Veritas Volume1 |Issue1| July 2026
Edmundian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (EJMR) ISSN: PP: 117-125

A study of production and marketing practices by Handicraft artisans at Pynursla block of Meghalaya

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Received: 30 April 2026| Reviewed: 10 July 2026| Revised: 19 July 2026 | Accepted: 23 July 2026

ABSTRACT

Several studies have examined the impact of handicrafts in the Meghalaya State. But there is a lack of focused research over the handicraft industry particularly at Pynursla block level. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the production and marketing aspects of handicrafts in selected villages of Pynursla Block, thereby providing insights into the sector's role in sustaining rural livelihoods and preserving cultural heritage. It is a descriptive research design based on primary data collected from 52 artisans, residing at seven different villages falling under Pynursla Block. A structured questionnaire originally prepared in English and later translated into khasi was used as research instrument. Outcomes suggest that handicraft production in Pynursla Block has not yet evolved into a commercially sustainable livelihood. The artisans are able to preserve their rich cultural heritage through production. There is also a lack of proper market and marketing technique mainly due to pre-defined set of customers mostly locals and middle-men

KEYWORDS: Handicraft, Production, Marketing, Meghalaya

INTRODUCTION

Handicraft symbolises articles made by hand using traditional skills and simple tools. It reflects the creativity, indigenous knowledge, and cultural identity of local communities while also serving functional and aesthetic purposes (Sarma, 2008; Sharma, 2014). It is predominantly a labour-intensive industry that is largely dependent on traditional techniques, locally available raw materials, and household-based units. It occupies a vital position in India's rural economy by generating employment, preserving cultural heritage, and contributing to export earnings.

An interlinkage between production and marketing is pertinent to the handicraft industry and has been highlighted in several studies exhibiting a link between production constraints and marketing challenges. For instance, Dash and Mishra 2021, observed that skills required for design innovation, quality standardization, and cost-efficient production are lacking among artisans. This limits their ability to place the[1] products effectively both in domestic and in international markets. They also face difficulties in procurement of raw materials, product distribution and pricing due to poor infrastructure as well as dominance of intermediaries who take away a substantial share of profits, resulting into less earnings and further less incentive to improvise upon production process (Dalal.et.al, 2024). Few more constraints are unorganized marketing systems, financial constraints, and the lack of branding and packaging facilities (Megha, 2019). Currently a growing proportion of craft enterprises are making use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Blogs to promote their craft items; although inadequate digital literacy and lack of training constraint

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the widespread adoption of these tools (Guha. et. al, 2021).

Production and marketing challenges are also pronounced in North-Eastern part of India. They may be categorized into general issues- such as weak branding and limited technology adoption; and region-specific issues related to raw materials, finance, and market access (Sengupta et al., 2020). Studies related to the state of Assam, reveal that handicraft products are tailored to meet market demand (Sarma 2008). However, lack of technological innovation and market intelligence both continues to constrain the bamboo handicraft industry, (Phukan, 2018). In Meghalaya the handicrafts are deeply embedded with tribal traditions serving both utility and decorative purposes (Arunkumar et al. 2012). But handicraft production here still remains largely unorganized and seasonal. It has remained a secondary activity after agriculture. (Tynsong et al., 2020). An absence of systematic marketing channels and limited training facilities related to designing and packaging also restrict the value addition, consequently effecting income of artisans (Lynser et al., 2014). There is also an absence of product customization as tourists demand artistically designed products, whereas the local artisans prefer to make more of utility items, reflecting a mismatch between productions focus and market segmentation. Dasgupta & Sen (2013).

