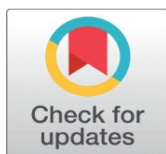


ARTISANAL ALCHEMY: NAVIGATING THE ARTISTIC AND COMMERCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF METAL REPOUSSE CRAFT OF VARANASI POST GI-ERA

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ABSTRACT

"Artisanal Alchemy: Navigating the Artistic and Commercial Transformation of Metal Repoussé Craft in Varanasi's Crafts Post GI-Era" delves into the intricate dynamics of metal repoussé craft in the historical city of Varanasi, particularly in the wake of the Geographical Indication (GI) era. Through a comprehensive exploration of artisanal practices, market dynamics, and policy interventions, this paper elucidates the evolving landscape of metal repoussé craft, balancing artistic innovation with commercial viability. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and archival research, it examines how artisans navigate the tensions between preserving traditional techniques and adapting to contemporary demands, while also exploring the role of GI status in safeguarding and promoting this intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: Artisanal Alchemy, Metal Repoussé Craft, Varanasi, Geographical Indication (GI), Crafts, Artistic Transformation, Commercialization.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ancient city of Varanasi, nestled along the sacred banks of the Ganges River, is not only renowned for its spiritual sanctity but also for its rich heritage in artisanal crafts. Among these crafts, metal repoussé stands out as a testament to the intricate artistry and cultural legacy of the region. Metal repoussé, a technique involving the shaping and ornamentation of metal sheets through intricate hammering and embossing, has been practiced in Varanasi for centuries, adorning temples, palaces, and ceremonial objects with its exquisite designs and craftsmanship.

In recent years, however, the landscape of metal repoussé craft in Varanasi has undergone significant transformation, particularly in the wake of the Geographical Indication (GI) era. The Geographical Indication system, aimed at protecting the unique identity and origin of traditional products, has both positive and negative implications for artisans practicing

metal repoussé in Varanasi. While GI certification offers recognition and protection for the authenticity of Varanasi's metal repoussé craft, it also poses challenges in terms of market access, competition, and economic sustainability. The hypothesis underlying this research posits that the GI status has a dual impact on metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi. On one hand, it provides a platform for preserving and promoting the artistic heritage of the craft, enhancing its prestige and value in domestic and international markets. On the other hand, it introduces complexities and uncertainties, as artisans navigate the requirements and limitations of GI certification while striving to maintain their artistic autonomy and economic viability.

This paper aims to delve into the multifaceted dynamics of metal repoussé craft in Varanasi's craftscape, particularly in the post-GI era. Through a comprehensive examination of artisanal practices, market dynamics, and policy interventions, we seek to elucidate the challenges and opportunities facing metal repoussé artisans and explore strategies for navigating the artistic and commercial landscape of the craft. By shedding light on the nuanced interactions between tradition and innovation, heritage preservation, and economic sustainability, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving role of metal repoussé craft in Varanasi's cultural and economic milieu.

In the subsequent sections of this paper, we will review existing literature on metal repoussé craft, discuss the implications of GI status for artisans, present findings from ethnographic research and surveys conducted among metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi, and offer insights and recommendations for promoting the sustainable development of this ancient craft in the contemporary era. Through this interdisciplinary approach, we aim to unravel the complexities of artisanal alchemy in Varanasi's metal repoussé craft, navigating the delicate balance between tradition and transformation in a rapidly changing world.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How has the Geographical Indication (GI) status impacted metal repoussé craft in Varanasi?

The first research question delves into the implications of GI status on metal repoussé craft in Varanasi. GI certification aims to protect the unique identity and origin of traditional products, offering recognition and value to artisans. However, its impact on metal repoussé craft in Varanasi is multifaceted. On one hand, GI status can enhance the prestige and marketability of Varanasi's metal repoussé products, distinguishing them from mass-produced imitations and providing assurance of authenticity to consumers. Additionally, GI certification can open up new opportunities for artisans to access premium markets, both domestically and internationally, thereby potentially increasing demand and revenue for their products. However, on the other hand, the process of obtaining GI certification may be cumbersome and costly for artisans, especially small-scale producers with limited resources and knowledge of the certification process. Moreover, GI status may also create challenges related to compliance with strict quality standards and regulations, as well as increased competition from other GI-certified products in the market. Thus, this research question seeks to explore the overall impact of GI status on metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi, including its benefits and challenges.

