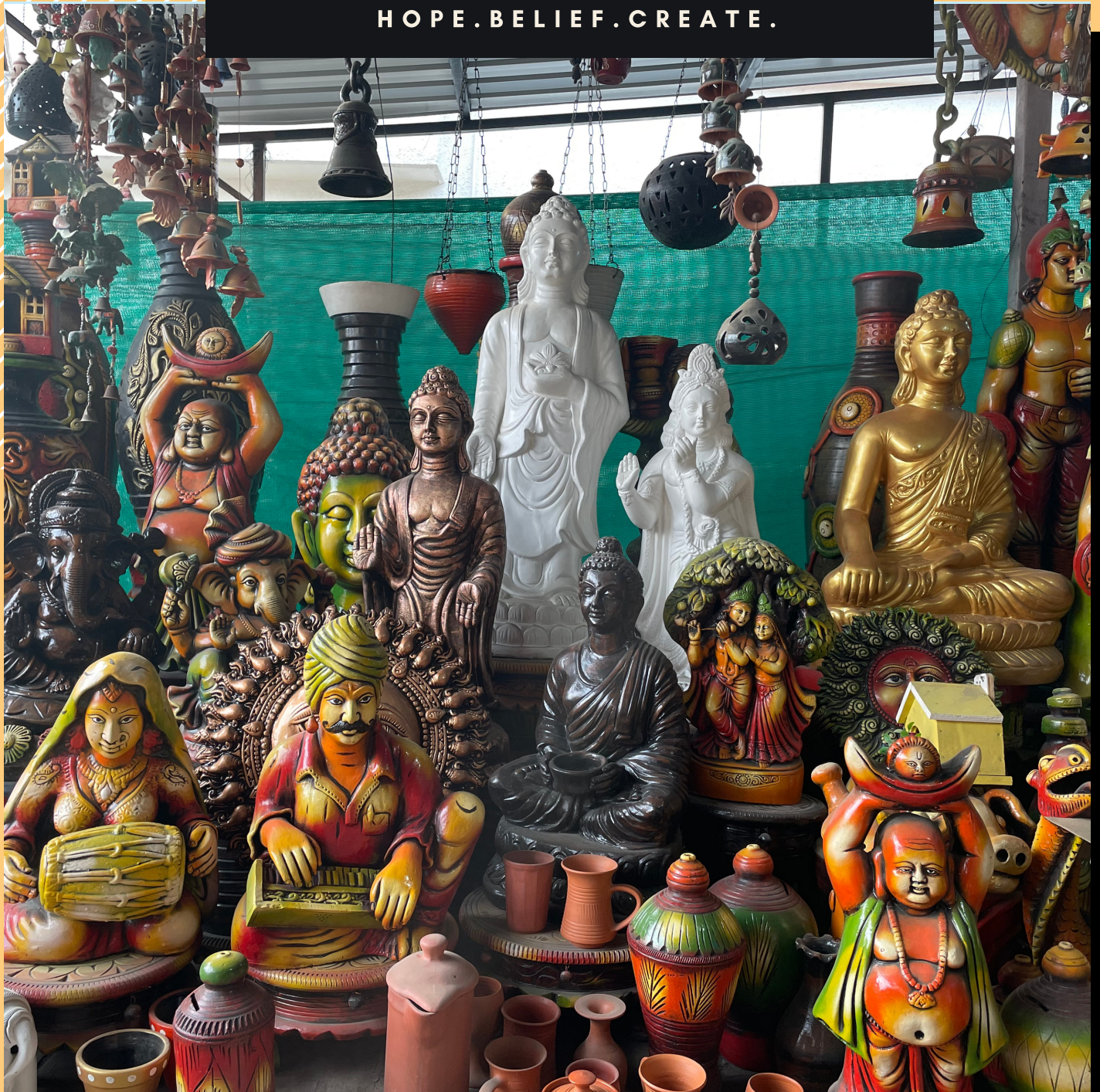


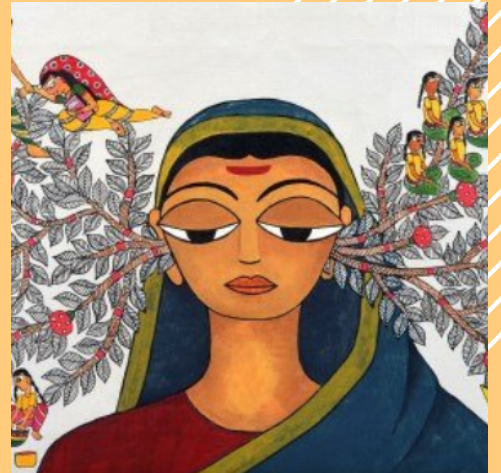
SWABHIMAAN

HOPE.BELIEF.CREATE.



