

Rural Livelihoods and Entrepreneurship Development in Nadia and Burdwan District of West Bengal: A Sociological Study

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Abstract. *Livelihoods in rural areas are deeply intertwined with traditional occupations such as crafts and craftsmen, artisans etc. that have evolved over centuries with knowledge and skills, and economic activities around them. In many regions, crafts and artisanal industries such as handloom weaving, pottery, metalwork, food processing (traditional sweet making industry) and folk art (clay doll making) continue to serve as vital sources of employment, income and social identity for rural communities. These occupations are not merely economic activities but are embedded in inheritance legacy over knowledge and skills local social structures, caste-based divisions of labour and knowledge, kinship networks and systems of intergenerational skill transmission. Traditional livelihoods thus contribute simultaneously to economic survival, cultural continuity and community cohesion in rural society.*

INTRODUCTION:

However, these livelihood systems are increasingly under strain due to rapid socio-economic transformations. The expansion of industrial production, the availability of cheaper machine-made substitutes, changing consumer preferences and the penetration of global markets have reduced the competitiveness of handmade products. Technological change, while offering new opportunities, has also marginalised artisans who lack access to modern tools, training and digital platforms. Additionally, limited access to institutional credit, weak market linkages and dependence on intermediaries have constrained the income-generating potential of traditional occupations. As a result, many rural households remain trapped in low-productivity, subsistence-based livelihoods, making them vulnerable to poverty, seasonal unemployment and economic shocks.

In this context, rural entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical pathway for sustaining traditional livelihoods while promoting inclusive and sustainable development. Rural entrepreneurship refers to the application of entrepreneurial skills such as innovation, risk-taking and market orientation within rural settings, often grounded in locally available resources and traditional knowledge systems. Its significance lies in its ability to transform inherited skills into viable economic enterprises, thereby enhancing productivity, income stability and employment generation. By encouraging value addition, product diversification and market responsiveness, rural entrepreneurship helps traditional occupations move beyond mere survival and towards long-term sustainability.

Entrepreneurship in rural areas plays a particularly important role in poverty reduction and employment creation, as it generates self-employment opportunities and reduces dependence on uncertain agricultural and others low wage income. It also contributes significantly to the empowerment of marginalized groups, especially women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minority communities, who are often concentrated in informal and low-paid sectors. Unlike urban entrepreneurship, which is typically capital-intensive and individualistic, rural enterprise development is largely rooted in family-based production systems, skills, collective labour arrangements and community networks such as Self-Help Groups and cooperatives. These social structures provide a supportive environment for risk-sharing, mutual learning and collective bargaining.

A crucial aspect of rural entrepreneurship is the utilisation of traditional skills and indigenous knowledge that have been preserved through generations. Indigenous knowledge systems relating to weaving techniques, craft designs, food preservation methods and resource management represent valuable cultural and economic assets. When combined with modern inputs such as improved technology, design innovation, branding and marketing, these traditional skills can be revitalised to meet contemporary market demands. This integration allows rural economies to maintain cultural authenticity while enhancing economic viability.

Government interventions therefore become central in enabling rural producers to transition from subsistence-based activities to enterprise-based livelihoods. Though schemes focusing on skill

development, financial inclusion, access to credit and market linkages, the state plays a facilitative role in strengthening rural entrepreneurship. By supporting capacity building, institutional finance and collective organisation, it can help rural entrepreneurs overcome structural barriers and participate more effectively in the broader economy. In this way, rural entrepreneurship serves not only as an economic strategy but also as a mechanism for social inclusion, cultural preservation and sustainable rural development.

Burdwan and Nadia district of West Bengal present compelling cases for examining this transformation. Both the districts are historically renowned for its rich artisanal traditions, including Tant saree weaving in Dhatri gram, Kalna in Burdwan, Shantipur and Phulia in Nadia, clay doll making in Ghurni (Krishnanagar), brassware production in and around Nabadwip and a vibrant sweet-making industry centred in towns such as Burdwan, Krishnanagar, Ranaghat and Nabadwip. These traditional industries not only contribute significantly to the rural economy but also embody the cultural heritage of the region.

Crafts and Craftsmen in Burdwan and Nadia District:

Burdwan District in West Bengal is a flat alluvial plane separated into four distinct topographical zone for “sweet hub” and for craft industries such as Bankapasi’s sola craft and Dwariapur’s Dhokra is now famous for its aesthetic beauty all over the world. Shakigarh; Lancha, ‘Sitabhog’, Mihidana, from Burdwan town represent traditional sweet making centres known to all over the India.

Nadia District, located in the eastern part of West Bengal, occupies a significant position in the socio-cultural and economic landscape of the state. Geographically, the district is part of the fertile alluvial plains of the Ganga–Bhagirathi River system, with rivers such as the Hooghly, Jalangi and Churni playing a crucial role in shaping agricultural patterns and settlement structures. Socio-culturally, Nadia has long been recognised as a centre of learning, religion and cultural exchange. Towns such as Nabadwip hold immense historical and religious significance as centres of Vaishnavism and Sanskrit learning, while Krishnanagar has been a prominent administrative and cultural hub since the colonial period. The district exhibits a rich cultural diversity shaped by different communities, as well as by the historical impact of colonial rule. Partition-induced migration significantly altered the demographic composition of the district, particularly through the settlement of refugee communities who brought with them artisanal skills, entrepreneurial practices and new forms of labour organisation.

