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A Geographical Assessment of Income, Livelihood, and Marketing Restraints among Kantha Artisans in Bolpur Santiniketan and surrounding areas

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Abstract

Kantha stich work is a very significant traditional handicrafts in our state, and it also plays a weighty part for preserving our ancient culture and also support the livelihoods in rural area, mainly for female workers. Bolpur–Shantiniketan and its surrounding area are famous for kantha handicrafts and other handicrafts production. The artisans exercise this primitive cultural handicraft and also face various types of socio-economic difficulties. This research work sightsees livelihood conditions, income structure, and market exposures of Kantha artisans from a geographical perspective, with special emphasis on sustainability of their livelihoods.

With so many difficulties, Kantha stich embroidery preserves primitive and traditional knowledge, female economic contribution, and also rural development in our study region. Those actions not only amplify the household condition of the workers but also contribute the long-term conservation and sustainable development of this treasured traditional handicraft.

Keywords: Kantha embroidery, livelihood; Socio-economic well-being, Traditional handicrafts, Digital marketing, sustainable development, income structure.

The handcraft textile around the Bolpur Shantiniketan and its surrounding areas signify a vibrant intersection of cultural legacy, artistic aesthetic appearance, and commercial activity, connection with rural women, where they play an important role in nourishing and advancing these ancient, traditional and sustainable hand crafts (Chaudhary, 2019). Shantiniketan-Sriniketan region including its buffer zone are extremely influenced by the idealism of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. He has nurtured the exclusive traditional art forms like embroidery, ceramics, weaving, pottery, and other handicrafts boom (Roy & Dey Biswas, 2011). The needlework imitates the livelily hood, work experiences, and imagination in craft work of rural women. The designs inspired from nature, animals, regional and folk festivals and others (Nayak and Sood, 2024). Basically, Kantha stich work is a primitive traditional needlework art in West Bengal which is mechanized from the practice of reusing old saris and other clothes. In rural Bengal house hold woman stitched the old sarees in

several layers that create a thick material and it is used in winter. Although it was made by old clothes so these materials were designed with threads. Day by day, this traditional embroidery becomes famous all over the country. Now in present day it has become an important source of income of house hold woman. This stich work improving the socioeconomic conditions of rural societies (Basu Thakur and De, 2022). Kantha stich reflected the remarkable creativity and skill of Bengali women. It began as a way of reusing old clothes by stitching layers of fabric together to make beautiful quilt and coverlets (Deb Roy, 2026). Kantha stitch is one of the most primitive arts in West Bengal. This is most beautiful and unique art and hand craft which shows the originality of artisans, especially women, and has been spread generation wise. This art became popular in some parts of Birbhum district in West Bengal. Because the farming land in this area is not very fertile, many people depend on this craft as an important source of income (Thakur & De, 2022). Kantha is a good example of eco-friendly and sustainable design. It is made by reusing old and leftover pieces of cloth, which helps reduce waste and protect the environment (Karim et al.,2022). The recycled fabric is turned into useful and beautiful items. Because of this, Kantha represents the ideas of sustainability and resilience. The income of artisans is basically irregular and highly relies on seasonal demand, tourism and market accessibility. As a result, the sustainability of kantha based livelihood has become an important issue in recent year (Chaudhary, 2019). In this context, this study tried to examine the income livelihood market vulnerability of kantha artisans in the Bolpur-Santiniketan region. The study largely focuses on the socio-economic conditions of artisans, their dependence on kantha work for livelihood, and the various market challenges affecting their economic stability.

Statement of the problem:

One of the most well-known and traditional handicrafts of West Bengal is the Kantha craft, which is an important means of livelihood generation, especially for rural women. Women in West Bengal have been associated with this art form ancient times. Initially, it served to meet their own financial needs, but over time, this craft evolved and is now globally recognized. Kantha embroidery cloth materials are very popular and demanding in present day in our country and in international market. But our kantha artisans are not getting their proper wages from the cloth merchants and middle man. Kantha artisans are facing some problems like minimum wages, limited profits, irregular payment, irregular employment, competition with other skilled workers. Furthermore, the livelihoods of Kantha artisans are affected by various market risks. Volatility in market demand, competition from machine-made products, and rising prices of raw materials undermine the security of their income and employment. As a result, many artisans have abandoned their traditional craft and taken up alternative livelihoods. Therefore, the present study aims to analyse the livelihoods, income, and market-related problems of the Kantha artisans in the Bolpur-Santiniketan region of West Bengal, and to determine potential strategies for their economic development to ensure the overall advancement of the Kantha artisans.