MERI ART MERI PEHCHAAN

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ABOUT THE EDITION

Empowerment and liberation are often considered a consequence of a successful entrepreneurial initiative. However, there is a tendency for the same to become paradoxical when entrepreneurial institutions themselves perpetuate oppression along with the intersectional layers of caste, class, and gender, i.e. through this edition of Swabhimaan, we bring to you stories of resilience, hardship, and success from the unorganised sector in the arts and crafts industry that have navigated through the gendered complexities embedded within the society. The scope of our edition extends to the role of women in small-scale family businesses, artists working independently and in collective groups.

The discussion for this topic is multi-faceted. Any meaningful venture requires skilled artists, investments, designing, market accessibility, demand and consumer interest, hope and scope of turning into a self-sustaining system. While gender does not disadvantage women in terms of acquiring artistic skills, there are several concerns around bargaining power within the household for income and expenditure, decision making in various stages of production, control over financial assets and accessibility to different resources.

To address some of these topics in this edition, firstly, we have a photo essay on Dilli Haat that provides an insight into the importance of market accessibility. The section, Nazariya covering the market of Dilli Haat shows how the post-production linkages of market accessibility and price bargaining enable the artisans and craftspersons to engage in their trade with the right set of motivation. The market serves as a platform to connect the creators with the customers directly, allowing them to understand the needs and expectations eliminating middlemen.

Such institutions enable women to participate in the pre and post production process which are usually considered men's responsibility. Women in unorganised sector face double burden (of professional work and household chores), lack of safety net, irregularity of work and lack of financial independence that restricts their participation. To understand this, we present an interview with Mr. Pradeep Kumar who runs a family pottery business with participation of female family members in Dehradun. Through this interview, we understand how women manage their different responsibilities and contribute towards the collective work.

Next, in the section – Ms. Malvika Raj, a dalit artist from Bihar takes us through her journey as a Madhubani artist. She breaks down the process of how one can find what they wish to communicate through art. She grew up inculcating Buddhist ideologies and also became an ardent follower of Babasaheb Ambedkar which inspired a unique style of Madhubani artwork reflecting her philosophical beliefs rather than the traditional hindu narratives followed in this art form. Her passion and hard work helped her establish her own clothing brand in New Delhi which is now employing more than 30 women artists.

The edition wraps up with the interview of Ms. Richa Sekhani, an economics researcher. She provides a deep academic perspective into the unorganized arts and crafts sector that weaves neatly into our narrative, substantiating and delving deeper into the major themes being explored in earlier sections. She covers several themes ranging from the business model of the unorganised sector, the role of gender within the industry, the effect of the pandemic on this industry, the role of technology, the importance of financial independence for women, all while drawing parallels from her field visits and research studies. The academic spin introduced in this issue ties together the rest of the interviews and the nuanced stories that each of the entrepreneurs shared.

This edition of Swabhimaan presents to you some of these tenets that weave together the unorganized sector of the arts and crafts industry in India.



DILLI HAAT

*Indian Ethical Sell and Importance of
Market Accessibility*



With an increasing gap between the urban and the rural, it is challenging for rural artists to establish themselves in urban spaces. An important way of bridging this gap is through well-established business that promote such artists. This photo essay will focus on the ethical sell – a concept by Tereza Kuldova and the role that institutionalised markets such as Dilli Haat play in combating the same.

Increasing awareness of climate change and the horrors of the fashion industry has led to more and more homegrown and locals clothing lines to be established in India. Many consumers view them as sustainable and believe that the local artisans are being benefitted in the process. On a closer examination, one realises that the brand is actually green washing its consumers by using the concept of ethical sell.

Ethical sell is an attempt at invoking ethical practices from Fair Trade to eco-fashion and sustainability while at the same time being deeply economic and profit-oriented. In particular, the ethical sell is designed to make people feel good about themselves by publically displaying their concern for their environment and fair labour conditions. Located precisely between the cultural and the political, companies are aware that the Indian elite wish to flaunt their capital culture. Unfortunately, this is also what the rural artists fall victim to when they sign contracts with such corporations.



