

## Handicraft Sector in India: An Instrument For Rural Economic Growth And Women Empowerment

### ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the Indian government is paying more attention to handicraft products and promoting handicraft artisans. Indian handicraft has so much potential to generate employment and income. Data is used from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> handloom census and the Export Promotion Council of Handicraft (EPCH). This paper tries to explore the workforce participation of handloom workers and the export performance of handicraft products. A major finding in this paper is that Indian handicrafts is rural and women-based industries. About 25 lakh women and 27 lakh rural workers are engaged out of 31 lakh workers. Major contributing states are Assam, West Bengal, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Also, observed that worker engagement has rose over decades. In 2021, a total of 4.3 billion US dollars in handicraft products were exported from India. The USA is the main trading partner of handicraft products. And it also shows that the share of export of every handicraft product has increased in past years, therefore, we can undoubtedly say that Indian handicraft is the future of the world handicraft market, especially in aspect of employment and income. Hence, it concludes that Indian handicraft industries are instruments of rural growth and women empowerment.

**Keywords:** - Handicraft, export, performance, labour-intensive, growth-oriented

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Indian handicraft encompasses a wide range of artifacts. This is the second largest sector next only to agriculture (**Singh et al., 2022**). It is the largest informal sector (ILO 1995) where people are engaged as a part of economic activity to use local resources and skills. Approx thirty-one lakh people are engaged out of which twenty lakhs belongs to rural and three lakhs belongs to urban areas including both male and female. Besides it, approx. twenty-six lakh women are engaged from both rural and urban areas, also representing the gender wage gap. Male-dominated culture is a part of gender inequality because the work decision of women is dependent on the male decision, which is affected by the availability of family supports, time availability and understanding (**Shimoda, 2022**). Besides it, government is working hard to reduce this problem, they started different schemes for women entrepreneurs like ODOP to represent the area-specific products. ODOP (One district one product) has a higher capacity to create jobs at a local level and more rural

development (**Yadav et al., 2022**). It is projected to be a five -billion-dollar market of this sector in 2025-26. Indian government started many initiatives for the development of handicrafts, mainly focused on enhancing export, job creation and social transformation (**Dixit et al., 2019**). Therefore, the handicraft sector contributes largely to the employment generation and it has huge potential for future inclusive growth.

Through the decades, Indian Handicrafts became popular day by day for their aesthetic view, creativity and exquisite craftsmanship. It has a great opportunity in both sectors domestic and international markets. Indian handicrafts generate foreign exchange and also conserve & represent our traditional and cultural heritage (**Deb et al., 2022**). It helps to boost our economy and the support survival of artisans (**Mehra et al., 2019**). (**Yadav et al., 2021**) Considering crafts are working for artisans to eliminate poverty and their problems. It helps in uplifting the living condition of the poor workers within the region.

Comparatively men, women are more engaged in this sector. (**Nizamani et al., 2019**) Women play a major role in the handicraft sector, lives change significantly through employment in this sector, now they can support their family. They all realized their potential and became self-reliant, they manage their work and families perfectly (**Sharan et al., 2022**) and create a sustainable environment without inequality and poverty (**Shimoda et al., 2022**).

The government also supports them by running different schemes and conserving the tradition, boosting their skills and uplifting the conditions. Recently the ODOP (**Yadav et al., 2019**) is an initiative to engage the rural artisan and boost the economy at district level to foster potential & socio-economic growth and create opportunities & competition at the national and global levels. The government promoting ODOP to help them through the different schemes via C&SG (Central Cottage Industries Cooperation of India (CCIC), USTAD and Hunar Hath, Dastkar Shashktikaran Yojana has collaborated with the 'Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana', MSME (Micro Small and Medium Enterprises), Common Facility Centre Scheme (CFC), Marketing Development Assistance Scheme (MDA),( **Tripathi et al.,2019**) Finance Assistance Scheme (Margin Money Scheme), skill Development Scheme etc (**Yadav, 2019**) (**Deb et al.,2022**).

India's handicraft has a small share of the global market but it has the potential to grow faster (**Fabelli et al., 2019**). Market experts estimate that the handicraft market grew faster than the previous year. Handicraft product demand is increasing day by day. Even it share one-third of its export percentage to the U.S. market which has worth 647.57 billion in 2020 worldwide and is expected to grow 10.9 per cent in 2022-2027 (**Rahaya et al., 2019**). Unfortunately, time is changing rapidly and people's desires, needs and preferences are also changing accordingly day by day (**Khan et al., 2013**). This sector needs to develop more equitable and sustainable value chains from previous value chains (**Mehra et al., 2019**). Artisans have huge pressure to come up with innovative and attractive ideas for their customers (**Lwin et al., 2019**). They need to upgrade themselves with tech. (**Shah et al., 2013**).