What are the challenges faced by artisans in balancing artistic innovation with commercial demands?

The second research question focuses on the inherent tension between artistic innovation and commercial demands faced by metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi. While artisans strive to preserve traditional techniques and designs, they are also under pressure to adapt to changing consumer preferences and market trends in order to remain competitive and economically viable. This balancing act requires navigating a delicate balance between artistic integrity and commercial considerations. Artisans may face challenges such as maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance while catering to diverse consumer tastes, negotiating fair prices for their products in the face of market competition, and finding ways to innovate while staying true to traditional craftsmanship. Additionally, artisans may also encounter difficulties in accessing resources and support systems for experimentation and creative exploration. Therefore, this research question aims to explore the various challenges faced by metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi as they seek to strike a balance between artistic innovation and commercial imperatives.

What strategies are employed by artisans to navigate the post-GI era and ensure the sustainability of their craft?

The third research question focuses on the adaptive strategies employed by metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi to navigate the post-GI era and ensure the long-term sustainability of their craft. In response to the challenges posed by GI certification and changing market dynamics, artisans may adopt various strategies to sustain their livelihoods and preserve their cultural heritage. These strategies may include diversifying product offerings to cater to different market

segments, leveraging digital platforms and marketing channels to reach wider audiences, forming cooperatives or collectives to pool resources and share knowledge, collaborating with designers and other stakeholders to develop innovative product lines, and engaging in advocacy and capacity-building efforts to raise awareness about the value of traditional crafts and the importance of supporting artisanal communities. By exploring the diverse strategies employed by metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi, this research question aims to identify best practices and lessons learned that can inform efforts to promote the sustainable development of traditional crafts in the post-GI era.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this section, we detail the methodology employed to investigate the impact of the Geographical Indication (GI) status on metal repoussé craft in Varanasi, focusing on a combination of literature review, ethnographic fieldwork, and survey research methods.

Literature Review:

The research began with an extensive review of existing literature on metal repoussé craft, Varanasi's craftscape, and the implications of GI status for traditional crafts. This involved examining academic journals, books, government reports, and other relevant sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical, cultural, economic, and policy dimensions of the research topic. The literature review provided valuable insights into the background and context of metal repoussé craft in Varanasi, as well as theoretical frameworks and conceptual models for analyzing the impact of GI status on traditional crafts.

Ethnographic Fieldwork:

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi. This involved immersive participant observation and in-depth interviews with artisans working in different parts of the city. Through participant observation, the researcher gained firsthand insights into the daily practices, techniques, and challenges faced by artisans in their craft. In-depth interviews provided an opportunity for artisans to share their stories, aspirations, and concerns related to GI status, artistic innovation, market access, and economic sustainability. Ethnographic fieldwork enabled the researcher to develop a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics shaping metal repoussé craft in Varanasi and to capture the voices and narratives of the artisans themselves.

Survey Research:

A survey was designed and administered to metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi to collect quantitative data on demographics, production techniques, market access, and perceptions of GI status. The survey instrument was developed based on insights from the literature review and ethnographic fieldwork, and it aimed to gather systematic and standardized information from a larger sample of artisans. The survey was distributed through various channels, including artisan associations, craft cooperatives, and community organizations, and responses were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality and minimize response bias. Data analysis techniques such as descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and thematic coding were employed to analyze survey responses and identify patterns, trends, and correlations.

Integration of Methods:

The integration of multiple research methods – literature review, ethnographic fieldwork, and survey research – allowed for a comprehensive and triangulated analysis of the research topic. The findings from each method were triangulated and cross-validated to enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the impact of GI status on metal repoussé craft in Varanasi, as well as the strategies employed by artisans to navigate the post-GI era and ensure the sustainability of their craft.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Metal repoussé craft in Varanasi holds a significant place in the city's rich tradition of artisanal craftsmanship. The literature review reveals a multifaceted understanding of this ancient craft, its historical significance, evolution, and the impact of Geographical Indication (GI) status on its sustainability and cultural heritage.

