



RESEARCH PAPER

Nurturing Creative Economies in Pakistan through the Craft of Hand Block Printing

Areesha Fatima

Alumna, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Qatar

Corresponding Author: af1180@georgetown.edu

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this paper is to explore the prospective capability of hand block printing, an age-old craft, in developing Pakistan's creative economy. This paper has discussed multiple reasons like a lack of value chain, insufficient government support and non-progressive production approach of craftsmen and has highlighted the efforts that have been taken by different NGOs and government organizations at different times for the uplifting of this craft along with the shortcomings of these efforts. In this research, qualitative methodology has been used and study two major centers – Lahore and Kahror Pakka have been selected as case studies for a comparative analysis. This study is based on contextual and intrinsic exploration of various factors affecting this craft. As a conclusive note, it has been witnessed that although this craft has been consistently present, it is unable to play its role in the growth of the creative industry of Pakistan. Creation of a value chain would boost this craft sector into a booming industry contributing to sustainable economic development.

KEYWORDS Block Printing, Value Chain, Ecofriendly, Creative Economy, Government Support, Sustainable Economy

Introduction

Amongst the various factors contributing to economic development, creativity is emerging as a pivotal driving force, fostering innovation and sustainable growth. Globalization and mass production has created a great degree of competition in consumer goods, and creative industries offer a viable solution for economic development in the form of creating employment opportunities and alleviating poverty-stricken areas, particularly in developing countries (UNIDO 9). According to UNIDO, creative industries “are defined as those industries which produce tangible or intangible artistic and creative output, and which have a potential for income generation through the exploitation of cultural assets and the production of knowledge-based goods and services (both traditional and contemporary)” (UNIDO 11). The term Creative Industries first appeared in a policy framework in 1994 by the Australian government. They aimed to formulate a cultural policy called “Creative Nation” which centered around the idea that “Culture created wealth” referring to the enormous economic benefits that cultural assets hold (Moore, 2014). However, the term itself dates further back to 1944 when it was first coined by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* where they were pessimistically referring to the “commodification of cultural forms” as a “means of income for their creators” (Moore, 2014). The industrialization of culture, therefore, represents an intriguing process of using innovative techniques to transform cultural products into marketable commodities (Moore, 2014).

Creative economy is characterized by the contribution of cultural and creative industries (CCI) to the economic development of a country, city, or region. In other words, CCIs convert cultural capital into economic benefits. A country's cultural heritage is an immense asset and developing the CCIs are a way to transform this cultural asset into means of economic development and poverty alleviation. Cultural knowledge and creativity have a

preliminary role in the production of cultural crafts. These crafts are the creation of individual, or group of individuals belonging to local community and carries significant role because of this indigenous ownership. In a broader spectrum it has impact on the economic growth of society in general. They provide financial benefits to a wide range of people engaged in the cultural sector, including artisans, middlemen such as retailers and distributors, salespeople, and other involved parties. Therefore, creative industries play a significant part not only to economic development but also in shaping identity and fostering cultural awareness by highlighting and supporting the work of those involved in the cultural sector.

Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) is an umbrella term for numerous forms that cultural representation through human creativity may take. According to UNIDO these may include the following: “Advertising, Art and Antiques, Architecture, Crafts, Design, Designer Fashion, Film, Interactive leisure, Music, Performing Arts, Publishing, Television and Radio” (UNIDO 11). While CCIs encapsulate a wide variety of art forms, the handicrafts industry is a prominent one identified by numerous countries to contribute to their creative economies. By definition, handicrafts are made by “manual labor with minimal or no input from machines,” by artisans who possess a high-level expertise in a particular form of art which holds traditional value (Maureen and Roy, 2003). Therefore, the handicrafts industry not only reaps economic benefits but holds immense cultural value because handicrafts may have been passed down through several generations and date back to century old practices.

