

**HERITAGE IN INDIA: THE MEANS FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT?**

Case of Sheep Wool Crafts in the Kachchh Region

BY

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**KEY WORDS: Emerging economies, heritage ecosystem, economic impact,
inclusive economic development**

Abstract

Amidst the many economic concerns and priorities that emerging countries like India have regarding optimal utilization of scarce resources, providing for culture and heritage is seen as an indulgence. As the government attempts to create the basic necessities and infrastructure for its people, heritage professionals are hard-pressed to justify the need for huge investments that the heritage sector requires. The problem here is that socioeconomic development and heritage are often seen as mutually exclusive. Heritage is seen only as a huge unproductive well that gulps down resources rather than a spring that can nurture a healthy ecosystem around itself and contribute to sustainable and inclusive economic development of a region.

Developing heritage resources in a place offers some unique benefits to the community. Unlike modern industries, heritage industries are unique to a region and cannot be shifted easily. Many of these industries are labour intensive in nature, providing greater employment opportunities without a need for migration. Also, some of these industries support small businesses with lesser capital investment. All these imply greater long-term economic security for a region, which is crucial for sustainable development and inclusive growth.

Such economic impact of heritage sector is well measured in developed countries and systematic efforts are made to create a robust heritage ecosystem in these countries. However, such attempts are missing in India, in spite of the fact the country is rich with many heritage sites as well as intangible heritage like crafts and living traditions.

This paper attempts to understand the linkages between heritage and economic development and the economic impact that a typical heritage site can have in emerging economies like India.

1. Introduction:

Heritage today is a broad term. It is basically used to describe an inheritance. Today it might be used to describe anything from the very tangible and solid like buildings, monuments, artefacts and art works to the ethereal and the intangible like songs, languages, cultural practices and traditional knowledge systems. (Harrison 2013)

In this paper we look at the heritage asset of traditional crafts and how they can be a means of social and economic development in India. Specifically we are looking at the sheep wool crafts in the Kachchh region of India.

Amidst the many economic concerns and priorities that emerging countries like India have regarding optimal utilization of scarce resources, providing for culture and heritage is seen as an indulgence. As the government attempts to create the basic necessities and infrastructure for its people, heritage professionals are hard-pressed to justify the need for investments that the heritage sector requires. The problem here is that socioeconomic development and heritage are often seen as mutually exclusive. Heritage is seen only as a huge unproductive well that gulps down resources rather than a spring that can nurture a healthy ecosystem around itself and contribute to sustainable and inclusive economic development of a region.

But culture and creative economies have been recognised as a driver of development. It has been recognised not only for its economic value but also non-monetary social benefits. In the past few years this potential has been proven by experts and practitioners across the world. (Isar 2013)

In this paper we explore how developing heritage resources in a place offers some unique benefits to the community. Unlike modern industries, heritage industries are unique to a region and cannot be shifted easily. Many of these industries are labour intensive in nature, providing greater employment opportunities without a need for migration. Also, some of these industries support small businesses with lesser capital investment. All these imply greater long-term economic security for a region, which is crucial for sustainable development and inclusive growth. This is while maintaining and in fact promoting the regional identity. Promoting these has

significant economic value and are also vectors of profound social and cultural meaning. (Isar 2013)

A heritage ecosystem is not only about preserving the visible aspects of the heritage but the different elements which go into creating the ecosystem. For example in the case of sheep wool crafts it isn't only about the craftsperson but the herder/breeder of the native species as well as the spinners and weavers who spin the wool. They might not be craftspeople ostensibly but have a major role to play and are greatly affected by these ecosystems. When the ecosystem is functional it benefits the local economy at different levels along with generating and sustaining livelihood and helping in maintaining the balance of nature.

It is an inclusive form of economic development where each and every participant in the chain is benefitted when all the activities which are part of the process of the creation of the craft are done locally.

Craftspeople are often the most vulnerable members of the community and often the least valued. Their skill and knowledge are seen as routine production processes with low value thus it becomes imperative to promote these industries and recognize their values.

