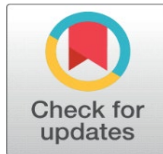


# INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL CRAFT PRACTICES INTO FASHION EDUCATION: A PATHWAY FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

India has a rich tradition of arts and crafts with immense diversity in its forms. However, the future generations do not find it lucrative enough to pursue it further due to access to contemporary markets and lack of formal education. Fashion design education thrives on how one integrates the arts and crafts into the formal ways of learning. The research explores positioning of fashion education—not merely as aesthetic or cultural inputs for design innovation, but as independent and employable skill sets that can groom a new generation of skilled craftspeople. It goes beyond preserving motifs and techniques—it lies in creating equitable partnerships, entrepreneurial opportunities, and consistent livelihood avenues for artisans. It can be achieved by including traditional craft practices, market understanding, business acumen into vocational fashion curriculum. The research involves various initiatives by designers, entrepreneurs, brands, educational institutions explained by way of case studies & interviews. The inclusive and appropriate education will prepare the designers to be socially responsible change makers who can enable rural artisans to thrive in today's competitive market while honoring their cultural legacy.

**Keywords:** Traditional Crafts, Fashion Education, Rural Development, Skills, Sustainable

## 1. INTRODUCTION

India is home to an extraordinary diversity of traditional crafts and art forms—ranging from intricate embroidery, woodwork, metal craft, and terracotta to folk painting traditions like Madhubani, Pattachitra, and Warli. These practices, deeply rooted in regional identities and rural economies, hold immense cultural and economic value. However, many of these crafts are under threat due to limited access to contemporary markets, the declining interest of younger generations, and the lack of formal educational structures to sustain and evolve these skills meaningfully.

Fashion design education in India, while increasingly inclusive of indigenous crafts, primarily integrates them to serve the creative needs of aspiring designers. Traditional techniques are often studied, interpreted, and reimagined for high-end fashion lines rather than sustained as community-owned practices. As a result, even when crafts are included in the curriculum, the outcome rarely contributes to the empowerment of the grassroots artisans or the development of a sustainable, affordable, and accessible market for traditional craft products.

This paper argues for a shift in the way art and craft are positioned within fashion education—not merely as aesthetic or cultural inputs for design innovation, but as independent and employable skill sets that can groom a new generation of skilled craftspeople. These individuals, rather than becoming designers, would be equipped with technical mastery, entrepreneurial knowledge, and direct consumer engagement strategies to create, market, and sell their products at fair and reasonable prices. The goal is to establish a self-reliant, decentralized ecosystem where traditional artisans can thrive economically without dependence on luxury markets or designer labels.

Importantly, this study excludes weaving—an area already well-integrated into textile and fashion curricula—and focuses instead on other traditional crafts that have been overlooked or underrepresented. By exploring how fashion education can be restructured to support craft-focused learning at the grassroots level, this research seeks to present a framework that fosters sustainable rural development, cultural preservation, and market accessibility for traditional arts.

The key objectives of this study are:

- To evaluate the representation and treatment of traditional non-weaving Indian crafts in current fashion education.
- To propose curricular strategies for training skilled craftspeople rather than designers.
- To identify the potential of such training in expanding direct-to-consumer markets for handcrafted goods at fair prices.
- To explore how such integration can contribute to sustainable rural livelihoods and the preservation of India's diverse craft heritage.

Through this approach, the paper aims to rethink the role of fashion education—as not only a platform for creative innovation but also as a vehicle for equitable development and grassroots economic empowerment.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

India has a rich tradition of arts and crafts like embroidery, painting, block printing, appliqué, and surface decoration. These crafts are not only part of our cultural identity but also hold great potential to support sustainable livelihoods, especially in rural areas. However, they are often missing from mainstream fashion education, which tends to focus more on creating new designs than on teaching hands-on skills at the artisan level (Singh 28).

This literature review looks at the gap between traditional crafts and what is taught in fashion institutions in India. It also compares how other countries integrate crafts into their design education and suggests a framework for how Indian fashion education can give more importance to craft skills. The goal is to help create more skilled craftspeople and support rural communities through meaningful employment.