Traditional industries form the backbone of Nadia’s rural economy and play a vital role in sustaining livelihoods beyond agriculture. The district is widely known for Tant saree weaving in Shantipur and Phulia, clay doll making in Ghurni (Krishnanagar), brassware production in and around Nabadwip and a vibrant sweet-making industry centred in towns such as Krishnanagar, Ranaghat and Nabadwip. These industries provide employment to many rural households and contribute significantly to household incomes, especially in areas where agricultural opportunities are limited. They also support a network of allied activities, including yarn supply, dyeing, transport, retailing and seasonal trading, thereby generating multiplier effects within the rural economy.

The organisation of these traditional industries is closely linked to caste, class and gender relations. Artisanal occupations in Nadia are historically associated with specific caste groups such as the Tanti and Basak communities in weaving, Pal and Kumar castes in clay doll making, Kansari communities in brassware production and traditional ‘moira’ families in sweet making. These caste-based occupational identities have shaped access to skills, resources and markets over generations. Most artisans belong to lower caste groups and operate within small-scale, informal production units, often with limited capital and bargaining power.

Class differentiation within artisanal communities is reflected in unequal ownership of looms, tools and working capital. While a small section of master craftsmen and traders exercise control over production and marketing, most of the artisans’ function as dependent producers or wage workers. Gender roles further structure the division of labour within these industries. Men typically engage in core production activities such as weaving and moulding, while women contribute through preparatory, finishing and ancillary tasks such as yarn processing, painting, packaging and sales. Despite their significant contribution, women’s work often remains undervalued and invisible, though recent entrepreneurship and self-help group initiatives have begun to enhance their economic participation and decision-making roles. So, transformation from caste society to class society is a myth the division between two is still prevail however, traditional skills confined within caste and gender domain while property ownership follow class line. This signifies caste domination by class over property ownership which are partially responsible for destruction of traditional knowledge and skill over which Indian caste systems have

exclusive inherited legacy due to lack of resources upon which caste people can build independent enterprises. Similarly, men domination over production activities led to marginalize women's knowledge and skill in craft production which remain women work undervalued and invisible. Although recent few initiatives like constituting Self Help Group (SHG) in rural areas and micro finance provision engage in women participation in economic activities and decision-making role to some extent.

Overall, Nadia district presents a complex socio-economic setting where geography, cultural traditions, artisanal livelihoods and social hierarchies intersect in significant ways. The coexistence of long-established craft industries with emerging forms of rural entrepreneurship highlights both resilience and vulnerability within the local economy. Understanding this regional context is therefore essential for analysing how rural livelihoods are shaped, sustained and transformed under conditions of market change and policy intervention. Such an understanding also provides the foundation for examining the opportunities and constraints faced by traditional producers in adapting to contemporary economic realities.

Rationale of the Study

Despite their cultural significance and contribution to employment, many of these traditional crafts remain economically vulnerable. Artisans and small producers often face challenges such as limited access to modern technology, unstable and intermediary-dominated market linkages, inadequate institutional credit and low levels of income security. These constraints are further intensified for women and socially marginalized groups, whose participation in production is substantial but whose access to resources and decision-making power remains limited. At the same time, Nadia and Burdwan have been a major focus of both central and state government initiatives such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Aajeevika and Anandadhara which aim to strengthen rural livelihoods through skill development, financial inclusion and market integration.

New Education Policy (NEP2020) in this context advocate to adapt traditional skill/ occupation through acknowledging and recognizing the potential of artisan and craftsmen paving the way for upskilling and mainskilling them in formal education like vocational education.

Studying Nadia and Burdwan district therefore offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of targeted policy interventions in revitalising traditional industries and promoting rural entrepreneurship. The districts' diverse mix of craft-based enterprises, social groups and institutional arrangements makes it a critical case for understanding how government programmes interact with local livelihood systems. Insights drawn from Nadia as well as Burdwan can contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in transforming traditional occupations into sustainable enterprises within the wider context of West Bengal and rural India.

From a sociological perspective, Nadia and Burdwan provide a rich empirical setting for analysing the relationship between state policies, social hierarchies and economic opportunities. The study seeks to examine how caste, class and gender dynamics shape access to entrepreneurial resources, participation in government schemes and pathways of social mobility. It also explores the role of community-based institutions such as Self-Help Groups in fostering collective agency, economic resilience and women's empowerment. By focusing on a district where cultural heritage industries intersect with policy-driven development initiatives, the study highlights broader processes of social transformation and inclusive development in rural communities.

