similarly, the ‘Khatri’ community of textile artisans have been associated with the production and usage of the indigo dye the Kutch region. The indigo dyeing process is optimally achieved at a pH level of 09 for silks at one end of the spectrum, or is increased to 11 or 12 for other harsher fabrics like cottons on the other end of the spectrum. This dyeing process today is executed on ground using technological aids like litmus paper for measuring the pH levels. However, the experienced dyers of Kutch seem to miraculously possess the ability to ascertain if the month-long process of fermentation of indigo is complete, by simply dipping their hands into the large *maats* (terracotta urns placed in the ground for maintaining the correct temperature). The dyers UNDERSTAND, rather than KNOW the science behind maintaining the desired optimum pH of indigo dye to get to the perfect dyeing stage. Such intense skill-based knowledge has evolved from centuries of experience before formal education or modern science reached these communities. These are evolved communities that have mastery through instinct and training which may be hard to replicate elsewhere.

Underestimating their cumulative knowledge, owing to their lack of access to formal or western education or formal certifiable training, is a serious mistake that the fashion industry and the modern society at large makes frequently.

Disparity

When so many artisans have specific styles employed to create imaginative or innovative products with sheer passion and scientific instincts, it is unfair that they came to be perceived not just different from artists but also as inferior. While artists are often seen as intellectuals, artisans are seldom perceived as more than skilled labour and destitute needing support to keep their craft alive. Despite a rich knowledge set passed down through many eons of generations, these artisans command little or no respect in society.

The Bauhaus (Griffith Winton, 2000) is known have sought a new grounds for labeling one as an artist/ craftsperson/ maker and used these terms interchangeably by seeking to find context in their role or purpose rather than their qualification, affiliation or occupation (Frayling, 2012). It oversaw the convergence of ideas without prejudice, but this line of thought was unable to capture the popular culture of an increasingly globalised society.

The disparity between a celebrated artist and artisan remains evident in plain sight. Art exhibitions are curated with great care to attract intellectuals, elites and socialites to review, appreciate or acquire the displayed items as investments. On the other hand, craft exhibitions and fairs are organised with little regard to placing and showcasing specific crafts in the best light or relevance. Artisans seldom have proper seating spaces that consequently devalues their relationship with views and visitors, most of whom are uninterested beyond mild curiosity and an opportunity for a cheap impulse purchase.

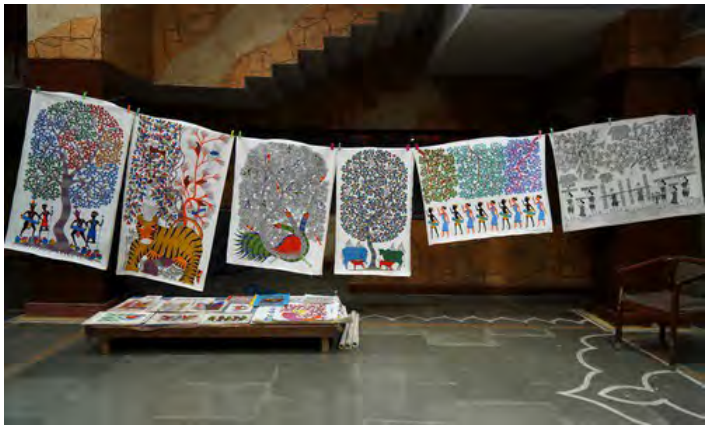

Figure 10. Folk art Exhibition space displaying Gondh Art in New Delhi on September 30, 2022.

Figure 11. Exhibition Inside Jehangir Art Gallery (Mumbai)

Figure 12. Artisan painting and selling Bengal Pot and Pattachitra while seated on the floor space allotted and viewers walk past looking down, at Craft Fair in Kolkata. (Photo Courtesy: Samrat)

Figure 13: Artist Arpan Bhowmik conducting a live session during an Art Exhibition curated at DLF Mall, in Delhi NCR on 22 January, 2023. (Photo Courtesy: Abhishek Sharma / Saurabh Kumar)

Key Factors for Low Esteem

Gradually artisan communities have come to value themselves and their knowledge less. Through multiple instances of primary research and interactions with artisans based in India (weavers of Benaras, block-printers in Bagh, Kasuti embroiderers of Wardha, Whorli painters in Maharashtra) and in Laos (Weavers in Vientiane and Luang Prabang) coupled with secondary research of data and interviews of several other eastern countries, certain common factors have been identified in many Indian and Southeast Asian subcontinent areas.