A primary component of Cultural and Creative Industries is the art of hand block printing which will be the center of focus in this paper. Hand block printing is an age-old, indigenous craft that finds its roots in the Indus Valley civilization about 5000 years ago (Hashmi, Sarfraz, and Naeem, 2022). There is evidence that suggests that these hand block printed products were exported to several parts of the world and the popularity of this craft in this area is evident from the discovery of remains of a “Dyer’s Workshop” in Harappa (Hashmi, Sarfraz, and Naeem, 2022). Punjab has been a historic hub of hand block printing evident from the artifacts displayed at Taxila museum which date back to 2 A.D., as well as a few artifacts dating back to the 19th century from Lahore and Kot Kamalia displayed in the V&A Museum in London. (Hashmi, Sarfraz, and Naeem, 2022). In addition to that, Lahore museum and Bahawalpur museum currently store hand block printing artifacts from Delhi Darbar and Kahrora Pakka respectively (Hashmi, Sarfraz, and Naeem, 2022).

Today, hand block printing is practiced in many parts of South Asia including Pakistan. Lahore is a prominent commercial hub of hand block printing in Pakistan while other cities like Kahrora Pakka, Multan, Jhang, and Sargodha are home to artisans who have learned and carried forward these crafts for generations (Hashmi, Sarfraz, and Naeem, 2022). This research has aimed to create connection hand block printing with the creative industry of Pakistan.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed for this paper is focused on various aspects of hand block printing; its cultural significance due to an age-old traditional craft, its commercial and economic potential and its role in creative economy of the country. This literature involves analytical study related to economic growth through craft sector focusing on hand block printing. For this study official reports on craft sector have been accessed along with NGOs accounts and activities. It also focuses on reviewing policies on government level and by NGOs for the development of craft sector with special reference to hand block printing.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) report “Creative Industries and Micro & Small-Scale Enterprise Development: A Contribution to Poverty Alleviation” highlights three case studies of Thailand, Pakistan, and Iran where successful projects have been or are planned to be implemented to develop the creative sectors of each

country respectively. In Thailand, the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) program was implemented in 2001 which proved to be phenomenal in producing desired results (UNIDO). The program aimed to develop rural areas of Thailand by capitalizing on the cultural assets (UNIDO). The layout of the program was that each tambon (meaning sub-district) would produce a unique product using local resources, traditional skills, and cultural heritage (UNIDO). This program involved 29,000 local societies. The second area as case study is Khairpur district in Pakistan which is popular for its various local crafts. For the promotion and preservation of these crafts different organizations decided to work together namely UNIDO, IRC and SAMEDA. The main motive of this collaboration was not only to preserve the cultural tradition of the region but also to play an effective role in improving the economic condition. Equal opportunities encouraged the local craftsmen to participate in the economic growth of the community. Third case study is on Iran's popular old craft of ZaBaft belonging to Kashan. The main aim was to revive the craft. This study also evaluates the then manufacturing system suggesting structural changes. With the support of the sponsors workshops were arranged for comprehensive discussions resulting in founding Creative Industries Cluster in Kashan for efficient production of ZarBaft. The outcome was the development of a detailed integrated action plan with short, medium, and long-term steps to implement the cluster concept to achieve this aim (UNIDO).

The article by Yongzhong Yang, Mohsin Shafi, Xiaoting Song and Ruo Yang titled "Preservation of Cultural Heritage Embodied in Traditional Crafts in the Developing Countries. A Case Study of Pakistani Handicraft Industry" outlines the rich cultural heritage of Pakistan and the significant contribution of the handicraft industry to the overall employment (2018). However, this industry faces numerous challenges ranging from rising raw materials costs, poor infrastructure, and declining wages to lack of innovation and interest in pursuing the field by younger generations. As a result, employment in the handicraft sector, as well as exports have been declining (Yang, Mohsin, Song, Yang, 2018). The article also mentions several governmental as well as non-governmental organizations such as Aik Hunar Aik Nagar (AHAN) and National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage (NIFTH) that are working to promote the handicraft sector in Pakistan.

The British Council has published two reports on the cultural sectors in various cities in Pakistan. The first one was "Cultural and Creative Industries in Pakistan" published in 2014 focusing on Pakistan's big cities i.e. Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore (2014). The second one was "Creative Cities of Pakistan" published in 2016 outlining the research on five other cities of Pakistan namely Hyderabad, Peshawar, Multan, Gilgit-Hunza, and Quetta have enormous creative potential and thus calls them creative cities. The report adopts a three-stage approach of outlining the handicraft industries in these cities, analyzing potential interventions to develop this sector, and proposing feasible programs for implementation (2016).