This is a conceptual paper which attempts to understand the linkages between heritage and economic development and the economic impact that a typical heritage site can have in emerging economies like India. In particular, we focus on the region of Kutch/Kachchh in the Western Indian state of Gujarat. Kachchh is a unique ecosystem and a related cultural landscape.

It has a distinctive cultural identity and cultural assets which may be useful for economic and social development of the local communities. Instead of built heritage, the focus is on crafts of the region, which have emerged as a result of the influence of nature and human nurture. Crafts – a tangible product from an intangible knowledge – are an organic evolution and Kachchh exemplifies it very well.

Every place has its own local histories, stories, practices and belief systems which are intimately connected to them these are the things which people have an immediate connect with and try to protect. It is also one aspect of heritage which it is extremely easy to lose. Also people may not realise that something important has

been lost as often these are matters of routine, which are not seen as important and special, and therefore are less likely to be documented. Intangible heritage is also much more sensitive than tangible heritage. It is a delicate balance between different stakeholders which is not very difficult to destroy and once destroyed it is not easy to re-establish.

2. The Indian Economy and the role of Intangible Heritage in it

India is one of the largest economies in the world and is the 7th largest in the world. It is also one of the fastest growing ones. The Country's GDP was USD 2.049 Trillion in 2014, the country has a population of 1.295 Billion as of 2013. However per capita income remains low at USD1570 (2014). Even with this number there is great disparity. It is classified as a lower middle income nation. It also has a very large rural population. (World Bank 2015.)

However vast sections of the population are left behind this fast economic growth and the country has a large population of rural and urban poor. The people falling in this category often have little formal education and few employment opportunities. The country has not been very successful in tapping this large section of society. The number of people living below the poverty line also is very high. In 2011 25.7 per cent of rural population and 13.7 per cent of urban population lived below the poverty line a total of 21.9 per cent of the country lived below poverty line. India's vast cultural assets and their recognition may have a role to play in improving the lives of the people. (World Bank 2015)

India is widely acknowledged as a multicultural society, with various religions, languages, cultural practices all over the nation. However indigenous cultures are slowly being lost. Though there is a wider understanding of the culture and its importance in the country, there is also a distinct loss of pride in clinging to heritage and indigenous knowledge as they are seen as backward. Culture and heritage are seen as non-development and backward, and there is a distinct feeling that one needs to let go of cultural practices and heritage in order to progress. They are seen as non-entities when it comes to development. No attempt has been made to know

the number of people benefitted economically by heritage- tangible or intangible and how it may benefit the country.

In the economic development of the country the heritage sector especially the crafts can have a huge influence but is seen as a liability instead. This sector can directly affect the urban and rural poor who have limited formal education but may have knowledge and training of indigenous craft forms passed down from their ancestors. Their skills and knowledge do not get any value in the formal education and employment sector. Another thing lacking is the clear understanding, study and measure that the sector has on the economy.

Such economic impact of heritage sector is well measured in developed countries and systematic efforts are made to create a robust heritage ecosystem in these countries. However, such attempts are missing in India; in spite of the fact the country is rich with many heritage sites as well as intangible heritage like crafts and living traditions.

In most developed countries where an effort has been made to measure the size of the creative industries, their share of the GDP is around 5 per cent and their growth rates have been higher than that of 'traditional' manufacturing industries. (Towse 2003).

As a further illustration in France, according to the official data published by the Directorate of Trade, Crafts, Services and Liberal Professionals (DCASPL) in 2006, artistic and crafts professions accounted for 37000 enterprises which employed 43,200 people. These enterprises accounted for 15 out of 1000 enterprises in the fields of industry, trade and services. A study commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of France in 2005 showed that close to 250,000 jobs were linked to the existence, management and use of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. (Rizzo and Mignosa 2015)

The handloom and handicrafts sectors are an USD 4.48 billion dollar industry and contribute USD 1.85 Billion to India's export earnings. According to the 12th five year plan of the government of India the handicraft production is supposed to double between 2012 and 2017 and exports were projected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 18% during the same period. Despite these numbers the crafts

are seen as a sunset industry in the country. Even these numbers just touch the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the influence of the crafts on the overall growth and development of the country.(Dasra 2013)

