

Handloom and Handicrafts: Employment Prospects and Sustainable Livelihood Option for the Himalayan State of Uttarakhand

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Abstract: *A sustainable livelihood is one which can cope with and recover from shocks and stresses, maintain and enhance its assets and capabilities, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation. It also contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the global and local levels in the short and long term. Handloom and handicrafts can have considerable significance as an alternate employment strategy built by promoting and utilising region-specific local skills and natural resources. This sustainable sector is labour intensive and capital saving. This paper is a secondary data-based study about the employment status in the handloom-handicraft sector in the Himalayan State of Uttarakhand. It also attempts to understand the potential of the handloom and handicraft sector in achieving self-reliance through localisation with special reference to the Himalayan State Uttarakhand. There exists geographical constraints and evident disparities in the structure of the workforce engagement and the economy of hills and plain regions of the Himalayan States. It is argued in this paper that Uttarakhand handlooms and handicrafts still have a lot of untapped potential for sustainable production, employment generation, restricting out migration from hills and above all realizing the mission of utilization of local resources, local skills for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. The study concludes with some policy-asks for a sustainable livelihood in this Himalayan region.*

Keywords: *Handlooms, Handicrafts, Localisation, Self-reliance, Sustainable-livelihood, Atmanirbhar Bharat.*

I. Introduction

The Sustainable Livelihood approach acts primarily as a programming agenda to formulate a set of inclusive and integrated support activities to improve the 'sustainability' of livelihoods among vulnerable groups/communities or the poor and thereby strengthening the resilience and spirit of their strategies for adaptation [based on United Nation's concept]. Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway proposed the following composite definition of a 'sustainable rural livelihood' in 1992:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term.

The very recent focus of India is on self reliance, self-employment generation and 'vocal for local'. It is the need for the country to acknowledge the importance of being "vocal for local" and support local manufacturing, local markets and local supply chains to promote sustainable development as well as create a sustainable livelihood. Covid 19 pandemic has globally derailed many lives and livelihoods. It has taught India the importance of being

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local as all our demands during the crisis were met locally. 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' or 'self-reliant India', is a mission to promote equity, resilience and efficiency announced by the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in May 2020. *Atmanirbhar Bharat* calls for the strategic option of shifting the workforce from an agricultural to a non-agricultural setup in order to provide better and productive employment opportunities as well as higher wages. Now it's time to be 'vocal for the local' and help the products meet the local demands first, use local resources and then penetrate the domestic and global market.

In this study the focus is on the hilly regions of the Himalayan State Uttarakhand which has very less scope for large industries due to terrain difficulties and has very few options of a sustainable livelihood. Out-migration from the hills of this state is significant primarily for the purpose of livelihood. State Government's bulletins like NITIGOSH mentions that during this whole Covid19 scenario, Uttarakhand has witnessed reverse migration from various places. This increases the need to provide self-employment opportunities for these people using local resources and developing the inherent regional skills. Considering the criterion of sustainability, local resources, self-reliance, strategic option of shifting the workforce from an agricultural to a non-agricultural setup, handloom and handicrafts can have considerable significance as an alternative employment strategy built by promoting and utilising region-specific skills and natural resources. This paper argues that the potential of handloom handicraft if utilised efficiently can help the sector grow manifolds and can act as a model for *Atmanirbhar Bharat* especially in the Himalayan Regions which already have many constraints of livelihood..

Handloom and Handicrafts as Sustainable Livelihood

The handloom and handicrafts are flag bearers of the rich culture and heritage of India and is a reflection of traditional wisdom as well as of localisation. Every region in the country has its regional specialty when it comes to handloom and handicrafts. A handloom refers to a loom that is weaved by hand or using simple tools like pit loom or frame loom, generally placed at the weaver household. The Handloom (reservation of articles for production) Act, 1985 defines it as 'any loom other than power loom'. The range of handlooms and handicrafts in India is as diverse as the cultural diversity of the country. The concept of loom is advantageous as it is affordable and accessible to a large number of people including the ones who have very limited work options. Though dispersed, isolated and decentralized, handloom-handicraft industry is a very important part of the Indian economy that brings into use the available environment friendly, sustainable, capital saving, labour intensive, energy saving local resources and local initiative in rural and semi urban areas. Uttarakhand handlooms are broadly categorised as woolens, silk and cotton handlooms. Plant based extracts like *kathha*, *kilmodh*, *kaphal* (Datta 2020) leaves are used to prepare the natural dyes. Uttarakhand is also known to have a unique environmental condition suitable for various types of silk. As per Department of sericulture,,Uttarakhand is the only state that is producing all four kinds of cocoon: Mulberry, Oak tasar, Muga and Ericulture. Uttarakhand is also the first state in India to legalise commercial cultivation of cannabis/hemp (Jayan 2018). Due to its texture, hemp has a great potential in the form of a fabric especially for the clothing of defense personnel serving in the high altitude (Datta 2020). Other items like dream catchers, bags, flip-flops, belts, wallets, and accessories are also manufactured using hemp. The main crafts of Uttarakhand include handicrafts made from natural fibers, *raambaans*, *ringal*, jute, *aipan* folk art, copperware, wooden work, wax work etc. However present statistics from Directorates in the State reveals that the production of both handlooms and handicrafts are still not at large scale and are done in some specific pockets in the hills which are quite dispersed and scattered, lacking in coordination and efficient marketing channels.