- Lost Relevance

Artisan communities constructed and innovated for the changing needs of their societies over many centuries. Their methods were traditionally sustainable using primarily locally

available materials optimised to produce goods to fulfil local demands or modified for trade (for example, silk, cashmere, bone china) to distant places where the exclusive products were in great demand. The same crafts are now grappling with the drastically changed markets after a century of industrialisation and decades of globalisation. Most of their youngest generation prefers western and formal education to vocational training from the elders in their families.

- Clashing Modern Methodologies

Many of the processes that could once be only achieved with painstaking detail-oriented hand-done processes, can be replicated easily using motorised or even computerised processes. Many of the crafts are best served if each process is done by those who are masters in the same. Master artisans feel that an assembly-line system reduces ownership and accountability of achieving excellence. This has given the craft an ambiguous nature and identity that no longer upholds its exquisiteness. Master artisans, taking pride in their ability, find their arduously acquired skills redundant and their communities value their expertise less.

- Quality Compromises

Whilst extreme care was taken to make detail-oriented quality handicrafts for elite royal patrons, artisans are now resorting to time-saving techniques to service a productivity driven market, even if they compromise on quality standards. Hand-made products cannot and should not have to subscribe to the parameters of the perfection of machine-made products. But in the absence of customised quality standardisation parameters or qualitative assessment standards for specific crafts, good quality and authentic products are pegged against cheaper ambiguous products. Most artisans or their apprentices have lost the incentive and pride of creating exquisite pieces of craft.

- Lack of Awareness and Intent

To make matters worse, potential buyers, especially in the case of souvenir buyers, do not concern themselves with quality or authenticity. Machine-made versions of traditional textiles or hand-embroideries, printed versions of Ikat, (speech by Padma Shri Gajam Govardhana, 2022) and mass-produced enameled iron kettle imitations of hand-made charcoal coated iron kettles (interview by Nobuho Miya, Iwate prefecture, Japan).

- Government Interventions and Middlemen

As a positive step, many government initiatives (state owned emporiums, craft fairs, and so on) are taken to market the artisans' fruits of labour. As discussed earlier, many of these outlets and fairs fail to adequately showcase or represent both the exquisiteness of the products as well as the process and passion with which it was handcrafted.

Middlemen such as co-operatives and traders or even designers, who commission exclusive craftsmanship, have their own agendas to monetise the products and the story behind it rather than represent the artisans as creative crafts-persons arduously and methodically creating exquisite works of craft. The artisans themselves would prove to be the best ambassadors of their craft if they are given the space, methods, confidence (possibly accompanied with training) and platforms to represent themselves and their crafts.

- Lost or ambiguous credits

As a fallout of using middlemen, it becomes hard to trace back the makers of handcrafted products. An artisan's labour of love bears little or no credits attached to them. Malpractice of non-disclosure is sometimes built into contracts or a verbal agreement between retailers, brands or designers and the craftspeople working on their directions. Sometimes, the craft or region gets generalised or ambiguous appreciation since actual artisan's identity is unknown. In some cases, it is also due to the fact that collaborative efforts of a family or clan or varied artisans credits become ambiguous as well. Receiving ambiguous or no credit when their work is appreciated, demotivates craftspeople from investing in excellence or even staying true to evolution.

Figure 14. Women circled around a fabric to embroider traditional shadow work *Chikankari* at Lucknow. Each dedicated artisan would not receive credit for their work if at all the clan/workshop were to be mentioned as a maker of the final masterpiece. (Photo courtesy of: Ada Chikan)

- Growing Lifestyle Aspirations

Many recognised craft clusters have received support and subsidies from local government and non-government organisations with regards to improving living and working conditions. Yet, there is a huge abyss in the lifestyle of the urban developed societies with modern amenities. Capitalism, globalisation, mass and social media have exposed simple living crafts communities to aspire for a lifestyle seemingly unattainable in their current clusters. Artisans and their children dream of corporate or tourism-service vocations with "comfortable settings and air-conditioned offices" (Carol Cassidy, personal communication).

