



An Analysis of Wool-Based Crafts of Lahaul Pangri Landscape, Himachal Pradesh, India

¹Dr Shipra Sharma, ²Dr. Paramita Sarkar

¹Associate Professor with the Department of Fashion Technology, NIFT, Panchkula (Haryana, India).

²Assistant Professor with the Department of Fashion Design at the National Institute of Fashion Technology, Bengaluru.

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.5.0624.1648>

ABSTRACT:

Indian crafts are important to the economic, ecological and social development of the rural communities. The harsh terrains of Lahaul-Pangi, Himachal Pradesh, India, helped the locals to adapt for the farming practices, livestock raising and development of woolen handicrafts. National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) as an eminent institute collaborated with local communities and craftspeople to gain information about the demographics, crafts variations, significance and techniques in the Lahaul Pangri region. The analysis presented in this paper indicates the sustainable development through the craft communities emphasizing on economic empowerment, cultural preservation, gender inclusivity aligning with the broader objectives of sustainability. Craft analysis in the Lahaul-Pangi region was done to gather the data about the artisans detailing their demographics, crafts prevalent, challenges and the evolution of their work. The findings highlight the importance of traditional crafts in promoting sustainable communities, and also the advancement and conservation of the traditional crafts. The results further could help in creating appropriate training programs, government policies, and design interventions.

Keywords: Indian crafts, sustainable communities, Lahaul-Pangi, wool based crafts

Introduction:

The harsh terrains of Lahaul-Pangi helped the local communities adapt in many dimensions including livestock rearing, traditional farming practices and wool based handicrafts. Understanding the importance of crafts in sustainable development of the region, NIFT collaborated with local artisans and communities to understand their demographics, crafts and the techniques involved, and their significance in the Lahaul-Pangi region of Himachal Pradesh. The wool-based crafts contribute to the artistic expression of the local residents. The intricate designs and patterns woven into these handicrafts are an embodiment of the region's opulent cultural heritage. They often come with various designs and patterns and are a part of the traditional attire in Himachal Pradesh, helping the residents cope with the cold temperatures in the region. These artisanal activities serve a dual purpose: not only do they generate income and offer sustainable livelihoods to the local population, but they also play a crucial role in preserving their invaluable cultural heritage. The advancement of handicrafts within these villages carries substantial significance for livelihoods, particularly since it stands out as one of the limited viable options during the winter season. This utilization of otherwise unproductive hours provides added motivation and benefits to the community. It was seen that handicrafts of the region could serve as a promising source of livelihood as well within the research area. Handicrafts enhance tourism experiences, leading to increased economic advantages for local community members. The development of handicrafts and tourism creates better economic prospects for both unemployed and educated young individuals. There is a decreased reliance on natural resources to fulfill livelihood needs. There is also an enhancement in the women's attitudes and behaviors with regard to conservation is another environmental outcome of development of wool-based crafts in the landscape. Both the Lahaul and Pangri communities possess the expertise needed to create handicraft items, although the specific techniques and types of crafts differ significantly between the two regions.

Wool-based handicrafts are an important part of the local economy, and they also play an important role in preserving the cultural heritage of the region. Wool based handicrafts not only serve as a means of income and sustenance for the local population but also preserve of the cultural legacy of the region. The wool-based products prevalent in the region are Zozi (handicraft ornamental wear), Pullay (footwear); Woolen socks, sweaters, mufflers and gloves. Zozi is a warm, woolen cap worn with traditional dress and often decorated with intricate embroidery. They are typically made from yak or sheep wool and are designed to protect the wearer from the cold and harsh weather conditions of the high-altitude valleys. Pullay are handknitted or woven by local artisans using locally sourced wool. This is due to the existing skill levels and the ready availability of resources, such as wool.

Results and Discussion:

Field Surveys were conducted in the Keylong and Saras, Udaipur, Tindi and Tingret in Lahaul region and Sechu, Sural, Sach, Dharwas, Karyas, Killar, Kumar and Purthi in Pangri region of Lahaul- Pangri landscape. The field survey aimed to gather information on various aspects, including demographic data, education level, prevalent craft activities, income generated, medical facilities, pricing, marketing channels, and the upgradation of the artisans. A total of 218 respondents were surveyed in the various villages covering all panchayats. It was observed that only 14.7% of the artisans were a part of self-help groups and more than 48 % of the artisans were not members of any organization. Policymakers and organizations can use this data to customize plans that can help the development of locals of the region.