Although a few studies conducted at the all-India level (and at the state level) had explored the structural factors that determined the growth of the handicraft sector, these studies had not examined the employment situation in all of India. This study attempts to fill this research gap. Hence, the main objective of this

study is to explore the workforce participation of handloom workers and the export performance of handicraft products., apart from exploring the recent trends and patterns of employment and export of this sector. Moreover, this study attempts to identify the possible factors, which are restricting the growth of handicraft sector employment in India.

This paper is organized into four sections. Section Two is the sources of data and methodology of statistical technique. The main findings of the paper are discussed in section three, which provides a detailed discussion, based on our statistical results. Finally, section four concludes the paper along with a discussion of the policy suggestions.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study is purely based on the secondary sources of data and information, which is collected from different secondary sources such as reports of the 3<sup>rd</sup> (In 2009-10) and 4<sup>th</sup> (In 2019-20) handloom census of India and also data from the Export Promotion Council for Handicraft (EPCH) of India. The collected data and information are meticulously checked and analysed with the help of statistical tools like percentages and averages etc. to generate a significant outcome of the study.

The study examined the number of workers who are engaged in the handicraft and handloom sector of India and their state-wise contribution in this sector .and also the export performance of the handicraft product of India. As we know that handicraft is labour absorbing and high-return-oriented industries. Hence, this study may help policymakers to understand the effectiveness of the handicraft sector in India and enhance the performance of handicraft industries.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section; we include all the information of artisans of handicrafts, which are working according to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> census of handloom of India and also the export-related information of the Indian handicraft. This section further divides into the three sections such as; 3.1 workforce participation of handicraft artisan,3.2 Distribution of handicraft workers by social categories, and 3.3 Export of Indian Handicraft products.

### **3.1 Workforce participation of handicraft Artisans-**

Table 1; shows the state-wise number of handicraft workers. About 3145000 workers are engaged in handicraft industries, which come from different backgrounds such as rural, urban including male and female. Out of the total, about 2546000 and 2748000 are women and rural workers respectively. This

indicates that handicrafts is the women and rural-based industries. The maximum numbers of workers come from Assam state, about 40.4 per cent out of the total. This number is followed by the state such as West Bengal (17.2 per cent), Manipur (7.02 per cent), Tamil Nadu (6.6 per cent), and Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh about 3-4 per cent. When we go through the rural areas' participation, the top participating state is Assam (45.56 per cent), West Bengal (17 per cent), Manipur (7 per cent), Tamil Nadu (5 per cent) and the remaining state has minor participation. Maximum urban handicraft workers come from West Bengal (18.88 Per cent), Tamil Nadu (16.40 Per cent), Andhra Pradesh (11.50 Per cent) and Uttar Pradesh (11.03 Per cent). Women participation of handicraft workers mainly belong to Assam (46.30 Per cent), West Bengal (14.50 per cent), Manipur (8.30 per cent), and Tamil Nadu (5 Per cent). From this table, we conclude that the maximum number of workers comes from some state, which are Assam, West Bengal, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu while other states have minor participation. Hence, we say that Handicrafts is mainly concentrated in the Northeast region of India and some southern state such as Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

**Table 1: Numbers of Handicraft Workers (In Percentage) 2019-20**

State	Rural	Urban	Total	Women
Andhra Pradesh	2.80	11.50	3.90	3.39
Arunachal Pradesh	3.06	2.35	2.97	2.90
Assam	45.56	4.37	40.37	46.32
Bihar	0.17	0.49	0.21	0.25
Chhattisgarh	0.56	0.91	0.60	0.38
Delhi	0.00	1.02	0.13	0.09
Goa	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gujarat	0.30	0.53	0.32	0.19
Haryana	0.01	6.35	0.81	0.55
Himachal Pradesh	0.48	0.08	0.43	0.40
Jammu And Kashmir	0.44	2.75	0.73	0.55
Jharkhand	0.46	0.98	0.52	0.46
Karnataka	1.04	1.28	1.07	1.11
Kerala	0.54	1.38	0.64	0.56
Madhya Pradesh	0.28	1.62	0.45	0.36
Maharashtra	0.04	0.62	0.11	0.05
Manipur	7.00	7.42	7.05	8.30