Figure 15. Carol Cassidy, American Textile Designer and proprietor, 'Lao Textiles', in Vientiane, Lao PDR for a few decades. She engages local Lao artisans as well as tries to train new aspirants into weaving for western designer labels.

- Fitting into Evolving Societal Structure

With the collapse of monarchy across the globe, their primary patronage was lost. Capitalism is competitive and the modern world finds only a niche market space for hand-crafted products. Along with lost relevance, artisan communities lost their valued position in the society around them.

Not only have artisans' traditional expertise become redundant, they face a stigma against trying to change or evolve their expertise. Many carry a family name or follow a religion that that traditionally defined their role in a now redundant craft process. Some fail to pick up a new trade under the pressure of a society that views them only restricted to the craft that is no longer viable while other craftspeople are force to migrate to cities or other more industrialised crafts.

Meeta and Sunny document the case of a *Chippa* printer, Raghunath Chippa, who learnt his craft of block printing under apprenticeship of his father. His father had tried to open a kerosene depot and a fertiliser shop neither of which worked as rural customers were used to buying on credit which they felt obliged to pay back only if the creditors were from the *baniya* (money-lender) communities who can be considerably intimidating. When Raghunath himself wanted to diversify into indigo dyeing, *Neelgars* (traditional Muslim indigo dyers) held a monopoly in the techniques and "Middle caste Hindu *Chippas* would not get their hands dirty in blue!" (Tyabji, 2007, p. 35)

- Temperament Change

Artisans need years of dedication to master their craft and every time they practise their craft, they need to do so in a meditative state of commitment to the process. It is, therefore unconducive that aspirations are coupled with the growing streak of instant gratification across all societies and nations. Television followed by smartphones have rewired our brains and studies show how humans are losing their attention span.

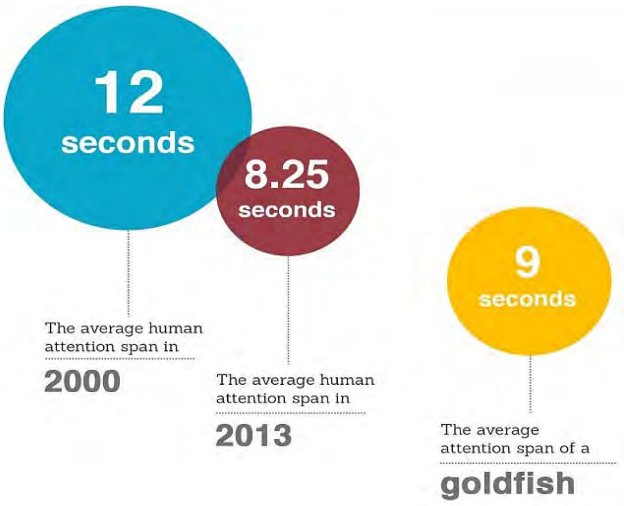

Figure 16. Average attention span recorded in an interval of 13years in this millennium indicate that human attention span is likely to be diminishing. (Source: Statistic Brain Research Institute, California) Although the exact figures are being debated, experts agree on the certainty of decreasing attention span. (Bradbury, 2016)

Across the strait of Gibraltar in the northern city of Fez in Morocco thrives the craftsmanship of handmade, glazed terracotta Zellige tiles. The tiles are hand cut into intricate geometric patterned mosaics or may be used as basic plane squares placed together to create a modern look of ombré effects that makes it especially popular in the global market. However, in an interview with the Business Insider (n.d.), a zellige supplier and company owner, Adil Naji, President of 'Arabesque', claims to have difficulty finding a new generation of skilled artisans to complete various specialised stages essential for constructing the zellige tiles. He feels that people nowadays are not as patient as before. "If you look at the people who used to work for in this trade they are very calm, they are very peaceful. They have inner peace" says Adil.

Figure 17. Zellige tile craftsman constructing a complex geometric mosaic pattern

Figure 18. A master artisan of Zellige tile explaining about craftsmanship achieved through dedicated focus. Photo still from Season 9 of 'So Expensive'.

