



In recent years, interest in India's traditional crafts has surged, with consumers seeking unique, handmade items that reflect our rich cultural heritage. However, despite this interest, there is occasional yet notable disappointment surrounding the quality, quantity, and consistency of these products. Complaints arise not only from consumers but also from authorities who set standards for Geographical Indications (GI) products, expecting them to live up

to high expectations of modernity. Ironically, while demanding excellence, many overlook the fundamental challenge being faced by these craftspeople: their survival. When artisans are barely able to make ends meet, how can they produce goods of superior quality, quantity, and consistency? This dilemma raises a critical question: have we truly laid the groundwork for a thriving craft industry that supports artisans as integral contributors to the

economy, or are we merely consumers holding them to impossible standards?

To understand the challenges, it is essential to look at the grassroots realities that artisans face. Traditional crafts in India are primarily created by individuals and small communities who work in informal, often unstable settings. These artisans are the custodians of our culture, creating products that embody India's diverse history,

techniques, and aesthetics. Yet, for most of them, craftsmanship is not a choice but a means of survival, often carried out under harsh conditions with minimal financial stability.

A major issue in the craft sector is the lack of access to resources and a formal structure that can support artisans as valued participants in the economy. Most artisans work within tight financial constraints, with little or no access to affordable loans or schemes that could help them expand their work. When financing is available, it often comes with high interest rates or complex requirements that artisans struggle to meet, trapping them in cycles of debt. This financial strain is compounded by inadequate infrastructure. Unlike other industries, traditional crafts lack access to modern technology, efficient distribution networks, and necessary facilities, making it nearly impossible for artisans to scale production or maintain consistent quality.

Compounding these issues is the lack of a structured industry around traditional crafts. Unlike manufacturing or other formal industries, traditional crafts in India do not benefit from official standards and regulations. There are no clear guidelines for quality, pricing, or durability, which often leads to inconsistency in products and ultimately contributes to consumer dissatisfaction.

Authorities are quick to demand high standards, particularly for GI-tagged products, but rarely provide the infrastructure or support needed for artisans to meet these expectations. Take, for instance, the weavers of Varanasi. While authorities, including consumers, expect premium-quality products, the weavers continue to struggle with outdated tools, unpredictable demand, and rising material costs, competition from counterfeiters at very high scale. These expectations, without accompanying support, only serve to increase pressure on already struggling artisans.

Creating a formal industry for traditional crafts would not only empower artisans but also address longstanding concerns from consumers and authorities. This approach would enable us to set quality expectations while giving artisans the resources to achieve them. In Japan, for example, structured industries around traditional arts like kimono-making and pottery treat these crafts as valuable cultural assets.

Artisans are respected, supported, and equipped to maintain the high standards consumers expect. With its rich and diverse heritage, India could greatly benefit from a similar approach, transforming our cultural legacy into a viable, respected economic sector.

Ultimately, the quality of traditional crafts reflects the conditions under which they are made. By investing in a structured industry that supports artisans, we lay the foundation for consistency, quality, and pride. While this requires dedication and coordination, it is an investment in our culture, economy, and future. The time has come for us to decide whether we will build an industry that genuinely empowers artisans or continue demanding quality without providing the necessary support. Transforming India's craft sector from survival to pride is not just an economic opportunity—it is a cultural responsibility, and for those who value India's heritage, this is a mission worth pursuing.



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Disclaimer: The views expressed are personal.