- 1) **Awareness regarding hazards associated with crafts:** The data regarding artisans' perceptions of occupational health hazards related to their crafts reveals several implications. A significant majority, accounting for 83% of the artisans, deny the existence of occupational health hazards or diseases associated with their craft. This suggests that a majority of artisans believe their craftwork is relatively safe in terms of health risks. On the other hand, only 17% of artisans acknowledge the presence of occupational health hazards linked to their crafts. This indicates a potential awareness gap or underreporting of health risks within the artisan community.

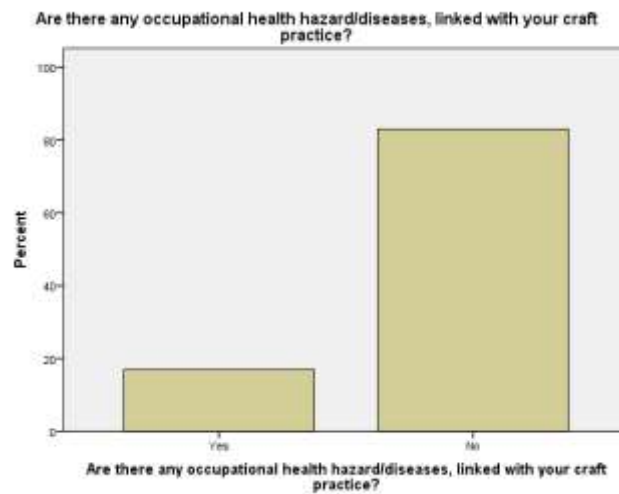
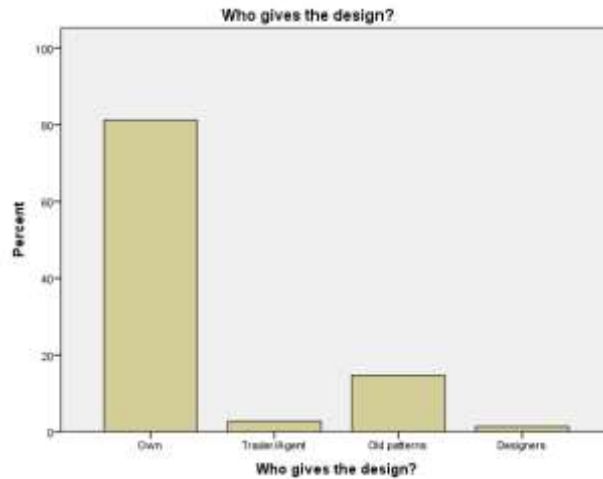


Chart 1.3: Awareness regarding hazards associated with crafts

The data highlights the need for raising awareness and providing education about occupational health hazards to protect the well-being of artisans, especially among the majority who do not recognize such risks. Artisan organizations, government bodies, and NGOs may need to implement safety interventions and measures to address potential health risks in the artisanal sector. In summary, the majority of artisans do not perceive occupational health hazards related to their crafts, while a minority acknowledges their existence. This data underscores the importance of increasing awareness and implementing safety measures to protect the health and well-being of artisans in this industry.

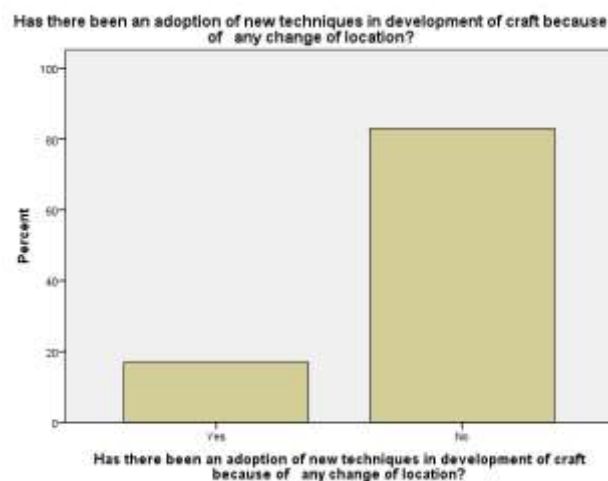
- 1.1) **Source of designs among artisans:** The data regarding the source of designs among artisans reveals several implications. A significant majority, approximately 81.2% of artisans, create their own designs. This indicates a high level of artistic independence and creativity within this group. About 14.7% of artisans continue to work with old patterns, showcasing a dedication to preserving traditional designs and craftsmanship. A small minority, around 2.8%, rely on designs provided by traders or agents. This suggests a level of dependency on external sources for creative direction. Only 1.4% of artisans work directly with designers. This highlights a limited degree of collaboration with design professionals, which may offer opportunities for enhancing product quality and market appeal.