## 3. TRADITIONAL INDIAN CRAFTS: SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL RELEVANCE

India's non-weaving craft traditions—like Chikankari embroidery and Madhubani painting—are closely tied to rural life and culture. These skills are usually passed down within families, without any formal training, and they provide important sources of income, especially for women and marginalized communities (Ghosh 12). However, many of these traditional crafts are slowly disappearing. This is due to reasons like people moving to cities for work, competition from cheaper machine-made products, and limited access to modern markets (Ramaswamy 45). Although government agencies like the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) and groups like Dastkar have tried to revive these crafts, such efforts often do not last long or reach enough people. A more sustainable approach is to include these crafts in formal education. Doing so can help turn traditional skills into recognized professions and allow artisans to connect better with today's markets.

## 4. FASHION EDUCATION IN INDIA: DESIGNER-CENTRIC AND CRAFT-PERIPHERAL

Most Indian fashion institutes prioritize design thinking, forecasting, and concept development over production-based skill training. Initiatives like the Craft Cluster Program (NIFT) involve short-term field exposure where students document or reinterpret local crafts, but these engagements rarely translate into empowerment or sustainable outcomes for the craftspeople involved (Mehta 63).

As Sharma points out, “crafts in design education are more often treated as inspiration boards rather than living practices” (Sharma 101). This approach ultimately contributes to market alienation, where consumers are offered high-end reinterpretations of folk traditions, often at unaffordable prices and with little benefit to the original communities.

## 5. INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS: CRAFT-CENTERED EDUCATIONAL MODELS

Several international models showcase how craft-based education can empower makers, rather than merely inspire designers.

- Japan’s Mingei Movement led to institutions like the Kanazawa College of Art, where traditional techniques like indigo dyeing, shibori, and lacquer work are taught as central crafts rather than design embellishments (Kawamura 47). This fosters preservation and market integration simultaneously.
- In Mexico, the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL) runs community-based programs that teach indigenous textile and embroidery skills alongside entrepreneurship, focusing on both cultural continuity and economic empowerment.
- In the UK, the Crafts Council and Cockpit Arts support craftspeople through studio residencies, education, and mentorship, linking craftsmanship with business skills, branding, and international markets.

These models contrast sharply with India’s focus on designer-led education and underscore the importance of rethinking curricula to support craftspeople as entrepreneurs, capable of accessing direct-to-consumer markets and digital economies.

## 6. THE POTENTIAL OF CRAFT-BASED, MAKER-CENTERED CURRICULA

There is growing evidence that curricula designed to nurture artisans rather than reinterpret their work can foster self-reliance, skill refinement, and innovation from within the craft community (Ramaswamy and Kumar 58). Such programs would include:

- Hands-on skill development in traditional crafts.
- Product adaptation training (e.g., turning Madhubani into wearable panels, or leather appliqué into garment trims).
- Digital and business literacy to enable e-commerce and fair pricing.
- Sustainability training, highlighting slow fashion principles.

These components can be embedded within fashion institutes as dedicated diploma or certification tracks—not just electives—targeted at rural youth, women artisans, and traditional craft communities. This approach democratizes design education by valuing making as much as designing.

## 7. METHODOLOGY

By repositioning fashion education as a tool for rural regeneration, cultural preservation, and economic self-sufficiency, this research aims to build a framework that cultivates craftspeople as professionals—not just as design inspiration.

This research adopts a qualitative case-study approach to explore the integration of traditional Indian arts and crafts (excluding weaving) into fashion design curricula, with a specific focus on empowering skilled craftspeople rather than generating conventional fashion designers. The study investigates how craft-based, maker-centered education can serve as a tool for sustainable rural development and economic regeneration in artisan communities. A qualitative methodology was chosen due to the exploratory nature of the study and the socio-cultural depth required to understand the dynamics between craft education, community empowerment, and market linkage. The research design includes:

In-depth interviews, Field-based case study analysis and Review of secondary literature on existing curricula and global best practices. This triangulated approach helps validate findings and ensures comprehensive insight into the subject. In addition to the primary case study, the research will incorporate Observational data, Secondary sources, including policy papers, institutional curricula, and NGO reports. Expert commentary from designers, educators, and artisan facilitators.