Literature Survey:

P. Roy and S. Dey Biswas (2011) throw the lights on the value chain involved in the production of Santiniketan Kantha stitch sarees and to identify the opportunities and challenges faced by the female artisans associated with the Kantha industry.

Chaudhury (2019) on her published article, aimed to understand the work of the handicraft industry in Bolpur-Santiniketan and analyse how it contributed to an alternative option of livelihood for women. The social and economic status of the artisans is analysed by the women of the arts and the research is directed based on the primary data.

C.M. Rogerson and P.M. Sithole (2001) in their research paper mainly discussed the challenges facing rural artisans in the Mpumalang region of South Africa as well as the support necessary for their development. The researchers gathered data through surveys and interviews conducted with various artisans, including woodcarvers and grass weavers. Based on this information, they analysed issue related to production, marketing, income.

Objectives:

(i) To examine the socio-economic profile and income structure of Kantha artisans in the Bolpur-Santiniketan region.

(ii) To analyse the livelihood dependence of artisans on Kantha handicraft production and related activities.

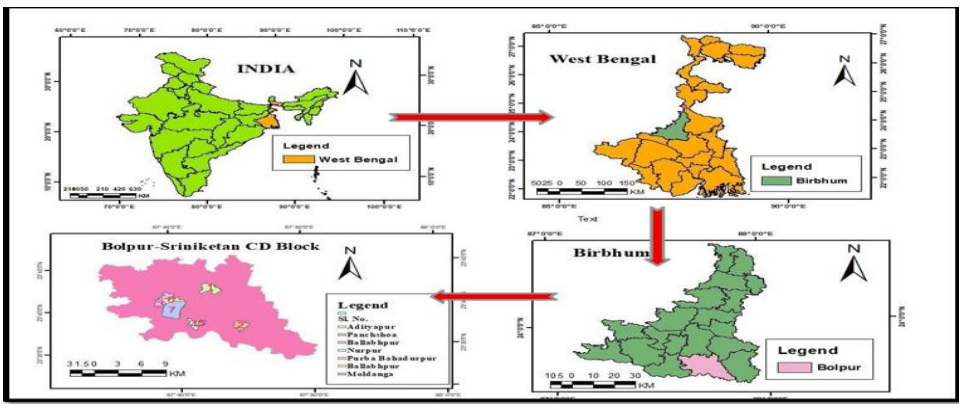
(iii) To identify the major market-related vulnerabilities faced by Kantha artisans, including price fluctuation, middlemen exploitation, and competition from machine-made products.

(iv) To assess the role of government schemes, self-help groups, cooperatives, and fairtrade initiatives in improving the economic condition and market access of Kantha artisans.

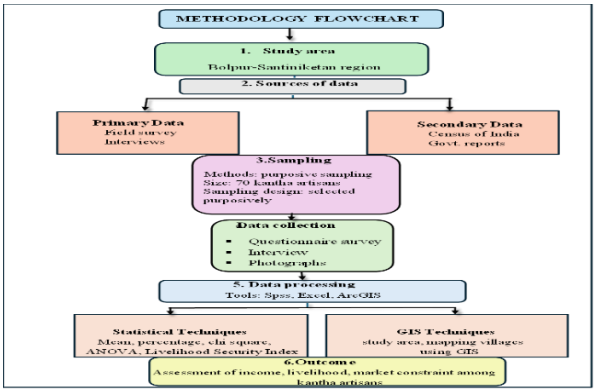
Data Base- Research Methodologies the precise measures or methods uses to identify, select, process, and analyse information about a topic. This study has been done on the basis of primary data collected through surveys, face to face interviews based on some common people of Bolpur Town.