Meghalaya	1.55	0.03	1.36	1.19
Mizoram	0.77	1.59	0.87	0.87
Nagaland	1.16	2.63	1.35	1.46
Odisha	2.23	0.51	2.01	2.26
Puducherry	0.01	0.36	0.05	0.04
Punjab	0.00	0.21	0.03	0.01
Rajasthan	0.22	0.70	0.28	0.25
Sikkim	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.03
Tamil Nadu	5.26	16.40	6.66	4.97
Telangana	0.71	2.14	0.89	0.91
Tripura	4.91	0.62	4.37	3.68
Uttar Pradesh	3.18	11.03	4.17	3.65
Uttarakhand	0.22	1.26	0.35	0.34
West Bengal	17.02	18.88	17.25	14.49
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

\*Source: - Author calculation from the 4<sup>th</sup> handloom census of India (2019-20)

### 3.2 Distribution of handicraft workers by social categories

Table 2, Shows the state-wise distribution of handicraft workers by social categories in 2009-10 and 2019-20. Over the decade the workers participation in handicraft industries has rose in India. In Both rural and urban areas, overall engagement has rose over the last decade. As we know that this sector is dominated by the rural and women workers. But our concern is to explore the distribution of workers based on social categories. In Rural areas, the number of artisans from the ST and Others have increased but artisans from SC and OBCs have decreased over the period while in urban areas, artisans from ST, SC, Others have increased and OBCs has decreased over the decades. The handicraft sector is mainly operated by the low caste categories but with the compression of both the decades, it is observed that other caste artisans numbers has also increased. It means that the upper caste is little attracted to work in the handicraft industries because it is becoming an export-oriented business. When we go through the social categories it incorporates that, In rural ST workers come mainly from some states such as Assam (44.46 per cent) and West Bengal (36.25 per cent) remaining a minor share in 2009-10 and also some pattern shown in the 2019-20, such as Assam (49 per cent), West Bengal (24.50 percent) and Tripura ( 9 percent ). In the case of rural SC, Assam is

again the main state whose share is high, followed by the Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram in both years. Assam is again the main state, which shares about half the case of OBCs workers followed by Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. In Rural other categories again, Assam's share is half of the total, which is followed by the West Bengal and Manipur. Whereas, in urban sector this pattern has changed for Assam state. West Bengal has half of the total share of urban ST workers and Uttar Pradesh and Assam are good in both years. SC workers from urban areas mainly belong to Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland while OBCs workers belong to Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh. Urban Others mainly belong to West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Hence, we conclude from the table below that, in the rural sector Assam and the north-east states are the main state hubs of handicraft industries, but the urban sector is different for the different social categories.

**Table 2: Distribution of handicraft workers by social groups (in percentage)**

State	Rural								Urban							
	ST		SC		OBCs		Others		ST		SC		OBCs		Others	
	2009-10	2019-20	2009-10	2019-20	2009-10	2019-20	2009-10	2019-20	2009-10	2019-20	2009-10	2019-20	2009-10	2019-20	2009-10	2019-20
Andhra Pradesh	0.50	0.73	0.09	0.19	10.80	5.86	0.93	2.40	1.42	5.70	2.54	1.61	28.78	21.24	7.53	3.16
Arunachal Pradesh	0.38	1.67	3.88	10.65	0.14	0.55	0.29	1.42	0.26	1.06	13.69	14.79	0.08	0.35	0.49	1.44
Assam	44.46	48.92	51.89	41.83	52.72	48.23	47.87	43.76	9.06	10.17	12.05	8.27	3.57	2.24	8.08	4.31
Bihar	0.36	0.15	0.09	0.56	2.01	0.10	0.16	0.01	0.44	1.69	0.44	1.42	1.94	0.37	0.07	0.01
Chhattisgarh	0.22	0.52	0.01	0.32	0.18	1.29	0.00	0.02	0.14	0.21	0.06	0.21	0.15	1.88	0.00	0.01
Delhi	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.62	5.37	0.10	1.87	0.37	0.52	0.13	0.17
Goa	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gujarat	1.14	1.95	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.00	1.37	4.67	1.24	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.17
Haryana	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.00	2.65	4.08	1.40	9.52	1.98	9.23	0.65	2.10
Himachal Pradesh	0.80	1.02	0.06	0.38	0.11	0.16	0.57	0.61	0.00	0.43	0.01	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08
Jammu And Kashmir	0.58	0.04	0.04	1.06	0.08	0.08	1.44	0.59	0.27	0.77	0.04	0.10	0.03	0.07	5.41	7.80
Jharkhand	0.02	0.47	0.01	0.51	1.32	0.89	0.01	0.01	0.21	0.10	0.54	0.53	0.76	1.93	0.03	0.10
Karnataka	0.32	0.35	0.18	0.30	3.15	1.82	0.42	1.05	0.23	0.21	0.32	0.20	1.54	1.47	0.46	1.91
Kerala	0.19	0.20	0.00	0.02	0.80	1.31	0.14	0.26	0.35	0.31	0.02	0.08	1.24	2.65	0.18	0.38