## 8. DATA COLLECTION

Dr. Nachiket Thakur, a designer and academitian focuses on the importance of a mutual understanding between artisans and designers for mindful innovation, appropriate technology for livelihood enhancement. He stresses on the importance of how designers must first immerse themselves in the materials, techniques, manufacturing processes and the social existence of the artisan communities. It will help to recognize the challenges for the younger generations from embracing traditional crafts. Similarly, the artisans must become aware of needs of the urban market and its demands. It will enable them to co-create designs with genuine commercial appeal. Dr. Thakur strongly promotes the integration of new materials and technologies into traditional crafts. It is not to replace heritage techniques but to enhance efficiency and widen possibilities. By following the specifications of designers, aligning to contemporary processes, artisans will be able to contribute in the ever-evolving competitive urban markets. Dr. Thakur proposes a model of co-creation respecting the strengths of the designer and the artisan. It's the best approach to have artisans and designers as equal partners in product development. It will ensure that the products that are crafted will be culturally rooted and economically viable. These efforts will add further value when the education sector takes the much-needed step of sensitizing the students to adopt to the traditional craft forms. Efforts need to be taken for bringing the artisans and students to work in tandem to preserve the traditional crafts to reimagine them for sustainable and market responsive futures.

## 9. PROF. NETRA TODKAR

Prof. Netra Todkar, a fashion educationist with 18 years of experience teaching vocational students has worked on ways to reduce the several persistent challenges faced by traditional artisan communities. She observes that the craft community lack the knowledge of the market. The challenge for them is to obtain orders from direct consumer, through government procurement mechanisms, trade fairs or modern retail channels. It forces them to rely on traders who often end up getting most of the profits. In addition to the market pressures the artisans manytimes end up paying too much for the raw materials for lack of appropriate channels of procurement. The benefits of cooperative purchasing, affordable sourcing practices cuts into their earnings or increases their production costs. Todkar also observes that many artisans are not exposed to design thinking, newer business strategies, modern manufacturing techniques which takes them away from understanding the urban markets or emerging consumer trends.

She believes that educational programs outlined in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 will help bridge this gap. The new education model will enable the fashion student being mentored by a local artisan as a equal partner in their co-creation journey. It will enable the partners who learns to secure orders, source materials responsibly, set pricing, maintain quality, negotiate contracts, and dispatch timely deliveries. These initiatives aligns to the NEP's emphasis on experiential, vocational learning rooted in real-world community needs. This approach ensures that artisans go beyond being skilled craftsman to become independent entrepreneurs. Integrating such capabilities into vocational fashion education will ensure that the traditional artisans will flourish as creators to independent economic individuals.

## 10. FAB INDIA

Fabindia was by John Bissell established in 1960. It is one of India's most well-known retail brands that integrates traditional Indian crafts with modern retail. Over these years, Fabindia showcases handmade textiles, garments, home furnishings, and personal care products created by rural artisans for their livelihood enhancement. They have played a key role in preserving and promoting India's rich craft heritage. Fabindia works with more than 55,000 rural artisans involved in non-weaving crafts such as block printing, embroidery, dyeing, hand painting, and surface ornamentation. The organization procures products from artisan communities and producer groups, ensuring that traditional skills are valued and compensated fairly. Special training is imparted to the artisans supported by local NGOs or self-help groups. Fabindia has become a bridge between the skilled artisans and urban consumers. That has helped transform their handmade crafts into high-quality products suitable for national and international markets.

In this "community-owned enterprise" model, artisans are not just producers—they are stakeholders who hold shares in the company. It gives them a sense of ownership and long-term economic security. Designers often work with

artisan clusters to modify designs, colors, motifs, and finishes to suit urban sensibilities yet respecting the core essence of the traditional craft.

## 11. THE BOMBAY STORE

In 1906 during India's Swadeshi movement, it was established as the Bombay Swadeshi Co-operative Store. The Bombay Store is a pioneer in retailing "a part of India"—with the authentic handicrafts, home décor, fashion accessories, and wellness products sourced directly from artisans and craftspeople from across the country. The Bombay store combines deep rooted India's heritage with a curated appeal for urban shoppers and tourists, blending traditional craft with contemporary retail experiences.

They source goods from rural and artisan communities, preserving legacy crafts while supporting livelihoods - it is a trusted platform for Indian craftsmanship.

The Bombay Store space design is inspired by India's local bazaars and royal homes. The complete experience with vendor-cart-inspired elements, carved wood, printed fabrics, and brass accents elevates traditional crafts through boutique presentation, making heritage appealing to urban affluent shoppers. The Bombay Store incubates emerging designers and artisans, offering in-store exposure across key outlets through its "Launchpad" initiative. This not only supports artisan entrepreneurship but also keeps the product mix fresh and aligned with urban tastes. The Bombay Store has embraced e-commerce and fashion campaigns—like its viral #ChappalMaaro—to engage younger consumers.