The doctoral dissertation of Farah Deeba Khan titled "Preserving the Heritage: A Case Study of Handicrafts of Sindh (Pakistan)" provides an in-depth analysis of the cottage industry in the province of Sindh in Pakistan. The prominent handicrafts here include pottery making, weaving and spinning textiles, fabric tie and dye, block printing (most notably, *Ajrak*), embroidery, wood craft, jewelry making, and carpet weaving (Khan, 2011). It also highlights that in recognition of the importance of cultural assets, the government has taken a few steps to promote the handicraft industry. Export Promotion Bureau has been arranging festivals in major cities. (Khan, 2011). Several articles like "An Economic Analysis of the Handicraft Industry in District Chitral Khyber Pakhtunkhwa" highlights the significance of craft industries in local revenue increase thus helping poverty alleviation. (Uddin et al., 2020).

Handicrafts sector's growth and development has been a primary aim of the India government since as early as the First Five Year Plan after independence in 1947. (Khan, Kirmani, Zoie and Kaur, 2024). Razia Bano in her paper "Role of Handicrafts in Economic

Development: A Case Study of Carpet Industry of India” has investigated the efficient carpet manufacturing in several popular regions showing more states involved in this process of growth of carpet industry thus playing important role in increasing trade and profit along with reducing unemployment (Bano, 2016). Government’s intervention in public private partnership and its positive impact in bolstering the craft sector has been studied through the quantitative analysis done in the article “Analysis of Government’s initiatives to Boost Handicraft Industry in India” written by Kalshetti, Patil and Jadhav. This article explains the impact of the agenda “Vocal for Local” that stresses on using locally made handicrafts aiming more on self-reliance and encouraging more employment prospects and helping preservation of the cultural heritage of the region (Kalshetti, Patil and Jadhav, 2024). The evident increase in the market of Indian handicrafts has been documented from 2012-2014 (Bano, 2016). Along with the efforts made by Jaya Jaitly who has highlighted the social and economic importance of these handicrafts and their preservation in her book “Crafts Atlas of India”.

Among these crafts, hand block printing stands out as one of the most ancient in India. This craft has also been supported by the government and NGOs in India and, in comparison, to Pakistan it has been flourishing. This craft has its roots in China, India and Egypt and it thrived more under the Mughals (Al-Hassan, 2001). Renowned centers for block printing in India include Jaipur, Bagru, Sanganer, Pali, and Barmer in Rajasthan, known for their unique prints like Syahi Begar, Dabu, Calico, and Doo Rookhi (Gandhi, 2019). Gujarat, Punjab, West Bengal, and other states also contribute to this art form (Gandhi, 2019). Modern designers have also been incorporating block prints into contemporary fashion (Gandhi, 2019). In fact, the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing in Jaipur, India was established in 2005 as an initiative to preserve the heritage of hand block printing (Lancy, 2019). It is an extraordinary space to showcase the beauty of this ancient craft through historic as well as modern works (Lancy, 2019). In addition to that, many organizations in India such as Aravali continue to preserve and promote this labor-intensive yet culturally significant technique (Ten Thousand Villages, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is based on the analytical study of an age-old craft, hand block printing, that has been investigated through the concept of creative economy that can be one of the key factors of Cultural and Creative Industry of Pakistan. This idea has been studied in a sequential research design and context based on the theoretical and conceptual knowledge related to cultural and creative industry; how the idea developed and how it can be connected to the craft under discussion. Hand block printing has been researched from varied angles initially starting from its dynamic history, its existing situation, its limitations, problems faced by the artisans, fragmented support from government and NGOs. Then a substantive discussion has been carried out on the literature reviewed in this context followed by the detailed methodology adopted for this research based on case study method using semi-structured interviews of craftsmen from the selected areas. Then the findings were elaborately discussed resulting in a comprehensive analysis that has been done followed by conclusive remarks and recommendations.