1.4: Source of designs among artisans

In summary, the data indicates that the majority of artisans have the autonomy to create their own designs, emphasizing their creative independence. Some artisans maintain a focus on old patterns, while a smaller portion depends on external sources for design inspiration. Exploring collaborations with designers could potentially benefit the artisan community by infusing fresh ideas and improving market competitiveness.

1.2: Effect of change in location on the techniques of the craft development: The derived statistics indicate that a significant majority, specifically 83%, believe that the adoption of new techniques in the development of crafts is not influenced by a change of location. In contrast, only 17% believe that a change of location does impact the adoption of new techniques. The majority's opinion suggests that the location where craft development takes place may not be a significant factor in whether new techniques are adopted. This implies that craft practitioners may prioritize other factors, such as tradition, skill, or access to resources, over geographical changes when considering adopting new methods. The relatively low percentage (17%) of respondents who believe that location impacts the adoption of new techniques suggests that some craft practitioners may be resistant to change when it comes to their traditional methods. They might view location changes as less relevant to the evolution of their craft. If innovation and the adoption of new techniques are desired within the craft community, these results highlight the importance of initiatives aimed at promoting innovation and educating craftspeople about the benefits of incorporating new methods, regardless of their location. Although the majority opinion suggests that location has limited influence, it's worth considering that regional variations in craft traditions and practices may still exist. More in-depth research could explore whether specific craft communities or regions exhibit different attitudes toward adopting new techniques.

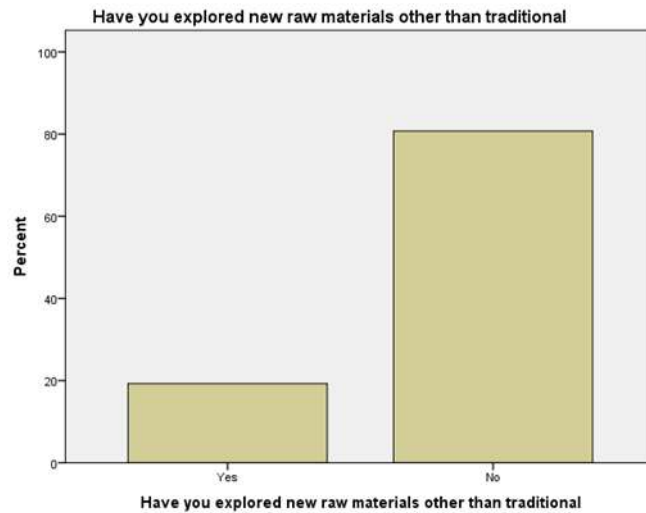


1.5: Effect of change in location on the techniques of the craft development

In summary, the data indicates that the majority of respondents do not perceive a strong connection between location changes and the adoption of new techniques in craft development. This suggests that other factors play a more significant role in shaping craft practices and traditions. However, the data also suggests a minority view that does acknowledge some impact of location changes on the adoption of new methods, emphasizing the need for further research and initiatives to promote innovation within the craft community.

1.3. Practices of artisans concerning the exploration of new raw materials: The provided statistics offer insights into the practices of artisans concerning the exploration of new raw materials. A significant majority of artisans, specifically 80.7%, have not ventured into exploring new raw materials

beyond the traditional ones. This implies that a large portion of artisans may be sticking to familiar materials and methods. The reasons cited for not exploring new materials, such as non-availability of products and market demand, suggest that artisans may face practical constraints in diversifying their materials. This could be due to factors like accessibility, cost, or the risk associated with introducing new materials into their craft. The fact that less than 20% of artisans have explored new materials indicates a potential innovation gap within the artisan community. Embracing new materials can lead to innovative products and potentially tap into emerging market trends. Artisans who do explore new materials may be more adaptable to changing market demands. This could give them a competitive edge in catering to evolving customer preferences or addressing sustainability concerns related to traditional materials. There may be an opportunity for providing education and support to artisans to help them overcome barriers to exploring new materials. Initiatives aimed at introducing artisans to innovative materials and techniques could be beneficial.



