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Exploring demographic profile of women Kauna handicraft artisans in Manipur: An investigative study

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Abstract

Background: This study explores the demographic profile of women Kauna handicraft artisans in Manipur, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of this unique and significant yet often overlooked artisan community. Kauna handicraft, a traditional craft involving the weaving of dried water reed materials, is a significant aspect of Manipur's cultural heritage.

Methods: This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather data on age, marital status, social caste, religion, educational background and socio-economic status of the artisans. It was carried out in the Imphal East and Imphal West districts of Manipur, with a total sample of 160 women Kauna handicraft artisans selected through purposive sampling.

Results: The findings of the study reveals that most women Kauna artisans are middle-aged, with 41.87% aged 46-60, while younger artisans, aged 30 or below, represent only 10.62%. A majority (54.37%) are married, with a notable portion being widows (19.37%), indicating the craft's role as a livelihood for women without familial support. In terms of social caste, the artisans are predominantly from Other Backward Classes (41.87%) and Unreserved categories (40%), with no Scheduled Tribe representation. Most artisans are Hindu (91.8%), and economically, 60.625% fall into the "Lower Middle" category, with 22.5% classified as "Poor."

Conclusions: Women Kauna artisans are mostly middle-aged, married, Hindu, and from OBC or Unreserved categories, with lower-middle-income status, highlighting the need for targeted socio-economic support.

Keywords: Demographic profile, Kauna handicraft, Socio-economic status

Introduction

Kauna, also known as water reed or *Cyperus pangorei*, is a versatile natural resource widely used in handicrafts, particularly in the northeastern region of India, notably in Manipur. This indigenous grass grows abundantly in marshy areas and wetlands, thriving in the unique ecological conditions of the region. Kauna Grass, belonging to the Cyperaceae family, has a cylindrical, soft, and spongy stem that is the main component of the products woven from it. The use of kauna in handicrafts dates back centuries, deeply intertwined with the cultural heritage and traditional practices of local communities. Artisans skilfully harvest and process kauna to create a variety of handcrafted items, showcasing their creativity and expertise. From intricately woven mats and baskets to decorative pieces and household items, kauna handicrafts encompass a diverse range of products, each reflecting the rich cultural heritage and artistic flair of the artisans. One of the remarkable aspects of kauna handicrafts is the sustainable and eco-friendly nature of the material. Harvesting kauna does not involve harming the environment or disrupting delicate ecosystems, as it naturally grows in wetlands and marshes.

The handicraft sector plays a crucial role in generating income and employment and has been globally recognized as an effective tool for reducing poverty (Jones *et al.*, 2012; Abisuga-Oyekunle & Fillis, 2017) [4, 1]. Despite the long-

standing recognition of its significance, the handicraft industry has faced numerous challenges, particularly with the rise of industrialization and globalization (Scrase, 2003; Barber & Krivoshlykova, 2006) [5, 3]. These factors have placed traditional artisans at a disadvantage, as they struggle to compete with large, well-organized industrial units, often forcing them to sell their products at lower prices to survive (Yang, 2018) [6]. Industrialization not only transformed production methods but also altered lifestyles and consumer preferences, leading to a gradual decline in demand for handmade goods. As a result, the handicraft sector has increasingly lost its foothold in the market, jeopardizing the livelihoods of artisans and the survival of traditional crafts. Therefore, to investigate the demographic profile of handicraft workers, particularly women artisans, becomes essential. By understanding their socio-economic conditions, including factors such as age, education, income, and access to resources, researchers and policymakers can gain insights into the specific challenges these artisans face. Such demographic data is critical for developing targeted interventions that can help artisans adapt to modern market dynamics, access better opportunities, and ensure the sustainability of their craft. Moreover, by shedding light on the vulnerabilities within this workforce, studies on artisan demographics can inform policies aimed at preserving cultural heritage while simultaneously improving the economic conditions of handicraft workers. This

demographic understanding is key to revitalizing the handicraft sector, empowering artisans, and securing the future of traditional crafts in a globalized world.

Despite the importance of Kauna handicrafts, there is a notable gap in comprehensive research focusing on the demographic characteristics of these women artisans. Understanding the demographic profile of women involved in Kauna handicrafts is crucial for several reasons. First, it provides insight into the socioeconomic conditions, educational levels, and age distribution of this group, which can highlight the specific challenges and opportunities they face. By documenting their demographic profile, policymakers, NGOs, and stakeholders can design targeted interventions to improve their working conditions, increase their income, and ensure better market access for their products. Additionally, understanding their demographic profile helps highlight the cultural significance of Kauna handicrafts and the role women play in preserving this traditional art form. This knowledge is essential for creating sustainable development strategies that empower these artisans, enhance their livelihoods, and safeguard the cultural heritage of Manipur.

This study aims to fill this gap by conducting an exploratory analysis of the demographic profile of women Kauna artisans in Manipur. By employing a mixed-methods

approach that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, the research seeks to map out the age, educational background, socioeconomic status, and work patterns of these artisans. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of their socio-economic realities and will offer recommendations for policy and practice to support the sustainability of the Kauna handicraft tradition.