Material and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the potential development of Pakistan's creative economy through the craft of hand block printing. The research design is comprised of case study methods and the main focus of this study is block printing in Lahore and Kahrora Pakka. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with block printers from three locations in Lahore and two in Kahrora Pakka to gauge the current state of the hand block printing industry in Punjab. These locations were selected because they are prominent centers of the hand block printing industry in Punjab; Lahore is the biggest commercial hub for hand block printing while Kahrora Pakka has some

of the oldest and finest hand block printing shops. Lahore has numerous shops selling hand block printed textiles in several parts of the city. Liberty Market, Ichra Bazar, and Islam Pura (previously known as Krishan Nagar) are the most popular markets for block printing. The researcher conducted site visits to these markets and conducted semi-structured interviews with local artisans here. Liberty market has the highest volume of activity and therefore the greatest number of hand block printing shops too. Four interviews were conducted here. In addition to that, two interviews were conducted from workers at Ichra Bazar, and one interview was conducted with the shop owner at Islam Pura. In Kahrur Pakka, there are relatively fewer hand block printing shops. There are three shops located in the main market near Chandni Chowk in Kahrur Pakka and the rest of the hand block printers are situated in their own houses where they practice the art. Site visits and interviews were conducted with all these artisans.

In addition, interviews were done with government officials and representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to explore the work that is currently being done in craft preservation efforts particularly involving the craft of hand block printing. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevant expertise, supplemented by snowball sampling to identify additional key informants. Three government bodies were identified as relevant in this regard. First was the Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Development Association (SMEDA) in Punjab. Second of them was the project Aik Hunar Aik Nagar (AHAN) which launched 2007 under a similar idea as Thailand's OTOP project (Yang, Mohsin, Song, Yang, 2018). The third government body is Sanatzar that is involved in providing training in several skills as well as organizing exhibitions to provide platforms to artisans. Representatives of these government branches were interviewed to delve deeper into the work, if any, that they do in supporting the hand block printing industry. Separate interview guides were developed for each participant group, exploring themes such as the current state of hand block printing, challenges faced by artisans, economic potential, existing support systems, and suggestions for development and preservation. Prior to these interviews, the researcher underwent Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training program to be well equipped to perform interviews in compliance with ethical procedures. Furthermore, this researcher gained official approval by IRB (Institutional Review Board) of the Georgetown University in Qatar to ensure that the ethical standards of IRB were followed in formulating the interview questionnaire and consent forms as well as carrying out the fieldwork.

Data analysis has been done in a sequential order following cross-case analysis method. The data collected after carrying out the interviews has been examined recognizing persistent patterns and trends. Through this method comparative analysis of Lahore and Kahrur Pakka was carried out to evaluate differences and similarities thus getting a true picture of this industry's situation in varied areas. By using secondary sources further this study was extended to compare this craft with Indian block printing industry which helped in understanding the shortcomings of the current state of our industry in a broader context, thus suggesting a practical and effective model that can be followed in Pakistan. To enhance the dependability and uniformity of the outcomes, the researcher applied data triangulation, using perceptions from varied participants to authenticate the found evidence. This was done to ensure that the perspectives of block printers, government officials, and NGO members were correctly recorded and interpreted in order to authenticate the found evidence.

Results and Discussion

Hand Block Printers in Lahore and Kahrur Pakka

When the artisans were asked where they learnt the craft from, many of them traced the skill back to their ancestors who had been practicing it for many decades. For instance, *Quas-e-Qaza* is a 30 years old shop in Liberty Market owned by Mr. Sajid Ali Siddiqui. His

family has been involved in this business since before independence in 1947, and he learnt the craft of hand block from his father and grandfather and is mentoring his son to take up the same path. The business initially started in his home and has now flourished into a shop at Liberty market. The most important center of block printing in Lahore is the oldest shop in Islampura popularly known as Baba Gi Chaape Waale. The owner of this shop is Mr. Aminuddin and this more than fifty years old shop was founded by his father who trained artisans in different institutes in 1960s. These artisans have their own business in different areas like She Block Printing in *Ichhra* market.