More recently, artists and craftsman are becoming increasingly visible in brand advertisements and social media platforms under the theme of empowerment. While representation matters and must be carried out, there is no concrete landing on how these grass root level workers are being empowered apart from a fair wage that is paid to them for their skill. Furthermore, designers maintain an air of distinction from their employed labour (that is often indigenous and regional) not just in terms of their profession but also symbolisation. This comes across as crass romanticisation and commercialisation of the artists.





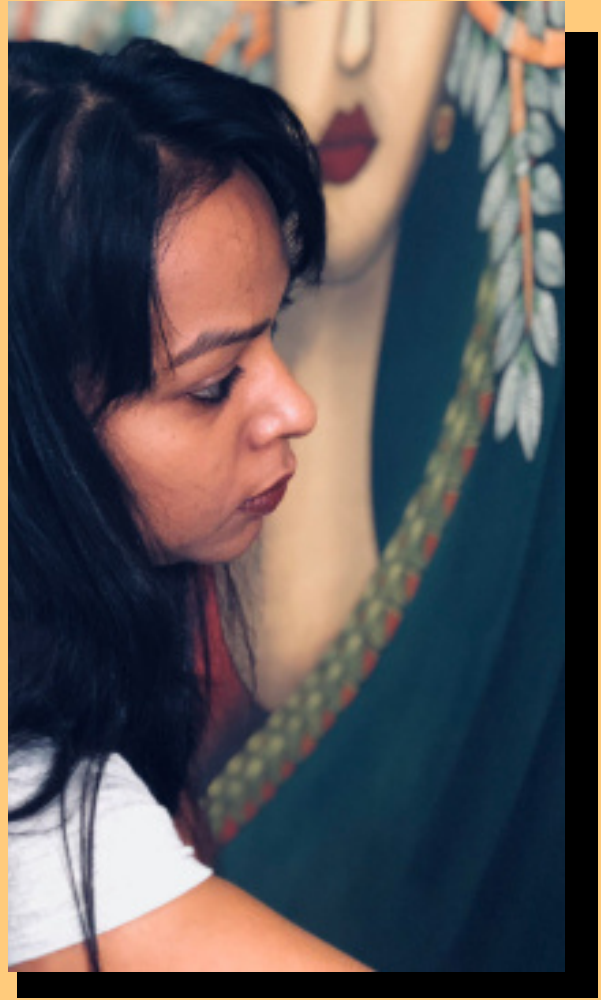
This highlights the core of the issue: inaccessibility to markets and limited mobility of the feminine gendered groups in rural India. Dilli Haat – a joint venture of Delhi Tourism, D.C Handicrafts, New Delhi Municipal Corporation and D.C Handlooms along with the Ministry of Tourism and Textile – is a step towards providing an economic and cultural haven to such women. With the image of a modern artificial village, Dilli Haat thrives on the very premise of ethical sell – artistic nationalism. Here, the artists are directly connected to the consumers, eliminating any middlemen that otherwise hurdle in the profits. Mona Sinha, professor of English, in her paper, *Bringing the Haat to the City: The Socio-Cultural and Commercial Dynamics of Dilli Haat*, claims that the exchange in Dilli Haat is a symbol of equalisation that led to transformation and evolution in the processes of art and craft.





While Dilli Haat suffers from instances of over-commercialisation and influx of cheap craft substitutes, it remains a pioneer in bridging the negative gap between the contemporary and the traditional. Though there is a long way before such spaces embrace sustainable livelihoods, Dilli Haat is successful in representing the Indian arts and artists powerfully.





SAMVAAD

In Conversation with Ms Malvika Raj, Madhubani Artist

Malvika Raj is an artist from Patna who is making waves in the Indian art scene through her innovative twist to the traditional Madhubani artform, which is centered around Hindu narratives. She graduated from NIIFT, Mohali and has had her art displayed at several prominent exhibitions. One of her paintings, a Madhubani rendition of Babasaheb Ambedkar, is displayed at the University of Edinburgh.



A fashion design student turned artist, her work is influenced by Buddhist philosophies and that has contributed significantly in her journey of being a Madhubani Artist. She's also an ardent follower of Babasaheb Ambedkar and her artistic endeavours largely depict those ideologies. She did extensive research in the ancient art and visited different towns in India, including Madhubani, the birthplace of this traditional art form, finally mastering the art while adding her own unique twist to it.





Click the link below to watch the conversation with Ms Malvika where she talks about her inspirational journey into the art sector, setting up her own business Musk Migi in New Delhi, govt schemes that help establish small enterprises, and her success mantra!!!