Role of Traditional Industries, Knowledge and Skills for Rural Livelihoods and Entrepreneurship in Nadia and Burdwan

Bengali textiles occupy a prominent place in India's craft traditions, with Tant sarees forming one of their most distinctive expressions. Nadia district developed an external demand for these sarees owing to their superior cotton quality and refined decorative motifs. Their exceptionally light weight gave rise to the term 'Tant'. Over time, Shantipur and Phulia developed into central hubs of production. The evolution of the Tant saree industry is closely linked with the social history of these towns, shaped by inherited skills and community-based transmission of weaving knowledge. Similarly, Dhatrigram and Kalna in Burdwan District renowned for 'Jamdani' sarees which are famous for its fine cotton 'muslin' weaving with traditional design with motifs. Traditional sweet 'Sitabhog' in Burdwan town associate with 'Royal' tradition of Burdwan Raja as a patron and its ingredients and texture exposed extraordinary skills inherited by offsprings of sweet making family. Thus, quality and test reached highest and distinctive compare to other sweets. Dokra Crafts in a village of Burdwan district exposed skill inherited by family

tradition of metal casting which is not only unique but its aesthetic sense and beauty make the crafts a status symbol of elite class with prestige and identity.

During the Mughal period, Shantipur weavers were renowned for producing fine mulmul and muslin-like cotton textiles, which were traded across India and exported to regions such as Delhi and Persia. Under British colonial rule, however, indigenous textile production suffered due to the influx of inexpensive mill-made cloth from Manchester. A colonial textile survey by John Taylor (1887) documented this decline. Despite these pressures, Shantipur's weaving tradition survived, sustained by deeply embedded artisanal knowledge and strong community networks, i.e., social capital.

The Partition of Bengal in 1947 marked a significant turning point for Tant weaving in Nadia. Hindu weavers migrating from Tangail (now in Bangladesh) settled in Phulia, bringing with them advanced techniques such as the jacquard system and richly ornamented jamdani-inspired designs. This migration led to a fusion of Tangail and Shantipur styles, revitalising the local weaving economy and expanding its design vocabulary (Das, 2008).

At present, weaving activity in Nadia district is concentrated in several key locations. Shantipur is known for its fine-textured sarees with subtle patterns, while Phulia is recognised for vibrant colours and bold designs influenced by Tangail traditions. Smaller clusters in Samudragarh and Dhatrigram in Burdwan contribute to regional supply, while Kalna, a bordering area, shares stylistic influences with Nadia. Collectively, these locations form an integrated weaving corridor catering to domestic as well as export markets.

The majority of Tant weavers belong to Tanti, Basak and Mahishya caste groups. Weaving is largely undertaken by men, while women contribute through preparatory tasks such as bobbin winding, starching and yarn preparation. In Phulia, some Scheduled Caste families and Muslim households are also involved in weaving activities (Sen, 2016).

Production is organised through both cooperative societies and private master weavers. Following independence, cooperatives expanded with support from the Village and Khadi Industries Commission. Weavers in Nadia use pit looms and frame looms, with jacquard attachments enabling intricate floral, geometric and temple motifs. Traditionally, fine cotton yarns ranging from 80s to 100s counts were used. In recent decades, polyester blends and mercerised yarns have been introduced to reduce production costs. The weaving process involves warping, sizing and starching, dyeing, weaving and finishing through ironing and packaging. Demand for Tant sarees peaks during Durga Puja and the wedding season. However, the industry faces stiff competition from cheaper power-loom textiles produced in centres such as Surat. The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted production and marketing, leading to a sharp decline in orders, particularly in export markets (Dasgupta & Roy, 2021). Limited access to digital platforms and working capital intensified the crisis.

Tant saree weaving in Nadia and Burdwan district represents a centuries-old socio-cultural heritage that has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of economic and market pressures. Shantipur, Phulia and Dhatri gram exemplifies a dynamic balance between tradition and change. Nevertheless, without structural reforms, educational support, fair trade practices and integration of digital technologies, this livelihood remains vulnerable now. So, Infrastructure development, design intervention and artisan empowerment are crucial to sustaining this iconic craft.

Clay doll making is one of India's most old and indigenous distinctive artistic traditions, centred in the village of Ghurni in Krishnanagar, Nadia district. renowned for their realism and expressive detail, Ghurni dolls have been produced for over two centuries by artisan families belonging primarily to the Pal or Prajapati community.

The origins of Ghurni's clay doll tradition are commonly traced to the early eighteenth century, during the reign of Maharaja Krishnachandra Ray of Krishnanagar. A notable patron of the arts, the ruler is believed to have invited skilled artisans from Dhaka and Natore to settle in Ghurni (Ghosh, 2010). Initially engaged in producing religious idols, these craftsmen gradually expanded into secular themes, creating lifelike representations of everyday Bengali life. Under British rule, Ghurni dolls attracted European collectors and colonial officials, who commissioned ethnographic and street-scene figurines. These works were exhibited in Kolkata, London and Paris during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Chakraborty, 2006).