Study area:

Bolpur-Santiniketan region is a rural area in Birbhum district, West Bengal, Bolpur and Santiniketan is twin area of Bolpur subdivision as well as Bolpur Sriniketan block. This area sits in the southeastern part of Birbhum, about 150 km north of Kolkata (Deb Roy, 2026). Geographically, Bolpur is located at approximately 23.66° North latitude and 87.66° East longitude (Bolpur-sriniketan.com, 2010).



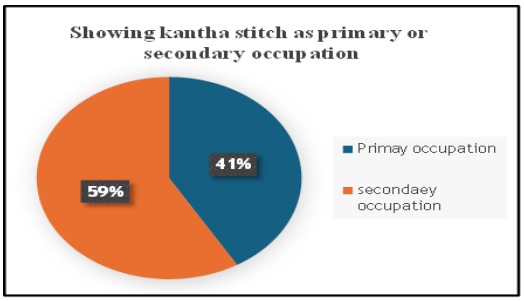
Location of the Study Area



Methodology based Diagram:

Occupation:

Occupation	
Primary	**Secondary**
29	**41**



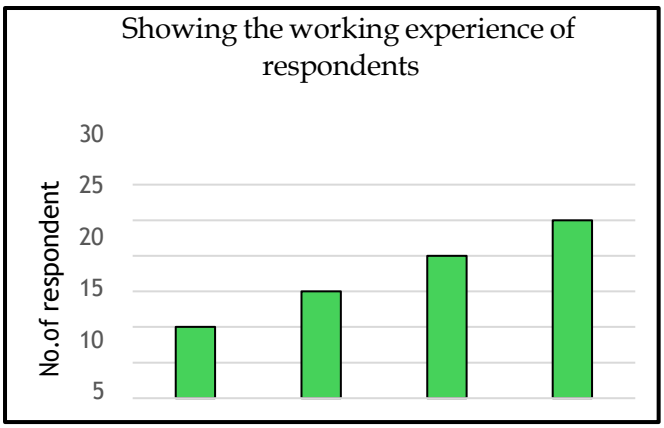
occupation types

The pie diagram shows occupational status of Kantha artisans in Bolpur–Santiniketan, indicating whether Kantha stitching serves as their primary or secondary occupation. Out of the 70 respondents, 41% artisans reported that Kantha stitching is their primary occupation, whereas 59% artisans stated that it is their secondary occupation. The findings reveal that the majority of Kantha artisans depend on Kantha stitching as a supplementary source of income rather than their main livelihood. The relatively lower proportion of artisans relying on Kantha stitching as their primary occupation indicates that income from Kantha embroidery alone may not be sufficient to meet all household needs.

Working experience:

How long you have been involved in kantha work?			
<1 years	1-5 years	6-10 years	>10 years
10	15	20	25

working experience of respondent



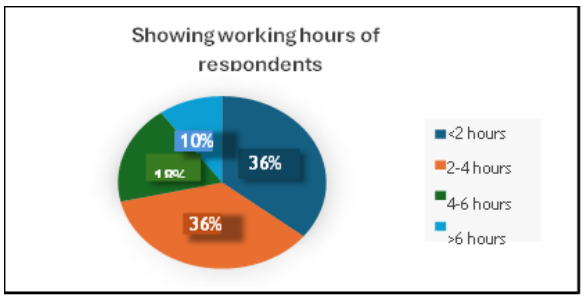
working experience of respondent

The bar graph shows the distribution of working experience among Kantha artisans in Bolpur–Sriniketan. Out of the 70 respondents, 14.3% artisans have less than one year of experience in Kantha stitching, 21.4% artisans have 1–5 years of experience, 28.6% artisans have 6–10 years of experience, and 35.7% artisans have more than 10 years of working experience. This indicates that the largest proportion of Kantha artisans 35.7% have been engaged in Kantha stitching for more than 10 years, followed by 28.6% with 6–10 years of experience. In contrast, only 14.3% of the respondents have less than one year of experience. This suggests that Kantha stitching is a long-established occupation in the study area, with many artisans possessing extensive skills and traditional knowledge acquired over several years. In this graph we can see that the higher proportion of respondents with long working experience, from this graph we also analyzed that this kantha handicraft has been sustained across future generation and also a chief source of woman livelihood.

