ABSTRACT

Textiles handicrafts have always been a source of employment for the masses in India. They are the backbone of the rural economy in many of the states even today. Although the government allocates huge amount to preserve and flourish these handicrafts in the budget, yet due to red-tapism, lack of willpower and lack of knowledge and awareness among the artisans many of these handicrafts have ceased to be. Many of these art and crafts have not been well documented even.

The literature review suggested that no such study had ever been taken up by anyone. The present study attempts to record the facts and figures of the Bandhej craft as regard to its historicity, techniques employed, production profit analysis of the traders and the artisans and other pertinent issues like supply chain and health problems. The most famous and highly productive centres in Rajasthan viz. Jaipur, Sikar and Jodhpur were selected for the purpose of the study.

The study approach was exploratory-cum-descriptive in nature. The respondents comprised of artisans (370) and traders (126). The primary source data was collected through the structured, semi-structured interview schedules, case studies and observation methods. Secondary data was collected from books, journals and museums.
Analysis for the study was done using different statistical tests like mean t-test and Anova. The findings of the study underline the following facts.

The general profile of the artisans revealed that the majority of the designers (70%) and dyers (76.1%) engaged in the craft in the three cities lie between the age brackets of 37-55, with only tiers being exception, 70% of whom belonged to 18-36 years category. The educational level of the artisans is very poor. More than half of the designers were illiterate or could read and write only. The data reveals that around one third designers, tiers and dyers were illiterate in the three cities. Further, 24% designers, 32.8% tiers and 27.8% dyers were only able to write and read. Only a meagre number of them (15%, 5.7% and 6.9% respectively) were educated up to secondary level.

The results related to income reveal that more than half of the designers are earning only Rs. 1000-4000 per month. Exceptionally, in Sikar 90% designers belong to Rs.4100-8000 category of income which is highest in all the three cities. The tiers are also specially underpaid. About 70% of the tiers of the three cities earn Rs. 1000 to 4000. Separately, as many as 92% of the tiers of Jaipur, 88% tiers of Jodhpur and 66% tiers of Sikar are earning 1000-4000/- per month. In Sikar, thin and subtle Bandhani is made, therefore the tiers get more money.

However, among the artisans, dyers were found to be better earners. Some of the skilled dyers of Jaipur and Sikar earn Rs. 8100-12000 per month.
On the other hand, there are 85% dyers of Sikar, 64% of Jaipur and 22.5% of Jodhpur who earn moderately i.e. Rs. 4100-8000/- . Contrastingly, in Jodhpur city, 75% dyers earn only between Rs. 1000-4000.

Holistic picture of the artisans in terms of income is still grim. About one third of the dyers of the three cities in total are earning only Rs.1000-4000 per month. Only 12.5% dyers were the exceptional ones who were earning Rs. 8000-12000. The reason behind low income are lack of knowledge, seasonal demand and lack of own capital.

Further, the study reveals that hundred percent designers and dyers were males and Muslims and all the tiers were females in all the three cities.

Exploring the family structure, it was noticed that Jaipur being a big city had the maximum percent of nuclear families i.e. 72% in the designers’ category, 62% in dyers’ category and 68% in tiers’ category. On the other hand, Sikar and Jodhpur had maximum number of joint families. Sikar and Jodhpur had 60% joint families in the designer’s category; 70% and 60% joint families in the dyers’ category and 66% and 62.5% joint families in the tiers’ category. Joint families help in labour division and better productivity is achieved.

All the artisans in designers and dyers of the three cities belong to a caste named Neelgar of Muslim community. Officially this caste belongs to
other backward caste (OBC) category. However, tying involves women from miscellaneous castes.

The study also churned out the peculiarities in the technique employed for making Bandhej garments in past and present in all the three cities. Regarding folding technique, it was found that different patterns were being used by the artisans in the three cities. As the designs are imprinted with plastic sheets in Sikar, the cloth is reported to be folded in two manners. On the other hand, as in Jaipur and Jodhpur wooden or iron blocks/frames are used to imprint designs, the folding depends on the size and type of block/frames. Further, traditionally, only wooden or iron blocks were used to imprint design in all the three cities, but now 76.6% designers of Sikar and 60% of Jaipur use a plastic sheet as a modern tool. It is convenient and less time taking technique according to the artisans.

The study brings forth some peculiarities of tying technique also. It was found that in all the three cities the cloth is lifted above with the help of nail in the form of a metal cone worn (locally called nakhuna) in the index finger. Those who don’t use nakhuna generally grow long nails to make it easy to tie. The art of tying shows certain modifications, yet no conspicuous change has been observed in it.