1.6: Practices of artisans concerning the exploration of new raw materials

The data reveals that a substantial majority of artisans (80.7%) have not ventured into using new raw materials beyond their traditional ones. This reluctance to explore new materials could be attributed to challenges such as non-availability of products and concerns about market demand. However, less than 20% of artisans have taken the step to explore new materials, possibly making them more adaptable to changing market dynamics and consumer preferences. Bridging the innovation gap and addressing the practical constraints faced by artisans in diversifying materials may present opportunities for growth and adaptation within the artisan community.

1.4) **Pricing of the products:** the majority of artisans, specifically 78% of them, have the autonomy to set the prices for their products independently, without external factors guiding their pricing decisions. Additionally, 11.5% of artisans base their pricing decisions on local market demand, and 5.5% consider the cost of raw materials when determining their prices.



Chart 1.8: Pricing of the products

In summary, the statement indicates that a significant portion of artisans, approximately 78%, make pricing decisions independently. A smaller percentage, about 11.5%, adjust their prices based on the local market demand, while a further 5.5% take into account the costs associated with raw materials when setting their prices. This highlights the diverse approaches employed by artisans in determining the prices of their products.

1.5) **Raw material procurement:** 62.4% of the respondent procure raw material from the local market, 18.8% procure from the nearby markets and 15.1% procure raw material from the far away markets.

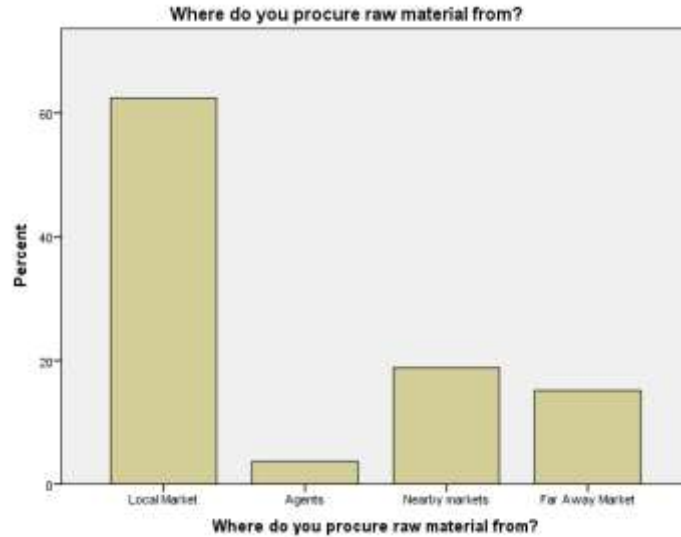
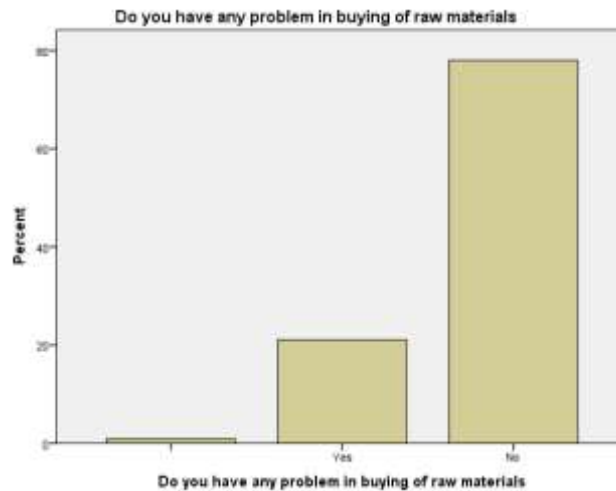


Fig 1.9: Raw material procurement

1.6: **Issues in buying new raw material:** Majority of artisans, specifically 78%, do not encounter any difficulties or problems when purchasing raw materials. In contrast, a smaller proportion, comprising 21.1% of artisans, do face challenges or issues when trying to buy raw materials.



1.10: Issues in buying new raw material

In summary, the data suggests that a significant majority of artisans, approximately 78%, have a relatively smooth and trouble-free experience when acquiring the raw materials they need. However, a smaller portion, around 21.1%, encounter problems or obstacles in the process of buying raw materials. This highlights a discrepancy in the ease of raw material procurement among the surveyed artisans.