## 12. BAMBOO CRAFT

Traditional bamboo craft has been developing over the years. Traditional artisans use thin bamboo strips to weave intricate patterns. They are used for making exquisite fashion accessories like bags, jewellery, hats etc. The knowledge of traditional weaving practices needs to be conserved and enhanced with modern techniques and designs. Many Fashion Designers have taken it as an opportunity to include bamboo craft as a medium of expression in their designs. Sandeep Sangaru of Sangaru Designs Bangalore has effectively used it to create ensembles for the ramp shows to depict the craft practices. Students of Fashion design should be sensitised with bamboo craft to develop their visualisation skills and artistry. The integration of bamboo craft practices in their teaching learning activities is essential for the students' development as well as the conservation of the traditional craft.

Various brands who use bamboo craft in their product range are Fab India, Bombay Store, Bamboo India, Pune, Sampoorana Bamboo Kendra, Melghat, Bamboo Tantra, Pune

## 13. COPPER CRAFT

Rashmi Ranade, Founder Studio Copper Pvt Ltd

Rashmi has been working with the copper artisans for over 30 years. She has meticulously worked with the copper artisans to conserve and develop the art form. It's a difficult craft form and also expensive as a material of construction. She has been designing and making high quality products using copper with involvement of traditional copper smiths from Pune. This metal beating and tinkering method on copper sheets can be used to make interesting fashion accessories like earrings, neck pieces, clutches, embellishments on bags.

## 14. RECHARKHA

Amita Deshpande, Founder

The traditional art of handloom has been effectively used for making fabrics out of reprocessed plastic waste. The plastic waste is cut into fine strips and converted into yarn using a traditional charkha. The yarn is used in the handloom to make fabric. This fabric is used to make bags, accessories and jackets. The traditional handloom is put to contemporary use which helps the craft to be revived and promoted. Fashion Designers should use this as an important element of their designs which will give them an edge over others. It will help the artisans to increase their livelihood, the designers will be able to make exclusive products and help in the sustainability initiatives which is the need of the hour all over the world.



## 15. SASHA – EMPOWERING ARTISANS THROUGH FAIR TRADE AND DESIGN SUPPORT

SASHA (Association for Craft Producers), established in 1978 in Kolkata, is a not-for-profit organization that works to improve the livelihoods of craft producers across Eastern India. It supports artisans—especially women and marginalized communities—by helping them access markets, improve product quality, and develop sustainable business skills. SASHA is widely recognized for its commitment to fair trade, women's empowerment, and design-led product development.

SASHA works with over 100 producer groups, including individuals and cooperatives engaged in crafts such as embroidery, block printing, kantha stitch, batik, leather work, jewelry, and natural dyeing. Most of these artisans come from rural and semi-urban areas of West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. Unlike commercial enterprises, SASHA encourages self-reliance and collective ownership by connecting artisans to both domestic and international fair-trade markets with buyer as facilitator. Women the primary earners in their families make up a significant portion of their artisan network

SASHA follows the principals of fair wages, Safe working conditions, No child labor, Capacity-building support and gender equity on the basis of the Fair-Trade principles set by the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO). What makes SASHA different is it's. The holistic support system provided by SASHA goes beyond sales to offer training in areas like design development, quality control, costing, packaging, and digital literacy. Artisans are sensitized about the value of their craft by fostering a sense of dignity and confidence. The in-house design team works closely with artisans to adapt traditional techniques to modern product lines and processes. The collaborations ensure that crafts remain rooted in tradition but relevant to contemporary markets worldwide.

## 16. RANN TENT CITY AND THE PRINTED APPLIQUÉ DURAI INITIATIVE

Gujarat government in 2005 launched the Rann Utsav – The Tent City, this festival in Dhordo, Kutch is designed to celebrate the region's starkly beautiful White Desert and also offer a platform for the local culture, crafts, and community. The event—spanning over 350 tents and attracting 500,000+ visitors annually—has been part of the public-private partnership effort to boost rural livelihoods, development of appropriate infrastructure, and local artisan exposure

Artisans meticulously layer and stitch fabric pieces to create vibrant quilts, wall hangings, and garments created through the Appliqué Durai traditional textile craft of Kutch region. The authentic process of intricate layering, precise needlework results in high production costs, making it less accessible to the average consumer. High prices created a barrier, even though the artistic quality and cultural value of the products were appreciated.

To overcome this challenge, local designers collaborated with craftsmen under the Rann Tent City program to develop a printed version of the appliqué Durai. Artisans now use digitally or screen-printed appliqué designs on base textiles instead of hand-stitching layered fabrics. These prints are then stitched together as finished products—retaining the cultural aesthetics while significantly reducing manual effort and cost. The outcome of this is the printed appliqué versions are sold at reasonable prices, aligning with tourist budgets and encouraging impulse purchases.