Why hills are important for such livelihood options

There exists geographical constraints and evident disparities in the structure of the workforce engagement and the economy of hills and plain regions of the Himalayan States. Constraints due to lack of appropriate industrial and infrastructural development, terrain constraints, harsh weather conditions, human animal conflicts, frequent natural disasters, adverse climatic conditions, problems of accessibility etc lead to an upward trend in the unemployment rate specifically in the hills. The absorptive capacity of agriculture is limited

and therefore there is an increased pressure on the limited cultivated land, thereby leading to a burgeoning labour force. If we look at Uttarakhand, most of the major industrial economic activities and high productive services are based in the three plain districts namely Dehradun, Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar. The handloom-handicraft sector fulfils the dual objectives of sustainable production and sustainable employment generation, especially in rural India. It can result in localisation of skills and resources, making the state 'Atmanirbhar'. In Uttarakhand, this sector has been ignored to some extent at policy level [even though the state was carved out separately on grounds of mountain development] and thus sectors like handloom and handicrafts which uses the natural-resource base and the indigenous knowledge of the community remains untapped, which hinders the development of the hills. There is a huge research gap in this area as far as the state of Uttarakhand is concerned and there is a need to understand the capability of this sector in making Uttarakhand self-reliant. The paper thus focuses on exploring the potential of handloom-handicrafts in the state from the perspective of achieving self-reliance.

In 2006 the Planning Commission sponsored a study with the help of Socio-Economic and Educational-Development Society (SEEDS) to evaluate livelihood options using local resources for Tribal Handicrafts. The study finds it vital on part of the government to set up some training and marketing centres, formation of Handicrafts Cell in the Industries' Directorate, establish linkages with financial institutions, provide raw materials, set up *haats* [small markets], demonstration centres, provide managerial inputs to the sector, exempt trade/sales tax on tribal handicrafts products. Goswami and Jain (2014) suggested strategies for sustainable development of the handloom industry. They mentioned 'overall cost leadership strategy' 'focus strategy' and 'differentiation strategy'. Patra and Dey (2015) analysed that even though the handloom sector provides employment opportunities, yet the profitability was found to be low for which the master and independent weavers must invest in more profitable products. Mishra, Srivastava and Shariff (2016) studied the problems and prospects of the handloom sector in employment generation and concluded that this sector provides large scale employment in rural areas as well as preserves heritage. Mishra and Bhattacharya (2017) did a case study in West Bengal to check the sustainability of the handloom value chain. The study reflected that the market for independent weavers need to be organised and expanded for the sustainability of the handloom industry.

Uttarakhand has a significant tribal population dispersed in different parts of the state with indigenous knowledge and skills related to handlooms and handicrafts which needs attention at policy level. Besides these the general population of the hills has the potential to acquire the skills to have a significant alternate livelihood option in the hilly regions. Moreover the huge reverse migration in the hills post COVID 19 has increased the demand to explore this livelihood option. Hence the need for this study was felt.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the employment status in the handloom-handicraft sector in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand.
2. To understand the potential of handloom and handicrafts in achieving self-reliance through localisation in Uttarakhand state and suggest relevant strategies for the same.

Research methodology

- **Study Area:** The Himalayan State of Uttarakhand (formerly known as Uttaranchal), was formed on 9 November, 2000, as the 27th state of the Republic of India on grounds of mountain development, with Dehradun as its capital. The State is spread over an area of 53483 sq. km. The State is divided into two regions (Kumaon and Garhwal) that are further divided into 13 districts. The handloom-handicraft industry is dispersed and weavers are found in certain pockets in both plain and hill districts of the state.
- **Research Type:** Descriptive and Analytical
- **Universe:** Weavers, self-help groups (SHG), cooperative societies, retailers related to the handloom and handicraft industry in Uttarakhand.
- **Data Type & Data Collection:** The study is based on secondary data.