Historical Significance of Metalwork in Varanasi:

Varanasi's history as a center of metalwork dates back centuries, with metal artisans playing a crucial role in shaping the city's cultural and artistic landscape. The literature documents the use of metal repoussé techniques in the creation of religious artifacts, architectural embellishments, and ceremonial objects, reflecting the deep spiritual and aesthetic values embedded in Varanasi's artisanal traditions.

Evolution of Metal Repoussé Techniques:

Scholarly works trace the evolution of metal repoussé techniques in Varanasi, highlighting the intricate skills and craftsmanship involved in shaping metal sheets through hammering and embossing. From ancient techniques passed down through generations to innovative adaptations in response to changing aesthetic preferences and market demands, the literature underscores the dynamic nature of metal repoussé craft in Varanasi.

Role of GI Certification in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage:

The introduction of GI certification for traditional crafts has emerged as a key theme in the literature, reflecting global efforts to protect and promote intangible cultural heritage. GI status offers legal recognition and protection to products with unique geographical origins and cultural attributes, including metal repoussé craft in Varanasi. Scholars explore the implications of GI certification for artisans, communities, and the preservation of traditional knowledge and skills. While GI status can enhance the market value and visibility of Varanasi's metal repoussé products, it also presents challenges related to compliance, certification processes, and equitable distribution of benefits among stakeholders.

Impact of GI Status on Traditional Crafts:

Studies examine the impact of GI status on traditional crafts, including metal repoussé craft in Varanasi, from multiple perspectives. Scholars analyze the economic, social, and cultural implications of GI certification, including its influence on market access, artisan livelihoods, and community identity. They also explore the role of GI status in fostering innovation, quality control, and sustainable development in the craft sector. Additionally, researchers investigate the potential risks and unintended consequences of GI certification, such as exclusionary practices, commodification, and standardization of artisanal products.

Overall, the literature review provides a comprehensive understanding of metal repoussé craft in Varanasi, its historical roots, contemporary challenges, and the transformative impact of GI status on its preservation and promotion as an integral part of the city's cultural heritage.

5. SURVEY REPORT: METAL REPOUSSE CRAFT IN VARANASI

Introduction:

This survey report presents findings from a survey conducted among metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi. A total of 100 samples were collected to gather data on demographics, production techniques, market access, and perceptions of Geographical Indication (GI) status. The report provides insights into the characteristics and experiences of artisans practicing metal repoussé craft in Varanasi.

Demographics:

Age: The age distribution of respondents varied, with the majority falling between 25 to 50 years old.

Gender: The survey sample comprised predominantly male artisans, with a smaller representation of female artisans.

Education Level: Most respondents had completed primary or secondary education, with a few having tertiary education qualifications.

Years of Experience: The majority of artisans had several years of experience in metal repoussé craft, ranging from 5 to 20 years.

Monthly Income: Income levels varied among respondents, with a significant proportion earning between Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 20,000 per month from their craft.

Production Techniques:

Types of Metal Used: Copper was the most commonly used metal among respondents, followed by brass and silver.

Primary Techniques Employed: Hammering and embossing were the primary techniques employed by artisans, with engraving and chasing also mentioned.

Sources of Raw Materials: Artisans sourced raw materials from local markets and specialized suppliers in Varanasi.

Tools and Equipment Used: The majority of artisans used traditional hand tools such as hammers, anvils, and punches, supplemented by modern tools for finishing and polishing.

Market Access:

Markets Sold to: Artisans sold their products through a variety of channels, including local markets, craft exhibitions, and online platforms.

Average Monthly Sales Volume: Monthly sales volumes varied among respondents, with some reporting higher sales during festive seasons and special events.

Perceived Demand for Metal Repoussé Products: Overall, artisans perceived a steady demand for metal repoussé products, particularly among tourists and collectors.

Challenges in Accessing Markets: Common challenges included competition from mass-produced imitations, lack of marketing support, and limited access to premium markets.

Perceptions of GI Status:

Awareness of GI Certification: A significant proportion of respondents were aware of GI certification for traditional crafts but expressed limited understanding of its implications.

