

ARTISAN VOICES: EXPLORING POLICY AWARENESS AND THE FUTURE OF UTTARAKHAND'S TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

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Abstract:

Uttarakhand, in recent times, has been a centre of much migration from the surrounding states, with immigrants pouring in, citing livelihood opportunities. As a result of the influx of various cultures, Uttarakhand's plethora of crafts faces the perils of hybridization. Indigenous crafts of the region, due to increased migration, faces a syncretism of cultural influences resulting in alteration of design and practice as evident in the recent designs produced by Aipan artists or facing extinction like the craft of Dikara. Whereas, a number of initiatives have been introduced by the Union government to help artisans such as the Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojna, National Handicraft Development program, Handicrafts Mega Cluster Mission (HMCM), the beneficiaries are often unaware of these policies. To ensure the continuation of cultural practice, the initiatives need to be familiarized to the artisans to safeguard their interests in order to continue their practice and well-being. Considering the reference of Aipan practice in Uttarakhand, through discussions with artisans, craft and design experts, this study sought to understand and explore the existing conditions of artisans from Uttarakhand and their awareness on such initiations the government. This study further explores the need of such artisans and their subsequent suggestions on government initiations and help they covet for their well-being and sustenance of their craft practice.

Keywords: Handicrafts, Artisan well-being, Craft practice preservation, Government policies

Introduction

Uttarakhand's traditional crafts enjoy a rich cultural heritage due to its unique mountainous culture and rituals. Among them is Aipan, a sacred floor-line drawing and wall-painting art of the Kumaon hills. It is an intricate geometric and figure motif (flowers, gods, sacred symbols) painted using red ochre and white rice paste for ceremonies and festivals, ref. Fig.1. Aipan patterns often painted by women using fingers, are believed to bring prosperity and good fortune (Negi, 1988), it is not merely a decorative art form it is a visual evocation, a symbolical performance, and a religious offering in the form of fine lines and detailed patterns, it is a deeply rooted cultural form that combines art, ritual, gender, and ecology into one aesthetic of the sacred.

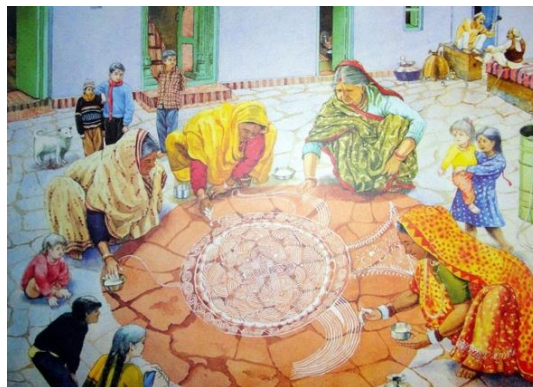


Figure 1: Family women passing on the sacred tradition of Aipan to the coming generation, as they create complex patterns and sing (mangals) chants, placing their eternal hopes and blessings into the tradition.

Source- Dr Yashodhar Mathpal

No less traditional is the practice of making Dikaras (also spelled as Dikare or Dikarey) is considered to be from the local Kumaoni language, clay figurines. They are typically crafted out of the local red or brown clay, shaped into simple, stylized human figures most typically that of Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati, lord Ganesha and Kartikey, Animals, birds, or geometric symbolic motifs can be added to some of them (Joshi, 1996). Dikara are most prominently featured during the Harela festival- which inaugurates the cycle of cultivation and the union of Shiva and Parvati a cosmological union that represents the arrival of the monsoon and fertility of the land, ref. Figure 2.



a



b

Figure 2. shows the clay images of Lord Shiva's family members and himself, called Dikare, which are put up during the Harela festival celebrations in Uttarakhand's Kumaon region. The dolls in the image are made from natural clay not terracotta ceramic and are given ritual importance during the festival. After the festival rituals, the dolls are dipped into water or simply left to decay, indicating the ephemeral nature of life and the birth-death cycle in Hindu philosophy.

Source – (a) Man culture and society in Kumaon Himalaya (Joshi, 1996)

The Harela festival, meaning "Day of Green" in the Kumaoni language of the area, is a colourful festival that is closely a part of the agricultural and cultural life of the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, India. It is a once-a-year celebration on the first day of the Hindu month of Shravan (mid-July typically) and is the beginning of the monsoon period and the beginning of the sowing period for crops. Every Harela, families make Dikaras of local gods or symbols as part of the ritual offering (Humans Of Uttarakhand Lively depiction of life of hill people , 2025). Ten days before Harela, five or seven seeds are sown in baskets of soil. As the seeds sprout, the Dikara are shaped, dried, and kept near the shoots on the day of the festival. The idols are offered along with the green harvest a symbolic birth and rebirth. Aipan and Dikara art forms, together, have been passed on matrilineally from generation to generation, providing both cultural value and ancillary income in rural Kumaoni families.