Along with this there are no comprehensive figures available on the number of people employed by the crafts sector or its economic output. Much of it is unorganized thus there is a high likelihood that it is not accounted for in the national income. In fact it is only in 2012 that artisans were included in the National Economic Census. The data from the census is still being tabulated; once the reports are available we should have a better idea of the number of people directly employed by the crafts. Until then we have different agencies giving different data for different years'. For example according to one World Bank Report 8.3 million people were employed by the crafts sector in 1994-1995 with the number estimated to rise to 8.6 million in 2000-2001. (Liebl and Roy 2004). According to the Planning Commission of the country the traditional arts and crafts sector provided livelihood to 10 million people in 2006. (Isar 2013)

Even when we get the data from the economic census, it would be difficult to know the exact number of people who are affected by the sector as a large number of participants support the artisan, who do not get accounted in the surveys.

The crafts sector is not a very organized sector with 67% artisan being self employed and 37% being wage earners. Most artisan productions are micro enterprises, 39% of artisans incurred production expenditure of less than USD 215 a year. Approximately 71% of artisans work as a family unit and 76% artisans attribute their skills to their heritage. (Dasra 2013)

Even in all this crafts are not recognised as a cultural capital. Capital is defined as goods which give rise to further goods when combined with other inputs. Cultural capital is not just cultural goods which give rise to further goods. There is a distinct economic value to it but along with it there is also cultural value attached to it; it is a multi-dimensional representation of the cultural objects assessed in qualitative or quantitative terms against a variety of attributes like its aesthetic quality, social function, symbolic significance, historical importance, uniqueness, spiritual meaning. Most traditional crafts fulfil these criteria very well but there is no recognition of them as such. (Towse 2003)

3. Crafts and Threats faced by them

What is today considered to be a cultural product are commodities which were created based on need and conditions of people and their environment. Every region thus has its own distinct culture and cultural products which are a response to its environment. Traditionally these products are made by cottage industries on a small scale. These support the local economies and small industries. Today these products command a premium in the global markets because they require a high degree of skill in their production and a large component of artisanal and handmade input. (Dasra 2013) However the benefit accrued to the artisan is often very low and even the reach of these products is varied.

With the post colonial emphasis on industrialization and the perception of the need for rapid growth in the 1960s and 1970s the heritage sector, especially the indigenous crafts came to be seen as a welfare sectors. The government completely overlooked the possibility of seeing the sector as a tool of economic growth. (Dasra 2013)

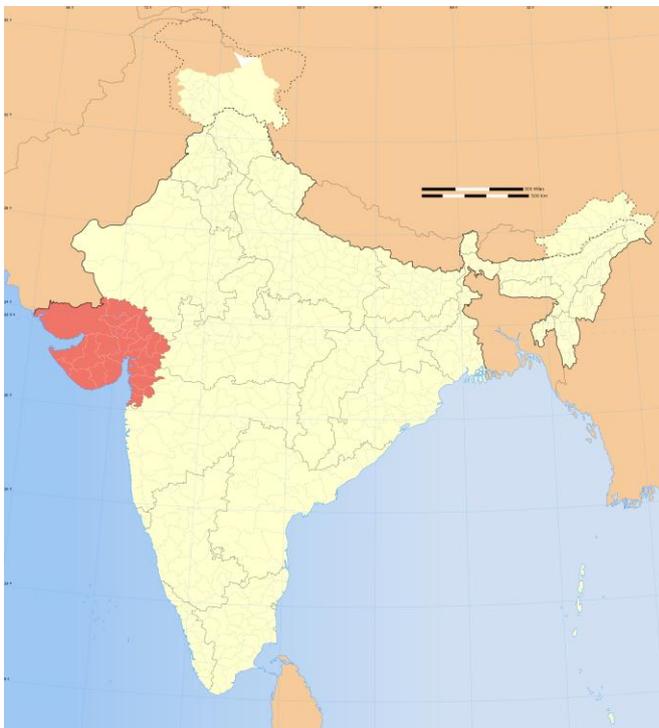
Even at the level of the Central Government the crafts fall under the purview of 17 different ministries. The government has launched many different schemes, institutions and welfare programmes to deal with the sector. However the efforts have not been cohesive and concerted, which has led to the sector being mired in inefficiency and bureaucracy at the government level. Furthermore 70% of the crafts budget goes towards development of an enabling environment for exports. This doesn't acknowledge the linkages in the local markets and the traditional consumers of the crafts. This leads to the losing out of the impact the crafts can have on the development of the country in various ways besides exports. (Dasra 2013)