Working hours:

Average working hours per day			
<2 hours	2-4 hours	4-6 hours	>6 hours
25	25	13	7

working hours of respondent



working hours of respondent

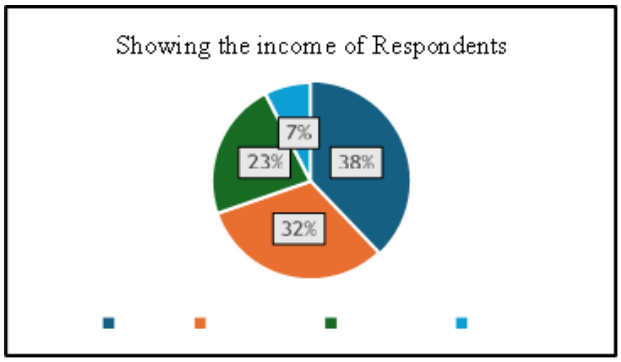
The pie illustrates the percentage of the daily working hours of Kantha artisans in Bolpur–Shantiniketan. Out of the 100% respondents, 35.7% artisans work for less than 2 hours per day, while another 35.7% artisans work for 2–4 hours per day. In comparison, 18.6% artisans spend 4–6 hours on Kantha stitching, and only 10.0% artisans work for more than 6 hours daily. the Overall diagram indicates that the majority of Kantha artisans 71.4% devote less than four hours per day to Kantha stitching. The above diagram suggests that Kantha stich

work is generally done as a part-time or additional occupation, The kantha artisans doing this embroidery work in off time when they are free from their household work. They stitched for extra income. Only 10% of respondents work for more than six hours per day, which indicates very few artisans are engaged in Kantha stitch work on a full-time basis.

Income:

Average monthly income (in Rs.) from kantha stitch			
<1000	1000-2000	2000-3000	>3000
25	21	15	5

Income of respondent



Income of respondent

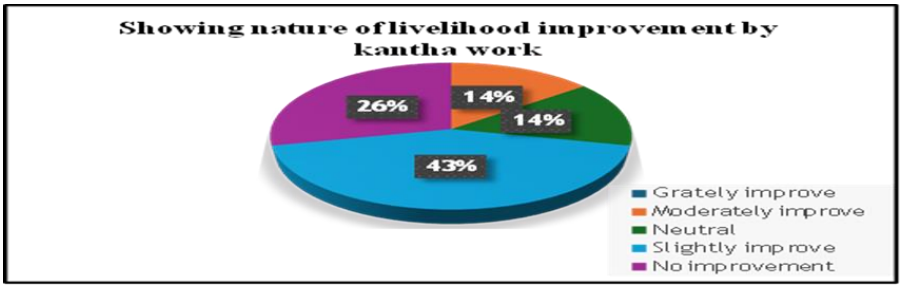
From the above diagram we can easily understand the scenario of Kantha artisans.38% of the total people earn less than ₹1,000 per month from Kantha stitch work, while 30% of respondent earn between ₹1,000 and ₹2,000. About 21% of the artisans receive a monthly income between ₹2,000 and ₹3,000, whereas only 7% earn more than ₹3,000 per month.

The findings reveal that the majority of Kantha artisans earn less than ₹2,000 per month, indicating that income from Kantha stitching is generally low. Only 5 respondents from the total people earn above ₹3,000, that suggests that very few workers receive higher monetary benefits from this traditional folk art.

Livelihood improvement:

Has kantha work improved your family's living condition?				
Greatly improve	Moderately improve	Neutral	Slightly improve	No improvement
-	10	10	30	20

livelihood improvement by kantha work



Nature of livelihood improvement by kantha work

The pie diagram shows that 43% of the respondents reported that Kantha work has slightly improved their livelihood, while 14% stated that it has greatly improved their livelihood. Another 14% of the respondents expressed a neutral opinion regarding livelihood improvement. In contrast, 29% reported that Kantha work has brought no improvement to their livelihood.

The results indicate that Kantha stitching has contributed positively to the livelihoods of many artisans, as more than half of the respondents experienced either slight or significant improvement.