## 17. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

### Hastkala Sahyog Shivar

Hastkala Sahyog Shivar is a field-level initiative launched by the Ministry of Textiles under the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts). These camps are organized in various craft clusters across the country to raise awareness among artisans about available government schemes and to support their integration into the mainstream economy. The Shivar provides guidance on aspects such as e-commerce onboarding, product packaging, branding, and compliance with GST regulations. Importantly, artisans are also encouraged to adopt direct-to-consumer models by participating in exhibitions and local haats, thereby minimizing dependence on intermediaries and improving income generation.

### India Handmade (Govt. e-Marketplace - GeM Portal)

India Handmade is a dedicated e-commerce platform under the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) initiative, developed to promote authentic handmade products by Indian artisans and weavers. The portal allows verified artisans to list their goods online and directly reach individual buyers, corporate clients, and even government departments. The

platform supports digital literacy among craftspersons, assists with product photography, cataloguing, and logistics, and promotes a DTC model that enables higher returns to the creators by removing multiple layers of middlemen. It is part of the broader vision of "Atmanirbhar Bharat" to empower rural producers through digital integration.

### **Marketing and Service Extension Centers (MSECs)**

Under the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) The Marketing and Service Extension Centers (MSECs) are established to provide artisans with comprehensive support in skill development, design training, and marketing. These are located in various craft-rich regions which function as local resource hubs, offering artisans a space to exhibit products and connect directly with potential buyers. They organize exhibitions, workshops, and buyer-seller meets to gain first-hand experience in handling direct market transactions, ensuring that artisans improve product quality

### **National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP)**

The Ministry of Textiles flagship initiative The National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP) is aimed at the holistic development of the handicrafts sector. It includes sub-schemes, like skill development, infrastructure support, and marketing assistance. The "Marketing Support and Services" enables artisans to participate in domestic and international fairs, exhibitions, and haats. It helps to provide artisans with direct selling opportunities, increasing visibility and helping them understand market demands.

### **Dastkari Haat Samiti (Supported by DC-Handicrafts)**

Dastkari Haat Samiti is a craft-based NGO that collaborates with the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) to organize exhibitions and crafts bazaars. The Samiti supports sustainable livelihoods by direct interaction between artisans and urban consumers. Their programs celebrate regional diversity, promote cultural dialogue, and ensure that the profits go directly to the makers. It also supports training, documentation, and innovation in crafts. This reinforces its role as a key bridge between rural artisans and contemporary markets.

### **Amazon Karigar & Flipkart Samarth (Govt-supported partnerships)**

Amazon Karigar and Flipkart Samarth are e-commerce platforms developed in collaboration with state handicraft boards and the Ministry of Textiles. They are designed to onboard rural artisans, weavers, and self-help groups onto leading digital marketplaces. They provide of digitizing product catalogues, managing online transactions, logistics, and customer engagement. These partnerships promote a direct-to-consumer model that increases artisans' earnings By eliminating intermediaries. It expands their market reach nationally and globally. This initiative aligns with government focus for promoting digital empowerment and self-reliance among traditional craft communities.

## **18. RESULTS AND FINDING**

This research collected data from interviews with field experts, institutional case studies, and reviews of government and grassroots initiatives. It brings out the need of how artisans are engaged within the fashion ecosystem, traveling the path from passive production to active stakeholder participation as co-creators.

### **18.1. DESIGNERS AND ARTISANS: A GAP IN UNDERSTANDING**

Dr. Nachiket Thakur reiterates that sustainable innovation in craft-based livelihoods needs mutual understanding between designers and artisans as co-creators. Designers must immerse themselves in the traditional processes, materials, and the practiced craft so as to bring social change amongst the stakeholders. The challenges faced by younger generations of artisans who wants to distance themselves from the craft practices should be addressed. Simultaneously, artisans must understand the expectations of contemporary urban markets and sensitise themselves with their requirements. The co-creation mindset is essential for meaningful collaboration in developing products which are culturally authentic and commercially viable. The new materials, technologies, and techniques should be integrated into traditional crafts in order to make them more efficient and market ready.

### **18.2. THE ROLE OF FASHION EDUCATION AND NEP 2020**

Prof. Netra Todkar highlighted the structural gaps that hinder artisan independence. Many craftspeople lack the market reach to secure consistent orders, to source affordable raw materials and how to adapt to current design trends.

