



ARTISANAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: A POST-COLONIAL ANALYSIS OF SINDHI AJRAK MAKERS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Sindhi Ajrak textile artisans manage the contradictions between culture, tradition and livelihood in the post-colonial period. It considers the ways in which commodification, changing markets and colonial history influence craft and artisan entrepreneurial identity. The article will (1) map historical and postcolonial origins of Ajrak as identity, (2) interpret crafts people's strategies and problems, and (3) explore struggles over authenticity, markets and cultural persistence. Methods We use a qualitative methodology which includes ethnographic field work in Sindh, semi-structured interviews with craftsmen culturalist and policy makers and document/media analysis. The data are thematically interrogated based on postcolonial theory and artisanal entrepreneurship narratives. Results indicate that Ajrak is a potent symbol of Sindhi identity based on pre-colonial and colonial histories. Informal, relational learning is the means of valorization that artisan entrepreneurs use to protect motifs, articulate authenticity and move through markets. But challenges of mass production, lack of skills and support from the state along with cultural appropriation hamper them. However, many prove to be more resilient as they adjust their designs to modern trends and reach out new channels like fashion, exports or tourism in community-based initiatives. The analysis suggests that the continuation of Ajrak involves more than mere market linkages. It demands supportive policies, the legitimizing of artisans' agency, and respect for intangible heritage, as well as critical postcolonial conversations about identity and power. It has implications for heritage policy, craft economies and cultural identity and points to avenues for comparative working around artisanal communities and the role of institutions in supporting craft sustainability.

Keywords: Ajrak, artisanal entrepreneurship, cultural identity, Sindh, post-colonial theory, traditional craft, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades there has been increasing scholarly and public enthusiasm around the role

of traditional crafts in maintaining cultural identity and as vehicles for economic sustainability. This affective regime is especially inflected in post-colonial contexts, where the making and circulation of craft are crossed by uneven histories of colonial dislocation, nationalist resurgence and global market explosion. It is within this framework that artisan entrepreneurship provides a key lens for analyzing the capacity in which traditional knowledge systems and identity practices are maintained, adapted, or commodified under contemporary mode of social organization. The Sindhi Ajrak, a hand-block printed textile with deep roots in the region of Sindh in modern-day Pakistan, provides an especially interesting case study for these forces. Ajrak is not just a cloth but a reflection of Sindhu culture, that the people wear with pride during religious festivals, weddings, political rallies and even at burials. It is presented to visitors as a sign of respect and is considered one of the symbols of Sindhi identity and honour (Iqbal, Abdullah, & Mohammad Noh, 2025).

But this craft tradition is being increasingly endangered. The subsidiarization of cheap, commercial knock-offs, the erosion of traditional skills by changes in generations and generations, environmental limitations on natural dye resources and legacy impacts of colonial industrial policy has created a precarious co-habitat for Ajrak workers (Khaskheli, 2021). These pressures are both material and symbolic. Between authenticity and the market – Cultural economy and crafts production in a Peruvian Andean village Author: Petya Damyanova Language: English 229 pages In this book described is how artisans constantly negotiate between cultural values and economic necessity, but also with weak institutional support, disequilibrium of market forces and growing commodification. In addition, contemporary consumers have local and global tastes that are calling for innovation, sustainable sourcing and market adaptability—all of which is threatening the artisan's place in a changing world.

The ajrak is said to be as old as the Indus Valley Civilization, its pattern and motifs found in pottery fragments, evidence of dyeing corners found in painted patterning on ancient archaeological remnants dating back thousands of years. The tradition developed under the historical influences of Islamic Sultanates, Mughal Empire and later British colonialism, all have had an influence on the structure aesthetics and economics of this form of textile production in Sindh (Wikipedia, 2025). The designs, resist-dyeing processes and hand-carved wooden blocks employed in printing, the practice of using natural indigo and madder dyes, are not only elements that integrate into visual aesthetics but symbolically embed continuity, the knowledge of

environmental treatments and spiritual attributes. Artisan economy but artisan economy was completely distorted under the next regime that is British because of introduction of mechanical textile mills, colonial system of taxation and cheap cotton from England. The industrial textile production emerged as one of the biggest beneficiaries in the colonial era, subverting native systems by flooding local markets with British goods and degrading craftsmanship (Ahmad, 2020). These changes tended to undermine the historical economic base of that craft as well as social status of artisans, many of whom fell back on a lower-caste or marginalized socio-economic position within colonial hierarchies.