For access to the full conversation:

<https://youtu.be/jltcxdU-bK0>

Interview by Sameeksha Chouhan

KAHANIYAAN



BEHIND THE POTTER'S WHEEL

In conversation with Mr Pradeep Kumar, who owns a small stall of pottery items on Haridwar Road in Dehradun, Uttarakhand. He is a potter and is a part of a family business that makes beautiful clay items ranging from necessary goods like pots to luxury items like sculptures.

Pictures and Interview by Tamanna Dahiya



How did you start your business and with what resources?

It is a family business; we are around 10-12 people including brothers, sisters and parents and the entire family contributes and We mainly work with Terracotta art. The main work is done in Rajasthan but we have Dehradun is our retail shop. My elder brother started this business twenty years back with a mere sum of Rs. 20,000.

We started by putting up a small shop in Dehradun on the Rajpur road, hoping we would make enough and then shift back to our village in Alwar district in Rajasthan. However, business boomed in Dehradun and we continued here with more items. We started with just clay pots or '*matkas*' in which people showed interest, and today we sell everything from masks to big sculptures.



How did the COVID pandemic impact your business?

COVID affected us disproportionately. While our "fancy items" such as sculptures did not sell and we faced a lot of loss, the essential items such as clay pots sold in decent numbers. Accordingly, we shifted our manufacturing style to suit the demand to cope with the pandemic in its initial stages. The people of Dehradun were very helpful in keeping our business afloat.



WOMEN IN THE POTTERY BUSINESS

Do women in your family participate and contribute in the work and how?

Yes. they do participate. They are mostly involved in the designing and manufacturing process. They stay at home in Rajasthan. They don't travel with my brothers.

What is the scope for women, in general, in this particular profession?

There is a lot of scope for women in this sector. This doesn't require any pre-requisites that women lack. Neither is it a profession that requires too much strength and heavy lifting. It requires skills and time management; which women are very efficient at. Women have learnt and continue to do well on the wheel. They produce as many products as men. This profession is not discriminatory in any sense. In addition, women, as I have seen in my village and in my family are multi-talented and they effectively handle domestic work as well as the job of a potter.

However, I think without the support of the family, it might be a little difficult as in the end, even this job does require a lot of time. My sisters and sisters-in-law are expected to do the housework along with their contribution to the family business as potters. They have devised a very efficient manner of sharing the workload. Two of them work on the wheel while two others deal with the family work and the next day they exchange their jobs. Sometimes when the workload is a lot, my parents also assist with the children or household chores.

But women have proven that when given support they are no less than men at this job. I say this after watching the women do so well in this field in my own family.



Is there scope in this profession? Do you plan on diversifying and expanding your business further?

There is scope in this profession, but no one is ready to put in that amount of effort. The coming generation does not appreciate or isn't interested in investing that amount of time and effort in a lesser rewarding profession as this. I have two sons who will not carry on this family business. This job, while I have full respect for it, requires a lot of effort, time and money and is not as rewarding in the end. We just manage to keep ourselves afloat. If my sons can get a good education they will do very well for themselves in some other sector like service.



We do not intend to expand this business any further. The transportation of raw materials, as well as marketing, is very expensive and the amount of effort we put in isn't as rewarding.





Where do you source your material from?

We get our *mitti* or the prime raw material which is the clay, from the Badli district in Haryana. The baking of the clay pots and sculptures, in the gas-Bhatti, happens in our village establishment in Rajasthan itself. The manufacturing process requires a mix of three types of clay- red, black and yellow.

How do you divide the workforce between those who manufacture and those who travel to sell the items?

While the entire family is busy manufacturing in our traditional home in Rajasthan, my three brothers and I are in-charge of travelling and setting up as well as selling items in Dehradun.

How much income do you generate?

Not much, just enough to fill our stomachs. We do not have set limits for spending on ourselves or a limit for reinvesting in the business to expand it. In a year we earn approximately 1-2 lacs for the entire family, after reinvestment and purchasing of raw materials. We count around Diwali, which is like the end of our financial year.



THE UNORGANISED ARTS AND CRAFTS SECTOR: AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

Ms Richa Sekhani is a researcher at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations. She is also a senior research analyst at CNES and has also worked with ORF's Economy and Development Program. She has over 6 years of experience in the domain of public policy. While our initiative aims to interview entrepreneurs, we opined the need for grounding their narrative in a broader understanding of the sector they were associated with, theoretically and empirically. Ms Sekhani borrowed from her experiences in the field, as well as academic research to share deep insight into the lives of workers in the unorganized sector of the arts and crafts industry in India.