The study reveals that there has been a significant change in the process of dying. Traditional dyers used natural dyes extracted from, roots,
flowers, leaves and berries. At present, no one uses these natural dyes. All the dyers use synthetic dyes in these cities for making Bandhej clothes. The study reveals that a significant number of dyers of the three cities were using modern equipments such as washing machine, spinning machine and jigger machine while dying.

The study yields that there has been changes in the cloth to be used in Bandhej craft and the garments made as final products. Majority (82.4%) of the artisans expressed that the craft was practiced mainly on cotton in all the three cities. In present time, silk of many varieties are used to make Bandhej clothes. On the other hand, cotton has taken first place in production of Bandhej clothes in Jodhpur.

Similarly, there has been a change in the garments made of Bandhej work. More than half of the artisans of all the three cities expressed that new garments have been prevalent in last decades. It was reported that in late 80s and 90s the Bandhej artisans began to make garments like skirts, tops, t-shirts, scarf, suits and curtains etc.

The study also records the designs and patterns prevalent in these cities and the changes occurred over the period of time. It was found that chiefly the designs and patterns prevalent in the craft can be categorized into four groups i.e. bird-animal, vegetation, geometrical and human designs. Along with the survival of the traditional designs, many other designs and
patterns have undergone substantial changes also in the last five or six decades. The complex and subtle designs of past have been replaced by simple geometrical or vegetation patterns in all the three cities. It was found that apart from human motifs, and bird animal designs, vegetation designs were predominantly produced in past in all the three cities. At present geometrical and vegetation designs are prevalent in all the three cities. The complex motifs of human figures and bird-animal designs are very much less produced due to time factor and labour intensive reasons. The study reveals that in all the three cities about half of the artisans (49.16%) in the three cities prefer to make geometrical patterns on Bandhej garments.

The artisan and the traders were found to be afflicted with many problems regarding supply chain and profitability. The designers and the tiers were specially underpaid who were earning between Rs. 3000-6000 only. Only some of the dyers were exception who were earning as much as Rs. 9000 per month. On the other hand in traders category, the wholesalers were the highest earners who were earning lakhs of rupees per month. The retailers were just next to them reaping good profits. Even the manufacturers who are one the Neelgar communities only were also earning fairly better than that of the artisans’. Thus the artisans were earning quite low in comparison to their trading counterparts.

It was hypothesised that there is no difference in the monthly production of the artisans of the three cities. The Anova test was performed
for all the artisans considering the mean sales units in a month. The test yielded that the calculated values of F were less than the table value in all but one cases. Hence, the hypothesis was rejected in most of the cases except in the case of dyers, who dye multi-colour dyes, in which it was accepted. The study apparently found the differences in the production and the income of the artisans.

Similarly, a hypothesis was framed that there is no difference in the monthly sales of the traders of the three cities. The t-test performed for the wholesalers yielded that the calculated value of t was 3.992, which is higher than the table value. Hence the hypothesis was rejected. Similarly in Anova test conducted for the retailers, it came out that the calculated value for F is 5.585, which is a little less than that of the table value. Hence, the hypothesis was rejected. Thus, the study reveals that there is substantial differences in the production and the income of the traders of the three cities.

Other issues of the traders were regarding the ill managed supply chain, which needs intervention from the government. Due to monopoly of China, the grey-traders were facing the problems of fluctuation of rates. dumping of stock and bad debts owing to credit buying were another problems. The manufacturers were facing dual problems of lack of own capital and heavy interest rate to be paid on credit buying. The defective products’ cost is also to be borne by them. The retailers face the problem of
uncertain demand from the consumers and dumping of stock due to fashion changes.

The study also brings forth the **working conditions and occupational health hazards** among the artisans. It was found that in all the three cities, the workplace of the artisans were filthy, unhygienic, less ventilated and unsafe. Some common diseases were also reported and observed among the artisans, which were directly or indirectly related to their occupation. Almost all (95.3%) agreed that modern artificial dyes have hazardous effects on the dyers. Majority of dyers of the three cities were found to be afflicted with some kind of skin disease such as contact dermatitis (70.7%), discolouring of skin (70%) and irritant dermatitis (63.8%). Nasal allergy and backache problem were also observed in above 60% of the dyers of the three cities. The tier women have weak eye sight problem common in all the three cities. Headache and shoulder pain were other common problems among them. Similarly, in all the three cities discoloration of skin especially in fingers was a problem among 41% of the designers. Nasal allergy (31%), and weak eyesight (28%) were the other problems reported by the designers of all the three cities. Moreover, as the water utilized by the dyers is thrown after dying operations without any treatment, the effluent water with residues of dyes poses grave environmental issues.