

ONE DISTRICT, ONE PRODUCT SCHEME OF GOVERNMENT OF INDIA: AWARENESS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY WOODEN CRAFT WORKERS: A STUDY OF SAHARANPUR (U.P)

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ABSTRACT

The One District One Product (ODOP) scheme in India aims to promote regional specialties and traditional crafts, fostering economic growth at the grassroots level. In the case of Saharanpur, a city renowned for its skilled wooden craftsmen, the ODOP scheme has both raised awareness and presented challenges.

KEYWORDS: One District One Product (ODOP), Regional Specialties, Economic Growth.

Introduction

Saharanpur, known for its rich cultural heritage and exquisite craftsmanship, has a long-standing tradition of wooden artistry. The wooden craftsmen of Saharanpur have been crafting intricate and timeless pieces for generations. However, this esteemed tradition faces several challenges in the contemporary era.

Awareness

The ODOP scheme has brought significant awareness to the unique wooden crafts of Saharanpur. The intricate carvings, delicate inlays, and timeless designs have gained recognition on a broader scale, attracting a more diverse clientele. The promotion of Saharanpur's wooden craftsmanship as a distinctive product.

Challenges

- **Economic Pressures**

One of the foremost challenges confronting wooden craftsmen in Saharanpur is the economic strain. The rising cost of raw materials, coupled with increased competition from mass-produced alternatives, has significantly impacted the earnings of craftsmen. This economic pressure not only affects their livelihoods but also jeopardizes the continuation of a craft deeply embedded in the region's identity.

- **Changing Consumer Preferences**

Modernization and changing consumer preferences pose another hurdle for Saharanpur's wooden craftsmen. The demand for traditional handcrafted wooden items has dwindled as consumers lean towards more contemporary and factory-produced alternatives. Adapting to evolving tastes while preserving the authenticity of their craft becomes a delicate balance for these artisans.

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- **Lack of Access to Markets**

Limited access to markets is a persistent challenge for wooden craftsmen in Saharanpur. Many artisans struggle to reach wider audiences, relying on local markets and middlemen. The absence of a robust marketing infrastructure impedes their ability to showcase and sell their products on a broader scale, restricting their economic growth and recognition.

- **Technological Disruptions**

As the world embraces technological advancements, wooden craftsmen find themselves at a crossroads. Incorporating technology into traditional craftsmanship is necessary for efficiency and innovation. However, the lack of resources, training, and infrastructure hinders many craftsmen from seamlessly integrating technology into their processes, putting them at a disadvantage in a rapidly evolving market.

- **Skill Erosion**

The transmission of skills from one generation to the next is integral to preserving the wooden craft heritage of Saharanpur. However, with the younger generation increasingly pursuing alternative careers, there is a risk of skill erosion. The scarcity of apprenticeships and formal training programs further exacerbates this challenge, jeopardizing the sustainability of these time-honored skills.

- **Environmental Concerns**

Wooden craftsmen are intricately linked with the use of natural resources, primarily wood. The increased focus on environmental sustainability raises concerns about the ecological impact of the craft. Balancing the demand for wooden artifacts with responsible sourcing and eco-friendly practices is a challenge that the craftsmen of Saharanpur must navigate to ensure the longevity of their craft.

- **Unpredictable Market Trends:** Wooden craftsmen in Saharanpur often face challenges due to the fluctuating demand for traditional crafts. Economic instability and changing consumer preferences impact their income.

Pricing Pressures: Global competition and the availability of cheaper alternatives challenge local artisans to maintain competitive pricing, impacting their profit margins.

Technological Gaps

- **Limited Technological Adoption:** Many artisans in Saharanpur still use traditional tools and techniques, lacking access to modern technology that could enhance efficiency and quality. This hampers their ability to meet contemporary market standards.
- **Skills Gap:** The younger generation's inclination towards modern careers has resulted in a declining interest in traditional craftsmanship. This trend contributes to a widening skills gap among artisans.

Raw Material Shortages

Depleting Forest Resources: The dependence on specific wood varieties like rosewood and sheesham is leading to overharvesting and depletion of these crucial resources. This poses a long-term threat to the sustainability of wooden craftsmanship in Saharanpur.

- **Rising Material Costs:** Fluctuations in the availability and cost of raw materials impact the artisans' production costs, affecting the overall viability of their craft.
- **Market Access and Distribution:**
- **Limited Market Exposure:** Many craftsmen in Saharanpur struggle to showcase their products on a global scale. Lack of exposure and marketing avenues hinder their ability to reach a broader customer base.
- **Challenges in Export:** Exporting wooden crafts involves navigating complex regulations and logistics. Smaller artisans often lack the resources and knowledge required to participate in international trade.

Artisan Welfare

Lack of Social Security: Wooden craftsmen, often working independently or in small workshops, face a lack of social security benefits. This includes issues like health coverage and retirement plans, leaving them vulnerable during challenging times.

Limited Access to Finance: Difficulty in accessing affordable credit constrains artisans from investing in equipment upgrades or expanding their businesses.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by wooden craftsmen in Saharanpur are multifaceted, encompassing economic, technological, and socio-cultural aspects. To safeguard this rich tradition, concerted efforts are needed, including targeted skill development, market access initiatives, and sustainable resource management. It is imperative to address these challenges collaboratively, involving both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, to ensure the continued prosperity of Saharanpur's wooden craftsmanship.