Ghurni remains the principal centre of clay doll making in Nadia and one of the foremost hubs in India. Approximately 300-400 artisan families are concentrated in lanes near the Jalangi river. Although small-scale attempts at replication exist elsewhere, Ghurni's long-established tradition, skilled workforce and

market recognition make it the core production zone. Artisans source clay from nearby riverbeds, using straw, husk and bamboo for structural support. The production process includes skeleton making, layered clay application, sun drying, carving, painting and final assembly with accessories. While fibre moulds and plaster-of-paris have been introduced for faster production, they remain controversial for undermining artistic quality. Ghurni dolls depict ethnographic scenes, religious figures, political personalities, animals and custom-made subjects. In recent years, global figures have also been crafted for international clients, reflecting adaptive creativity within the tradition. The craft is dominated by Pal and Kumar caste groups, with women contributing primarily to preparatory and finishing tasks (Banerjee, 2020). Ghurni dolls are sold through fairs, exhibitions and limited export channels. Challenges include declining patronage, introduction of fibre moulds and plaster-of-paris in doll making, urban pressures and disruptions caused by COVID-19. Although NGOs, state agencies and municipal initiatives have proposed for establishing craft villages, cooperative models and training programmes, but these initiatives are yet to implement.

Ghurni's clay doll tradition represents a unique synthesis of realism, ethnography and artistic imagination. Despite its cultural significance and global recognition, the craft faces existential threats. Sustainable revival depends on stronger policy support, market access and skill transmission to younger generations.

Brassware, locally known as 'kansa' or 'pitol' work, constitutes an ancient craft tradition embedded in Bengal's material culture. In Nadia district, brassware production historically flourished within temple economies and domestic rituals, sustained by artisan communities such as the 'Kansaris'.

Brass and bell-metal working in Bengal dates to early historic periods and gained prominence in Nadia through medieval temple networks. By the nineteenth century, towns such as Nabadwip were recognised for high-quality brass production, as noted in colonial records (Taylor, 1907). Today, residual clusters survive in Nabadwip, Sukhpur, Muragachha and surrounding areas. Production involves casting, hammering, finishing and joining using traditional tools and limited mechanisation. Items include domestic utensils, ritual objects, religious idols and decorative pieces. Demand is largely seasonal and has declined due to competition from steel, plastic and imported substitutes.

Most artisan families earn low and unstable incomes, with many engaging in part-time, contractual and wage production. Rising raw material costs, skill erosion, ageing workforces and lack of branding or cooperative infrastructure further threaten the traditional craft industries.

Sweets, or mishti, occupy a central place in Bengali culture, marking festivals, rituals and life-cycle ceremonies. Nadia and Burdwan districts are renowned for its diverse sweet-making traditions, particularly in Saktighar, Krishnanagar, Nabadwip and Ranaghat.

The development of chhana-based sweets in Bengal dates to the eighteenth century, influenced by colonial and religious contexts (Sen, 2007). In Nadia, temple economies and royal patronage played key roles in shaping sweet production. Towns such as Burdwan, Krishnanagar, Nabadwip and Ranaghat became specialised centres, each associated with distinctive sweets. Sweet production relies on manual techniques that possess skilled "moyeras" working in family-run establishments. The industry employed workers across the district and they experienced peak demand during festivals. However, profit margins remain low due to raw material price fluctuations and labour shortages in peak session.

Health concerns have led to the emergence of low-sugar sweets, while regulatory pressures and competition from branded urban sweet chains pose new challenges. Limited digital marketing and cold-chain infrastructure further constrain growth.

The sweet-making industry of Nadia reflects a dynamic interplay of culinary tradition, religious practice and local economy. With improved hygiene standards, branding and policy support, this culturally embedded industry holds potential for sustainable growth and wider recognition.

Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in the advancement of rural development in India, particularly given that agriculture and traditional occupations constitute the primary sources of income for most of the rural population (Mishra, 2015). In rural areas, individuals often initiate entrepreneurial ventures to generate income and mitigate poverty. Such initiatives not only contribute to economic upliftment but also promote the empowerment of marginalized groups, including women and individuals from lower castes (Saha, 2018).

Entrepreneurship development in Nadia and Burdwan districts must be understood not merely as the introduction of modern business practices but as a process rooted in the gradual transformation of traditional skill-based occupations into organised and market-oriented enterprises. In weaving centres such as Dhatrigram, Kalna Shantipur and Phulia, as well as in the clay modelling clusters of Ghurni, entrepreneurial capacities often evolve from within artisanal households rather than through formal managerial training. Indigenous knowledge and craft skills are transmitted primarily through intergenerational learning embedded in family and community life. Children grow up observing elders at work, gradually assisting in minor tasks, internalising techniques, design sensibilities and work discipline through participation rather than classroom instruction. This apprenticeship model- informal, experience-based and practice-oriented ensures continuity of traditional knowledge systems while adapting them subtly to changing market demands. Craft production, therefore, is less a product of formal training programmes and more the outcome of sustained embodied practice, repetition and tacit knowledge accumulated over time. While contemporary skill development initiatives may introduce design innovation, digital marketing or financial literacy, the core competence of the artisan remains grounded in habitual practice, sensory learning and inherited technical mastery. Entrepreneurship development in such contexts thus builds upon this deep reservoir of indigenous skill, transforming experiential knowledge into economically viable enterprise without severing it from its cultural and social foundations. Knowledge and skill in traditional crafts are exclusively domain of traditional caste people but poor economic conditions and low income led erosion of traditional knowledge and skill in that members of caste family chose for alternative income opportunities hence transmission of traditional knowledge and skills end with opting otherwise.