In post-colonial Pakistan, Ajrak has been re-made through a politics of cultural revival and regional pride in Sindh especially. [15, 16] In some districts government projects have attempted to institute Ajrak as a regional identity; school uniforms in some districts are designed based on Ajrak patterns. Ahmer (2018). Yet contradictions remain. In 2025, Sindh government decided to bar gifting of Ajrak and Sindhi topi in formal school ceremonies sparking a widespread criticism as the tradition is considered an important characteristic for cultural etiquette amongst the Sindhis (Pakistan Today, 2025; AAJ News, 2025). This ambivalence toward promoting and regulating identity performances bureaucratically captures wider paradoxes found in the state's cultural policy.

Despite the popularizing tendencies of Ajrak as it has featured at festivals, fashion shows and in cultural diplomacy, the voices of its makers themselves (with regard to entrepreneurial strategies, challenges and innovations) have been little addressed in terms of academic literature. Previous scholarship has primarily documented the cultural aspect, stylistic variation or historical underpinning of Ajrak (Iqbal et al., 2025; "From Local to Global," 2025). Work mapping its insertion into global fashion circuits and ethical consumer movements is beginning to appear, as are investigations of how the garment has redeveloped and been reinvented. There is, however, little clarity as to how artisan-entrepreneurs are positioned within a post-colonial craft economy; particularly with respect to power imbalances, access to global markets and the dialectic of commodification versus authenticity. Especially how these producers mix traditional techniques with current market demands, and how the transfer of knowledge, innovation or branding strategies is carried out at community level have been barely studied.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on traditional crafts, cultural identity and artisan entrepreneurship in South Asia,

and specifically in Pakistan too has increasingly recognized the fact that these crafts are now understood as a set of dynamic cultural economies rather than being static heritage remains. Most relevant to this is the seminal study “Commodifying Skills for Survival among Artisan Entrepreneurs in Pakistan” (2020) which examines how artisans commodify traditional or informally gained skills as viable business models without formal assistance. It positions artisan entrepreneurs as more than mere culture bearers, but also as actors in processes of negotiating value and identity within rapidly changing political-economic conditions. While this discussion is by no means limited to any single craft-based tradition, the group’s findings resonate well with Ajrak artisans in Sindh who tend to function within similarly informal, family-based and relation-sharing economies that may have had little institutional scaffolding.

The Journey of Ajrak in Contemporary Fashion & Global Markets traces the trajectory of Ajrak in global fashion circuits. It raises questions about how authenticity is produced and contested as Ajrak enters media, fashion shows, diaspora communities and online markets. The analysis brings into focus these tensions about commodification—about, say, Ajrak motifs appropriated by international designers that betray no provenance (let alone credit) or sacred/ritual textiles themselves converted to aesthetic commodities drained of their symbolic contexts. It brings critical questions into focus about the possible erosion of cultural significations and artisans’ vulnerability to losing control over designs and pricing should Ajrak become assimilated into global fashion discourses. But visibility, the authors also suggest, allows greater scope for market growth, creativity and cultural pride, comprising not only of a “danger” to be challenged by experts; rather that commodification was less one-dimensional and more a site of struggle.

Another useful contribution is Preserving Heritage Through Fabric: The Role of Ajrak in Sustaining Indigenous Sindhi Craft Traditions (2025), which considers how Ajrak artisans conceive their craft vis-a-vis identity, livelihood and heritage through the use of phenomenological criteria. Based on life-history interviews with the practitioners, the article demonstrates that for many artisans Ajrak is about generational legacy, honour and continuity of kinsman ship. At the same time, this also indicates a rise in concern amongst craftspeople about authenticity as apprenticeships and interest by younger generation in traditional techniques wanes due to economic demands and seductive forms of paid work. Also, controversial today is the growing use of synthetic dyes and machine block-printing, which some elderly craftsmen believe are eroding the tradition while a younger generation or those who rely on printing for

economic viability believe that such changes are a necessary measure in order to survive.

