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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**A study on Swarming Apprehensions and challenges of Handicraft Artisans of Agra District:  
 with special reference to Inlay Work**

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**Abstract**

This research paper exemplifies the present status of handicraft artisans to assess the need of skill training programmes with a particular focus on existing inlay art of Agra district, to enhance livelihood opportunities, to provide sustainable employment and to preserve this most precious world famous art. However, there are many challenges confronting the work, market, accessibility, raw material, designs and many more. This paper projects that skill development plays an important role in developing societies to change economic and environmental conditions. The paper is divided into three parts. Part one represents introduction and research methodology. Part two review the problems and issues of the study. This study is based on data obtained from primary sources. Final and third part includes conclusion and suggestions of the study. It aims to study the current situation, identify the problems and explore the prospects available to improve the productivity to increase the standard of living in these areas.

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## Introduction:-

Indian handicrafts described by Jaya Jaitley, in the book, **Crafts Atlas of India**

*“...The tap-tap-tap of the stone carver’s hammer  
Turning mere rock into gods and cooking pots  
Listen as instruments and craftsmen  
Create infinite rhythm  
Listen to the sounds of yesterday  
Moving the footsteps of the today”*(Jaitley, 2012)

Agra, the city of most fascinating world heritage site of the Taj Mahal, has very exclusive and imitable culture. Agra was ruled by many emperors from Lodhis to Mughals, so it came into an acquaintance with different religions, cultures and traditions. These varied and distinctive rulers left their unique impression. The city is ruled by Mughals for a long time, so the impact of their long rule is still evident in the age old beliefs, cuisine and in structures.

As mentioned in agra.nic.in that the contemporary Agra displays significant endurance with the past, which is clearly visible in the viable movements. Agra has considerably significant manufacturing units of shoes, leather goods and handicrafts such as Zari Zardozi, Carpet Weaving, Inlay Work and Marble Stone Carving. Each area of Agra district is inherently connected with some or the other handicraft.

Chandra (2004) emphasised in the book ‘Cities and Towns of India’ that Agra is a valuable hub of beautiful inlaid marble articles, stone carvings, carpets and also for zardozi work. As specified by Jha (1979) that the skilled artisans of Agra are still creating exclusive and distinctive products, as they used to produce decades ago.

Handicrafts are aperture for this historically famous district. Agra is blessed to have adequate amount of highly trained artisans. They are augmented the status of handicrafts around the world. These artisans are the major part of our Indian society. Swaroop (1996) illucidated in his book that in olden times Indians cosidered handicrafts as the channel of liberation of souls. According to him handicrafts are the real expression of divine, actual and physical prospects of the community.

Handicraft industry is basically an unorganized industry, but provides employment to large number of rural people of the Agra district. These handicraft artisans constitute poor and vulnerable sections, among whom the migration for work is very high. Since the organized sector is more interested to take educated and skilled persons, it is still to provide them good and sustainable source against poverty, unemployment, restriction of social opportunities like basic facilities of life, education and health.

Inlay as described in Wikipedia, that a range of techniques used for the insertion of contrasting coloured pieces into the base material. In Europe, the work ‘Pietra Dura’ is used for detailed Inlays in contrasting colours or stones and ‘Parchinkari’ is the Indian term used for Inlay.



**Picture 1: Inlay Work**

The origin of Inlay art is not clear, but most accepted version is that it is Italian in origin and introduced in India by the Mughals in 17<sup>th</sup> century. Indian artisans learnt it and modified according to their taste and gave it an ethnic look and use this skill to produce various Indian traditional designs. The technique of making artefacts is still the same and tools used are also unchanged. This art requires a lot of patience and expertise, as it needs more than a day to create a small flower. At times, a single magnolia flower may have more than 100 individual pieces and may require about one week to make.



Picture 2: Tools & Technique



Picture 3: Creation of flower

Inlay art requires special skill to cut and engrave marble and precious stones. Floral and geometrical designs are engraved on the marble and the tiny pieces of different coloured marble pieces are shaped finely to fit in the predefined grooves. Different gems and precious stones are also used with coloured marble pieces. Some of them are:

- Pana Shell
- Lapis Lazuli
- Malachite
- Turquoise
- Coral
- Carnelian
- Amethyst
- Jade
- Variscite
- Tiger's Eye
- Omyx
- Agate
- Jasper



Picture 4: Precious Stones

The Inlay art of Agra is world famous but the condition of artisans is very awful. They live in a very depressed circumstance; even survival is a biggest challenge for them. Inlay artisans are mainly home based workers, they work from home. They receive work from contractors or middlemen or exporters and are paid per piece according to the items produced. Some of them

work for the exporters at small export units on daily wages and are paid very meagre amount for their hard laborious work. They does not have any direct link with the market.