II. Analysis and Discussion

Employment status and potential of the handloom sector in Uttarakhand State

According to the third handloom census data (2009-10), almost 23.77 lakh looms were traced in the country, providing employment to 43.31 lakh handloom weavers and ancillary workers across the nation. On the other hand, a Planning Commission Report (2014) mentions that the North-Eastern Region (NER) alone had 15.1 lakh weavers and almost 15.50 lakh looms. In contrast to the nation-wide trend, the North Eastern Region has shown an increase in handloom activities. In table number 2, we see that the major part of the Himalayan States comprises the NER, therefore we may establish from here that other Himalayan States like Uttarakhand can also take advantage of the NER's experiences in this sector to improve the scope and understand the real potential of the same. The flourishing handloom sector in the NER gives us a good example of the success of this sector in the hill states of India. The total number of weavers enumerated in the fourth handloom census (2019-20) is 26.74 lakh. A major portion of this (48.6% weavers) belong to just 2 of the Himalayan States, namely Assam and Manipur. Other Himalayan states have a good share as well, reflecting the potential of the Himalayan states in this particular sector. As per the data received from Directorate of Industries, Dehradun, a report by KARVY (2018) presents the following in regard to the number of weaver households, weavers as well as allied workers in Uttarakhand: Handloom weavers and Allied workers in Uttarakhand are divided between both the regions (Garhwal and Kumaon). Garhwal region occupies almost 54% of the total of 13 districts in Uttarakhand, but presently only 16% of the employed weavers and allied workers are there in the Garhwal belt. 84% of the weavers and allied handloom workers of Uttarakhand belong to the Kumaon region. Therefore there is a lot of scope of improvement in the Garhwal belt of Uttarakhand.

The KARVY report shows a total of 14191 weavers and allied workers in Uttarakhand by 2018. Whereas the 'Handloom Census 2010' states the numbers of handloom workers in Uttarakhand to be 15468. This reflects a decline of 1277 (8.26%) weavers in 8 years. Handloom census data (2019-20) declares 7967 weavers and 4594 allied workers in Uttarakhand which means a dip of 1630 weavers and allied workers since 2018. Table 1 shows that the 'average number of days of engagement of a person (yearly) in weaving activity in India, increased from 183 days in 2009-10 (as per the third handloom census data) to 208 days by 2019-20 along with an increase in the households engaged in weaving and allied activities. Uttarakhand exceeds this number (235 days) and is in the 16th position from the top overall. Despite these improvements the data shows a decline in the status of handloom activities in Uttarakhand State. Data overall reflects that the sector has potential to flourish but in the state of Uttarakhand it needs a lot of efforts through skill upgradation and policy implications.

Table 1: Households Engaged and Average yearly engagement per person in weaving in Uttarakhand

Handloom Census	Year	Households Engaged [weaving & allied activities] (in lakhs)	Average yearly engagement per person in weaving (in days)
Third	2009-10	27.83	183
Fourth	2019-20	31.45 (↑)	208 (↑) [Uttarakhand 235 days]
Difference		3.62 (+)	25 (+)

Source: Handloom Census Data (2009-10 and 2019-20) [all over India] ; + (positive)

Table 2: Distribution of handloom worker households in the Himalayan States of India 2019-20

	Rural	Urban	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	84,014	9,300	93314 (5%)
Assam	12,52,188	17,318	1269506 (67.4%)

Himachal Pradesh	13260	312	13572 (0.7%)
Jammu & Kashmir	12173	10,895	23068 (1.2%)
Meghalaya	42647	108	42755 (2.3%)
Manipur	192431	29424	221855 (11.8%)
Mizoram	21100	6302	27402 (1.5%)
Nagaland	31970	10441	42411 (2.3%)
Sikkim	690	7	697 (0.04%)
Tripura	135001	2454	137455 (7.3%)
Uttarakhand	6099	4997	11096 (0.6%)
Total	1791573	91558	1883131

Extracted from: Datta R. (2020) . The percentage in brackets () in column 4 has been calculated by the researcher and it is the approximate percentage of handloom worker households in the particular Himalayan state as a percentage of the total households of the overall households in the Himalayan States(rural& urban).