For many of the artisans the traditional value chains and linkages between the different communities and artisans have broken down. Thus the raw materials one may have found within one's own village or region now has to be bought from outside. This has many effects on the people. One is that the material is more expensive which drives up the cost. Another is that the quality may or may not be as good or suitable as the local produce. Another very important impact is that the local

linkages are broken and the benefits get spread out beyond the locals and often it is the traders and middlemen who take the lion's share of the earnings.

One important factor is that very often the local consumption linkages are lost and the traditional communities which used to consume these products have shifted to goods produced on a large scale by contemporary industries. This is due to various reasons like lower prices, easy availability, changing tastes and preferences of the consumers, especially the younger generations, etc. When looking at sustainability of crafts as viable economic activities, we should also address these questions and how to best deal with them. A myriad number of questions are raised like whether we should try to re-establish these local linkages, whether it is feasible or not. These questions are difficult to answer and there are no rights or wrongs. A global market has also opened up for the crafts but till which extent the benefit reaches the craftspeople is questionable. Also whether the global market can or more importantly should replace the local markets is a tricky question.

4. Gujarat; Kachchh and its distinct culture



Gujarat is a state in western India bounded by the Arabian Sea on the west, the state of Pakistan on the northwest and the Indian states of Rajasthan on the north, Maharashtra on the south and Madhya Pradesh on the east. The state itself was created in 1960, 13 years after India's independence from colonial rule. It has its own distinct cultural identity with its own language, food, religious practice, cultural practices, and arts and crafts. Even within Gujarat the

different regions have their own cultures. It has 4 different cultural zones- North Gujarat, Kachchh, Saurashtra and South Gujarat. Each has a unique terrain, people and practices. The state has people following different faiths like Hinduism, Islam,

Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. In all there are 289 distinct communities in the state which have their distinct faith, customs and traditions. (Mirza and Mallya 2012)



Kachchh is a vast land in the northern part of Gujarat. It is a distinct and interesting geographic entity. It has a vast coastline with the Arabian Sea. To the south is the Little Rann of Kachchh, to the north the Great Rann of Kachchh, vast seasonal

salt marshes.

Kachchh was a royal princely state in the pre-independence India and remnants of the royal heritage can still be seen in the royal palaces and the erstwhile royal family. But even the common people of the region have their own rich distinct cultures and practices.

Each region and community in Kachchh has its distinct way of living which is reflected in the architecture, costumes and fabrics, jewellery, animal ornaments and tools. The connections between the different communities are often reflected in this. Each community had a different role to play in this system, doing different things in the creation of the different articles.

The district of Kachchh has a rich and varied culture; it has been an important centre for trade, commerce and transport. It has also been melting point of cultures, where people from different regions have historically migrated and settled here. This gives the region a distinct identity and culture. Talking about the different communities and their cultures would take several papers, hence they are not discussed here.

From this unique diversity of nature and culture we see the distinct heritage of Kachchh emerging. Different crafts made with different materials have emerged from this. Crafts using leather, metal, cotton, wool, pottery, wood, lacquer and different embroidery and printing techniques can be found in Kachchh. (Mirza and Mallya 2012)

5. The Craft ecosystem and its Disintegration

We can see from the previous section that the Kachchh has a distinct cultural identity and a unique cultural landscape. From this emerge the exquisite crafts of Kachchh. The crafts of Kachchh have a distinct identity and are well known the world over. Even within the region different communities have their own distinct craft forms which are reflected in their costumes, homes and in their lifestyles in general. Every product of everyday use has evolved into a distinct craft form and has become a signature of the region.