- Correlating Literacy to Education

While literacy opens many doors to knowledge, the experiential knowledge of many generations of artisan communities fails to reach their young ones when they are pushed into formal school education. They spend all their time learning conventional knowledge with no time or inclination remaining for learning from their elders through practice.

- Linguistic and Physical Barriers

Some artisan communities are Bedouin/ gypsy whilst many others continue to live and work in remotely accessible locations. This isolates them physically and heightens linguistic barriers preventing them from reaching global markets and audience.

Rebuilding Esteem

Craft revival efforts are afoot but a game changer in designing sustainable model of craft revival should focus on the Artisan's own confidence to thrive in this rapidly evolving world.

- Identity Markers

Measures amplifying the Geographical Indications (GI) Tags in India have been assigned to protect and copyright certain crafts but they become ambiguous since the same can attributed to specific crops. 'One District One Product' of the State government of Uttar Pradesh was inspired by Japanese 'One Village One Product' programme but again it assigns value to crops as well as handicrafts. A more comprehensive definition of each craft and its **key identity markers need to be established, branded and propagated in popular media** to educate prospective buyers. It is similar to giving the artisans a copyright that should not be allowed to be replicated, and be legally binding.

- Artisan Signature

As collective identity of crafts are protected, creative rights of individual artisans must also be ensured. Designers must show commitment to collaborate rather than use artisans. Credits should be compulsorily available along with designer goods made by artisans. Visual or audiovisual storytelling should accompany products glorifying, or at least acknowledging, artisans creating exquisite products. Simplest of all techniques is that of **building a signature or mark** into design patterns or inconspicuous placements indicating the Artisan and year of make.

Figure 19. A functional boomerang Hand-crafted in Australia, decorated on the front but bearing engraved signature and timeline.

- Artisan Interactions:

History demonstrates how Royal patronage fostered crafts especially in the East. Lessons drawn and superimposed in the modern society could assist in engaging the 'Nouveau Rich' with crafts and artisans to achieve mutual beneficial goals (Dhasmana, 2018). When Satwashila Devi married into the erstwhile royal family of Sawantwadi during the era of a newly independent India in the 1970s, she teamed up with her husband in her revival efforts for almost extinct '*Ganjifa*' card making. One of her earliest methods was to employ the last artisan as a teacher to teach intricate painting techniques of '*Ganjifa*' painting to her and her husband. He in turn **got the required encouragement and the confidence to reestablish himself as an Artisan** rather than live the life of a common peasant (Kadapa-Bose, 2018).

Figure 20. Rajmata Satwashila Devi Bhonsle in her palace, showcasing the Ganjifa cards. (Picture courtesy: India Today Spice)

Ock Pop Tok, in Luang Prabang, Laos has been successful in replicating the model in a commercial set up. The stores and spaces have created a brand identity around hubs for trendy but ethical buying, providing weavers with workspaces and livelihood and giving customers the experience of viewing the process as they lounge and enjoy food and beverages served at scenic cafeterias. But most importantly, it routinely runs day-long courses for tourists and expats, organises seminars and has now been offering online classes with DIY kits and videos for an audience who may be unable to travel to the exotic country.

Figures 21 and 22. The ambience and seating arrangements at Ock Pop Tok keep artisans at par with their patrons/students. (Photo courtesy: Ock Pop Tok)