Chi-Square Test:

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	117.562a	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	101.730	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	48.513	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	70		

a. 11 cells (68.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is.50.

chi square test:

A Pearson Chi-square test was conducted to examine whether there was a relationship between working hours and monthly income among Kantha artisans in Bolpur–Santiniketan. The test produced a Chi-square value of 115.356 with 9 degrees of freedom, and the p-value was less than 0.001. Since the p-value is lower than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the number of hours worked and the monthly income earned by the artisans. The findings suggest that variations in working hours are linked to differences in income, indicating that working time is an important factor influencing the earnings of Kantha artisans in the study area.

Descriptive Statistics (LSI)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
	70	.23	1.00	.6717	.19323
Valid (listwise)	70				

livelihood security index frequency

livelihood security index

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	low	5	7.1	7.1	7.1
	moderate	25	35.7	35.7	42.9
	high	22	31.4	31.4	74.3
	very high	18	25.7	25.7	100.0
	Total	70	100.0	100.0	

livelihood security index means

The Livelihood Security Index (LSI) was calculated to evaluate the overall livelihood status of Kantha stich workers in Bolpur Shantiniketan and surrounding area. The frequency distribution table illustrates that only 7.1% kantha workers lie in low livelihood security class. The maximum part of participants 35.7% artisans, fall in to the moderate livelihood security group, after that 31.4% kantha artisans lies in the high livelihood security category. And lastly, 25.7% kantha artisans are laid under the very high livelihood security category.

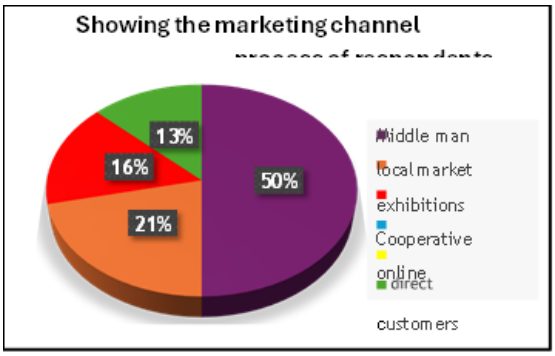
These data indicate that the majority of Kantha artisans 92.9% experience moderate to very high livelihood security, while only a small proportion remain in the low livelihood security category. This calculation suggests that Kantha embroidery is one of the most significant craft works, which supports the livelihoods of workers households in Bolpur–Santiniketan and its surrounding areas.

The Livelihood Security Index (LSI) has a mean value of 0.6717, representing that the inclusive livelihood security of Kantha artisans in Bolpur–Shantiniketan is at a moderately high level. The mean value of this calculation is closest to 1 than to 0, it recommends that Kantha embroidery work specifies a relatively stable source of livelihood for the kantha sti h workers. However, as the mean value is not close to the maximum value of 1.00, it also indicates that there is still scope for improvement in strengthening income stability, market access, financial support, and livelihood opportunities. Overall, the mean LSI value demonstrates that Kantha work plays a significant role in enhancing the livelihood security of artisans in the study area, although further interferences are needed to achieve a higher level of livelihood security.

How do you usually sell products?	
Through middlemen	35
Local market	15
Exhibition	11
Cooperative society	-