Although crafts are seen as creative expression today, the crafts of Kachchh are inherently rooted in tradition and local heritage. For the people they are distinctly connected to identity, ethnicity, gender, religion as well as the phases of life. From these roots the crafts have grown and evolved with the times. Many of them have changed with the times and market needs. Today they no longer cater only to local needs but also to global demands.

Thus crafts are not just an expression of creativity but are also a part of the heritage and also reflect the artistic skills of the craftsperson. Thus crafts have elements of 3 important cultural ideas- as a heritage entity, as an expression of creativity and as an artistic expression.

Economically and under government policy they are cottage industries and usually fall under the Micro, Small and Medium enterprises categories. The benefits from these go to smaller units and the profits are spread out more evenly and go to a much wider pool of people. In order to understand the crafts and how the economic system works the sheep wool crafts have been taken as a case. The chain from the sheep and its breeding and herding, to the shearing, weaving, and product creation is a vital one and has benefits for different sections of the society.

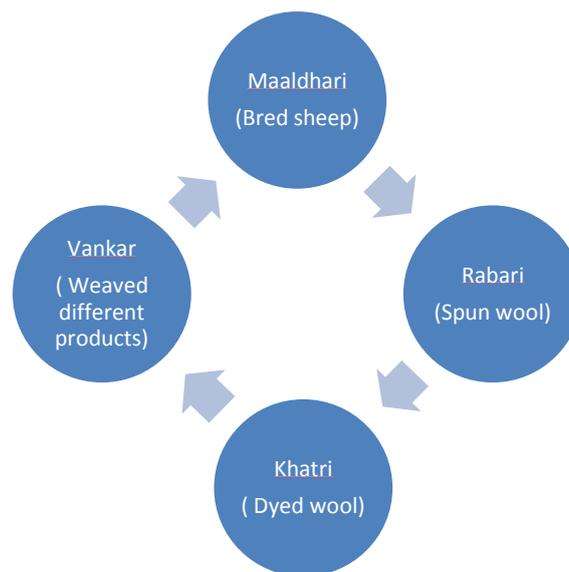
Sheep wool crafts

Pastoralism is one of the most common traditional occupations of Kachchh. It is a way of life extremely suitable for the semi-arid desert environment of the region. The pastoralists of the region keep various animals like camels, cows, buffaloes, sheep and goats.

The region of Kachchh has a large number of pastoralists and many of them keep sheep. Sheep were traditionally kept for wool and the wool was used for many different craft forms that were practiced in the area.

Some of the craft techniques which use sheep wool are: Tangalia weaving; Kharel weaving; Bandhini- tie- resist dyeing. Some craft product which are made with sheep wool are: Namda- a felted rug; Dhabla- woollen blankets/ large shawl; Pachhed- large shawl; Shawls, Dhurrie- a floor covering, and Kharad- woven rug. (Mirza and Mallya 2012)

The traditional ecosystem functioned in such a manner that the different communities exchanged different goods and services to produce the items of daily need. The Maaldhaaris used to breed and herd the



sheep, The Rabaris used to spin the wool, the Khatri used to dye it and the Vankars would weave the wool into the different products. These products would be used by the communities in exchange for the work done. This is an excellent example of the idea of 'cultural ecosystems'- shared cultural networks and relationships that facilitate cultural, social and economic interaction between members of communities. (Towse 2003)

However with the passage of time and changes in social structures these linkages have broken down. Same is the case with sheep wool and its crafts. Many of the

crafts which used the wool have been replaced by commercially produced cotton or synthetic fabrics. Even the sheep wool is now bought by wool traders from the big cities for a throwaway price from the shepherds and the weavers acquire it from the cities at a high price.