Table 2 shows the rural-urban distribution of the handloom households in the Himalayan states of India. Most of the Himalayan States have a good number of households engaged in either the handloom sector directly or are engaged in allied activities. Except in Manipur, in all other Himalayan states the percentage of weavers engaged in handloom and allied activities is more in rural areas as compared to the urban areas. Various reports and literature show that operations in the Indian handloom industry are primarily household based and therefore need less capital investment, more human resource development and skill upgradation leading to ease of doing handloom activities with limited funds as well. Nearly 72% handloom weavers in India are females (Bhowmik 2019). Therefore, this sector also has a great potential to empower the women of Uttarakhand and make them self-reliant. An article on 2 June 2019, in ‘The Times of India’ mentions that a report by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) states the unemployment rate in India to be 6.1% (2017-18) and Uttarakhand exceeds this by 1.5% with an unemployment rate of 7.6% in the same year (2017-18). Therefore, growth and development of the handloom industry will be beneficial in reducing the unemployment rate of Uttarakhand as a major part of the state is a rural hill economy and requires self-employment opportunities.

Employment status and potential of the handicraft sector in Uttarakhand State

Uttarakhand is one of the Himalayan states of India that’s cradled in the lofty Himalayas with snow-capped peaks, rivers, glaciers, mist laden valleys and a variety of flora fauna and abundant natural resources. The state has nurtured and created various forms of art and crafts since generations. The art and craft items like baskets, doors, windows, rugs, carpets, copper utensils, folk art etc. have a unique touch of nature in the designs.

Table 3: Number of handicraft households, artisans, allied workers in Uttarakhand

District	Hill/Plain	No. of Blocks Covered	Households	Artisans	Allied Workers	District Household
Almora	Hill	4	632	563	69	15368 (4.11%)

Bageshwar	Hill	3	81	84	6	2054 (4.1%)
Chamoli	Hill	4	496	508	80	14646 (3.4%)
Dehradun	Plain	4	88	124	27	202889 (0.04%)
Haridwar	Plain	2	557	811	127	133627 (0.42%)
Nainital	Hill	2	397	380	17	76429 (0.52%)
Pithoragarh	Hill	7	965	968	32	17759 (5.4%)
Rudraprayag	Hill	3	122	52	71	2660 (4.6%)
Tehri	Hill	2	48	44	7	17023 (0.3%)
Udham Singh Nagar	Plain	11	8705	5143	4622	109936 (8%)
Uttarkashi	Hill	6	423	397	59	5688 (7.4%)
Total		48	12514	9074	5117	598079 (2.1%)

Source: (Karvy Data) [Collected from DC(H)-Dehradun] (Last updated in 2018). The percentage in brackets () in column 7 has been calculated by the researcher and it is the approximate percentage of weavers/artisans and allied workers households in the district as a percentage of the total households of the particular district.

The above Table 3 depicts that even though Uttarakhand is covered mainly by hill districts, the three plain districts namely (Udham Singh Nagar, Dehradun and Haridwar) in total have the maximum number of weavers/artisans, allied workers or artisan households. It clearly reveals that this alternative livelihood hasn't been utilised in proper scale in the Himalayan State of Uttarakhand especially in the hill districts. The government records provide that there has been a reverse migration during the covid19 pandemic and over 52,216 people returned back to the 10 hill districts of Uttarakhand from various cities and countries (Verma 2020). Therefore, there is an urgent need to provide self-employment opportunities in the rural areas and the hills of Uttarakhand and utilise the local natural as well as human resource to the utmost and take a step ahead towards 'Atmanirbhar Bharat.' The vice-chairman of the Uttarakhand migration commission, in an interview mentioned that the government looks at the reverse migration as an opportunity to retain the youth by notifying them of different schemes and gainfully employing them (Prakash 2020). The potential workers amongst the reverse migrants can be provided with appropriate skills and infrastructure facilities to pull them back to the hills permanently with a stable and sustainable livelihood option using the local crafts heritage of the region. Development of allied industries would further strengthen the employment statistics of Uttarakhand.

Table 4: Data of reverse migrants during covid19-pandemic

Sr. No.	Name of district	Number of Returnees / Reverse Migrants
1	Almora	9303
2	Bageshwar	1541
3	Chamoli	3214
4	Champawat	5707

5	Nainital	4771
6	Pauri	12039
7	Pithoragarh	5035
8	Rudraprayag	4247
9	Tehri	8782
10	Uttarkashi	4721
Total		59360

Source:Report- Uttarakhand Migration Commission, Pauri , 2020 (Inputs for supporting reverse migrants after COVID-19)

Handloom-Handicrafts Related Sustainable Employment Alternatives in the Hilly Regions