Over the past decades, Uttarakhand has experienced rapid population movements. Its far-flung hill districts have experienced mass out-migration, while the plains (e.g. Dehradun, Haridwar, Udham Singh Nagar, Nainital) have urbanized rapidly unexpectedly. Hundreds of thousands of Uttarakhandis particularly from high-altitude Himalayan valleys are said to have emigrated (Bansal, 2024). A state commission estimated that approximately 3.3 lakh people departed from Uttarakhand between 2018 and 2022 (predominantly from hilly areas). Earlier estimates suggest that more than 5 lakh departed during the

2010s, usually temporarily, "in search of work or due to a lack of basic facilities" in the hills. Consequently, the number of "ghost villages" (now abandoned) has grown rapidly, reaching nearly 1,792 by 2018 (Arya, 2024), (Rana, 2024).

Plains cities rose by over 30% during the decade between 2001 and 2011 alone due to this migration. Election statistics suggest that the population eligible to vote in the plains districts has grown much faster than in the hills. In short, therefore, Uttarakhand's demography is now bimodal: sparsely populated and de-populated hills, and overcrowded plains that have absorbed migrants from within the state and outside (Rana, 2024), (K, 2017). People are immigrating to Uttarakhand not just to escape urban living, but to find purpose, joy, and a sense of oneness with nature once again. As pioneers, as adventurers, and as businesspeople, they are drawn by the allure of a slower, cleaner, wiser existence—while the state strives to offset its environmental fragility with growing popularity.

These migration currents seriously threaten Pattachitra, Aipan, Dikara and other traditional crafts. The main impact is the loss of practitioners and authenticity, migration to Uttarakhand, while in a way beneficial, also poses extremely dire threats to the hill cultural traditions and crafts. While the outsiders move into the hills and the longtime residents move away, the fine balance of cultural conservation is being disturbed (Negi C. S., 2016), (Kala, 2017). Experienced craftsmen and their children abandon village life to obtain education or employment, disrupting the chain of intergenerational transmission. As a commentator puts it, Aipan and Dikara art is "traditionally practiced by women who transfer their knowledge to their descendants through generations". When young villagers migrate, these traditional home-based apprenticeship dies out.

Concurrently, as hill communities diminish, local demand for ritual crafts declines. Once Aipan-decorated houses remain unoccupied, and fewer ceremonies are performed locally, undercutting the traditional occasions that support the arts. Additionally, migrated craftsmen are usually under urban employment pressures that dissuade time-consuming handicraft activity. Indeed, economic migration has diminished the number of Kumaoni craftsmen and degraded the social context for crafts, threatening Aipan and Dikara traditions to erode unless actively preserved.

Therefore, the state and central governments have initiated a number of schemes for the well-being of handicraft communities as given in Table 1. Among these are:

Table 1 shows central and state government schemes for artisans:

Scheme / Initiative	Level	Implementing Body	Key Features
Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana (AHVY)	Central	Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles	Cluster development, skill & design workshops, toolkits, marketing support
National Handicrafts Development Programme (NHDP)	Central	Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles	Human Resource Dev., Direct Benefit to Artisans, infra & tech support, marketing & exhibitions
PM Vishwakarma Yojana	Central	Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium	Certification, basic training, concessional loans,

		Enterprises (MSME)	toolkit grants, digital marketing assistance
Artisan Credit Card (ACC)	Central	Ministry of Textiles / Commercial Banks	Easy collateral-free credit up to ₹1–3 lakhs at concessional interest
One District One Product (ODOP)	Central & State	Ministry of Commerce & Industry / Uttarakhand Industries Dept.	Branding & marketing of one signature craft per district, export facilitation
India Handmade (e-commerce portal)¹	Central	Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles	Free online storefronts, logistics tie-ups, digital training
Skill India (Training & Certification)	Central	Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship	Short-term courses in traditional and modern craft skills, certification by NSDC
Uttarakhand Handloom & Handicraft Dev. Council (UHHDC)	State	Uttarakhand Industries Department	Training camps, fairs & exhibitions, artisan registration, GI-tag support
Mukhyamantri Swarozgar Yojana (MSY)	State	Uttarakhand Industries / DICs	Subsidized loans, entrepreneurship training, margin money subsidy for new/self-employed artisans
Integrated Livelihood Support Project (ILSP)	State (IFAD-backed)	Uttarakhand State Rural Livelihood Mission	Livelihood group formation, skill enhancement, market linkages for local crafts
State Craft Clusters & SHG Promotion	State	Rural Dev. Dept. / Panchayats	Formation of SHGs, localized craft clusters, design intervention, micro-infrastructure support