This paper is prepared on the basis of Primary Data Survey conducted across 7 villages of Pynursla Block located in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. This region predominantly inhabited by the Khasi tribe and is well known for bamboo and cane crafts. According to the Meghalaya Pynursla Intelligence Report (Balipara, 2024), about 10% of the population in Pynursla Block is directly engaged in handicraft activities. These crafts not only preserve traditional skills but also generate employment and income (Tynsong et al., 2020). However, no research is evidenced examining the combined effect of production and marketing upon the artisans' here. This critical research gap is addressed here by examining the production and marketing aspects of handicraft industry through a primary data survey at Pynursla Block of Meghalaya. The present study aims to examine the status and role of the handicraft industry in Pynursla Block of East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya, with particular emphasis on production, marketing, and livelihood aspects. The objectives of the study are:

i. To study the demographic variables of artisans with reference to their gender and. age
ii. To identify the major raw materials and production techniques used by artisans in the study area.
iii. To analyse the customer base and promotional mechanism used by artisans in Pynursla Block for marketing their handicraft products.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive research design based on primary data collected through direct personal interviews conducted between the period of August and October 2025. Sample selection made through simple random sampling method comprising of 52 artisans both registered and unregistered, residing in seven different villages falling under Pynursla Block. A structured questionnaire originally prepared in English and later translated into khasi language to provide ease of language and better understanding among respondents, was used as research instrument. It covered aspects related to demographic profile, production techniques and marketing of product. Due to limited access of internet facilities in rural areas the questionnaire was printed and data collected through direct administration i.e., face to face interview with respondents.

Responses were systematically organised and tabulated for analysis using MS Excel. Descriptive statistical tools such as frequency and percentage were used for data summarization, identifying the number of observations and facilitate comparison among groups. Bar graphs and pie charts were used to make visual presentations of raw data, providing an aggregate view of variables.

RESULTS

Out of the seven villages surveyed, Tangmang Village have the highest number of respondent artisans engaged in handicraft production (38.46%) followed by Mawlam Village (34.62%), Pungweikyian Village has 13% of the respondents, Korblang, Nongshken and Wahumleiñ village covered 3.85% each. Lastly Myllat Village has the least number of respondents forming only 1.92% of the total respondents. Outcomes are presented under various sub-sections below.

A. Demographic Profile

Demographic profile presents the aggregate statistical summary of the respondents based on characteristics such as age and gender of the artisans. Data collected from the artisans of Pynursla Block reveal that majority of the artisans (around 67%) are not registered, whereas only 33% artisans were registered with the Government and some Government agencies. There is no uniformity in gender representation as more than 88.5 % of the respondents are female; whereas, only 11.5% of the respondents are male artisans, which is also an indication that this sector is female dominant.

Figure 1 below shows that the majority of respondents belong to the age group of 25 to 50 years, accounting for 65% of the total sample. This indicates that the study is largely represented by the economically active and working-age population, who are more likely to have informed opinions and practical experience related to the subject of the study. Respondents aged between 50 to 75 years constitute 31%, reflecting a substantial participation from older adults who may contribute valuable insights based on their experience. There is a limited involvement of teenagers and youngsters in this profession with only 4% of respondents are of up to the age of 25. The findings suggest artisan's age is an important determinant factor and are mainly influenced by middle-aged and older respondents.

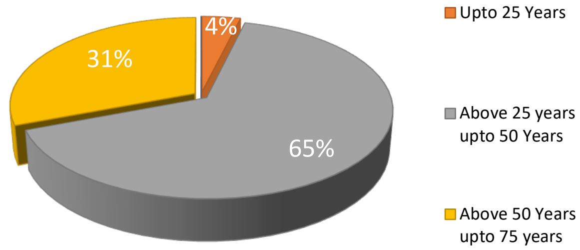

Fig. 1: Age group profile of respondents. Data Source: Primary Data Survey

Gender-wise distribution of respondents across different age groups is depicted in Figure 2 below. Within the age group below 25 years, there are no male respondents, and has only 2 female respondents. In the age group of 25 to 50 years, the number of male respondents (4 nos) is again less as compared to female respondents (30), indicating a stronger female participation. Yet again the 50 to 75 years category has a smaller number of males (2) as compared to females (14).