In the context of Nadia district, West Bengal, rural entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical driver of economic growth, supported by various government schemes aimed at enhancing employment opportunities. The local economy of Nadia is characterized by traditional industries such as Tant saree weaving, clay doll making, brassware production and the confectionery sector, particularly sweets. These artisanal trades have long served as vital sources of livelihood for the local population and continue to be integral to the region's cultural and economic identity (Chatterjee, 2017).

Several national and state-level initiatives have been implemented to support rural entrepreneurship and improve the living standards of rural communities. Among the most prominent programs are the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Aajeevika and Anandadhara. These initiatives aim to foster rural development by encouraging entrepreneurship, promoting social inclusion and facilitating financial literacy and access to credit (Ministry of Rural Development, 2020; Government of West Bengal, 2021). The role of governmental schemes in rural entrepreneurship development in Nadia and Burdwan districts.

In this section I examine nature and extent of Central and State Government schemes for rural livelihoods and income generation that contribute to the development of entrepreneurship in the region. Furthermore, the review emphasizes the significance of traditional industries and assesses how these sectors facilitate local artisans for creating and sustaining their livelihoods and expanding their market reach. The review also considers their broader implications for the district's socio-economic development.

The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), launched by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, serves as a central pillar in the country's strategy to alleviate rural poverty and promote inclusive development. Central to its design is the creation of sustainable livelihoods through the promotion of rural entrepreneurship, particularly among women and marginalized groups (Ministry of Rural Development, 2020). The program emphasizes a community-driven approach that relies on the mobilization of rural households into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), enhancement of skill capacities, financial inclusion and the development of market linkages. NRLM operates through an integrated set of strategies.

The implementation of NRLM in Nadia and Burdwan districts has been notably effective in leveraging traditional artisanal skills to foster rural entrepreneurship. The district, known for its rich cultural

industries such as Tant saree weaving (in Shantipur and Phuliya), clay doll making (in Ghurni, Krishnanagar), brassware production and indigenous sweets manufacturing, has experienced significant livelihood enhancement through NRLM interventions (Saha, 2018; Chatterjee, 2017). Through NRLM artisans have been collectivized into SHGs, which function as both economic and social units. These groups provide a platform for skill development, shared investment and collaborative business strategies. Access to microfinance has enabled small producers to invest in better-quality raw materials, diversify their products and scale production. SHGs have become instrumental in negotiating loans, managing repayment and creating internal savings mechanisms. Enhanced market exposure through NRLM-sponsored exhibitions, marketing drives and digital platforms has increased visibility for local products. Artisans report improved incomes and greater bargaining power. (Ministry of Rural Development, 2020)

One of NRLM's most significant impacts in Nadia as well as Burdwan districts have been its contribution to women's socio-economic empowerment. Women engaged in Tant weaving and sweets production have not only increased their earnings but have also gained greater autonomy in household financial decisions. This transition reflects a broader shift in gender relations, as women assume leadership roles within SHGs and local economic networks (Chakraborty, 2019). Moreover, participation in SHGs has helped women overcome traditional social constraints, enabling them to engage more actively in community development processes.

Launched in 2014 under the broader umbrella of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Aajeevika is a central government initiative aimed at creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for rural poor households. The program focuses particularly on the socio-economic empowerment of women and marginalized communities by promoting self-employment and microenterprise development. Through the facilitation of access to financial services, skill development and market linkages, Aajeevika seeks to alleviate rural poverty and support inclusive economic growth.

In Nadia and Burdwan districts, Aajeevika has emerged as a critical enabler of rural entrepreneurship, particularly within traditional occupational sectors such as Tant saree weaving, clay doll making, brassware production and sweets manufacturing. These industries, deeply embedded in the district's cultural heritage, have received renewed institutional support under the scheme. In Dhatrigram and Shantipur, Tant saree weavers have benefited from technical training and financial assistance under Aajeevika, which has helped enhance product quality, increase production capacity and tap into wider markets (Government of India, 2014). Aajeevika has facilitated the formation of SHGs across Nadia and Burdwan enabling artisans in sectors like brassware manufacturing and confectionery production to access microcredit. This financial support has allowed entrepreneurs to invest in raw materials, adopt better techniques and expand their enterprises. The program has been instrumental in connecting rural artisans to broader markets. Through participation in trade fairs, exhibitions and online platforms, entrepreneurs such as the clay doll makers of Ghurni, Krishnanagar—have been able to gain national exposure, leading to improved business outcomes and increased visibility for local crafts.