All of these schemes recognize that craftsmen need help not just for training and equipment but also institutional and financial support. Through organizing craftsmen, skill improvement, and market access, the policies seek to create conditions wherein folk artists can prosper at home and not migrate. Successful implementation of such schemes is being viewed as key to the survival of Uttarakhand's folk art tradition in the context of demographic change.

¹ Central-scheme entries are based on official web sites of Ministry of Textiles and Ministry of MSME (up to May 2025). State-scheme entries are based on publications of Uttarakhand Industries Department and ILSP reports sponsored by IFAD. Scheme features may differ at district level.

Uttarakhand artisans need continued and systemic support from the government to continue their craft and source of livelihood. They need exposure to skill development schemes, advanced machinery, and markets connecting them to national and international markets. They need easy credit, subsidies, and insurance for economic stability. They need certification and local craft clusters, design innovation centers, as well. They need not only to continue traditional crafts such as Aipan, Ringaal, and wool weaving but also to make these economically viable, making them self-sufficient and contributing to the region's cultural and craft economy.

The government has initiated schemes such as AHVY, PM Vishwakarma, and handicraft cluster development to benefit artisans in the form of training, finance, and marketing assistance. In Uttarakhand, however, individual artists are mostly unable to benefit from these schemes (Handicrafts, 2025), (Textiles, Development Commissioner for Handlooms, 2025). Big NGOs and organizations appropriate the application and implementation processes at the cost of individual artisans. Though many artists have registered under these schemes, their traditional knowledge and conservation requirements are neglected. Bureaucratic delays, indirect outreach, and poor grassroots implementation deny true individual artisans complete benefits, and the very basic purpose of preservation of craft and empowerment of people remains mostly unachieved. Below are the govt schemes discussed.

The Pehchan scheme, launched in 2016 by the Government of India, Ministry of Textiles, aims to provide handicraft artisans with a unique identity in the form of Aadhaar-linked Pehchan cards. The cards are authentic identity cards of artisans, enabling them to take advantage of government schemes and benefit, 42,890 artisans of Uttarakhand have been registered under the Pehchan program as of June 30, 2023 (Handicrafts, 2025). This allows them to avail a variety of benefits and support mechanisms offered by the Ministry of Textiles. Although this figure is an approximation of artisans, it should be noticed that the figure of artisans in Uttarakhand would be higher in actuality. A majority of artisans, especially in rural or rural remote areas, might not have registered due to the fact that they were not aware, had no registration center within reach, or other socio-economic factors (Sundriyal, 2011).

Additionally, Uttarakhand is also home to a huge population of artisan communities. For instance, the state has as many as 451 bamboo artisan villages, and districts like Bageshwar have a huge population of such communities. Additionally, the Shilpkar community traditionally engaged in a range of crafts comprises approximately 52% of the state's Scheduled Caste population (Government of Uttarakhand.Handicrafts, 2023). From these findings, it is evident that the artisan communities are the pillar of the economy and culture of Uttarakhand. Support and encouragement of these communities are the key if the state's rich artisan culture is to be maintained.

Likewise, the PM Vishwakarma Yojana has seen record response from artisans of Uttarakhand since its launch, with more than 18,000 registrations and more than 6,000 skill trainings already carried out (Priya, 2024) (SMARTBOARD, 2021). As of July 15, 2024, 12,413 traditional artisans of Uttarakhand have received basic training in various traditional crafts under the PM Vishwakarma Yojana as shown in Table 2. The scheme, launched on September 17, 2023, deals with the skill upgradation of traditional artisans and craftsmen as well as financial assistance and exposure to new tools and technology.

Table 2 shows the Representation of benefits gained by non-artists under the artists' category, revealing inequalities in appreciation, access, and resource distribution among the artist.