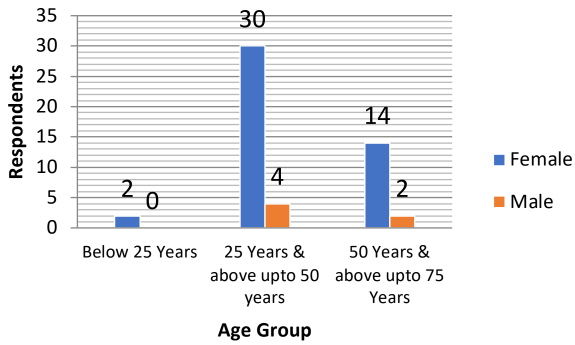

Fig. 2: Age Profile of Respondents (T-Value =1.63, P-Value=0.18, Not significant @5% level), Data Source: Primary Data Survey

In general, the findings advocate a gender imbalance with female respondents dominating across all age groups. This may influence the overall findings and perspectives of the research and are more likely to be influenced by female insights.

B. Production:

In handicrafts, the term production and techniques refer to the various types of Handicrafts items/ products of different designs which these artisans make by using their skills; and the various mechanisms and tools used by them to manufacture such items. In this section the second objective has been analysed, i.e., to study the production techniques and mechanisms. It is sub divided into sub - sections namely, Handicraft items manufactured, Techniques of production, Innovation and design, Time taken, Raw materials and training.

B.1. Handicraft items manufactured

Goods produced by the artisans are mainly traditional in nature, the production process of which they have learned from their ancestors and elders in the family as well as through training mechanism.

Table 1: Products made by artisans

Product manufacture	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Basket	7	13%
Basket and other	14	27%
Basket, Jewellery and other	8	15%
Basket, furniture, Jewellery and other	1	2%
Basket and Jewellery	1	2%
Jewellery	2	4%
Others	19	37%

Data Source: Primary Data Survey

Table-1 above shows distribution of artisans based on the type of products manufactured. Out of 52 respondents around 13% stated that they are making Basket only and concentrate on manufacturing baskets of various types like Betel nut basket, rectangular basket (locally known as Polo), Close weave basket (locally known as Khoh) among others. When combined with basket related production, the figure is significant with 31 artisans (63%) engaged in basket making either exclusively or in combination with other products, indicating that basket-making remains a dominant traditional craft activity among the respondents. A group of artisans also make multiple products. 27% of the respondents stated that they are making Basket and other products (Mat, Cushions, and Coasters). Around 15% of the respondents make Basket, Jewellery and other products. Additional 2% make Basket and Jewellery, whereas remaining 2% stated that they make basket, furniture, jewellery and other items. Almost all the artisans are involved in basket making along with jewellery, furniture and other handicrafts items. Majority of the respondents (37%) are making other handicraft items such as Cushion, Coasters, Tray, Winnowing Fans, Flower baskets and Trap. 4% of the respondent artisans make only Jewellery and the handicraft items manufactured by them include Earrings, Necklaces and Headgear (Traditional Khasi Crown) out of bamboo.

B2. Raw Materials:

Raw materials refer to unprocessed product which the artisans and craftsmen transform into unique piece of sculpture. Basically, materials from nature such as Bamboo, Cane, wood, leaves, etc., are being used since ages by artisans and craftsmen to create beautiful and unique pieces of handcraft product and are also a part of their tradition. During the survey it has been found that, majority of the artisans use 'Bamboo' and 'Cane' as their prime of raw materials. In addition, they are also using leaves and woods while making products such as Rain shields.

Findings at Table 4 above show that artisans obtain raw materials from multiple sources, i.e., training institutes, local markets, outside village markets and their own farms. Out of the 52 artisans surveyed, 13 artisans (25%) stated that they acquire raw materials through training institutes and organisations. Again, another group of 13 artisans (25%) stated that they purchase raw materials from both local (within village) market and outside village markets.