Frequent shocks, natural disasters, high logistic costs, terrain constraint, lack of skilled personnel, dispersed settlements, human animal conflict are some of the major constraints in the livelihood of mountain areas. Despite the disadvantages, the hilly regions are blessed with abundant natural resources that can be sustainably used to promote local handloom and handicraft products. Along with preserving the cultural heritage it would also lead to comparative advantage and self-reliance among the people of the particular region. Recently major fashion brands and designers are also supporting sustainable fashion. Designer Masaba Gupta, in one of her interviews with 'The Indian Express' shares how the global pandemic has changed the buying pattern of the customers. The preference has changed to buying things that can be passed down to generation and have value, quality and are timeless pieces instead of splurging on multiple trend-centric and seasonal pieces mindlessly. In such a situation the potential of handloom-handicraft if utilised sensibly and fully can help the sector grow manifolds. The rich heritage and in depth story behind the handloom and handicraft of every region makes it unique and timeless. 'HM' , a Swedish brand that's extremely popular in India has taken up the sustainable way of fashion as well. The brand is one of the biggest users and buyers of better, organic and recycled cotton. By 2030 they aim that all of the products that the brand produce come from more sustainable and recycled sources (Samaha 2018). The sector has immense potential for the hills if people in the hills are trained and skilled properly along with provision and knowledge of quality checks, marketing , advertising and collaborations with big brands .

Strategies to achieve sustainable livelihood and self-reliance via localisation through handloom and handicraft sector

The dictionary meaning of localisation is that it is "the process of making something local in character or restricting it to a particular place." The study of varied handloom-handicraft related data and literature review has given us a picture that Uttarakhand State has not been able to make a mark in the handloom and handicraft sector yet. Various measures and strategies are required to harness the potential of this sustainable alternate livelihood in Uttarakhand.

Some of the strategies are:

- Micro Enterprises and Related Linkages
Enterprises dominated by household manufacturing with a narrow profile of activities are most suited for the rural areas especially in the hills. Enterprises that run on less investment and with limited product lines are best suited. Handloom handicrafts of every region have some specificity of the cultural heritage of that particular region. So people can be engaged directly in these enterprises and allied activities.
- Migration-Livelihood Option

Migration has evident implications on the households and local economy. There are various push and pull factors that motivate people to move from one region to the other. The major ones are better employment opportunities, increased income, improved education and health facilities, social factors like marriage etc. Out-migration leads to various changes in gender-roles by giving greater responsibility to the women. The productive base should be enhanced via diversification , industrialisation, setting up of small scale enterprises and cottage industries, infrastructural development and lastly by focusing on areas where there is a comparative advantage.

- Diversification Strategy

There is a dire need to diversify human resources from agriculture to other areas to improve livelihoods and generate more earnings. Lack of proper institutional mechanisms such as availability of raw material, storage, credit facilities, innovation in designs, quality, marketing network have severely hampered the systematic growth of handloom and handicrafts in Uttarakhand.

- Skill upgradation

The potential of the human resources need to be fully exploited by upscaling the skills and developing the regional art and craft of a particular locality. Capacity building and human resource development needs to be accomplished through relevant technical and vocational education emphasizing on the usage of available local resources and regional specificities with development potentials.

- Engagement of designers

Professional designers can be hired at clusters of block level and beyond to design innovative and sustainable products. They can also assist the weavers and artisans in establishing marketing linkages.

- Promoting sustainable fashion

There is a huge opportunity to channelize the minds of the consumers towards sustainable fashion with a blend of traditional knowledge and modern design and demand. By using 'sustainable fashion concept' such products can be marketed in the international market as well and can be a good source of revenue.

III. Concluding Remarks

The geographical terrain of Uttarakhand does not allow establishment of large industries in the state. The state is blessed with abundant natural resources which if productively utilised would help achieve socio economic upliftment as well as an inclusive development of the state. It is vital to develop and strengthen a sustainable as well as labour intensive means of livelihood i.e. the handloom-handicraft sector. Provision of sustainable employment opportunities in Uttarakhand shall prevent outward migration in search of job opportunities. The challenge today is to create skilled manpower, generate market demand and a wider reach for handloom-handicraft products while ensuring the economic viability to generate useful employment and a life of dignity for the local communities in the hills of Uttarakhand. Exploring alternative livelihood for the mountain communities with minimal degradation of the environment and the natural resources has become the need of the hour. It is therefore compulsory to formulate a mountain perspective that calls for an integrated development approach by interlinking the mountain specificities adequately to achieve the expected results and desired objectives. As the handloom handicraft sector have the potential to generate sustainable livelihood for a large population, it is therefore vital for the government as well as related craftsmen and weaver organisations to chip in with prompt interventions to act as a defensive wall to offset the crises afflicting the handicraft - handloom industry due to the covid-19 pandemic. Through appropriate planning and skill development, the handicraft-handloom sector has a potential to provide sustainable employment opportunities to the people of Uttarakhand.

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