These artisans have skill, but they have no financial assistance, though government is launching various schemes for the handicraft artisans but they are not aware of the government initiatives. They have artisan cards also, but have no knowledge, how to use them.

Bajpayee (2009) mentioned after taking interview of Inlay artisans of Agra that the children of these artisans are not ready to continue this art; they are more inclined to pursue other trades, though their family is into this trade for more than 400 years. Artisans feel that the urgent steps should be taken for the revival of Inlay art.

The growth of this art slowed down because it is more time consuming but the worker gets very less out of it. These artisans are not able to earn even minimal sources needed for survival. This is one of the reasons that artisans does not want their children to continue their art and also even young generation after seeing their parents struggle want to take another work for their livelihood.

A web-site reported that Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, while speaking on lack of skill development in the country mentioned that 65% of the Indian population is young, they are hardworking but not trained according to the market yet they possess certificates (Nation's Priority in Skill Development, 2013).

The Times of India reported that according to a survey conducted by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in 2009-10 on 4.6 lakh persons claimed that only 2% youth and about 7% of the working age population is trained (S, 2013).

As mentioned by Sethi (2010) that craft sector is mainly positioned in Rural India, and give employment to many million people. They belong to the weaker and vulnerable sections of the society. These people are skilled and creative and also the bearers of our traditional Indian culture, but because of the globalization and increasing competition in the market, they need to be trained (R, 2010).

The artisans are still using old, traditional techniques and tools for production and this is the very reason they are not able to compete. Another important reason is that they are still using century old designs and are not ready to change those.

In a Ph.D. thesis, Fathers, J. (2012) explores the role of design trainings for the betterment of artisans and concluded that with the introduction of new designs and design trainings, the artisans can compete in the market and can find sustainable livelihood opportunities (Fathers, 2012).

As mentioned in the 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan that Swarn Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojna is renamed as a National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) with a purpose to proliferate work employability by increasing employment opportunities to give sustainable livelihood to the rural people.

One more scheme is introduced by the government as Kaushal Vikas Yojna to set up skill development centres for the people of distant and secluded places to provide better life and to reduce poverty (12thplann.gov.in).

Chadha (2003) concluded in his paper on Rural Employment in India that rural work force is in very difficult conditions of life because of low quality of education, and non-availability of skill training programmes for them. (Chadha, 2003)

Mahajan et.al (2008) mentioned in a report that almost 92% of the working population in India is in unorganized sector. The risk in continuous flow of work is much higher than organized sector, so income generation is more questionable in unorganized sector.

Another study by Sengupta et. al. ( 2008) claims that in 2004-05, around 836 million people live in miserable conditions, i.e. about 40% of the population in 2004-05.

These artisans lives in remote areas of rural India, they are landless, poor, work on daily wages for land owners, exporters or middlemen. They earn money by various activities, which are diverse from each other. Their earnings are very less also not permanent, if they are dependent on agriculture for support, then they are at the mercy of nature because major part of the Agra District is rainfed rely's on the unpredictable monsoon and seasonality and if they are dependent on the skill they possess then they are at the mercy of middlemen for raw material, design and work.

Availability of finance is a major issue for these artisans. Government has taken different steps and issued artisan cards but these cards are of no use. Artisans claim that even government banks not accept these cards. Skill is also a big challenge for getting sustainable livelihood opportunities for handicraft artisans. They possess different skills but they have not received any formal training, so they are not aware of the new technology, sources, needs and demands of the customers.

Braja et.al. (2008) mentioned in their report that in 2004-05 92% of the India's working population is placed in the unorganized sector, so there is always uncertainty of income and low social security.

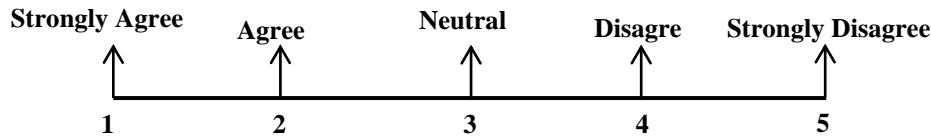
Though government is taking many steps to give better life and to increase work employability especially for the people of rural and remote areas, but we are still far behind. This research is an attempt to study the socio-economic conditions of Inlay artisans, with a focus on the need of skill training.

## **Methodology**

The research is undertaken with a particular focus on Inlay artisans of remote and backward areas of Agra District. The present study is descriptive in nature, in which data is collected without changing the environment. The research is undertaken with particular emphasis in-lay artisans of Agra district giving a special concentration on remote and backward areas.