TABLE 4: Procurement Of Raw Materials

Sources of Procurement	Percent
Purchased through training Institute and organisation	25%
Produced in own Farm	17%
Purchase from local market	8%
Purchase from local market and Outside village	25%
Partially from own field and partially through outside village purchase	13%
Partially from own field and partially purchased from local market	8%
Purchase from local market and have our own raw material	4%

Data Source: Primary Data Survey

About 9 artisans (17%) stated that they use raw materials produced in their own farms, indicating self-reliant. 4 artisans (8%) depend solely on the local market for raw materials. Further, 7 respondents (13%) obtain raw materials partly from their own fields and partly from outside village purchases. Remaining 4 artisans (8%) combine their own field production with purchases from local market. Thus, many respondents depend on multiple sources for procuring raw materials that means they face challenges in obtaining sufficient raw materials from a single source. So, they combine self-production with market purchases to meet their production needs effectively. Hence the artisans first try to fulfil their requirements for raw materials from their own sources of production. Those who are not self-sufficient and those who do not have their own sources are purchasing raw materials form market or organisation(s). One noticeable aspect is that most of them procure raw materials from local sources and are not dependent in any outside region for their supply.

B.3. Time Taken:

Time taken refers to the time devoted each day for affecting the entire process, i.e., moving the raw materials through the entire production process from start to finish, till it gets the final product shape ready for consumption or marketing. As may be seen in Figure 3 below, a large proportion of respondent artisans (46%) devote more than 12 hours per day, followed by the next group of respondent artisans (38%) who devote 6-12 hours per day. Therefore, a clear indication that handicraft production is highly time-consuming. It is also a labour-intensive activity with want of manual skills. A smaller share of 10% stated that they spend 2-6 hours per day with remaining 6% saying that they spend less than 2 hours per day reflecting that for this group of respondent's handicraft activity may not be the primary activity. The fact that close to half of the respondents are working for more than 12-hours a day reflects the labour-intensive nature of handicraft work with reliance upon manual skills.

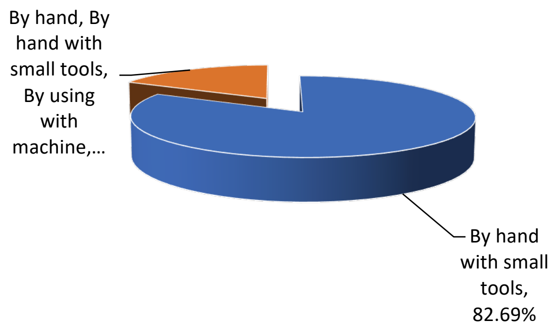

Fig 3: Time Spent per day in making Handicraft Items. Data Source: Primary Data Survey

B.4. Techniques Used

Technique is a method of converting raw materials into output that involves practical skills and the usage of tools and can be classified into labour-intensive and capital-intensive methods. Figure-4 below provides an overview of the tools and techniques used by these respondent artisans. It is observed that a substantial majority of the respondents (82.69%) rely on manual techniques using small hand tools only. Some of the small tools used by them are cutting machine, knife, scissors and saw. In contrast only 17.31% of the artisans use a combination of methods which includes hand work, hand tools and machines.

There is a clear dominance of traditional; labour-intensive production techniques among the artisans surveyed reflect the culture of traditional skills and craftsmanship. A minimal usage of modern machine is an indication that modernisation is not yet prevalent in this sector. This highlights the impact of maintaining the ethnic skill-based value of artisanal work.

B.5 Innovation

Innovation is an essential component of production as it develops something unique in its offerings to customers. Figure 4 shows that 52% of the respondents stated

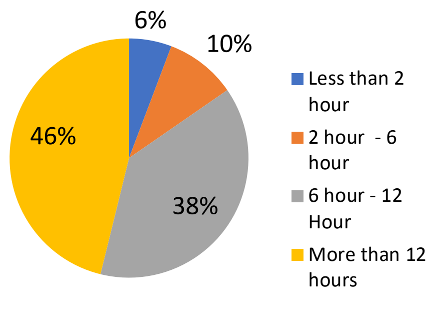

Fig 4: Tools Used for Making Craft Items. Data Source: Primary Data Survey

'No' to the question of innovation, while 48% responded 'Yes', depicting approximately half of the respondent artisans have engaged in some form of innovation or design modification. A marginal dominance of artisans who do not innovate indicates an inclination towards established pattern of production and may be linked to limited knowledge about market trends with a strong preference in protecting traditional designs. Conversely, a significant proportion of 48% artisans adopting new designs and mechanisms are also an indication of a gradual shift towards innovation. Possible explanations are customer demand, competition or external support through exhibitions or training programmes.