In Kahror Pakka there are only a few families left who are still in this business. However, it was once the main center of hand block printing industry with hundreds of shops engaged in producing and exporting their goods to other areas in the region and even to Europe. Mr. Husnain Chughtai of Chughtai Block Printing shop told that they are in this business for four generations. While another shop Al Imran's owner, Mr. Imran also confirmed this craft as their family traditional business for more than ninety years. These interviews established the fact that block printing has been practiced in this region before partition Kahror Pakka was one of the main centers of this craft with its exclusive textile production. While the current state of this industry in Kahror Pakka is deteriorating because of multiple reasons like lack of resources, easily available machine printed fabrics, no support from government to promote cultural goods and no programs for the preservation for this heritage craft.

There are few NGOs and government organizations who offer these craftsmen opportunities to showcase their work. Organizations like THAAP, Lok Virsa and Sanatkar invite these artisans to exhibit their art and conduct workshops. Mr. Chughtai also mentioned the attempts of the organization *Aik Hunar Aik Nagar (AHAN)* to create a block printing cluster by providing the artisans in Kahror Pakka with training on how to grow their businesses and hosted exhibitions for them too, the most recent one of which was in 2018. However, he expressed disappointment at AHAN's closure and that it did not reap any tangible, long term results.

There has been a surge in popularity and demand nationwide in recent years. Many designers have started incorporating block printed textiles into their collections, recognizing the cultural value and craftsmanship of this traditional art form. However, interviews with the local artisans in Kahror Pakka revealed that they have not officially collaborated with these designers in any capacity. While some designers do visit the block printing shops in Kahror Pakka as regular clients, placing orders and sourcing block printed fabrics, there does not appear to be any structured collaboration between the local craftspeople and the design community. Mr. Chughtai mentioned the lack of registered designs and hence the lack of copyrights for these designs that may be originally created by a certain artisan but used by other designers as part of their marketable products. The artisans also stated that they have not seen an increase in their earnings as a result of this growing designer interest in block printing because of the lack of any sort of partnership between the two. This disconnect suggests that the local block printing businesses in Kahror Pakka, despite their long heritage and skill, are not yet fully integrated into the broader design ecosystem. Without formal collaborative partnerships or government support, these traditional artisans may be missing out on opportunities to sustainably grow their enterprises and incomes alongside the nationwide resurgence of interest in block printing.

Existing Efforts to Preserve and Develop Hand Block Printing in Pakistan

There have been some efforts on the government level as well as by several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to support the cottage industry of Pakistan, including several craft sectors. Following are details of some of these initiatives:

Aik Hunar Aik Nagar (AHAN)

Aik Hunar Aik Nagar (AHAN) was an initiative launched by the government of Pakistan following the model of Japan's One Village One Product project (Zainab, 2012). It initially fell under the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA) and was later registered as a nonprofit organization in 2007 under the Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC) (Zainab, 2012). AHAN's objectives involved product development and quality control, enhancing marketing strategies, technological advancement, and establishing connections with microfinance institutions to facilitate networking between rural entrepreneurs and financial institutions. The organization faced several challenges such as insufficient funding from the government, incompetency in strategizing leading to problems in sustaining the organization, limited access to the international market due to lack of marketing initiatives (Zainab, 2012). AHAN's aim of creating a "Handicraft Emporium" had immense potential. Under this idea, AHAN would help artisan develop and promote their products by providing them with technical support and enhancing their interaction with customers in the shared space which would be the emporium (Zainab and Gillani, 2019).

Due to the lack of available studies, it is unclear how successful AHAN was in different handicraft sectors. An interview with a former employee at AHAN provided clarity on this. According to her, AHAN identified and worked on more than 400 clusters across Pakistan. Blue pottery is a very successful example of AHAN's work in product development through the use of China clay instead of red clay as raw materials and to experiment with different colors to diversify and enhance their product. The challenge was to convince the artisans to make changes in their age-old practices which they believed to be too risky. The production improved with the introduction of this change but as it did not increase the exports AHAN program was withdrawn.