The primary data for this research is collected by questionnaires and interviews. The secondary data is collected through books, journals, newspapers, published and unpublished research work and various search and official website etc.

Five point likert scale is used for data analysis:



The primary data is organized as:

### Variables

### Specifications

Sample Area	Remote and backward areas of Agra district.
Sample Population	25 Inlay Artisans
Research Tool	Questionnaire and interview
Sampling	Convenient sampling
Research scale	five point Likert scale

To identify problems associated with artisans and also to explore the role of vocationalization of existing arts in remote and backward areas of Agra district two sets of questionnaires are used. The artisans are asked to number the statements in order of their preference.

### Issues

- Main issues of marble artisans are as follows:

No awareness about their rights and government schemes

No health facilities

Large number of artisans are below poverty line

Develop skin diseases, asthma, poor eye sight, TB, broken finger tips, malnutrition, lung problems

Unorganized sector

Some of them possess artisan cards issued by government but they have no access to the facilities

Due to irregular work, income is also not regular

Children are not able to go to school, due to poor economic condition

Extreme poverty and unhealthy working conditions

No interaction with customers

Still confined to remote areas

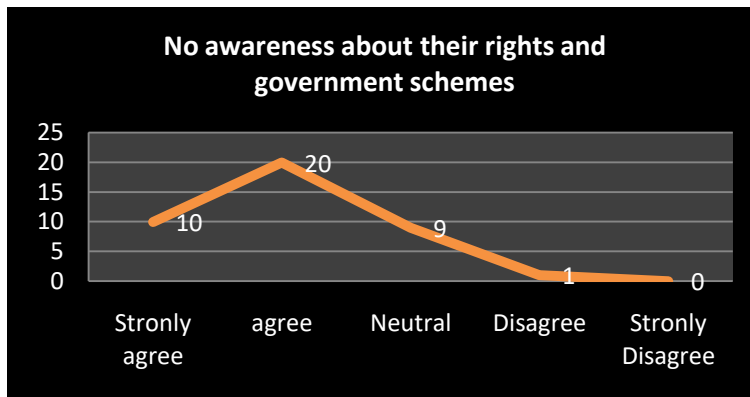
Figure 1: Issues of artisans

Source: Primary Data

**Results and Discussion:-**

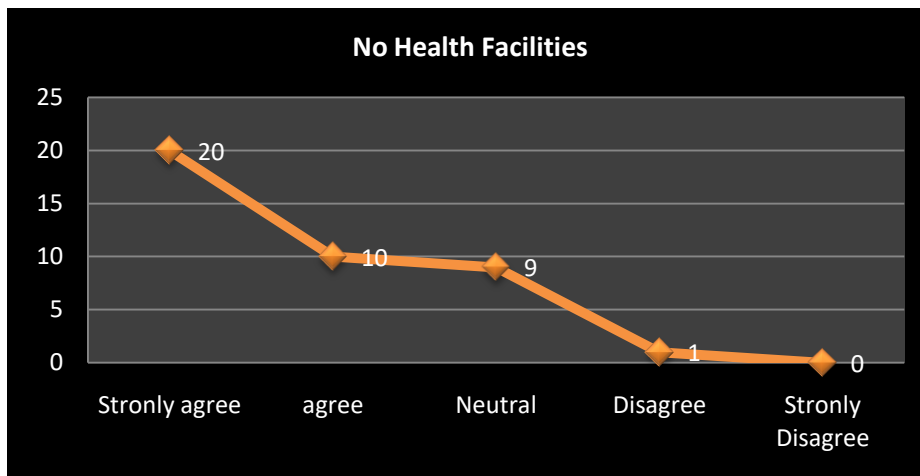
- **No awareness about their rights and government schemes**

Artisans are not aware about their rights and some of the artisans have artisan cards but they are not able to access the facilities given by the government. Lack of awareness is the biggest issue with these artisans.



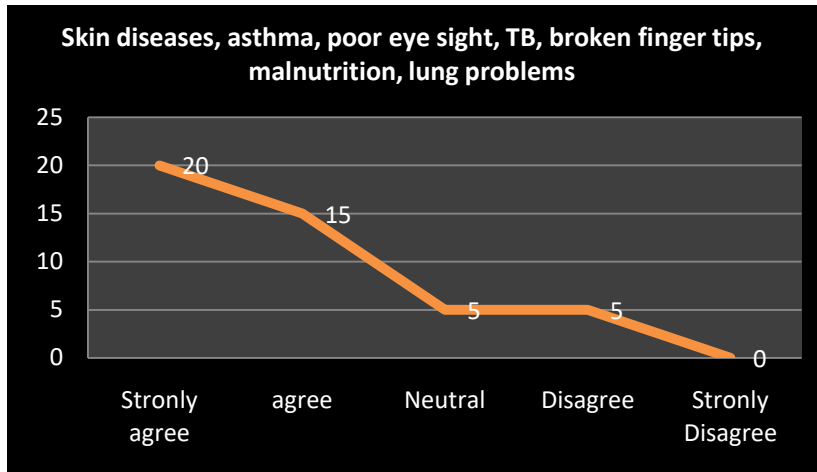
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Figure 2: Not aware about their rights