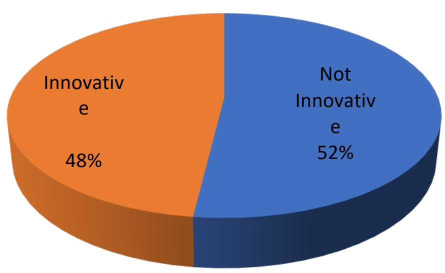

Fig 5: Innovative or Not Innovative. Data Source: Primary Data Survey

Overall findings advocate the existence of traditional practices with emergent openness to innovate, indicating an acceptance of adaptability of new design development and capacity building initiatives required to enhance sustainability and competitiveness. There are some innovations taking place in the manufacturing process of handicrafts, but that is not a striking factor.

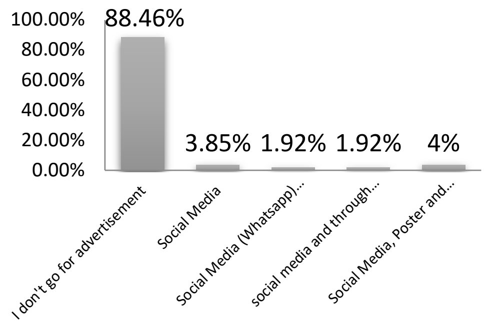

Fig 6: Advertisement & Publicity. Data Source: Primary Data Survey

C. MARKETING

Marketing of Handicraft product is important because it is a means to take the finished products to final consumers. By providing good quality product it will attract customer and helps in preserving the cultural heritage of the handicraft product made by the artisans of the state.

In this section the third objective is being analysed the customer base and promotional mechanism used by artisans in Pynursla Block for marketing their handicraft products. Analysis of customer base is important because the customers drive revenue making them essential for the survival and growth of business. Business houses study customer behaviour to tailor their products and improve services. Again, advertising is also important as it acts as an influencer for customers to purchase their product.

C.1. Customer Base:

Customers are another crucial element for selling products and revenue generation. They are the essential elements for growth and survival of any business. Table 5 below, shows that the local customers form the main component of customer base; with a significant proportion of 37% of the respondent artisans stating that for the sale of products they are solely dependent on local people (i.e., villagers) only.

Table 5: Customer Bases for Handicraft Production

Types of Customers	Percent age
Local people	37%
Local People, others and if someone is ordering	2%
Local people and middlemen	10%
Local people, middlemen and other	6%
Local people, Tourist and other	2%
Middlemen	6%
Local People & Others	57%
Middlemen and other	8%
Middlemen, Other (when we get order)	25%
Other	2%
Middlemen & Others	27%
Outsider	2%

Data Source: Primary Data Survey

This combined with varied sources reaches up to 57% meaning additional 20% also have local customer base in blend with other sources that are from outside the village. For 8% of the respondents, middle-men and others are the sole customers. When combined with other categories (such as local people or order-based buyers), they represent a larger proportion, including 25% who sell to middlemen and others when orders are received. A heavy dependence on middleman also in combination with other categories of customers suggests a limited direct access by artisans to wider markets.

This not only reflects the artisans' requisite for assured sales channel and market connectivity but also a 'reduced bargaining power and profit margins. A Smaller proportion (2%) reported having customers such as tourists, outsiders and other occasional buyers point towards the untapped potential of expanding market reach through other means like tourism promotion, exhibitions and digital platforms.

C.2. Advertisement:

Advertisement of handicraft products educates the consumer about the materials, process, and proper care of the product that adds to the perceived value of these goods. But the response of artisans depicted in Figure 6 below demonstrates a different attitude towards advertisement.

A vast majority of respondents (88.46%) do not engage in any form of advertisement. Remaining 11.54% respondents' make limited use of promotional methods such as social media (3.85%), WhatsApp and exhibitions (1.92%), social media and promotion through friends (1.92%), and social media, posters and exhibitions (4%). This may be linked to demand and sale of products with more to local customers. There is a minimal use of formal or structured advertising channels that is extremely limited. These restraints can be associated with lack of digital literacy, limited access to technology, financial limitations or even insufficient knowledge about marketing strategies.