Source: Department of Skill Development and Employment, Government of Uttarakhand (2004)

Breakdown of Basic Training by Trade in Uttarakhand		
Trade	Number Trained	of Artisans
Armourer	96	
Barber (Naai)	1,342	
Basket/Mat/Broom Maker/Coir Weaver	508	
Boat Maker	10	
Carpenter (Suthar/Badhai)	2,087	
Cobbler (Charmakar)/Shoesmith/Footwear Artisan	11	
Doll & Toy Maker (Traditional)	87	
Fishing Net Maker	0	
Garland Maker (Malakaar)	387	
Goldsmith (Sonar)	0	
Hammer and Tool Kit Maker	791	
Locksmith	0	
Mason (Rajmistri)	1,147	
Metalsmith/Metal Caster	940	
Potter (Kumhaar)	90	
Sculptor (Moortikar, Stone Carver), Stone Breaker	45	
Tailor (Darzi)	4,669	
Washerman (Dhobi)	203	

- AHVV's reach in Uttarakhand was limited between 2018 and 2021, covering around 1,905 artisans (Textile, 2021). Almora & Bageshwar were among the very first districts included under AHVV due to Aipan art and loom weaving methods. Pithoragarh & Chamoli witnessed growth in support owing to vibrant natural fiber crafts and wool. 2020-21 witnessed increasing emphasis on virtual interventions (branding, e-commerce training) post-COVID-19. (Textiles, Annual Report on Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana (AHVV), 2018–2021.) Each craftsman was usually entitled to allowances of ₹10,000 to ₹25,000, depending on the intervention type.

- The table 3 has been prepared from government annual reports and scheme summaries of the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), and regional observations have been deduced from Uttarakhand-based cluster reports and artisan outreach data under AHVY (2018–2021).

Table 3 shows the Annual report of artisan-centric interventions under the AHVY programme in Uttarakhand (2018–2021), covering the districts covered, the crafts included, the number of artisans included, and key interventions. The figures indicate targeted interventions in the heritage crafts of Aipan, Ringaal, wool work and iron work, based on government surveys and outreach at the cluster level.

Year	Districts Covered	Craft Focused	No. of Artisans Benefited	Key Interventions
2018–19	Almora, Bageshwar	Aipan, Wool, Bamboo (Ringaal)	360	Skill development workshops, design input, exposure visits
2019–20	Pithoragarh, Chamoli	Wool, Wood carving, Natural fibers	760	Cluster formation, infrastructure support, common facility centres, marketing linkage
2020–21	Tehri, Uttarkashi, Nainital	Ringaal, Iron craft, Aipan	785	Toolkit distribution, branding & packaging training, e-commerce onboarding
Total	—	—	1,905	—

- For other schemes like NHDP, MSY, and India Handmade platform, no individual registration data is presented for Uttarakhand, revealing a lack of improved reporting and transparency in the data.
- The House of Himalayas (HoH) initiative, which was inaugurated at the Uttarakhand Global Investor Summit 2023, is an umbrella brand to market genuine, handcrafted products of the region. HoH hopes to empower the local artisans and producers by providing quality products and tying up with e-commerce portals for exports (TOI, 2024). Through carefully selecting products from simple handlooms and handicrafts to herbal wellness products and natural foods, HoH focuses on quality, traceability, and authenticity of culture. The company attempts to simplify branding, packaging, and access to markets, some of the biggest obstacles that local producers encounter in expanding their businesses. One of the features of the venture is that it is partnering with big e-commerce portals and retail chains and empowering rural artisans to reach urban consumers and international buyers without depending on middlemen. These strategic alliances, in turn, enable HoH to revive traditional knowledge systems, offer livelihood opportunities, and position Uttarakhand as a world hub for ethical, sustainable, and culturally authentic products.

Table 4 Mapping of Government Schemes to Artist Needs

Category of Support	Covered by Govt Schemes?	Relevant Schemes
Skill Development	Yes	AHVV, NHDP, PM Vishwakarma, Skill India, UHHDC, ILSP
Financial Assistance	Yes	PM Vishwakarma, Mukhyamantri Swarozgar Yojana, Artisan Credit Card, AHVV
Infrastructure	Partial	AHVV (CFCs), UHHDC, ODOP (limited infra), ILSP
Marketing & Branding	Yes	ODOP, NHDP, India Handmade portal, UHHDC exhibitions
Cultural Preservation	Partial	GI Promotion (through UHHDC), AHVV documentation component, but limited fellowships or grants
Digital & Technological	Partial	India Handmade, PM Vishwakarma (some digital literacy), but broader tech adoption (AR/AI) is limited
Legal & Policy Support	Limited	GI Tag enforcement is present but weak; copyright or social security inclusion is under-addressed
Community Recognition	Limited	Awards exist (Shilp Guru, State honors), but representation in policymaking and cultural councils is minimal