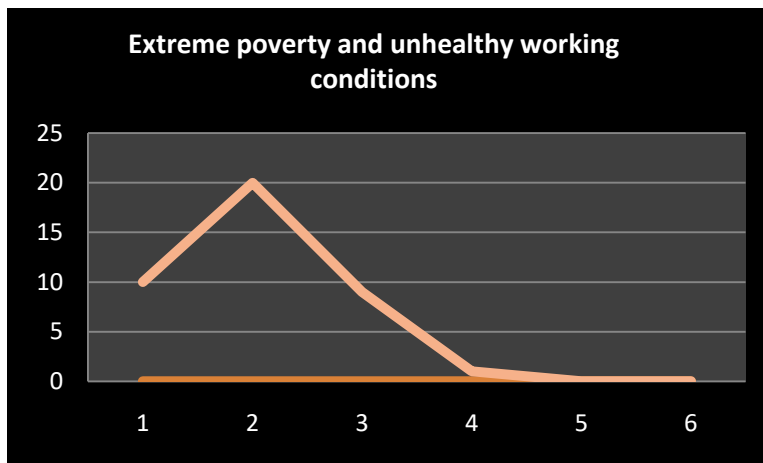
Source: Primary Data

Figure 3: No Health Facilities



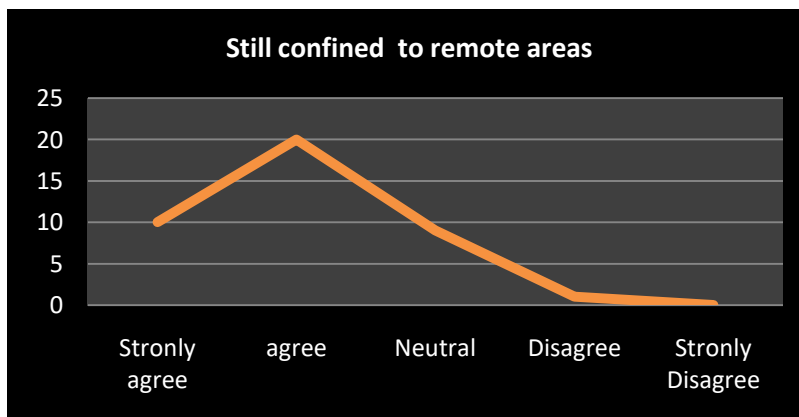
Source: Primary Data

Figure 4: Diseases



Source: Primary Data

Figure 5: Unhealthy working conditions



Source: Primary Data

Figure 6: Confined to remote areas





Picture 6: Researcher with inlay artisan



Picture 5: Some inlay motifs

### Suggestions:-

- Assistance required to improve the socio-economic condition of Inlay artisans
- Some steps may be taken to find out the initiatives taken by government for these artisans actually reach to them as they are cornered by middlemen.
- Inlay artisans are not using any safety measurements, if given some information, they will be benefitted.
- They are not aware of the diseases related to this art, if provided some knowledge, help them to remain healthy.
- Skill trainings are needed to get better earnings and need to be trained according to the market requirements, to strengthen competitiveness
- Support from the government for the upliftment and improvement of these artisans.
- Improvement in the living standards and productivity of the people in these areas.
- Individuals ability to adopt changing technologies
- Create opportunities for all to acquire skill especially for youth and women.

### Conclusion:-

The paper concludes that the Inlay artisans of far away and distant places of Agra district are facing lot of problems regarding their work place, raw material, wages and financial assistance. This is possibly due to the fact that they are not aware of the current scenario as compared with the artisans working in urban and connected places. As Agra is a hub for Inlay art, national as well as on international level, a wide range of Inlay art of Agra stand out as the promising one. Yet it cannot be ignored that agriculture is the main occupation of the rural people and major part of the artisans work on daily wages in the absence of the work, and paid very less. In this context, the crucial role of skill training with an aim to provide knowledge of new technology, market, need of the customer, assistance and also the help given by government for them. Finally, the need of the hour is to give them good life and sustainable employment. Thus the fact that skill training programmes has to be implemented.



Picture 7: Inlay artefacts

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