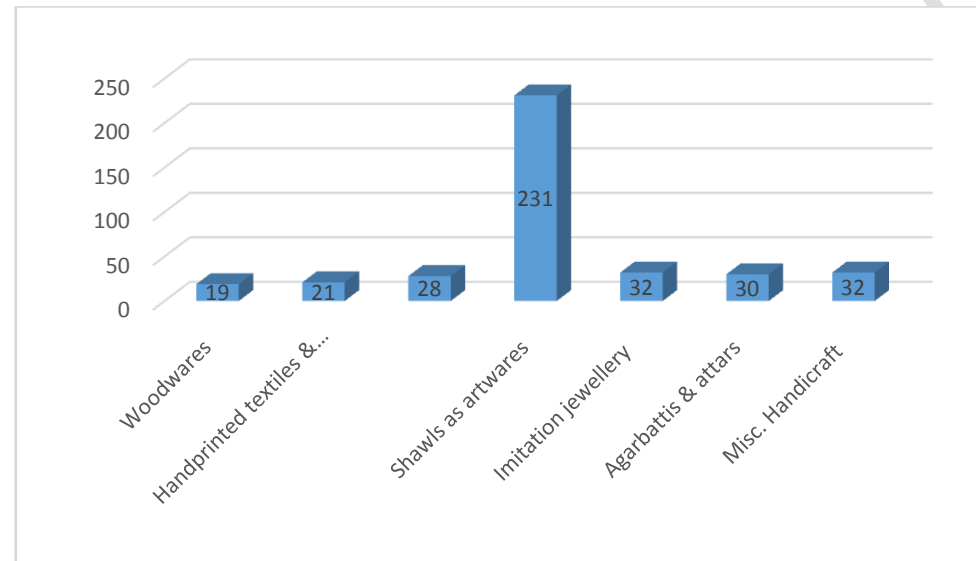
Madhya Pradesh	0.51	0.28	0.03	0.14	0.11	0.55	0.02	0.12	3.77	2.59	1.05	0.34	1.81	2.53	0.73	0.52
Maharashtra	0.06	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.01	0.04	0.35	0.34	1.50	0.27	0.26	0.93	0.54	0.38
Manipur	2.47	1.36	6.43	11.17	4.29	9.01	10.18	5.04	6.55	4.87	2.54	7.96	3.85	9.36	17.22	5.37
Meghalaya	0.15	1.37	1.83	2.40	0.01	0.13	0.00	2.50	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.23	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Mizoram	0.03	0.01	5.16	3.77	0.02	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.01	0.04	47.29	14.62	0.00	0.01	0.15	0.00
Nagaland	0.14	0.04	9.96	5.62	0.01	0.03	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.46	3.14	22.39	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.39
Odisha	2.33	1.03	0.21	1.38	3.46	4.61	0.06	0.98	0.05	0.11	0.17	0.49	0.64	0.67	0.01	0.42
Puducherry	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.43	0.00	0.46
Punjab	0.20	0.03	0.07	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.01	0.00	1.83	0.88	0.01	0.35	0.07	0.13	0.03	0.07
Rajasthan	3.86	0.81	0.03	0.07	0.48	0.23	0.46	0.04	4.65	1.77	0.27	0.30	1.55	0.96	0.90	0.16
Sikkim	0.02	0.01	0.06	0.07	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tamil Nadu	1.53	2.51	0.39	0.27	9.52	5.44	2.84	9.42	2.24	4.39	2.81	1.68	28.07	13.04	15.99	29.17
Telangana	0.00	0.18	0.00	0.02	0.00	1.80	0.00	0.31	0.00	0.15	0.00	0.20	0.00	2.87	0.00	2.36
Tripura	0.45	8.91	18.78	11.81	0.59	1.22	0.12	2.41	0.43	1.26	2.45	1.51	0.09	0.26	0.12	0.63
Uttar Pradesh	2.38	2.71	0.16	0.59	5.37	8.23	0.98	0.12	14.54	9.85	2.24	4.00	17.63	20.83	4.86	0.34
Uttarakhand	0.65	0.20	0.16	0.29	0.41	0.37	0.08	0.05	0.50	0.40	1.43	10.42	1.53	0.08	0.15	3.74
West Bengal	36.25	24.51	0.45	6.58	4.14	7.99	33.29	28.80	46.05	38.10	2.89	6.36	3.77	3.44	36.26	38.21
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

\*Source: -Author calculation from 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Handloom census of India.