The Uttarakhand Government has initiated various targeted schemes to promote its handloom and handicraft industries. The Chief Minister Handicraft and Handloom Promotion Scheme provides registered artisans with a one-time grant of up to ₹25,000 towards the cost of raw materials and machinery, directly addressing the capital deficiencies that usually afflict small-scale producers (Handloom and Handicrafts Division, 2024), (Uttarakhand, 2024). Complementing this financial support, the Uttarakhand Handloom and Handicraft Development Council (UHHDC), established under the Department of Industries, organizes exhibitions and fairs, offers end-to-end training and skill-development programs, and actively promotes and brands local crafts such as Aipan, Ringaal, and traditional woolen weaving. Furthermore, the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative promotes a signature craft from

² **Table 4** Government scheme classification is adapted from a compilation of reports on government schemes and government reports on AHVV (Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana), NHDP (National Handicrafts Development Programme), PM Vishwakarma Yojana, Chief Minister's Self-Employment Scheme (Mukhyamantri Swarozgar Yojana), UHHDC (Uttarakhand Handloom & Handicraft Development Council), India Handmade portal, and ILSP (Integrated Livelihood Support Project), as outlined in Empowering Uttarakhand Handicrafts (Government of Uttarakhand, 2023) and ministry publications.

each district—Almora's Aipan, Chamoli's Ringaal bamboo craft, and Uttarkashi's woolen fabrics—offering specialized branding support, training workshops, market-linkage development, and targeted subsidies to boost local³ economies and cultural heritage.

Despite being eligible for various government schemes, the majority of artisans in Uttarakhand are still unable to access or avail themselves of them due to systemic as well as informational reasons (R.Meena, 2021) . Scheme awareness, particularly in rural and remote areas, is still one of the largest gaps. To explore the solution to this gap, it is essential to explore the current situation regarding the awareness surrounding government initiations for artisans among practicing artisans. Through discussions with Aipan and Dikara practitioners, this study sought to explore the current state awareness regarding government initiations among the practicing artisans in the Indian state of Uttarakhand.

Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature with ethnographic research being complemented by the employment of purposive and random sampling methods for exploring the artisans' needs, aspirations, and issues in Uttarakhand state. Field interviews, in-depth interviews along with participant observation have been employed first for data collection.

To ensure a representative spread, artisans were divided into three broad categories: (1) Practicing Art Researchers, (2) Individual Artisans, and (3) Artisans turned Entrepreneurs. Purposive sampling was applied for categories 1 and 3 due to the fact that they were limited in numbers and expertise-driven. The sample size for artisans-as-researchers was $n = 3$ and consisted of people who have dedicated their lives to preserving traditional art methods. Similarly, $n = 3$ samples were drawn from artisans-turned-entrepreneurs (what kind of entrepreneurship), and they represented people who have transitioned from creatives to craft-based ventures.

The largest group, individual artisans ($n = 8$), was selected by means of random sampling procedures and consisted of female artisans. The group was also split into two subgroups by age (15-45 years and 45- 75 years) and level of education, with each containing $n = 4$ participants. This was done in order to capture the impact of generation and education on practice in the craft, knowledge transmission, and access to government assistance.

Ethnographic research, such as direct observation, context interviews, and informal interviews, was utilized within the study in an effort to achieve grounded understanding of artisan life, focusing on spatial contexts and socio-cultural processes. Triangulating government data on information with that of the local level was designed to attain dependability and density to findings. For cross-verifying data and ensuring the study was more precise, ethnographic study was conducted among the Kumaoni community, targeting families that had at least one practicing artist. Such families were chosen purposively because they furnished adequate information about the art tradition as well as its socio-cultural context.

It was observed that in the majority of these households, the men were more educated than the women—a reflection of the patriarchal nature of the region. This language familiarity was identified as a major area of concern in the research. Language difference has been a major barrier in documenting indigenous knowledge, particularly while interacting with older artists. Most of the older women artists, with little or no exposure to the outside world, do not speak little or no official language. This hinders them from participating in institutional arenas or

documentation activities, although they possess the most genuine and ingrained knowledge of the art.