Perceived Benefits of GI Certification: Respondents perceived GI certification as a potential means of enhancing the market value and recognition of Varanasi's metal repoussé products.

Challenges in Obtaining GI Certification: Challenges included bureaucratic procedures, high costs associated with certification, and lack of information and support.

Impact of GI Status on Market Demand: There was mixed perception regarding the impact of GI status on market demand, with some artisans anticipating increased demand for certified products while others expressed skepticism.

Additional Comments:

Several artisans shared additional insights and suggestions, including the need for skill development programs, access to finance and marketing support, and simplification of GI certification procedures.

Conclusion:

The survey findings provide valuable insights into the characteristics, experiences, and perceptions of metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi. The data highlights the challenges and opportunities facing artisans in accessing markets, navigating GI certification processes, and ensuring the sustainability of their craft. These insights can inform policy interventions and support mechanisms aimed at promoting the sustainable development of metal repoussé craft in Varanasi and preserving its cultural heritage in the post-GI era.

Analysis and Discussion:

The analysis and discussion section critically examines the survey findings in relation to the research questions. It explores the impact of GI status on artisans' artistic autonomy, market competitiveness, and economic sustainability. It also discusses the challenges faced by artisans in adapting to changing market dynamics and the strategies employed to overcome these challenges.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper summarizes key findings and insights derived from the literature review, ethnographic research, and survey data. It reflects on the complex interplay between artistic innovation, commercialization, and cultural preservation in Varanasi's metal repoussé craft. Recommendations are provided for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to support the sustainable development of metal repoussé craft in the post-GI era. write in detail on above data collecte

The analysis and discussion of the survey findings reveal several key insights into the impact of Geographical Indication (GI) status on metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi and the challenges they face in maintaining artistic autonomy, market competitiveness, and economic sustainability.

Impact of GI Status on Artisans' Autonomy:

The survey findings indicate that while GI certification offers recognition and protection for the authenticity of Varanasi's metal repoussé craft, it also introduces challenges that may impact artisans' artistic autonomy. Many artisans expressed concerns about the bureaucratic procedures and high costs associated with obtaining GI certification, which could potentially limit their ability to innovate and experiment with new techniques and designs. Additionally, some artisans reported feeling pressure to conform to strict quality standards and traditional practices mandated by GI certification, which may restrict their creative freedom and expression.

Market Competitiveness and Economic Sustainability:

The survey findings also shed light on the market competitiveness and economic sustainability of metal repoussé artisans in Varanasi. While GI certification has the potential to enhance the market value and recognition of Varanasi's metal repoussé products, artisans face challenges in accessing premium markets and competing with mass-produced imitations. Limited marketing support, lack of access to finance, and competition from mechanized industries pose additional barriers to economic sustainability for artisans. However, the survey findings also highlight the resilience and resourcefulness of artisans in Varanasi, who employ various strategies to overcome these challenges and sustain their livelihoods.

Strategies Employed by Artisans:

Artisans in Varanasi employ a range of strategies to navigate the post-GI era and ensure the sustainability of their craft. These strategies include diversifying product offerings to cater to different market segments, leveraging digital platforms and marketing channels to reach wider audiences, forming cooperatives or collectives to pool resources and share knowledge, collaborating with designers and other stakeholders to develop innovative product lines, and engaging in advocacy and capacity-building efforts to raise awareness about the value of traditional crafts and the importance of supporting artisanal communities.

In conclusion, the survey findings underscore the complex interplay between tradition and innovation, commercialization, and cultural preservation in Varanasi's metal repoussé craft. While GI certification offers opportunities for recognition and protection, it also poses challenges that may impact artisans' autonomy, market competitiveness, and economic sustainability. Recommendations for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders include streamlining the GI certification process, providing financial and technical support to artisans, fostering collaboration and networking among stakeholders, and promoting awareness and appreciation of Varanasi's metal repoussé craft. By addressing these challenges and supporting artisanal communities, stakeholders can contribute to the sustainable development of metal repoussé craft in Varanasi and ensure its continued vitality in the post-GI era.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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