Marketing Channel

Online platforms	-
Direct customer	9



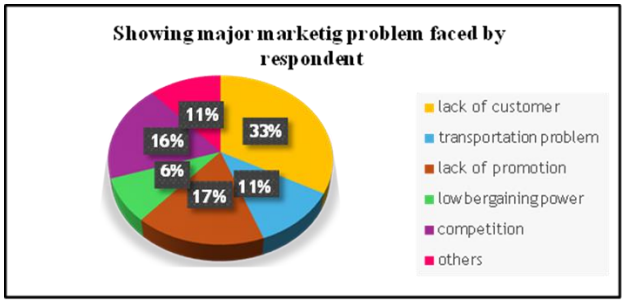
showing the marketing channel

The figure and the table expose that 50% of the kantha artisans in Bolpur- Santiniketan depend on middleman to market their products, making it the most widely used sales channel. Local markets contribute for 21%, which shows that few kantha stich artists sell their products directly within local market place. Exhibitions account for16%, which explains kantha artisans have prospects to reach a higher customer base and earn best prices. Only 13% artisans sell their manufactured product directly to consumer. Actually, some of the fixed customers of them. Strangely, none of the kantha stich workers use cooperative societies and online platforms, which is very disappointing and shocking in current situation, that reflects a deficiency of institutional support, digital awareness, and access to recent marketing networks. Overall discussion show that Kantha artisans rely heavily on traditional marketing methods, particularly intermediaries, which limits there reduces profit margins, bargaining power and negatively affects their income and livelihood. Promoting digital knowledge, strengthening cooperative marketing, and expanding direct market access could significantly improve their economic conditions.

Marketing problem:

What are the major marketing problems you face?					
Lack of customer	Transportation problem	Lack of promotion	Low bargaining power	Competition	Others
23	8	12	6	13	8

Major marketing problem



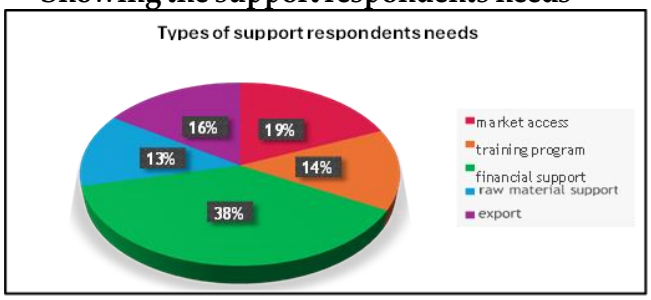
Major marketing problem

From the above graph it is seen that the largest proportion of participants (33%) recognized lack of customers as their main marketing challenge, representing that many artisans struggle to find sufficient buyers for their products. Competition with other work (19%) is the second most significant problem, as artisans face, increasing competition from machine-made products and other handicraft sellers, making it difficult to secure regular sales. Lack of promotion (17%) is another major constriction, reflecting limited access to advertising, branding, exhibitions, and marketing support. Transportation problems are (11%) also hamper artisans from reaching markets and participating in festive carnivals, while another 11% reported other marketing-related issues, such as irregular demand and financial restraints. Only 9% of respondents considered low bargaining power as their primary problem, although it still affects their ability to negotiate impartial prices with buyers and middlemen. Overall, analysis disclose that insufficient customer access, poor promotional opportunities, and market competition are the major marketing constraints that reduce income, limit sales and negatively affect the livelihood of Kantha artisans. Economic Well-being will increase if the digital marketing, market linkages, promotional support, transport facilities will improve

Expected government support:

What kind of support do you expect from the government				
Better market access	Training programs	Financial support	Raw material support	Export opportunities
13	10	27	9	11

Showing the support respondents needs



Types of support respondents needs

From the above graph it is seen that various type of support needed by Kantha artisans in

Bolpur–Shantiniketan to progress their socio-economic level. From the above graph is seen that the major percentage of participants (38%) recognized financial support as their most important need, the higher proportion indicates there is lack of investment for stocking raw material and growing production. Market access (19%) which is the second most significant necessity, the worker needs to better market accessibility and want to reach directly to the customer as well as reducing the dependency of the middleman. Export opportunities (16%) are also highlighted in this graph, it shows there are huge demand on national as well as in global markets. Training programs (14%) are also an important part for cultivating technical skills, product excellence, and marketing knowledge, lastly raw material support (13%) was recognized as another vital need to reduce regular production cost, if they get pure raw material in local level, it cost would be less. Overall, the graph recommends that financial support, enhanced market associations, skill expansion, and institutional support are important for strengthening the marketing system, and improving the socio-economic structure of Kantha artisans in Bolpur–Shantiniketan and its surrounding areas.

Major findings:

The research reveals that the middle-aged rural women involved in this craft and manage to balance it alongside with their household. Most of the respondents have limited formal education, resulting in a lack of knowledge regarding the financial aspects and digital marketing. They have adopted Kantha stitching as a supplementary activity, pursuing it after completing their domestic duties to earn extra income and achieve financial self-reliance. However, as they can only commit a limited time to this work, the production becomes slow, which in turn limits their earnings.