By doing so, the integration of such families helped bridge the gap between old custodians of knowledge and modern communication systems so that the craft and its evolving environment could be appreciated in a more nuanced manner. The following questionnaire was circulated to conduct the discussions:

1. Name & Profession:
2. What is your age?
3. Where do you live?
4. Where is your business set up?
5. How's the business running?
6. Tell us about your approximate sales per month.
7. Are you the sole earning member of your family?
8. How's the demand for Aipan designs
9. Which designs sell the most?
10. Which kind of products do the customers favour?
11. Who are your primary customers?
12. Do you think the design preferences have changed over the years?
13. Among the years you have worked as a practitioner, how do you think the demands have fared?
14. How, in your opinion, is the condition of craft practitioners, specifically Aipan practitioners in Uttarakhand?
15. Do you the government initiatives directed towards craft artisans? Have any such initiatives been conveyed to you?
16. If yes, how was it conveyed / How did you come to know?
17. Are you interested in knowing about such initiatives?
18. What kind of initiatives do you think are needed?
19. What are your suggestions for such initiatives

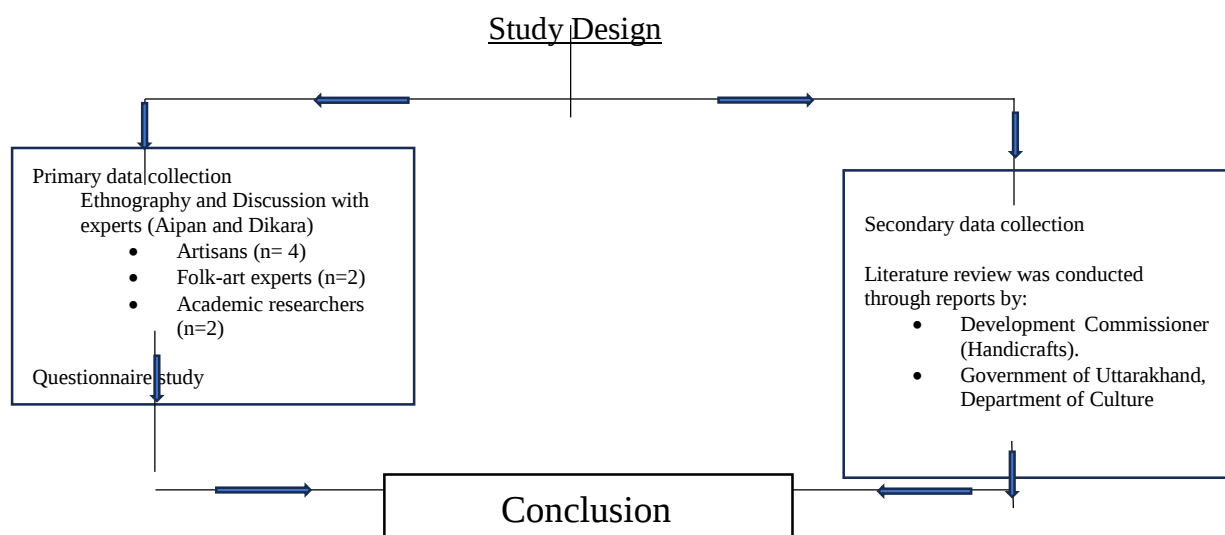


Figure 3 Shows the schematic study design diagram followed for Exploring Policy Awareness and the Future of Uttarakhand's Traditional Crafts

Results and Discussion

The research shows a list of socio-cultural and structural hurdles to effective engagement of traditional artisans especially women and rural craft producers, under government welfare programs meant for their benefit. Language and educational disadvantage is one of the most robust hurdles, especially for rural women artisans of Uttarakhand (Dhasmana, 2018). Most of the women, ranging from 40 years and older, have only secondary-level education (Class 10th or 12th pass) and lack functional literacy in Hindi and English, the prevailing languages of official papers and digital portals. This limited education limits their reading and understanding of official papers and digital portals by themselves, access to government schemes, or even registration by themselves. Less formally educated artists will tend to introduce hybridity into conventional work unintentionally. This is when they are attempting to be responsive to shifting market needs without necessarily having an in-depth knowledge of the cultural or historical context of their work. More formalized artists will tend to enter their work with educated intent, introducing considered focus that seeks to innovate but also to honour the tradition.

The impact of education can be observed not just in the manner in which crafts are made, but also in how they are interpreted and appreciated within society. Less-educated artists will find themselves focusing on transferring surface value to a limited range of products and will most likely create designs that borrow from one another for no seeming cultural purpose. Artists who are educated will focus on playing with meaning and applying what they have learned to push the craft in directions that honour its beginnings but also allow it to evolve.