Although AHAN was rolled back in 2020, its initiatives were quite effective for the block printers in Kahrur Pakka as it introduced organic printing techniques instead of using age-old technique of using chemical colors and tints in an effort to produce more environment friendly products. This effort has placed the local block printing industry to keep stride with internationally required standards for sustainable, ecologically aware manufacturing practices. Despite these eco-friendly measures offered by AHAN, the organization faced varied problems due to the rigid approach of the craftsmen who were not convinced to adopt new techniques and strictly held on to their old and familiar methods. It was natural for the artisans to be hesitant to adopt new practices and not letting go of their generation's old methods because of their deep-rooted affiliation with them and because of their cultural identity associated with these traditional methods. Another reservation of the artisans was the quality of their products which they doubted would be compromised with this shift. All these reasons did not allow AHAN to gain required results in manufacturing eco-friendly products according to their set program. The author witnessed very few block printers left in Kahrur Pakka (Husnain, 2022).

Sanatzar

The District Industrial Home called "Sanatzar" is a training and production center established by the Social Welfare Department of Punjab. There are 36 Sanatzars, one in each district of the province. These centers offer women training in contemporary and marketable skills and aim to empower them economically through various entrepreneurship strategies. Recently, they have also started focusing on digital marketing, market connectivity, and using online platforms to sell products made by the women at these centers. During the last financial year 2022-2023, 28,319 women were trained in various trades such as spoken English, hand embroidery, cooking, baking, leatherwork, dry flower work, food presentation, driving, and computer applications. This led to over 2100 women securing market orders worth Rs. 5,511,547 for their finished products. In addition to that,

the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) organized the 11th WEXNET Exhibition from September 30 to October 2, 2023, at the Expo Centre in Lahore. WEXNET is the largest women-exclusive exhibition in Pakistan and features the products of all Sanatzars, showcasing the signature and cultural items of each district and region. This event brought together the country's top artisans, designers, and entrepreneurs, helping women entrepreneurs display their talents and gain the knowledge necessary to turn their businesses into success stories.

In the context of Sanatzars' work particularly in block printing, Sanatzar in Lahore offers a three month course on fabric block printing but no students are enrolled in it. This Sanatzar has two hand block printing workers registered with it and is reported to have received orders of Rs. 23000 in value from January to June 2024. On the other hand, the Sanatzar in Lodhran district (where Kahrur Pakka is located) is not offering any training workshops but there is a short assignment on block printing that is included in the fine arts course. Five block printing workers are registered with Sanatzar in Lodhran and they have reported to have received orders totalling Rs. 12500 in value from January to June 2024.

Lok Virsa

Through research and documentation Lok Virsa or NIFTH (The National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage) aims to preserve palpable and impalpable socio-cultural tradition of Pakistan (Khan, 2011). It is a federal body that has objectives to create museums and art and craft galleries, and it also helps to connect the craftsmen with the related institutions thus prompting private-public enterprise. Heritage Museum Islamabad is one of their benchmark setups where the exhibits are a reflection of Pakistan's various cultural heritage and different creative trends of the country. Along with other crafts the exhibits include block printed fabrics from different parts of Pakistan showcasing the creative skill and versatility (Khan, 2011). Lok Virsa annually organizes Lok Mela where all the artisans have opportunity to present their products and sell their goods

Trust for History, Art and Architecture of Pakistan (THAAP)

Thaap was founded in 2006-7 and has been involved in research work along with projects related to art and architectural heritage conservation preserving and helping to promote Pakistan's rich cultural landscape (THAAP). This organization has been working for the betterment of various crafts with special support to the block printing artisans. They have focused on the idea that the artisans should be in direct contact with the buyer. They have invited the artisans to exhibit their products in their heritage exhibitions facilitating the connection with potential buyers which can increase the artisan's business. The area of THAAP's focus is Kahrur Pakka and the artisans not only exhibit their products in THAAP exhibition but get some financial support also in the form of free-of-cost fabric on which they can create their designs. THAAP has been helping the artisans as a marketing agent for the broader interest of the artist in specific and Pakistan in general.