This has led to a complete loss of social and economic value for the raw materials, the skills and the craft produce in the socio-economic structure. This is also eroding the unique craft traditions of the region which give the space identity. Strangely enough, these products, which have completely lost their value over here, command a premium in the global markets.

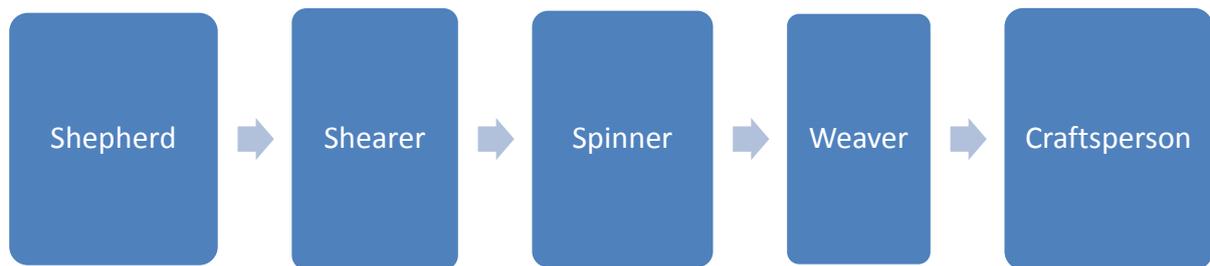
6. Value chains of Sheep wool crafts

A heritage ecosystem is not only about preserving the visible aspects of the heritage but all those aspects that go into creating it. Because heritage isn't an isolated entity but a manifestation of the environment – it includes the natural and human aspects.

These ecosystems also evolve and change with the time. This may be influenced by the internal as well as the external factors. When the craft is produced and put together with local resources, it benefits the local economy and generates and sustains local livelihood. For example in the case of the sheep wool crafts all the communities do a share of the work and get useful goods in return. They do not have to spend much and may even earn a little while using their traditional skills.

This is an inclusive form of economic development where each participant in the chain is benefitted. The economic benefits trickle down the value chain. Here, heritage not only supports the craftsman but a whole chain of participants. Thus when we develop a heritage site or asset, it benefits a whole chain of people economically.

This also benefits the environment as the products have a low environmental impact, if any, as the raw material is mostly natural and produced on a small scale, not needing heavy polluting industries.



The Breakdown of the Value Chain and Challenges

Traditionally all the raw materials as well as the processes involved in the creation of the craft were sourced locally, however these chains have broken down over the years. So now the craftsman is disconnected from the spinner and the breeder

These traditional methods had multiple benefits- one was that the material and craft had influenced each other, thus they complemented each other. Since these were done locally and on a small scale they had minimal impact on the environment. Also when everything was done locally, a distinct identity was created, thus giving the object a different value.

With the breaking up of the value chains we find that the price the participants get for their product is much lower and what they have to pay is much higher. This is due to the large overhead costs added by the increasing number of participants in the form of traders and the transport.

The original wool is also not used and a standardised homogenised product is brought from a distant wholesale market. This doesn't have the identity that local wool has. Thus the product may be the craft ostensibly but an important element of the authenticity is lost. Also the benefit accrued from the product goes to too many different players, many of whom aren't local.

This slowly erodes the identity of the people and the region. This also has an economic influence. The people slowly start becoming dependent on completely external sources for both consumption and their livelihoods. They need to work as wage labourers to supplement their incomes. These are also homogenised

workspaces where their own skill and knowledge have no role and they are just labour and completely replaceable.

They sometimes have to migrate to larger towns and cities for work and work as factory workers, domestic help or other menial jobs. These jobs discount their knowledge, skill and value that the people themselves have and reduce them to faceless labourers. Their work and skill is homogenous and replaceable.

Reviving and valuing the crafts would have multiple benefits. This would allow the craftspeople to live in their native villages which have limited employment opportunity otherwise. Their skills and knowledge get recognised and valued. This can only happen when their crafts are concerned as they have their little formal education and belong to disadvantaged social groups. Our formal education and employment structures don't recognize these skills and there are no mechanisms where this can be done presently.