This unbalance has far-reaching consequences in the market. People will buy crafts that are well-marketed, usually by artists who are well-educated and well-versed in branding their craft. We thus get an abundance of hybridized forms of crafts on the streets, at the expense of the original crafts' true identity. More often than not, the deeper cultural significance of the craft gets lost, overshadowed by market-driven versions that are more concerned with novelty than authenticity.

Education then becomes a determining element in directing the trajectory of traditional crafts, whether they remain embedded in their cultural origins or are diverted into commercialized hybridity (Nayak, 2018). The problem is further aggravated by the absence of localized facilitators or guidance. In rural enclaves where institutional coverage is poor, artisans are deprived of anyone to guide them through scheme procedures, assist with form filling, or even translate scheme requirements into their own local dialects. They become dependent on middlemen who may not always act in their best interests. A generational transition also happens as a determining factor for the erosion of craft conservation. Young artists, while typically more digitally knowledgeable and exposed to global art trends, show little interest in carrying on conventional techniques. They are more concerned with hybridized forms of art, which tend to be based on commercial preferences and social media imagery. Such hybridization may seem progressive but tends to rob the craft of its cultural roots and sanctity—a consideration that is particularly apt for ritual forms such as Aipan. Also, the detachment of younger artists from heritage crafts tends to equate to detachment from institutionally provided support structures, such as state and central government initiatives, which tend to be structured for practitioners who have roots in convention. One of the key and under-explored dynamics revealed in this study is the gatekeeper attitude of certain NGOs, private enterprises, and facilitators. A number of artisan-entrepreneurs and local NGOs, while being the recipients of initiatives like AHVY, PM Vishwakarma, or ODOP, are found to actively withhold information from grassroot artisans. This is typically driven by a need to hold on to chains of production, labour availability, or money flow. By keeping the individual artisans in the dark

or in their dependence, middlemen guarantee business model sustainability at the expense of equity, empowerment, and effective conservation of the craft ecosystem.

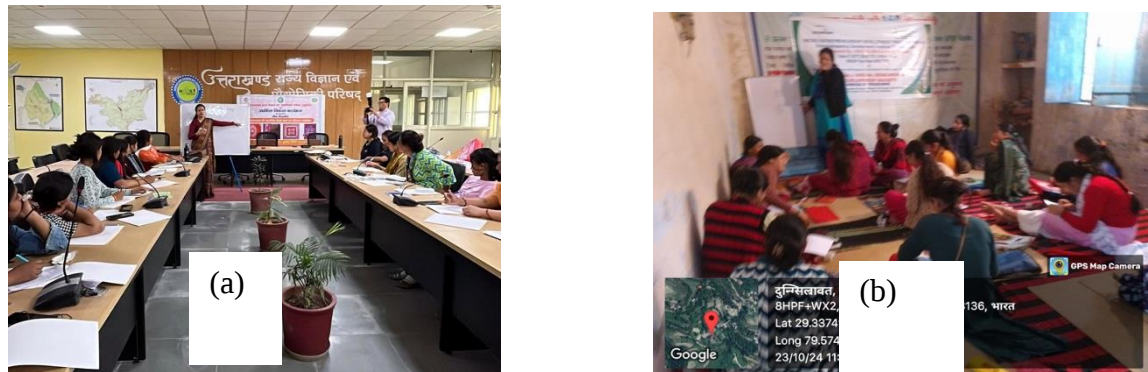


Figure 4 shows (a) Entrepreneur-artist leading a craft workshop at UCOST, Dehradun, under a skill development program, highlighting access to facilities, visibility, and potential direct benefits from government schemes due to improved connectivity and awareness.

(b) Individual artisan working with school children on traditional art practices through an NGO-run outreach program, showing the dependence of grassroots artisans on middlemen for outreach and limited direct access to government support systems.

Source- Meenakshi Khatri (Instagram) and Hema Kanaiyat

The results thus indicate that the issue is less one of policy vacuum, but one of unequal access

Such a situation underlines the need for decentralised outreach mechanisms, culturally appropriate awareness drives, and policy frameworks which actively involve individual artisans in preference to involving primarily through larger collectives and institutional agents. The difference in the exposure received and utilized, dependent on the education divide and digital literacy factor can be derived from Fig. 4.