Materials and Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to analyze the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of 160 women Kauna handicraft artisans in Imphal East and Imphal West districts of Manipur. Data was collected using a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, targeting women directly involved in Kauna handicraft. Quantitative data covered variables such as age, marital status, social caste, religion, and educational background. The responses were recorded and analyzed in terms of frequency, percentage, and mean $\pm$ standard deviation (SD) to provide both statistical and descriptive insights into the artisans' profiles.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Women Kauna Handicraft Workers

Parameters	Frequency	Percentage	Mean $\pm$ SD
Age			
≤ 30	17	10.62	2.65 $\pm$ 0.88
31-45	49	30.62	
46-60	67	41.87	
61 and above	27	16.87	
Marital Status			
Married	87	54.37	1.65 $\pm$ 0.78
Unmarried	42	26.25	
Widow	31	19.37	
Social Caste			
Unreserved (UR)	64	40	1.78 $\pm$ 0.73
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	67	41.87	
Scheduled Caste (SC)	29	18.12	
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	-	-	
Religion			
Hinduism	147	91.8	1.24 $\pm$ 0.82
Christianity	-	-	
Islam	-	-	
Other	13	8.12	
Educational status			
illiterate	47	29.37	1.96 $\pm$ 0.80
primary education	79	49.37	
secondary education	27	16.87	
graduation and above	7	4.37	

Age

The data provides an age distribution of a sample group, with a breakdown of participants across different age categories. The majority of the individuals, 41.87%, fall within the age range of 46-60, indicating that middle-aged artisans form the largest group. This is followed by 30.62% of participants aged 31-45, which suggests that a significant portion of artisans are in their early to mid-careers. Those aged 61 and above constitute 16.87%, reflecting a smaller group of older artisans who are likely nearing retirement age. The youngest group, aged 30 or below, represents only 10.62%, indicating that younger individuals are less

involved in this occupation. The mean age for the group appears to be around 2.65 $\pm$ 0.88 years.

Maritals Status

The data presents the marital status distribution of women Kauna handicraft workers. A majority, 54.37%, are married, indicating that most of the artisans are balancing family responsibilities alongside their work. This is followed by 26.25% of the women who are unmarried, suggesting that a significant portion of younger or single women are also engaged in this traditional craft. Additionally, 19.37% of the workers are widows, which highlights that handicraft work

may provide an important source of income and livelihood for women who may not have other forms of familial support. Overall, this distribution shows that the Kauna handicraft industry supports a diverse group of women, many of whom rely on this work to sustain their households, whether they are married, single, or widowed. Understanding these dynamics can help shape policies and programs that address the unique needs of these women in maintaining their livelihoods through handicrafts.

Social Caste

The data on the social caste distribution of women Kauna handicraft workers reveals that the workforce is composed of diverse caste groups, with the Other Backward Classes (OBC) making up the largest portion at 41.87%. Close behind, 40% of the artisans belong to the Unreserved (UR) category, while 18.12% are from the Scheduled Caste (SC) category. Notably, no representation is seen from the Scheduled Tribes (ST), with 0% participation from this group. The mean value of 1.78 ± 0.73 suggests a central tendency around the OBC and UR groups.

Religion

The data from table 4.1 it indicates that Hinduism is the predominant religion among the women kauna workers, with 91.8% of individuals identifying with it. In contrast, there are no reported followers of Christianity or Islam,

suggesting that these religions are absent from this group. Additionally, 8.12% of the population identifies with other religions, highlighting a small but notable diversity in religious affiliations beyond Hinduism.

Educational status Socio Economic Status of Women Kauna Handicraft Workers

For analysing the socio-economic status of women Kauna handicraft workers, the study employed the socio-economic scale developed by Aggarwal *et al.* (2005) [2]. The socio-economic scale developed by Aggarwal *et al.* (2005) [2] provides a comprehensive framework for assessing individuals' socio-economic status by evaluating 22 multiple dimensions such as income, education, occupation, and living conditions. This scale categorizes individuals into various socio-economic classes—typically Upper High, High, Upper Middle, Lower Middle, Poor and BPL—based on their economic and social attributes. By incorporating a range of factors, including financial resources, educational attainment, and job status, the Aggarwal scale offers a nuanced understanding of socio-economic disparities. It enables researchers and to analyze how different socio-economic groups experience access to resources, opportunities, and quality of life. The scale is widely used in socio-economic research to provide a structured and measurable approach to understanding socio-economic inequalities.

Table 2: Distribution of Women Kauna Handicraft based on Socio economic Status

Socio-economic Status	Frequency	Percentage	Mean $\pm$ SD
Upper High ≥ 76	-	-	2.94 $\pm$ 0.62
High 61-75	-	-	
Upper Middle 46-60	27	16.875	
Lower Middle 31-45	97	60.625	
Poor 16-30	36	22.5	
BPL ≤ 15	-	-	

The socio-economic status data for women engaged in Kauna handicraft work reveals a diverse range of economic conditions. None of the workers fall into the "Upper High" or "High" categories, indicating that none of them report a high socio-economic status. A small portion, 16.875%, is classified under "Upper Middle," while the majority, 60.625%, fall into the "Lower Middle" category, reflecting a predominant middle-lower economic status within this group. Additionally, 22.5% of the workers are categorized as "Poor," indicating a significant portion facing economic challenges. No workers are classified under the "Below Poverty Line" (BPL) category. The mean socio-economic score of 2.94 ± 0.62 suggests a tendency toward lower to middle socio-economic status, highlighting the need for targeted economic support and interventions to improve their living standards.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the demographic analysis of women Kauna handicraft artisans reveal a workforce predominantly composed of middle-aged, married women from diverse social caste backgrounds, with the majority belonging to the OBC and Unreserved categories. The artisans are largely Hindu, with minimal religious diversity observed. Socio-economically, most artisans fall within the lower-middle-income bracket, with a significant portion facing economic challenges, yet none fall below the poverty line. The data

underscores the need for targeted interventions and support systems to address the economic and social needs of these artisans, particularly in sustaining their livelihoods and improving their socio-economic status.

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