This often leads to rely on mediators/traders retain a significant portion of the profits to control prices. The Community Engagement/Development Projects vertical of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 should be leveraged. As part of this the Fashion students can mentor at least one artisan, equipping them with contemporary designs, entrepreneurial skills of order procurement, pricing, quality control, and logistics. This education led initiative builds artisan capacity and promoted sustainable livelihood along with providing meaningful experiential learning to students.

### **18.3. LIMITATIONS OF POPULAR RETAIL MODELS**

Case studies of Fabindia and The Bombay Store are success stories with significant limitations. These ventures have succeeded in promoting Indian crafts at global urban markets but their impact on artisan's livelihoods are limited compared to perception.

The products are often expensive and therefore have a limited customer base due to their premium pricing strategy. Due to this the production volumes are low, which results in infrequent and inconsistent orders for artisans. Artisans in these models often work in small batches, so do not receive continuous work. They also do not participate in the design or pricing processes. They remain marginalized in the ecosystem which is perceived to uplift them.

These findings often challenge the assumption that good visibility translates to economic empowerment. Without continuous engagement such retail models perpetuate dependency rather than eliminate it.

### **18.4. COMMUNITY-BASED MODELS WITH INCLUSIVE DESIGN THINKING**

Organizations like SASHA in Kolkata works with a more inclusive model. SASHA helps artisans retain cultural authenticity while adapting to contemporary product demands by facilitating fair trade practices, offering design support, and promoting artisan entrepreneurship. The Printed Appliqué Durai Initiative under the Rann Tent City tourism project in Kutch illustrates how adaptation and simplification of traditional crafts significantly boost artisan income and sales without compromising aesthetics.

This exemplifies the need for innovation, driven by community insight and not merely market aesthetics. At ReCharkha where plastic waste is converted into handloom fabric, demonstrates how traditional skills can be applied to modern environmental challenges. It shows how sustainable craft practices can also serve broader social sustainability needs.

### **18.5. BRIDGING MARKET ACCESS THROUGH GOVERNMENT SCHEMES**

Government supported initiatives like India Handmade (GeM), NHDP, Flipkart Samarth, and Amazon Karigar removes the middlemen and facilitate direct-to-customer models. Many artisans are still unaware of these schemes and/or lack the digital literacy to derive benefits from them. To ensure artisans receive the appropriate training and exposure there is a strong need to integrate such platforms with local vocational institutions to fully participate.

## **19. CONCLUSION**

This study conforms and reassures us that integrating traditional crafts into vocational fashion education holds immense potential to drive sustainable rural development. Women artisans derive maximum advantage from these initiatives for greater livelihood. However, realizing this potential requires rethinking the current ecosystem that surrounds craft production, design, and retail should be rethought considering the immense potential for social growth.

Fabindia and The Bombay Store have helped preserve, sustain market India's cultural crafts. However, their models are not fully inclusive or sustainable for artisan livelihoods. The premium pricing, limited production result in low-volume sales which offers the artisans only seasonal or batch-based employment. The artisans are often excluded from decision-making roles which fail to ensure consistent income or capacity-building opportunities. This results in not fostering long-term empowerment.

A more inclusive and transformative approach is achieved from the community-based initiatives and education-led engagement—as recommended by NEP 2020. The fashion students collaborate directly with artisans through Community Engagement Projects, in order to share design skills, market knowledge as mutual mentors to develop a robust ecosystem around artisans. It helps them establish as empowered entrepreneurs. The model equips a craft



family member to manage sourcing, pricing, logistics, and customer interaction. This reduces the dependency on intermediaries and improves direct market access.

Case studies like SASHA, ReCharkha, and the Rann Tent City Appliqué Durai Initiative illustrates how sensitivity, appropriate designs, collaborative processes, simplified techniques expand the market reach while preserving the essence of traditional crafts. Government programs such as India Handmade (GeM), Amazon Karigar, and NHDP also give much needed platforms. It must be linked with grassroots vocational education and training for artisans to derive maximum benefit.

In conclusion, sustainable craft goes beyond preserving motifs and techniques—it lies in creating equitable partnerships, entrepreneurial opportunities, and consistent livelihood avenues for artisans. It can be achieved by including traditional craft practices, market understanding, business acumen into vocational fashion curriculum. The inclusive and appropriate education will prepare the designers to be socially responsible change makers who can enable rural artisans to thrive in today's competitive market while honoring their cultural legacy.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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