Traditional artists and artisans of Uttarakhand have long expressed a complex set of needs going well beyond economic assistance. These have ranged from holistic support systems that appeal to a sense of cultural heritage and economic viability to the need for formal channels for skill development that enable them to innovate while staying rooted in tradition (R. Pant, 2015). Issues also include infrastructural shortfalls, ranging from a lack of shared workplace amenities to the lack of rural galleries or spaces for public engagement. These are a drag on not only productivity but also intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Further, the demand for market integration is now greater than ever before, with artists demanding help to navigate cyberspace, gain access to fair trade markets, and access techniques of brand development. They want to move beyond transactional relationships to value creation over the long term through geographic indication (GI) protection and narrative. Their aspirations are tempered by the stark lack of recognition both in law and policy. Issues such as copyright protection for indigenous design, inclusion in mainstream welfare policy, to substantive participation within cultural decision-making forums remain to be addressed. Artisans continue to express a profound yearning for recognition not so much through awards but through structural inclusion within the state and national cultural committees and councils concerned with their interests. Their voice expresses a desire not merely to make a living as craft workers

but to flourish as custodians of culture in a new world. Table 5 shows a cumulative summary of the types of Government support desired by the artisans.

Table: 5 Shows, types of Government Support Desired by Artisans		
Category	Type of Support Requested	Purpose / Impact
Skill Development	Advanced design and technique training- Craft-based education in schools/vocational centers	To preserve traditional knowledge and promote innovation
Financial Assistance	Subsidies on raw materials/tools- Direct cash transfers during off-seasons- Low-interest or interest-free loans	To ensure economic security and sustain livelihoods
Infrastructure	Artisan hubs and community workshops- Common Facility Centers (CFCs)- Rural exhibition and gallery spaces	To improve production quality and promote public engagement
Marketing Branding	E-commerce training and support (e.g., India Handmade)- Participation in trade fairs- GI tagging and storytelling support	To increase visibility, demand, and fair pricing for products
Cultural Preservation	Grants for documentation of rare crafts- Recognition of master artisans- Cultural exchange and residencies	To safeguard and sustain intangible heritage
Digital & Technological Literacy	Digital literacy programs- Online marketing platforms- AR/VR/AI for craft education	To modernize traditional practices and reach wider audiences.
Legal & Policy Support	Awareness programs on IP including design registrations along with the significance of GI and documentations of applying for government schemes.	To protect intellectual and social rights of artisans.
Community Recognition	National/state awards and honours for handicraft artisans. Artisan representation at decision making bodies concerned with the matters of interest for MSME and handicraft industries.	To boost dignity, status and policy influence of artisans.

Conclusion

The discussions highlighted a mammoth gap in digital literacy and access to information among handicraft artisans that continues to hinder effective delivery of government schemes aimed at promoting traditional crafts. While various schemes have been introduced to encourage and sustain artisans' livelihood, many are unaware of these facilities due to inadequate outreach and low digital literacy. A two-stage approach was contemplated to address this issue. For older

craftsmen or those who may be less accustomed to computer technology, there will have to be a system under which information can be accessed, printed, or otherwise brought into usable, non-digital formats. This will provide important information to those who are not able to utilize computers or smartphones, so they can continue to be able to contribute to the craft economy. On the other hand, for youth or novice artisans, more specifically those hailing from rural or marginalized communities, compulsory digital literacy must be enforced. These would allow artisans to read, use, and apply information communicated through digital media independently, thus creating autonomy and enlightened participation in government programs. The members reiterated again and again the need for core training in digital literacy supplemented by other support systems. These include technologic upgradation of equipment and techniques through training sessions, legal training in intellectual property rights, and skill development in branding, marketing, and business development. Whereas such interventions may enhance the livelihoods of the craftspeople, cultural sustainability of their craft must not be given any less priority. Where the markets of the globe are evolving to access local creative economies, artisans need to be empowered with the ability to make culturally-informed decisions. Sensitization initiatives on cultural values of sustainability should therefore be initiated so that craftspeople can guarantee the integrity of their traditional practices in the context of the intricacies of international trade.

Limitation of the study

Even though the research offers information on the Uttarakhand craft economy, it could have been enriched by a larger sample size and consideration of more varieties of handicrafts across the state.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest.

Funding Disclosure/Acknowledgement

No funding has been received for the publication of this article.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges Aipan artist Dr Kiran Tewari, Bharti Pandey art researcher Dr Yashodhar Mathapal, Hema Kanaiyat, Mr. Bidhan Biswas and Advocate/Phd Scholar Anusree Bhowmick for his help in the study.

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