### 3.3 Export of Indian handicraft products

In this section, we trying to show the export performance of Indian handicraft products. Figure 1, shows the growth of the export of handicraft products from 2020-21 to 2021-22. We observe that the export of all the Indian handicraft products is rising over the period. Indian shawls as art wares are becoming the main attraction of the consumers, hence their export of Indian shawls has increased by 231 percent. Imitation jewellery, Miscellaneous Handicraft, Agarbattis & attars and embroidery handicrafts are rising by approx 30 percent from previous years; while Handprinted textiles & clothing and woodware have increased by about 20 percent. Hence, we observe that all handicraft product is getting notable growth from previous years.

**Figure 1: -Product -wise increase in export (percentages) from 2020-21 to 2021-22**

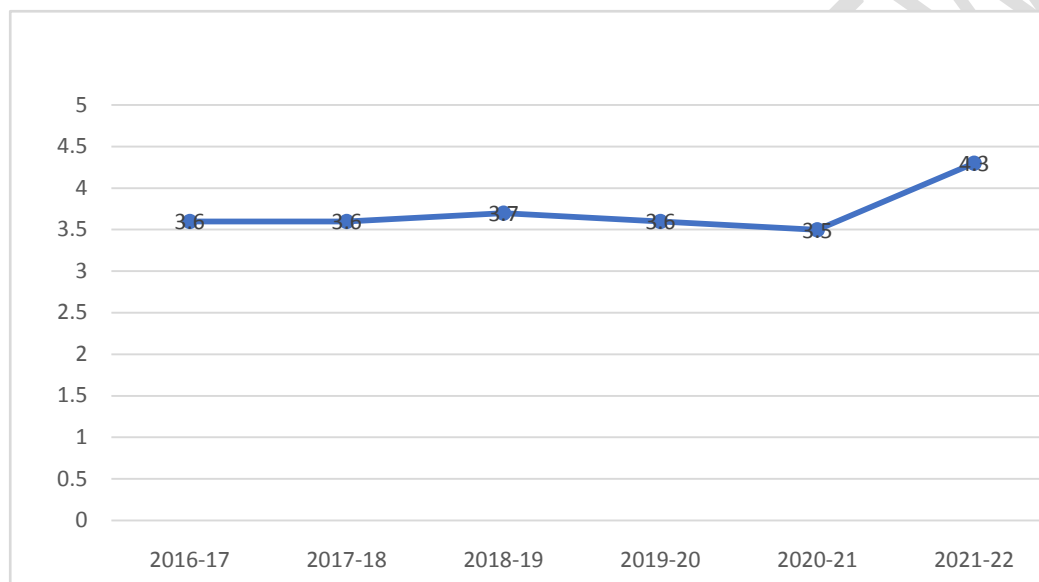


\* Sources: - Author calculation from the report of Export Promotion Council for Handicraft (EPCH)

Figure 2 shows the growth of the export of Indian handicraft products in last five years. As we know that a major income comes from the handicraft product in India. According to the report of the Export Promotion Council for Handicraft (EPCH); it is expected that the export of handicraft product is touching the value of Five Billion US Dollars till 2025-26. Also, we observe the increasing trend in the export of handicraft product. In the year 2016-17, India exported handicraft products worth 3.6 billion US dollars all over the world. It is also constant in the year 2017-18. After that, it rises to 3.7 billion US dollars in 2019-20. After this, the export of handicraft products decreased a little to 3.6 billion US dollars in the year 2019-20 and further decreased to 3.5 billion dollars in the year 2020-21. As, we know that both the year are abnormal year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economy of all the countries was hampered during these years, but we can see that handicraft is not much effect by this pandemic. Export of Indian Handicraft marked decreased, but better off from all over the world. After the end of the pandemic, the export of Indian handicrafts marks remarkable growth in the year 2020-21. Handicraft products worth about 4.3 billion US dollars

are exported around the world and also is predicted to record more growth in upcoming export. Hence, we can say that Indian handicraft product is high growth and export-oriented industries.

