

Handicrafts, Cultural Tourism, And Regional Development: An Analysis Of Jammu Division's Creative Economy.

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Abstract

The creative economy has emerged as an important framework for understanding how culture, creativity, and heritage contribute to economic development. In regions with rich cultural resources, creative industries can generate employment, support entrepreneurship, preserve cultural identity, and stimulate regional growth. Jammu Division possesses a unique cultural landscape characterized by traditional handicrafts, Dogra heritage, religious tourism, folk arts, and historical monuments. These cultural assets form the foundation of a growing creative economy that has the potential to contribute significantly to regional development. This paper examines the role of handicrafts and cultural tourism in the economic transformation of Jammu Division. Using secondary sources, the study explores the contribution of creative industries to employment generation, income creation, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. The study finds that handicrafts and cultural tourism play a vital role in supporting local livelihoods and strengthening the regional economy. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited market access, insufficient branding, and low technological integration continue to affect the sector. The paper concludes that strategic investments in cultural industries, digital marketing, skill development, and heritage conservation can enhance the contribution of the creative economy to regional transformation.

Keywords: Creative Economy, Handicrafts, Cultural Tourism, Regional Development, Jammu Division, Dogra Heritage, Creative Industries.

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I. Introduction

In recent decades, the concept of the creative economy has gained increasing attention among policymakers, economists, and development scholars. Unlike traditional economic sectors that rely primarily on natural resources or industrial production, the creative economy derives value from cultural resources, creativity, Knowledge, and innovation. It encompasses activities such as handicrafts, tourism, performing arts, heritage conservation, design, media, and cultural entrepreneurship.

The growing significance of the creative economy reflects a shift toward knowledge-based and culture-driven development models. Many regions around the world have successfully utilized their cultural assets to generate employment, attract investment, and strengthen local identities. In developing regions, creative industries often provide livelihood opportunities while simultaneously preserving traditional knowledge and cultural heritage.

Jammu Division, located in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, possesses considerable cultural wealth in the form of handicrafts, historical monuments, religious pilgrimage sites, folk traditions, and artistic practices. These resources contribute not only to the cultural identity of the region but also to its economic development. The interaction between handicrafts and cultural tourism creates opportunities for income generation, entrepreneurship, and community development.

This paper analyzes the contribution of handicrafts and cultural tourism to regional development in Jammu Division within the broader framework of the creative economy.

II. Research Methodology:

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary data obtained from:

- Economic Survey of Jammu & Kashmir.
- Tourism reports.
- Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom.
- Research journals.
- Government publications.
- Academic studies.

Data have been analyzed through tables and thematic interpretation.

III. Employment In The Handicraft Sector:

Recent studies indicate that the handicraft sector remains the second-largest employer after agriculture in Jammu and Kashmir. Employment in the sector increased from approximately 3.40 lakh artisans in 2020-21 to 4.22 lakh artisans in 2023-24, reflecting growing formalization and registration of artisans.

Table 1: Employment in Jammu & Kashmir Handicraft Sector.

Year	Employment (Lakhs)
2020-21	3.40
2021-22	3.67
2022-23	3.95
2023-24	4.22

Source: Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom, J&K (reported in recent studies).

Interpretation

The data show a steady increase in handicraft employment. The growth reflects government initiatives such as artisan registration, credit facilities, and market promotion schemes. The sector's ability to absorb labor highlights its importance for regional development.

Export Performance of Handicrafts:

The handicraft industry contributes significantly to export earnings. Export values reached approximately Rs.1,162 crore during 2023-24, demonstrating the continuing relevance of traditional crafts in national and international markets.

Table 2: Handicraft Export Performance

Year	Export Value (Rs. Crore)
2020-21	562
2021-22	733
2022-23	948
2023-24	1,162

Source: Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom, J&K

Interpretation:

The export trend reveals increasing market demand for traditional handicraft products. Growth in exports enhances regional income and creates employment opportunities for artisans.

Cultural Tourism and Regional Development:

Tourism Resources of Jammu Division:

Jammu Division hosts several important tourism destinations:

- Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine.
- Bahu Fort.
- Mubarak Mandi Palace.
- Shiv Khori.
- Patnitop.
- Bhaderwah.