1) Can you please share how the organized and unorganized workers within the art and craft sector in our country are distributed?

The art and craft sector is the largest employed sector in the country after the agriculture sector. While there is no clear number on how much employment the art and craft sector generates, an article pointed out that more than 1,30,000 lakh people are employed from rural and semi-rural locations; a substantial amount of them are daily wage workers. Hence, the concentration is more in the unorganized sector.

2) Given that you mentioned the concentration is higher in the unorganized sector, can you tell us how these workers run their businesses? How do they source their resources and what business model, if any, do they follow?

I would like to answer this based on the field experiences I've had with the Centre for New Economic Studies. There are several stages in the basic supply chain, starting from the procurement of raw materials. It ends in the final stage, which is the distribution stage, where consumption is made possible for the end consumer - there is a proper channelized path followed when we look at the formal sector.

For the unorganized sector, I'll give you a very interesting example. We went to Kolkata and visited the Kumar Toli Market, which is famous for making idols for Durga Pooja. Here, while there is no formalized path, there is a pattern. Raw materials, such as scrap and clay that are required for making the idol, are sourced from Delhi and Kolkata. More specifically, clay is collected from the Bank of Ganges - a soil called 'puniya matti'. It is then brought to the place where the idol is created. Using a designated process, a designing stage follows where different vendors design the idols. The final stage, which is the formal sector equivalent of inventory management, is where the final product (the idols) is either stored in the godowns or their local stores. It is then distributed. However, distribution is not centred around Kolkata. It is also shipped to countries such as Bangladesh and the United States, via trains or cargo ships. A crucial difference from the formal sector supply chains is the fact that taxes cannot be applied across different stages. Therefore, there is a structure when you look at each product basket that is followed. However, it is not formalized in the way we define supply chains.

3) How is the scope of the production in the unorganised sector extended to export markets like the US or Bangladesh? Does it primarily serve to provide income as a means to sustenance?

I would say it's a mix of both. It depends on the resources that they have. If you look at Dilli Haat for instance, people travel across the country to set up their stalls here. It provides not just a source of income but also a chance to market their product given that Dilli Haat attracts a lot of foreign tourists. These tourists place bulk orders – in this way they can market their product as well as sell their product in the export market. I'll give you another brief example of Janpath, where women are selling handmade bangles among other things. Here, their purpose of selling is restricted in support of their family. At the end of the day, whatever you earn is to primarily support your family income. However, you do see a mix of both sets in the workforce – those that work to either support their family or to sell their product in the export market.

4) These markets are situated outdoors and the sales are reliant on people visiting to buy their products. However, during the pandemic, the announcement of the lockdown was sudden and unprecedented. How did it impact this sector, especially the migrant workers?

The daily-wage workers in the art and craft industry, who are dependent on the informal market to generate their day-to-day income, do not find their place in the government policies, which makes their situation alarming.

There have been reports that suggest that the economic livelihood of Indian artists has been severely undercut because of the temporary closure of the brick-and-mortar Indian art galleries and businesses. One could see huge unsold inventories that piled up and that there has been no sale through exhibition or through orders due to a halt in tourism during the pandemic. Export has been consequently

affected because of the flight restrictions and lack of movement.

The art and crafts products are conceived to be a luxury item. Therefore, people would not want to spend on these goods. The artists do not have the necessary capital to invest. Neither do they have food or savings to meet their day-to-day demand.

I happened to interact with some artists who are based in Bihar. I come from Patna; therefore, I was able to take field interviews with artists from the Madhumati village, which is famous for Madhubani paintings. Some of them said that they had not stepped out during the lockdown. Furthermore, these products being non-essential, they found very little visibility. Therefore, they stopped getting orders, and even if they did, they did not have access to raw materials. These problems were exacerbated because of the absence of government assistance. While the government has come out with initiatives such as Vocal for Local or Atmanirbhar Bharat, I think these workers have faced the real brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic.

5) Moving to the theme of gender, what role does gender play in this sector? Importantly, given this is a sector that mandates hard labour, how does that factor into how much women can actively contribute to this industry and their family. Where does one draw the balance between work and home?

