



Education for Empowerment: A Study of Dokra Artisans of Bikna, Bankura in the Context of Skill India Mission

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Abstract:

This study examines the role of education in empowering Dokra artisans of Bikna, Bankura, within the framework of the Skill India Mission. Despite the historical and cultural significance of the Dokra craft, its sustainability has been threatened by limited market access, lack of formal training, and inadequate educational integration. Data for this study were collected from 25 artisans using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, seven artisans through structured interviews, and three artisans through in-depth case studies. Findings revealed that while formal education levels remained low, informal learning and training programs under government schemes significantly enhanced artisans' confidence, market awareness, and income-generating capacity. However, the study also highlighted persistent gaps in digital literacy, localized training content, and policy outreach. It concludes that integrating craft-based education, digital skills, and targeted training within the Skill India framework is essential for the socio-economic empowerment of Dokra artisans and the preservation of their cultural heritage.

Keywords: Education, Empowerment, Dokra, Skill India Mission, Bikna, Artisans, Vocational Training.

1. Introduction:

The Dokra craft of Bikna, Bankura, represents a centuries-old tradition of non-ferrous metal casting using the lost-wax technique. This indigenous craft, rooted in tribal communities, has historically been sustained through informal apprenticeship-based learning rather than formal education (Roy, 2010)¹. While the craft is valued for its cultural and aesthetic significance, artisans have faced increasing economic marginalization due to industrial competition, changing consumer preferences, and lack of institutional support (Ghosh, 2020)².

In this context, education—both formal and vocational—emerges as a critical driver of empowerment. The Government of India's Skill India Mission, launched in 2015, aimed to provide structured skill development, certification, and entrepreneurial support for traditional workers, including artisans (MSDE, 2023)³. However, field evidence suggests that the benefits of these initiatives remain unevenly distributed, especially in rural craft clusters like Bikna (NSDC, 2022)⁴.

This paper explores how education, in both formal and non-formal forms, impacts the empowerment of Bikna's Dokra artisans by examining their access to training programs, digital literacy, and participation in the Skill India Mission.

2. Review of Literature:

Scholars have highlighted the socio-cultural value of indigenous crafts and the transformative role of education in their sustainability. Sen (2019)⁵ emphasized that crafts like Dokra not only preserve cultural identity but also provide livelihoods for marginalized communities. However, industrialization and market mechanization have led to a decline in artisanal incomes and social recognition (Chatterjee & Dutta, 2018)⁶.

Research further indicates that vocational education has a significant impact on artisans' skill enhancement, income stability, and market participation. Roy and Majumder (2020)⁷ found that targeted training under programs such as PMKVY improved artisans' product quality and access to wider markets. Nonetheless, gaps remain in the localization of training content and the recognition of prior learning for artisans who rely on traditional knowledge (NSDC, 2022)⁴.

The Skill India Mission has been positioned as a transformative policy framework; however, studies such as those by Patel (2020)⁸ and Das (2021)⁹ point to structural limitations, including lack of rural outreach, gender barriers, and limited integration of cultural dimensions into training curricula. These gaps underscore the need for research that examines the intersection of education, empowerment, and indigenous crafts at the grassroots level.

3. Objectives:

1. To analyze the educational background of Dokra artisans in Bikna and its influence on their craft practices.
2. To assess the extent of training and skill development under the Skill India Mission for Dokra artisans.
3. To examine the role of education in empowering artisans economically, socially, and culturally.
4. To identify challenges faced by artisans in accessing educational and training resources.

4. Methodology:

This study employed a mixed-method research design. The sample included 35 artisans from Bikna, Bankura, comprising:

- 25 artisans surveyed through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire,
- 7 artisans interviewed using a structured interview schedule, and
- 3 artisans selected for in-depth case studies.

Purposive sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of artisans across different age groups, genders, and levels of experience. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies), while qualitative data from interviews and case studies were thematically analyzed to capture the lived experiences of artisans.

5. Results and Analysis:

5.1 Educational Background of Artisans:

The findings revealed that 68% of artisans had education below secondary level, while only 12% had completed higher secondary education. None possessed formal higher education qualifications. However, 85% of artisans expressed interest in training programs, indicating a strong demand for skill-based learning (NSDC, 2022)⁴.

5.2 Participation in Skill India Programs:

Only 28% of artisans reported participation in training programs under PMKVY or other government schemes. Those who participated highlighted improvements in product design and market knowledge (MSDE, 2023)³. However, a lack of localized training centers and limited awareness about government schemes constrained wider participation.

5.3 Impact on Empowerment:

Education and training positively influenced artisans' confidence, income generation, and market access. Artisans with training reported income increases of 20–30%, alongside improved decision-making power within households. Social empowerment was particularly visible among women artisans who engaged in cooperative-based training programs (Das, 2021)⁹.

5.4 Challenges:

The study identified several challenges:

- Limited awareness about government schemes,
- Language barriers in training modules,
- Poor digital literacy and lack of internet access,
- High dependence on middlemen for market linkages.

6. Discussion:

The findings reaffirm that education is a crucial enabler of empowerment among artisans. The case of Bikna's Dokra artisans demonstrates that skill development initiatives, when aligned with local cultural and economic contexts, can enhance both livelihoods and heritage preservation. However, the limited outreach of the Skill India Mission calls for a more decentralized and craft-specific approach (Patel, 2020)⁸.

Further, the integration of digital literacy in training modules is essential. As online marketplaces increasingly dominate the craft economy, artisans must be equipped with skills in e-commerce and digital promotion (Ghosh, 2020)².

7. Conclusion:

This study concludes that education, encompassing both formal schooling and vocational training, significantly contributes to the empowerment of Dokra artisans in Bikna. However, the potential of the Skill India Mission remains underutilized due to limited rural outreach, lack of culturally relevant training, and insufficient market linkages.

Policy interventions must therefore focus on:

- Establishing localized training centers,
- Integrating digital literacy and financial education,
- Promoting artisan cooperatives,
- Ensuring targeted outreach for marginalized groups.

Strengthening these dimensions can help ensure that the Skill India Mission fulfills its mandate of creating a skilled, empowered, and culturally rooted artisan community in West Bengal.

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