Aajeevika has had a notable impact on the social and economic empowerment of rural women in Nadia. Many women previously engaged as workers in household industries, such as Tant saree weaving and sweet making, have transitioned into independent entrepreneurs. This shift has been facilitated through their enhanced access to credit and training in business skills, enabling them to manage and expand their own enterprises (Chakraborty, 2019).

Moreover, the initiative has contributed to improving the financial stability and social standing of these women. Participation in Aajeevika has allowed them to break from traditional roles and exercise greater control over household income and business decisions. The adoption of modern techniques and better-quality production, acquired through Aajeevika training modules, has further positioned rural enterprises from Nadia as well as Burdwan on a competitive footing in both regional and national markets (Saha, 2018). Importantly, the scheme also prioritizes support for marginalized and socially excluded groups, thereby broadening access to economic opportunities. This inclusive approach ensures that traditionally disadvantaged communities are integrated into the mainstream economy. In doing so, Aajeevika not only contributes to poverty reduction but also strengthens the overall resilience and cohesion of rural society in Nadia (Chatterjee, 2017).

Anandadhara, a flagship initiative of the Government of West Bengal, was introduced with the objective of fostering entrepreneurship among rural populations through the provision of financial, infrastructural and skill development support. The program is aimed at alleviating rural poverty and

improving community well-being by focusing on the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, the generation of local employment and the revival and modernization of rural craft industries (Government of West Bengal, 2021).

In the Nadia and Burdwan districts of West Bengal, Anandadhara has played a critical role in facilitating the transition of traditional industries into more modern and sustainable business models. Local craft sectors including Tant saree weaving, clay doll making, brassware production and sweets manufacturing have benefited from both technical and financial interventions under the scheme. The initiative has provided rural entrepreneurs with both training in modern techniques and financial assistance. For instance, weavers in Shantipur have received capacity-building support that has enabled them to upgrade their weaving practices, enhance the quality of their sarees and increase production output (Government of West Bengal, 2021). Similarly, clay doll artisans in Ghurni, Krishnanagar, have leveraged Anandadhara's support to access funding and improve their product lines. The scheme has facilitated the establishment of artisan workshops and craft hubs equipped with modern tools and machinery. These infrastructural developments, alongside exposure to new technologies, have increased productivity and improved product consistency. Anandadhara's efforts to enhance market connectivity have been especially impactful in Nadia as well as Burdwan's renowned sweets sector. Artisanal producers of Sitabhog, Mihidana, Rosogolla, Mishti Doi, Sharpuriya and Sharbhaja have participated in trade fairs and gained access to digital sales platforms, thereby expanding their consumer base and increasing revenues (Government of West Bengal, 2021).

The Anandadhara scheme has made notable contributions to both economic advancement and social inclusion in Nadia district. Women engaged in traditional sectors such as Tant weaving and confectionery production have experienced transformative changes. With access to entrepreneurial training and credit, many have shifted from wage-dependent labor to independent enterprise ownership. This shift has not only improved their financial autonomy but also enhanced their role in household and community decision-making (Chatterjee, 2017). By facilitating entrepreneurship in traditional industries, the scheme has enabled artisans to increase their incomes, generate local employment and contribute to the districts' rural economy. Enhanced market access and production capacity have allowed entrepreneurs to diversify and stabilize income streams. A key strength of Anandadhara lies in its inclusive approach. Special attention is given to marginalized communities, including women, Scheduled Castes (SC) and other historically disadvantaged groups. By providing these populations with training, financial support and access to market networks, the scheme fosters their integration into the mainstream economy, thereby enhancing the resilience and inclusivity of rural development initiatives.

Following the above examination of the various schemes, the implementation of NRLM, Aajeevika and Anandadhara has significantly influenced the landscape of rural entrepreneurship in Nadia district, West Bengal. While NRLM has laid the foundational framework by promoting self-help groups, financial inclusion, and market linkages, Aajeevika has further strengthened these efforts by focusing on sustainable livelihood creation through enterprise development and skill-building. Anandadhara, as a state-specific extension, has complemented these central schemes by emphasizing local industries, technology adoption and infrastructural support. Collectively, these initiatives have not only revitalized traditional occupations such as Tant saree weaving, clay doll making and sweets production but have also empowered women and marginalized communities by integrating them into the formal economy. The synergy between national and state-level schemes demonstrates a holistic approach to rural development, underscoring the importance of targeted policy interventions in fostering inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship at the grassroots level. This preliminary analysis provides a foundation for more detailed field-based inquiry into the micro-dynamics of SHGs, income trajectories and entrepreneurs' development.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyse the transformation of traditional craft industries in Nadia and Burdwan districts from subsistence-based activities to commercially viable enterprises.
2. To critically examine the role of government schemes in promoting rural entrepreneurship in Nadia and Burdwan districts.
3. To assess the impact of these schemes on the socio-economic empowerment of women and marginalized communities.