Historically, women have been more responsible for domestic responsibilities. The situation has changed somewhat, where many women in the rural sector make articles on their own and even sell them. In these changing times, females have started their own business and reached tremendous heights within this sector. They are the ones who help from the backend. If you talk about home-based artists, who are most marginalized and form one of the biggest chunks of workers within this sector, they may have their own individual set up, or work as a dependent artist.

Traditionally, if you look at several professions such as the production of glass bangles, porcelain articles, small level packaging, a gathering of consumable hand-knitting, needlework, which usually does not involve offices or any sort of educational background, you will see a high concentration of women. In fact, you can categorize them as the dependent workers, where they are given deadlines for the handicrafts that are needed to be made and delivered by their bosses. Some of them work for small-scale or large-scale businesses whose products they then sell to wholesale retailers and consumers.

Managing work and home, therefore, becomes easier for the independent worker who you largely see in an urban phenomenon, where they employ artists under them and they can manage their own home and work. But when you talk about dependent workers, those who are employed by companies, the balance gets tricky because they have their own schedule where they have to work and meet their target but also manage things at the home front. Overall, however, this sector has a lot of flexibility.

6) What would you say about the role that technology and social media platforms play in the arts and crafts sector? How have these dependent and independent workers assimilated technology? Is it accessible to both men and women in the first place?

Very interesting question! I happen to work in the telecom and technology sector. Overall, I think it's a boon for the sector. In terms of global consumer acquisition, e-commerce has become the most potent medium to support the art and craft market. Additionally, you have social media platforms that are used for marketing and increasing awareness. This ease of accessibility to go through online platforms for consumers across the world has created a tangible impact in the lives of these artists. The increasing demand for handicraft products both at national or international markets is also creating a great opportunity, not just for the urban but also rural Indian artists. E-commerce joints including CraftsVilla, Indian Grooves or

Engrave are constantly empowering the artists by creating market linkages between customers who are ready to pay the price for their art and crafts.

Coming to the second question, there are stories of rural artists who face struggles in adapting to changing times and technology. They lack the necessary skills and resources to promote or sell their products. When you talk about women and digital literacy, they are far behind. While technology creates a platform, the lack of basic skills such as digital literacy or resources inhibits the use of technology.

7) As we are speaking about the industry from a gendered lens, do you think women are better skilled, better producers as opposed to their male counterparts? Or is it a stereotype?

Personally, I disagree. Gender stereotyping of occupations and skills works to limit the potential of an individual. In fact, you see a lot of examples that prove otherwise. M.F. Hussain or Sayed Haider Raza are two Indian male artists whose paintings have been widely recognized. I would also like to give you an example of another sector – nursing. Nursing and caregiving are usually seen as a female or feminine sector. However, you see a lot of male nurses or caregivers who work in this sector. Therefore, I do not think it's correct to say that women produce more skilled art or craft work as opposed to men.

8) On this note of equality, women are often dependent on men for financial decision making. Why is that so? What is the importance of financial independence for women within this specific industry or even generally? For married women, does financial independence give an option of exit point in case of a troublesome relationship?

In response to your first question, there are a lot of women who still leave the handling of finances to men. Most women understand the importance of being financially independent but lack confidence in their own ability. However, I believe women should know and believe that they are equally good, if not better at making sensible money decisions. There is research that suggests women, who are sitting at the top-level positions such as in the board of management, make good decisions in managing the company. However, a mere lack of confidence should not come in the way for rural and urban women, regardless of their marital status. There are instances where women want to or are forced to be dependent on the male or the head of the family when it comes to having financial freedom. However, if you are married, you need to actively participate in any financial decisions as a part of the family. Whether they are contributions or not, they stand to be affected as beneficiaries.

Coming to your last question, exit from marriage is contingent upon a lot of external factors. In India, more people are separated rather than legally divorced. This is due to the stigma associated with divorce and the time taken in disputes in the slow-moving Indian courts. Moreover, family values, whether you have children or not, are factors to be taken into consideration too. Some women misuse having financial independence too. So, there are both, pros and cons to it. It should not be the case that after having a small argument and, just because one is financially independent, one thinks of exiting. One should be conscious of the other factors when it comes to something as big as marriage.



Click [here](#) to listen to the podcast

Interview by Tejaswini Vondivillu

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Swabhimaan is a joint initiative undertaken by the Centre for New Economics Studies and Start-up JGU. It aims to bring out stories of success and positive evolution from gendered hurdles in the entrepreneurial spirit of creation and self-respect. The Team would like to thank all the interviewees who made the second Issue of Swabhimaan successful.



Swabhimaan

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