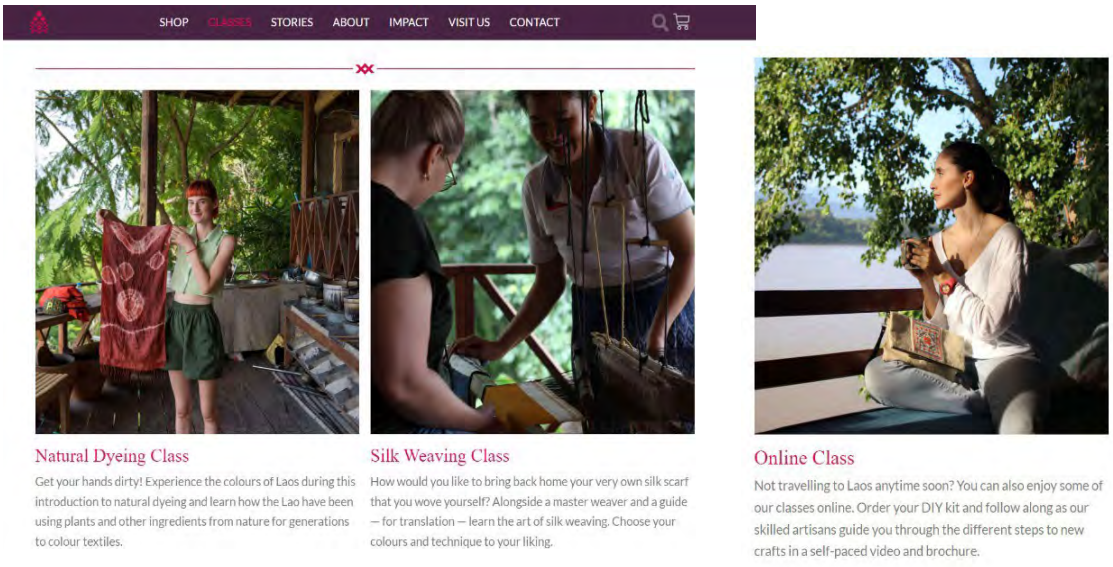

Figure 23. Ock Pok Tok website highlighting their classes including online classes. (Photo courtesy: Ock Pop Tok)

- Craft Pedagogy:

Stringent Certification system should be adopted classifying artisans in a spectrum of apprenticeship (*Shaagird)* to master–craftsman (*Ustaad*) based on skill levels and years of experience. Mentoring or training in any craft needs to open **opportunities by breaking community or gender- based barriers** for apprenticeship. Such programmes should be built into school and college curriculums so as to **integrate it with formal** education.

- Product Innovation:

Lateral growth and product innovation can be established though collaborative production using two or more varying craft forms. This would provide for growth opportunities in multiple craft clusters simultaneously and thrust artisan to think of collaborative design. Appropriate material substitutions such as choice handmade paper for making folk art traditionally done on mud walls andso on, can give artisans more freedom to express.

- Invigorate the Innovator:

Artisans have not lost their creativity. Many instances show that they are too engrossed to create that which they perceive the market will demand. Giving them financial assurance and exposure to **understand that sky is the limit** makes them grow as designers in their own craft. In the case of *Chippas*, Raghunath felt liberated to explore once hand-holding was done in exposing him to concepts of design beyond the needs of the local market. He found further confidence to dye and print silks and tussar, out of his comfort zone of cotton once he was assured that rejected pieces would be tie dyed or reprinted and sold. Eventually he and his wife were able to create a brand identity around '*effectwaali*' sarees with the attitude of "*jo bigda so fashion*" (the spoilt becomes fashion) (Meeta and Sunny as cited in Tyabyi, 2007, p. 37).

- Redefining Market and marketing:

The craft sector needs a marketing **revamp from the tourist memorabilia to Luxury Heritage products** (Dhasmana, 2018). Storytelling and interaction with customers and patrons, even if an artisan is collaborating with an established designer will not only help them set the right note for their exclusive work, the pride and ownership will be imprinted in them during the interactions.

- Opening the online platform:

During COVID-19 crisis, more interest was generated for slow fashion and interest in handicrafts has grown. Many artisans with access to internet and basic literacy, were able to **capitalise on this opportunity as this was more 'home-based' modus operandi** (Ratten et al., 2022, p. 22). The relative ease in starting an online business with low investment capital and in-house manufacturing is expected to boost a growth in online handicraft businesses (Bakas, Duxbury, and de Castro, 2018).

Moreover, online commerce has opened up platforms for artisans to showcase their products and create greater awareness. This has resulted in interesting innovations and the confidence of many artisans and entire craft clusters have grown in leaps and bounds.

- Social Media training:

Given the above development, grooming sessions should be conducted to help artisans **optimise their online presence and marketing**. They should be coached in simple things like creating their accounts, hashtags and making and displaying a QR code during trade fairs, and so on. More intensive practices like keeping Pinterest and Instagram activities

updated, making show-reels of the processes for each exquisite creation accompanied by correct credits and music choice, should also be taught so that they can take charge of a self-created brand identity with their smartphones.