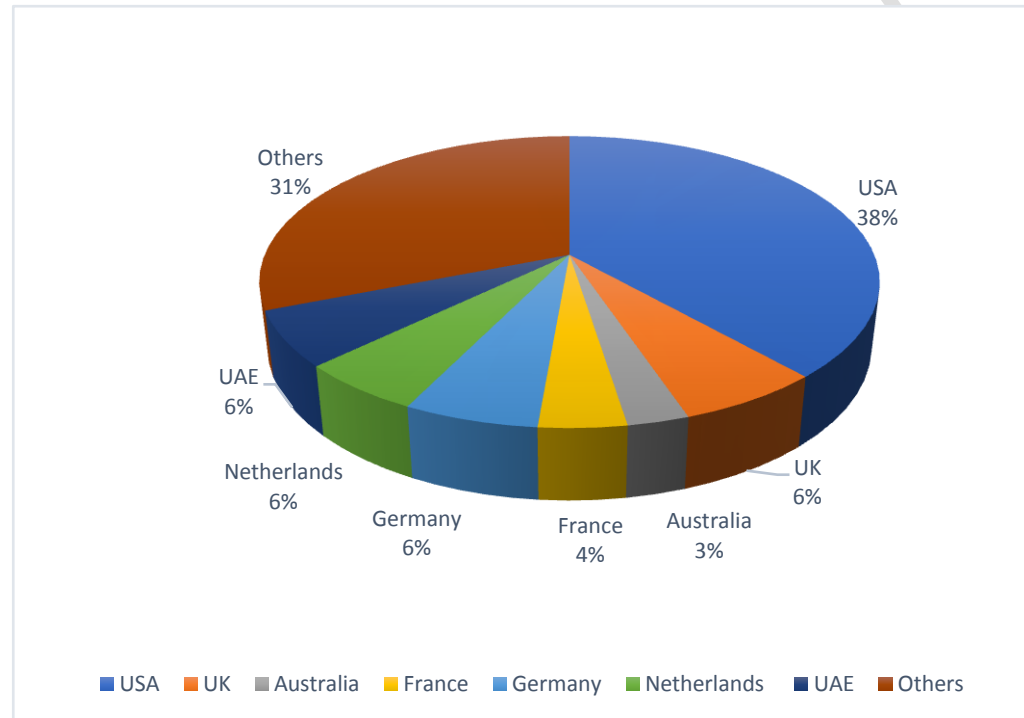
**Figure 2: Export of Indian handicraft products (US Dollars in billion)**



Sources: - Author calculation from the report of Export Promotion Council for Handicraft (EPCH) #excludes data on the export of carpets

Figure: - 3 shows the export destination of Indian handicraft products. As we know that export of handicraft product has increased over the period. The demand for Indian handicraft products is rising day by day in the world market but our concern is which are the main country, which demanded most. The United States of America is the main destination for Indian handicraft products. About 38 per cent of the total export of handicrafts is only in the USA and rest in the world. About 6 per cent of handicraft products exported is shared by each of the countries such as; UAE, United Kingdom (U. K), Germany and the Netherlands. The share of France and Australia is 4 and 3 percent respectively. Hence, we conclude that Indian handicrafts are the most demanding in the whole world and Some countries are the major importing countries of Indian Handicraft.

**Figure 3: Export of Indian handicraft products in 2020-21 (country-wise share in percentages)**



\* Sources: -Author calculation from the report of Export Promotion Council for Handicraft (EPCH)

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY SUGGESTION**

Handicrafts are a highly growth-oriented industry in India because of the larger number of the labour force engaged and the export has increased over time due to the demand for the Indian product in the world market. As we see in the paper, the greater number of artisans are depended on the handicraft industries. About 3150000 artisans belongs to different states in this sector. Especially North-east states are highly dominating in this sector. In this state, the population mainly depend on the handicraft business except some of these states like West Bengal Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Some of the handicraft products are in most demanding in the world market such as Indian shawls, Agarbattis and Imitation jewellery. The USA is

the major export destination of Indian Handicraft products. Hence, we can say that Indian handicrafts are the future of the world handicraft market and also handicraft is quite instrumental in boosting rural growth and women's empowerment.

Indian handicrafts are a growing industry but the question of concern is why artisans are lagging behind the others. Policymakers should think about it. In these times, artisans need some government supervision for skill enhancement and finance for scaling these industries. Artisans should update themselves with the help of technology and digital marketing- the most important weapon for exclusion of middlemen.

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