4. To evaluate the extent to which skill development, financial inclusion and market linkages under these programs have contributed to the sustainability and growth of traditional crafts.
5. To explore the challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs in accessing and utilizing government support schemes.
6. Integrating traditional craftsmen and artisan with present skill development programme and empower them to improve and upgrade their competencies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study is an exploratory and descriptive research design which is appropriate when one wants to comprehend the dynamics of livelihoods and entrepreneurship in traditional rural industries. The exploratory aspect makes it easier to determine the emergent problems, the latent trends and the contextual realities of artisans and micro-entrepreneurs. The descriptive element permits systematic recording of socio-economic circumstances, production procedures, work related challenges and market practices in the chosen sectors. Since the study aims to build knowledge, but not to quantify variables, such integrated design fits the qualitative focus of the study.

The approach to the research is qualitative, which focuses on narratives, perceptions and lived experiences of those people who are engaged in the chosen industries. Qualitative research captures the meanings, motives, transfer of skills and practices within communities living in traditional lifestyles. It allows the researcher to comprehend the social and cultural backgrounds that influence rural entrepreneurship especially in sectors that are driven by heritage skills and in the informal economic systems. Qualitative techniques are flexible and this helps in revealing problems that otherwise would be concealed in structured surveys.

Study Area

The study was done in Nadia and Burdwan districts which are regions of crafts clusters and cultural heritage. There were sites that were chosen according to the concentration and economic significance of the four industries. Tant saree weaving was concentrated in Phulia and Shantipur, clay doll artisans were concentrated in Ghurni, Krishnanagar, sweet production clusters were concentrated in the areas of Ranaghat and Nabadwip and the rural pockets produced units of brass work making. These were the areas that were selected deliberately to cover a wide range of livelihood practices that goes with traditional industries in the district. In Burdwan Kalna, Dhatrigram and Burdwan town are chosen as centres of Dokra Crafts in Dariapur, Kanla and Dhatrigram as famous for Tat and Jamdani Sarees, and Burdwan town is known as Royal Sitabhog and Mihidana.

Sampling

The participants were identified through purposive sampling technique where a sample was obtained of the individuals that were directly involved in the industries being studied. The respondents were tant weavers, clay doll makers, sweet makers, brassware craftsmen, small business owners and members of local cooperatives or chains of supply. The size of the sample was also flexible and informed by the concept of data saturation whereby interviews were extended until no new themes were brought in significantly. Such a method of sampling facilitated the exploration of pertinent experiences and industry-related insights in depth.

Sample Size

Twenty individuals comprising of different crafts and crafts men and artisans from Nadia and Burdwan districts were interviewed following a purposive sampling method for collecting varieties of information. Drawing on qualitative responses from the semi structured interview schedule, the analysis is organised in line with the six specific objectives of the study, enabling a clear thematic linkage between the research aims and the findings.

Data Processing and Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. Transcripts of interviews and field notes were carefully read and patterns and themes were recognized. Codes were formulated through manual means and were classified under broader thematic groups like livelihood dependence, constraints of production, market linkages, role of intermediaries, entrepreneurial strategies and sustainability issues. The last interpretation was obtained by relating the emergent themes to the broader academic perspectives.

DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that the transformation of traditional craft industries in Nadia and Burdwan districts are not a linear process driven solely by economic incentives or policy interventions. Rather, it is deeply embedded in everyday social practices, shared meanings and indigenous knowledge systems through which artisans interpret, negotiate and respond to change. This section interprets the empirical data for a nuanced understanding of how rural entrepreneurship is socially produced and culturally sustained.

From an Ethnomethodological insights the social order is not imposed externally but is continuously created and maintained through routine, taken-for-granted practices of everyday life. The study's findings clearly demonstrate that artisans in Nadia and Burdwan make sense of government schemes, markets and entrepreneurship through their everyday interactions, conversations and accumulated experiences. The widespread perception of government schemes as "complicated," "time-consuming" or "risky" is not merely an individual attitude but an outcome of collective sense-making within artisan communities. These shared interpretations function as practical "methods" through which artisans decide whether to participate in formal interventions such as National Rural Livelihood Mission, Aajeevika and Anandadhara or continue relying on familiar production and marketing arrangements.

It is useful in understanding why similar schemes produce uneven outcomes across different craft sectors and social groups. Meanings attached to concepts such as "training," "credit," or "market linkage" are context-dependent and interpreted differently within the lifeworld of weavers in Burdwan, Shantipur and Phulia, clay doll makers in Ghurni, brassware artisans in Nabadwip and sweet producers in Krishnanagar and Ranaghat. For instance, while skill development programmes are officially framed as instruments for enhancing productivity and competitiveness, many artisans evaluate them through prior experiences of bureaucratic delay, uneven access, gendered mobility constraints or mismatch with inherited techniques. Thus, policy effectiveness cannot be assessed solely through quantitative outputs; it must also account for how interventions are locally interpreted, negotiated and enacted in everyday practice.