1.7) **Marketing channels used by artisans:** Artisans use different channels to sell their products. The largest proportion, 43.1%, sell their products directly to customers, while a smaller percentage, 11%, opt to sell in local markets, and an even smaller group, 7.3%, participate in melas and festivals to sell their products.

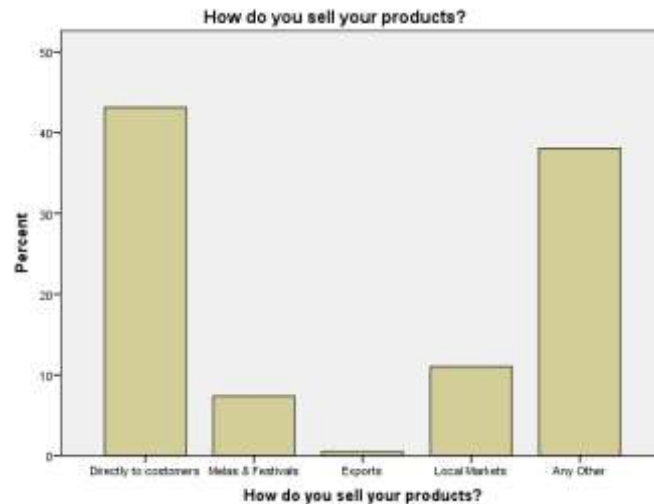


Fig 1.12: Marketing channels used by artisans

In summary, the data indicates that artisans employ various sales channels. The majority, approximately 43.1%, prefer direct sales to customers, possibly indicating a personalized or direct-to-consumer approach. A smaller portion, around 11%, choose to sell in local markets, and an even smaller fraction, roughly 7.3%, participate in melas and festivals, possibly to leverage the increased footfall and festive atmosphere for sales. This highlights the diversity in sales strategies among artisans.

Conclusion and Scope of work:

Artisans in the Lahual-Spiti region are predominantly independent and creative, with a majority designing their own products. However, there is limited collaboration with design professionals, which could offer opportunities for enhancing product quality and market appeal. Despite the harsh climate conditions, the artisan database is fairly comprehensive and representative of the region as a whole. However, there is a lack of formal organizational memberships and potential challenges in engagement with cooperatives. This highlights the need for tailored outreach efforts and further research to explore the reasons behind these patterns for community development and social cohesion. A majority of artisans do not perceive occupational health hazards related to their crafts, while a minority acknowledges their existence. This underscores the importance of increasing awareness and implementing safety measures to protect the health and well-being of artisans in this industry. Although the majority of artisans believe that the adoption of new techniques in the development of crafts is not influenced by a change of location, a minority view acknowledges some impact of location changes on the adoption of new methods. This emphasizes the need for initiatives aimed at promoting innovation and educating craftspeople about the benefits of incorporating new methods, regardless of their location. A substantial majority of artisans have not ventured into using new raw materials beyond their traditional ones. This reluctance to explore new materials could be attributed to challenges such as non-availability of products and concerns about market demand. However, less than 20% of artisans have taken the step to explore new materials, possibly making them more adaptable to changing market dynamics and consumer preferences. A significant portion of artisans consider themselves semi-skilled, indicating that there may be room for improvement or further training in their craft. Bridging the innovation gap and addressing the practical constraints faced by artisans in diversifying materials may present opportunities for growth and adaptation within the artisan community. The given data would help devise tailored training programs and design interventions to bridge the gap between traditional craftsmanship and contemporary design sensibilities. These programs would not only impart essential skills to artisans but also introduce them to modern design trends, market dynamics, and eco-friendly practices. By training artisans in design interventions, NIFT empowers them to create products that not only honor tradition but also appeal to the evolving tastes of consumers. This strategic convergence of tradition and modernity not only safeguards these craft forms but also opens up new avenues for economic sustainability for the artisans.

References:

- Studies in Craft and Design: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jun/07/subject-guide-design-and-crafts>
- Textile: The Journal of Cloth and culture: <https://journals.indexcopernicus.com/journal/11926>
- The Craftsman: An International Journal of Making and Learning: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273947548_The_Craftsman
- The Journal of Contemporary Craft: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rfmc20>
- The Journal of Modern Craft: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rfmc20>