Koel by Noorjehan Bilgrami

Noorjehan Bilgrami has dedicated herself for the preservation and progress of the craft of hand block printing and her area of interest is traditional Sindhi *ajrak* block printing. She narrated her story in her interview of how, in 1976, she stumbled upon the craft of block printing blocks and her passion to preserve the craft began. She mentioned that "there was no idea or concept of block printing, it had come to a halt or a decline." A craft that was once flourishing and was iconic in creative industry of Pakistan was at the edge of extinction. This realization became the driving force for her dedication for the preservation of this craft.

Since 1978 her organization, Koel, has been arranging successful exhibitions promoting the work of local artisans and incorporating their skills to the fashion industry of

Pakistan. Koel has arranged various training programs, workshops and exhibitions in Karachi all contributing to developing the skill of the artisans and training them to cope up with the contemporary trends along with preserving the local *ajrak* block printing that is deeply rooted in the culture of Sindh.

Discussion

The analysis of the current state of the Hand Block Printing industry of Pakistan, particularly in Lahore and Kahrora Pakka illuminates several key opportunities as well as challenges. First and foremost, the sector remains fragmented due to the lack of a systematic value chain. Artisans appear to be working independently on a small scale and often remain alienated from the larger markets, especially the ones in Kahrora Pakka which remains a remote and underdeveloped region of Punjab. Consequently, artisans lose on higher profits as well as a strong bargaining power to demand more effective policies for the craft sector. The earnings of the artisans remain low and stagnant and they are unable to move up the social ladder.

The factor that makes the case of Kahrora Pakka particularly concerning is how the industry has faced a stark decline over the past few decades. A place that was once the hub of hand block printing buzzing with the work of hundreds of artisans is, today, only home to 5-7 businesses. This highlights the need for governmental intervention to prevent this valuable industry from going completely extinct. While one such effort was made in the form of AHAN, there is a need to revive such initiatives to safeguard the industry.

Another significant issue that was revealed during AHAN's work in Kahrora Pakka was the reluctance of local artisans in adopting new techniques that may be more cost-effective and profit oriented. There seems to be a tendency to stick with traditional methods because they are tried and tested and fall under the artisan's comfort level. While these indigenous techniques preserve a level of authenticity, they also put a limit to the returns that the artisans can gain from them. This is another area where training and education would enable artisans to capture the full economic potential of their art.

In addition to that, there appears to be a disconnect between artisans and designers which presents a missed opportunity. A formal collaboration between the two has immense potential in reaping monetary benefits for the artisans and adding a human element to the work of designers. With the rise of ethical purchasing, empowering artisans instead of just selling the art would popularize the products of designers and bring due recognition for the artisans - a symbiotic relationship benefiting both.

Furthermore, while there are multiple organizations working on preserving crafts and empowering craftsmen, the efforts are, again, fragmented. Most of these efforts are by Non-Governmental Organizations with limited resources and, therefore, limited success. The incredible and well-intentioned work of these organizations would be much more effective if a more integrated approach was adopted which would involve a holistic development of the sector. Thus, work on such a scale would be most appropriately undertaken on a government level. The case of India presents a helpful example of developing strategies to not just invest in the growth of the hand block printing industry but also to market the craft as a precious symbol of the country's cultural identity.

Conclusion

Hand block printing has been studied and analyzed from various perspectives in this paper focusing on its cultural significance and its prospective role in the creative economy of Pakistan. The main area of interest is Punjab focusing on Lahore and comparing it with Kahrora Pakka, once the main hub of block printers. This research reveals that hand block printing has been declining in old centers like Kahrora Pakka because of multiple reasons

including lack of government initiatives on regular basis, detached value chain, preference of customer for machine printed fabric rather than hand printed one and economic factor. The development and growth of this industry has been obstructed due to the lack of documentation and unavailability of data, disjointed support system and absence of market connections. The comparative analysis with India's prospering block printing industry further enhances the need to understand the potential to grow in this craft through strategic government support and effective marketing.

This industry needs to be restored with its energy to grow and prosper through cohesive support system initiated by founding a reliable device for the data assemblage and research to reinforce sound policy formulation. By following a structure-based strategy displayed in the practical example of Thailand's OTOP program which may provide administrative backing required for evolution. To further enhance the performance of this industry it is essential to create proper value chain refining each step from locating raw material to acquiring effective market reach and scope. The cultural aspect of hand block printing needs to be revived through museum initiatives, targeted marketing tactics and connectedness with tourism. Further more there should be alliance between local artisans and modern designers along with acquiring environmentally friendly techniques to align this craft with commercial market inclinations.