DISCUSSION

This study presents some important understandings about the production and marketing dimensions of the handicraft sector in Pynursla Block of East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya. The outcomes highlight that handicraft production continues to be deeply embedded with traditional practices and strong cultural significance acquired through inter-generational inheritance of skills. Data collections constraint from the artisans is one of the challenges such as limited access or response bias with 52 artisans. The limited sample size may also affect the generalisation of the findings.

Objective 1 , i.e., to study the demographic variables of artisans with reference to their gender and age; shows a clear dominance of female artisans across all age groups which indicate that handicraft production is playing an important role in women's economic participation and household sustenance. This is evident across all age groups. Additionally, the artisan's age is an important determinant factor with more representation from middle-aged and older respondents denoting economically active and working-age population. A limited involvement of younger generation, particularly below 25 years of age marks a gradual disengagement of youth from traditional crafts possibly due to want of modernisation, low return and availability of alternate livelihood options. This also is a cause of concern about the long-standing and sustainability of this sector.

Objective 2 i.e., to study the production techniques and mechanisms; unveils that the artisans are mainly dependent on the traditional methods and techniques in producing the Handicraft Items. Majority make use of small tools and equipment with a negligible usage of modern and electronic gadgets. Time taken to manufacture goods is higher and goes even up to 12 hours of work each day making only limited quantity; is an indication that they give preference to quality over quantity. Innovation in production is not a striking factor. For raw materials, which are mainly bamboo and cane, they are dependent on multiple sources from production in farm to procurement through institutes and markets. So, these artisans are preserving their tradition of manufacturing process that are inherited through training given by elders and others in the same profession and from within the village community only.

Objective 3 i.e., the customer base and promotional mechanism used by artisans in Pynursla Block for marketing their handicraft products, unveils a narrow customer base as most of them have local village people and middle-men as the primary buyers for their products. The predominance of customers from inside and nearby locality as well as middlemen reduces the need for active advertising, as sales is mostly dependent on familiar, adjacent, or order-based channels rather than on competitive and open markets.

All the findings above clearly indicate that handicraft production in Pynursla Block has not yet evolved into a commercially sustainable livelihood activity. These are corresponding to the ones made by Dasgupta & Sen, 2013; Lynser et al., 2014; Roy, 2016; and, Tynsong. et. al, 2020; in their respective works piloted earlier and in other parts of Meghalaya state. However, the presence of skilled artisans, availability of raw materials, and gradual openness to innovation suggest a stronger potential for development. So, to ensure the long-term sustainability of this sector, there is a need for targeted interventions focusing on skill upgradation, design innovation, access to modern tools, and capacity building in marketing and digital literacy. There also is a need to go for systematic marketing, make more use of electronic media like open their own websites and make thorough advertisements. Furthermore, strengthening institutional support, improving market linkages and encouraging youth participation are also crucial for revitalizing the handicraft industry in this region.

CONCLUSION

The Handicraft Industry in Pynursla Block is culturally rich one driven by skilled artisans and abundant natural resource; has not grown to become a primary source of income. The primary focus is on making products related to daily usage and decorative items using traditional production practices with cane and bamboo as the chief input(s). There is more of female participation those who are also engaged in making handicraft products mainly baskets along-side their other jobs.

The handicraft sector in Pynursla also faces constraints on account of inadequate production capacity, limited market access, dependence on intermediaries, and inadequate institutional support in production and marketing; which further restrict the potential of artisans to expand production and get access to wider markets. Using leveraged institutional support, adopting modern marketing strategies, and fostering product innovation, Pynursla handicraft sector can switch into a more organized and sustainable enterprise, empowering its artisans and preserving valuable local traditions

.ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
This research paper is a part of IGNOU M. Com Dissertation Project by Phulstimon Kharkongor, completed under the supervision of Dr. Dipankar Shome. Hence the authors would like to acknowledge their heartfelt gratitude towards IGNOU.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST We declare that there is no Conflict of Interest related to the publication of this work.

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