There are many things which play a role in it. The government and its policies, the communities, the civil societies in the form of NGOs. The traders, retailers and the consumers all are important stakeholders.

Promoting the crafts would play an important role in achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations like no poverty, decent work and economic growth, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production and reduced inequalities. The traditional craft making techniques fulfil these goals naturally.

7. Suggestions and conclusion

Crafts are a major cultural asset which is also very sensitive to external and internal factors. There are many stakeholders involved and many factors which come into play. They can not only benefit the communities economically but also have the human development impact of identity affirmation and community awareness. (Isar 2013)

What are the challenges and threats have the possibility of turning into opportunity given the right platforms. We need government policies which are straightforward

and the benefits of which can reach the craftsman. There is also a need of greater awareness and value creation of the craft products.

Recognition to the crafts:

By the government: the government needs to have a coherent crafts policy and policies which can benefit the craftsman. It should recognise the crafts as a viable industry and focus on promoting it in the local markets as well. It should recognize the unique value of these locally produced handmade goods and the role they can play for the sustainable economic development of the country.

There also needs to be better awareness about the uniqueness of the crafts. We also need better ways to guarantee authenticity so that the genuine producers get a good price

Beyond the niche: today most craft products are aimed at a niche market of consumers and are often found in speciality stores. There is a possibility to increase their market if their reach increases to more retail stores which are used by a more general populace.

Recognition of traditional knowledge in the education system:

Traditional knowledge and skill are not given any recognition in the education system. The current education system is of a completely western orientation which discounts anything beyond book learning. This also makes the communities feel that their own knowledge is value less in the modern world. It would be extremely beneficial if some mechanisms were established to recognise these knowledge systems and that learning beyond the books is also sensible and useful.

Re-establishing the value chains:

An attempt should be made to re-establish the traditional value chains where the different communities directly take different products from each other without involving traders and middlemen. This would help them economically as well as re-

establish social connections. This may improve the authenticity and quality of the crafts as well.

Awareness and education for the craftspeople:

There needs to be better education and awareness amongst the craftspeople as well as the related communities about the value of their skills and the ways they can benefit from it. With regards to this a fair amount of work has been and is being done in the region of Kachchh by various organizations.

Vocational training systems to sustain these crafts could also be developed to ensure that these crafts not only survive in the long run but also provide meaningful employment to the communities involved. If promoted well, these crafts related occupations can draw and support much larger numbers of people in labour intensive, low investment economic activities, which are crucial to reduce unemployment rates in the rural regions.

Promotion in local markets:

The local markets are today flooded by mass produced, synthetic fabrics. The communities are now giving up their traditional clothes in favour of more generic clothing. An attempt should be made to promote the local crafts in their traditional markets.

In this increasingly homogenised world our culture and heritage is what gives us our identity. Not all of it may be good or rational but we need to preserve the good and let go of the bad. Our traditions, customs, culture, languages and crafts are uniquely ours and give us our sense of place on this vast planet. Heritage has an intrinsic value, its importance and meaning in a historical, cultural and emotional sense regardless of its economic value. (Rizzo and Mignosa 2015) But today we need to make a case to protect the same. By looking at the ways these can economically add to our lives we can do so.

In this paper we have tried to examine various economic, social and environmental impacts that crafts can make on a region and communities within it. Promoting the crafts sector will not only allow the continuation of traditions and culture and preserve heritage but also help in creating livelihood opportunities for millions.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the faculty and staff of Ahmedabad University. In particular, we would like to give a special thanks to Dr. Neel Kamal Chapagain, Mr. Debashish Nayak, Ms. Santana Pathak, Dr. Shahul Ameen, Ms. Sushma Iyengar, Ms. Juhi Pandey, Mr. Ghatit Laheru, Mr. Harish Hurmade. We are grateful to the teams of Khamir Craft Resource Centre and Sahjeevan, the Non-Government Organizations engaged in the crafts and livelihood of Kachchh. Finally, thanks are also due all our friends and family who have supported us in this endeavour.

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