Most of the workers earn only 2,000 rupees a month from this work; consequently, they are often unable to save money. As a result, the majority of the respondents depends on loans to run their households. Furthermore, due to a lack of practical knowledge regarding marketing and other aspects of the trade, they are forced to depends on middleman.

The research works also suggest that financial knowledge, market linkage, skill development are so vital for socioeconomic improvement of the kantha artisans of Bolpur Shantiniketan region and its surroundings.

Conclusion:

This research work, "A Geographical Assessment of Income, Livelihood, and Marketing Constraints among Kantha Artisans in Bolpur–Santiniketan," examines the socio-economic conditions and various challenges faced by the artisans involved in this craft work. Kantha stitching plays a significant role in rural areas, serving as a vital source of supplementary income of the people. Moreover, it has helped carry forward the village's traditional heritage and ancient culture into the future. Rural women have transformed everyday household items into works of art, showcasing them on the global stage; through this exceptional craftsmanship, they have also strived to improve their livelihoods. However, a lack of education has often left these rural women lagging behind in society, creating obstacles regarding their social lives, economic well-being, and access to markets. For these reasons, they have to rely heavily on middlemen to sell their products. Difficulties in understanding market strategies result in them missing out on the profits they deserve; even when market prices are high, they do not receive fair remuneration for their labor. Consequently, their economic standing fails to improve. Despite possessing skilled craftsmanship, they lack a distinct market presence, while large investors reap the benefits by branding the goods

which they produce. From the geographical perspective of our study, it is evident that the structure of the sector depends on socio-economic characteristics, market accessibility, government support, and local development, as well as on financial support, market linkages, and investment in skill development. Overall, the study highlights that 'Kantha stitch' work is currently in high demand and plays a crucial role in fostering self-reliance among the women of rural Bengal. This craft not only fosters financial self-reliance among rural women but also preserves traditional rural culture and promotes female empowerment, thereby helping to sustain their households. Above all, it contributes to societal development; however, achieving such sustainable growth requires greater government support and local operational backing. That said, numerous NGOs and institutions ranging from small to large have emerged in the area to preserve and encourage this craft, while also motivating future generations to engage with it.

Recommendation:

According to the above discussion there are some recommendations from our point of view, these recommendations are for the kantha artisans of Bolpur Shantiniketan and surrounding areas to improve their social life, economic condition, and livelihood security.

Local authorities and the West Bengal government should arrange for loans featuring low interest rates, easy terms and conditions, and subsidies to buy raw materials, equipment, and infrastructure, as well as to boost production. Providing these facilities would enable beneficiaries to avoid relying on moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates.

Various companies, institutions, and governmental agencies can organize programs to help individuals gain knowledge and develop skills in this field, thereby enhancing their aesthetic sense and enabling them to complete tasks efficiently. Participants can gain hands-on design experience and benefit from collaborations involving market management, tie-ups with major merchants, and partnerships with government technical training institutes. Additionally, these programs can provide market-oriented insights such as when to scale up production and how to keep pace with fashion trends. How to put up the ancient technique in modern style.

Having proper knowledge of modern digital platforms such as e-commerce, online banking, social media marketing, advertising, digital branding, and customer engagement is very crucial. Adopting such initiatives would significantly reduce reliance on middleman, foster self-reliance, and boost self-employment.

It is necessary to organize various exhibitions including government-funded fairs and handicraft expos to encourage these artists, promote their art forms, and facilitate the direct delivery of their products to customers. Production can be boosted by working collectively through cooperative societies or groups; this approach allows for bulk purchasing of raw materials to maximize profits, requires only a small investment from each individual, and enables the creation of a wider variety of products.

Financial advisors should provide training to educate artisans on household budgeting, insurance, investment planning, and savings, thereby improving their overall financial well-being. Beyond these aspects, it is crucial to raise awareness about this craft among the younger generation; it is not merely an ancient art form but a means to achieve significant financial advancement.

Finally, further research into the craft of Kantha can be conducted to foster even greater

progress for the artisans.



Kantha Artesian



Different types of
Kantha stich product

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