- Apps to Connect:

Although certain a handful of apps like Artisans d'Art (Tunisia) and Yeebo (India), already exist, none are making true impact with regards to creating an exclusive platform for artisans connecting them with the whole wide world. Lack of awareness and poor user experience are the key reasons for their failure in the long run.

Figure 24. Screenshots of Tunisian App for Artisans (Photo courtesy: Google Play)

A one stop shop for global customers is still needed connecting artisans from across the world to peer review, learn, collaborate and sell. Answers may lie with e-retail; app giants like Amazon should be able to create specific sections dedicated to video-based storytelling tactics to showcase and retail craft items vetted by them to a pre-existing customer and audience base .

Conclusion

> "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" Chinese philosopher **Lao Tzu**, founder of Taoism.

Artisans and their ancient experiential knowledge will be lost forever if efforts are not made towards empowering them. Artisan communities require more meaning and self-belief in the changing world, rather than charity. Giving them the means to recover their lost *Âtm Sammān* (self-esteem) will go a long way in ensuring that their communities thrive sustainably innovating and producing crafts and keeping their practices alive. Integrating and reestablishing their value our larger societies will in turn make us more enriched.

References

Ada Chikan. (2018, 11 June) *Chikan Embroidery: Lucknow's Pride*. Available at: http://chikanada.blogspot.com/2018/06/chikan-embroidery-lucknows-pride.html (Accessed: 20 January 2023).

Bakas, F. E., Duxbury, N. & Vinagre de Castro, T., (2019). Creative tourism: Catalysing artisan entrepreneur networks in rural Portugal. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, *25*(4), pp.731-752.

Bose, N. S. (2003) 'Beyond Frames, Cultural Development& Indigenous Arts: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Contemporary Practices in Developing, Promoting and Marketing Indigenous Arts, in India and Australia', (unpublished), 319-358.

Bradbury, N. A. (2016) Attention span during lectures: 8 seconds, 10 minutes, or more? *Advances in Physiology Education*, *40*(4), 509-513.

Business Insider. (n.d.) So Expensive Season 9 Marathon [online] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxoTzt2TnaM&t=3098s (Accessed: 27 December 2022).

Cambridge English Dictionary. (2022) Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions. Available at: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ (Accessed: 12 December 2022).

Coleman, C. (1908) 'Cosmati Mosaic', in The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Available at: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04405b.htm (Accessed December 12, 2022)

Dhasmana, S. (2018) 'Creating New Patronage: Revival of Asian Indigenous Crafts by Evoking Interest amongst the Nouveau Riche', *20th IFFTI Annual Conference, Fashion Futures*. Donghua University, Shanghai, China, 12 April. China: IFFTI, pp.340-352.

Frayling, C. (2012). *On craftsmanship: towards a new Bauhaus*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Griffith Winton, A. (2000). 'The Bauhaus, 1919–1933', *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History.* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Hoyte, C. (2019) "Artisan entrepreneurship: a question of personality structure?" *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 615-632.

Kadapa-Bose, S. (2018,20 May) *Royal Saviour.* Deccan Herald. Available at: https://www.deccanherald.com/sunday-herald/sunday-herald-art-culture/royal-saviour-670692.htm (Accessed: 4 December 2022).

Ock Pop Tok. (2023) Discover Laos Through Textiles - Ock Pop Tok. Available at: https://www.ockpoptok.com/ [Accessed 2 January 2023].

Ratten, V., Jones, P., Braga, V. and Parra-López, E. (2022) *Artisan Entrepreneurship*. Emerald Group Publishing.

The Statesman. (2018) 'The handloom communities of India', *The Statesman*. Available at: https://www.thestatesman.com/india/handloom-communities-india-1502670307.html (Accessed: 11 December 2022).

Hoskin, T. (2022) In 1512, Sistine Chapel Ceiling Floors the Public | by Toni Hoskin | Medium. Available at: https://medium.com/@tonihoskin/in-1512-sistine-chapel-ceiling-floors-the-public-c2579fff9588 (Accessed: 12 December 2022).

Totally History. (2022) Qing Dynasty Social Structure & Hierarchy. Available at: https://totallyhistory.com/qing-dynasty-social-structure/ (Accessed: 14 November 2022).

Tyabji, L., 2007. Threads & Voices. Published for Marg Publications, pp.5-43.