These attractions support pilgrimage tourism, heritage tourism, and eco-tourism.

Economic Contribution of Tourism:

According to the Economic Survey 2025-26, tourism contributes approximately 7% of Jammu and Kashmir's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and supports around five lakh livelihoods, directly and indirectly.

Table 3: Economic Significance of Tourism

Indicator	Value
Contribution to GSDP	7%
Livelihoods Supported	5 Lakh
Major Activities	Hospitality, Transport, Handicrafts, Pilgrimage, Tourism.

Source: Economic Survey of Jammu & Kashmir 2025-26.

Pilgrimage Tourism and Regional Economy:

Pilgrimage tourism forms a major component of Jammu Division's economy. The Vaishno Devi pilgrimage attracts millions of visitors annually, creating demand for transportation, hotels, restaurants, retail trade, and handicraft products. Historical analyses suggest annual pilgrim arrivals often exceed 90 lakh and can approach or exceed one crore in strong years.

Table 4: Economic Effects of Pilgrimage Tourism

Sector Benefited	Impact
Hospitality	Increased hotel occupancy
Transport	Higher passenger traffic
Handicrafts	Growth in souvenir sales
Retail Trade	Increased local business
Employment	Direct and indirect job creation

Handicrafts, Tourism, and Regional Development

The relationship between handicrafts and tourism contributes to regional development through multiple channels:

Employment Generation:

The handicraft sector employs over 4 lakh artisans, while tourism supports approximately 5 lakh livelihoods. Together, they constitute major employment-generating sectors.

Income Diversification:

Rural households supplement agricultural income through handicraft production and tourism-related activities.

Entrepreneurship Development:

Creative industries encourage self-employment and small business formation.

Cultural Preservation:

Economic incentives promote the continuation of traditional crafts and cultural practices.

Rural Development:

Many handicraft-producing communities are located in rural districts such as Kathua, Udhampur, Doda, and Reasi, contributing to local economic development.

IV. Challenges Facing Jammu Division's Creative Economy:**Market Constraints:**

Artisans often depend on intermediaries who capture a significant share of profits, reducing earnings for producers.

Infrastructure Deficiencies:

Insufficient transport, exhibition facilities, and tourism infrastructure limit growth.

Declining Youth Participation:

Many young people are reluctant to continue traditional crafts due to lower income expectations.

Digital Divide:

Limited access to e-commerce platforms restricts market expansion.

Institutional Challenges:

Greater coordination among tourism, culture, and industry departments is required for integrated development.

Findings:

The study reveals:

- Jammu Division possesses substantial cultural assets capable of supporting a vibrant creative economy.
- The handicraft sector employed approximately 4.22 lakh artisans in 2023-24.
- Handicraft exports reached approximately Rs. 1,162 crore in 2023-24.
- Tourism contributes around 7% of J&K's economy and supports five lakh livelihoods.
- Cultural tourism significantly increases demand for local handicrafts and services.
- Market access, infrastructure, and technological limitations remain major constraints.

V. Recommendations:

1. Establish handicraft clusters in major districts of Jammu Division.
2. Strengthen digital marketing and e-commerce platforms for artisans.
3. Develop integrated cultural tourism circuits linking heritage sites and craft centers.
4. Enhance financial support through artisan credit schemes.
5. Promote Geographical Indication (GI) branding for traditional products.
6. Encourage youth participation through skill development programs.
7. Invest in heritage conservation and tourism infrastructure.

VI. Conclusion:

Handicrafts and cultural tourism constitute critical pillars of Jammu Division's creative economy. Statistical evidence demonstrates their substantial contribution to employment, exports, and regional income. The handicraft sector provides livelihoods to over four lakh artisans, while tourism contributes approximately seven percent of the regional economy and supports five lakh livelihoods. These sectors not only generate economic benefits but also preserve cultural heritage and strengthen regional identity. With appropriate policy support, digital innovation, and infrastructure development, the creative economy can become a major driver of sustainable regional transformation in Jammu Division.

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