The idea that actions simultaneously shape and reaffirm shared meanings. The study indicates that artisans' cautious engagement with new markets or digital platforms reinforces established typification of "trusted local buyers" versus "uncertain external markets." When artisans repeatedly choose familiar intermediaries over direct marketing channels, these actions reproduce subsistence-oriented production patterns even in the presence of entrepreneurial opportunities. Limited commercialization, therefore, emerges not only from infrastructural gaps but from socially constructed norms of trust, reciprocity and economic morality embedded in community life.

The findings also resonate strongly with indigenous methodology, which prioritizes culturally grounded knowledge systems and community-centred modes of change. Traditional industries in Nadia and Burdwan whether Tant weaving, clay modelling, brass casting or sweet preparation are sustained through intergenerational transmission of tacit knowledge, kinship-based labour organization and embodied skill acquired through practice. Knowledge is transmitted orally and experientially rather than through formal certification. Apprenticeship within family workshops ensures that techniques, aesthetic sensibilities and work ethics are internalized from childhood. This embedded learning process shapes artisans' responses to external interventions. Adoption of new technologies—such as jacquard attachments in weaving or improved packaging in sweets production, occurs selectively and is mediated by local cultural logics that value continuity, authenticity and social cohesion.

Women's empowerment under livelihood schemes further illustrates this culturally embedded transformation. While statistical indicators show increased income and credit access through Self-Help Groups, qualitative narratives reveal empowerment as a gradual reconfiguration of everyday authority. Women in weaving and confectionery sectors often continue to operate within familial production systems, yet their participation in SHGs under schemes like the National Rural Livelihood Mission enhances their bargaining power, visibility and confidence in community forums. Rather than representing a radical break from tradition, empowerment unfolds as a negotiated expansion of roles within culturally legitimate boundaries—an incremental and relational process consistent with indigenous modes of social change.

The study also identifies structural constraints that intersect with these cultural dynamics. Challenges such as complex documentation procedures, digital illiteracy, irregular market demand and competition from mechanized production limit the full realization of entrepreneurial potential. However, these constraints interact with localized interpretations of risk and trust. For example, even when credit is available, artisans may prefer informal borrowing within kin networks due to familiarity and flexibility.

Similarly, participation in exhibitions or online platforms is often filtered through collective deliberation within SHGs, reflecting a communal rather than purely individualistic entrepreneurial orientation.

Methodologically, the qualitative design of the study—relying on in-depth interviews, participant observation and narrative analysis—aligns with both ethnomethodology and indigenous methodology. By foregrounding artisans lived experiences, the research moves beyond a top-down evaluation of policy success to examine the micro-processes through which rural entrepreneurship is socially constructed. Artisans are thus understood not as passive beneficiaries of state intervention but as active agents who interpret schemes, adapt selectively and embed economic decisions within moral and cultural frameworks.

Last but not the least, the transformation of traditional industries in Nadia and Burdwan districts emerge as a culturally mediated and socially negotiated process rather than a straightforward outcome of economic modernization. Government schemes such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission, Aajeevika and Anandadhara have undeniably expanded access to credit, training and markets. Yet their impact depends fundamentally on how they are interpreted within local knowledge systems and everyday practices. Sustainable rural entrepreneurship, therefore, requires policy frameworks that are not only economically sound but also culturally responsive recognizing the indigenous methods, social relations and shared meanings that underpin the resilience of Nadia and Burdwan's traditional craft sectors.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that the transformation of traditional craft industries in Nadia district is fundamentally a social and cultural process, shaped by everyday meaning-making as well as economic structures and government interventions. While schemes such as NRLM, Aajeevika and Anandadhara have contributed positively to skill development, financial inclusion and women's participation, their outcomes are mediated by how artisans interpret and integrate these interventions into their lived realities.

The study demonstrates that rural entrepreneurship is produced through routine practices, shared typification and collective interpretations that define what is perceived as feasible, risky or desirable. Artisans do not passively respond to policy frameworks; instead, they actively construct their entrepreneurial choices through community-based reasoning rooted in trust, past experiences and social norms. Consequently, policy effectiveness depends not only on technical design but on alignment with the everyday methods through which rural actors organize their social world.

At the same time, the study underscores the importance of indigenous methodology in understanding rural livelihoods. Traditional industries in Nadia are sustained through indigenous knowledge systems that integrate economic activity with cultural identity, social relations and moral values. Sustainable development, therefore, cannot be achieved by replacing these systems but by working with them recognizing artisans as knowledge holders and co-creators of development pathways.

In conclusion, the study highlights that rural entrepreneurship in Nadia and Burdwan should be understood not as a transition from tradition to modernity, but as a negotiated process of continuity and change. Effective policy interventions must engage with the lived experiences, cultural meanings and indigenous knowledge that structure everyday economic life. By integrating ethnomethodology and indigenous methodology, the research provides a theoretically grounded and culturally sensitive understanding of rural transformation one that has significant implications for inclusive development policy, future research and participatory planning in traditional craft economies.

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