Thus, this industry is at the important turning point with its cultural and historic significance and its potential to play iconic role in the creative economy of Pakistan. In the current scenario effective role can be played by government organizations, NGOs and private business sponsors for the progress and growth of this valued cultural asset.

Recommendations

Value Chain for the Craft Sector of Pakistan

Drawing on the analysis of the present state of the hand block printing industry in Punjab, this section will propose creation of a value chain to address the issues and revive the sector. The first issue facing the industry is the lack of data. Without knowing the true level of development of the sector, for example the number of artisans and businesses in place and the marketing and sales trends, formulating and implementing an effective policy is not possible. Therefore, a mapping exercise is crucial before policy-making. This would involve the following steps

- Conducting a national craft census in order to document the number of artisans associated with hand block printing, their geographical locations, and production capacities.
- Analyzing the trends of demand and supply in the market to gauge the level of mismatch.
- Conducting market research on international demand of hand block printed products to understand the export potential thereof.
- Carrying out an impact analysis of the programs and initiatives implemented in the past to understand reasons for success and failure in order to take these lessons forward.

Only after establishing this database will it be possible to curate policies which are evidence-based and take into account all stakeholders.

While the artisans possess the skills, their techniques may be old and not as efficient. To counter that, the next step of the value chain would be to provide training to block printers on efficient production techniques that maintain traditional quality while improving output. To convince the artisans to adopt these techniques as opposed to the practices more familiar to them, it is essential to demonstrate tangible benefits to them. This can be done by showing them the increase in product quality and productivity that results

from the proposed techniques by performing both practices simultaneously and comparing results during workshops and training sessions. Once the artisans see such improvement for themselves, it would be easier for them to adopt the newly proposed production process.

Next, the OTOP model implemented in Thailand can serve as a prototype for establishing a similar cluster-based approach in Pakistan. The cluster-based approach would play out in a form of division of labor. In an area such as Kahrur Pakka where there are several artisans involved in this industry, each artisan would specialize in specific tasks of the production process. Some artisans might focus on block carving, others specialize in preparing and mixing dyes, some would concentrate on the actual printing process, while others would be involved in the finishing processes. The clusters would have common facility centers where artisans would have access to shared resources for each step of the production process. Furthermore, this way products can be produced in bulk quantities and can be aimed at exports as well which is currently not the case because each individual artisan does not have the resources and production capacities to grow their businesses to that level.

Once the cluster is established and is well-functioning, the next step is to facilitate direct linkages between artisans and end-consumers or retailers to ensure fair compensation for the artisans. Encouraging collaborations between artisans and designers to integrate block printing into contemporary product development can also be beneficial. For instance, one way of doing so is to create a cluster brand and develop a comprehensive marketing strategy for this brand. This can be efficiently done by utilizing different forms of media including traditional media, print media, and social media marketing. These platforms will showcase behind-the-scenes glimpse of artisans and the use of their skills. This would highlight the historic and cultural importance of indigenous crafts and would appeal to both national and international audiences, potentially boosting sales.

Another effective strategy would be organizing events for direct sales of these handicrafts. There are currently a few organizations that host exhibitions of such products but the artist who made the product still remains unknown. In order to give visibility to the artisans, regular exhibitions and pop-up shops in multiple cities can be set up. This would expand the reach of the artisans' work beyond one area or district and give them a chance to explore new markets.

Lastly, it is essential to promote this craft as a symbol of national identity of Pakistan, given the immense historic and cultural value attached. This can be done by establishing and promoting craft museums similar to Lok Virsa, which particularly highlights the art of hand block printing just like the Anokhi Museum in Jaipur, India does. The museum could include experiential elements as well such as workshops on hand block printing and guided tours showcasing the history and evolution of the craft. By implementing these strategies, this craft can be elevated from its current state of decline to a nationally and internationally recognised art and a vital driver of Pakistan's creative economy.

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