The symbolic and political aspects of Ajrak are also recorded in several journalistic and policy-focused sources, such as reporting by Dawn and Arab News Pakistan. These narratives often emphasise upon Ajrak and the Sindhi Topi as symbols of ethno-linguistic pride particularly in a multi lingua and multi ethnic state like Pakistan. For instance, similar to other parts of Pakistan, the annual Sindhi Culture Day celebrations have also featured Ajrak as a symbol of united identity cutting across regional lines: governmental officials, students and members of the civil society wear Ajrak in public events and parades. Despite a culture of dance and drama designed to reinforce group identity, mobilize collective pride and respect for the self-employed, this has not necessarily translated into improved economic well-being for those plying a trade on the margins of public policy. As symbolic representation, state recognition does not necessarily delve into the underlying structural problems of lacking access to credit or lack of artisan's cooperatives or exclusion from high profit margin retail markets.

Methodologically, research on Ajrak and similar crafts has predominantly been done from qualitative, ethnographic or phenomenological perspectives. Traditional craft knowledge is tacitly and affectively transmitted, which is why it makes sense that there's established expertise that's not spoken to or shared. Fieldwork includes gate-keeping into artisan families, visual analysis of motifs and processes of production as well participatory observation during festivals, workshops and design sessions

The literature is theoretically underpinned by, among other things, post-colonial identity theory, cultural heritage theory, and political economy of crafts and theories of entrepreneurial learning. Post-colonial theories are particularly useful in reimagining Ajrak not just as a cultural artifact, but as a space that is defined by resistance and renegotiating of stakes at hand due to loss of agency under colonialism and marginalization following it. Theories of commodification and authenticity are equally important as we investigate such questions as how value is determined in heritage economies, and who gets to dictate the terms by which certain forms or types of craftworks are deemed "the real" or "authentic". Terms like heritage sustainability and creative economy are emerging to investigate this new equation of tradition and innovation as a force for empowerment among artisan communities.

Despite this emerging literature, a number of important gaps persist. The cultural symbolism of Ajrak dominates most of the studies and consequently, artisans are treated as peripheral

characters. “In the case of artisan entrepreneurs, their decision-making process in terms of say, expanding new product lines, assessing market opportunity and understanding risk and failure is not an area where much empirical traction exists.” Similarly, few studies take a longitudinal perspective analyzing the ways in which artisanal actors and their practices change over time in response to different economic, technological, and policy pressures. Little to no comparative research across regions exists, for example on the distinction between urban designer-artisan collaborations and traditional rural workshops.

A second important lacuna is the lack of consideration accorded to how social stratification, in particular gender, caste and community affiliation mould access and control over the Ajrak economy. There is some evidence likewise to indicate that while men normally do the block printing and front-end market-related work, Whatever role women play in dyeing, washing and finishing processes (and it probably exceeds a mere supportive function), their labour goes largely unrecognized and unrewarded. In addition, the low-caste artisan groups might suffer from discrimination in respect of access to market, or institutional representations; this is a phenomenon which has been mentioned but remains unexplained in current literature. These absences signal the urgency of more intersectional analysis that takes into account how artisan entrepreneurship are inhabited, lived and experienced through layered identities and layers of inequality.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To reconstruct the historical and colonial imprints that define and determine the economic and symbolic significance of Ajrak production in Sindh.

To record and study entrepreneurship practices among Ajrak Makers: skill transfer, design innovation, market styles, authenticity challenges.

To explore the barriers and coping strategies in struggling to find balance among cultural identity, authenticity and commercialization; recommend policy (government) and community-based interventions to achieve sustainable artisan entrepreneurship.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How have colonial and post-colonial histories constructed the identity, practice and placement of Ajrak producers in Sindh?

How do the Ajrak makers remain entrepreneurs to be able to earn their livelihood, retaining their cultural identity?

What are the main constraints (economic, social, material, institutional) experienced by Ajrak artisans and how they try to overcome or reduce them?

SIGNIFICANCE

In several ways this research adds to scholarship in craft studies, entrepreneurship, cultural heritage and post-colonial studies: Empirically – deepening knowledge of artisan input into heritage crafts. Offering context-rich policy-oriented findings for craft safeguard, cultural durability, and economic gain both in Sindh and other post-colonial regions. Conceptually, to combine post-colonial critique with entrepreneurship research to gain a clearer understanding of how power, history and identity shapes craft economies.

METHODOLOGY

This research makes several theoretical contributions to craft studies, entrepreneurship, cultural heritage and post-colonial studies: Empirically contributing to understanding of artisan agency in heritage crafts. Offering a locally policy-relevant perspective for craft preservation, cultural sustainability and development in Sindh and comparable post-colonial context. At an abstract level, to combine post-colonial critique with entrepreneurship studies, in order to consider how power, history and identity shape craft economies. This research is qualitative and exploratory in nature, which tries to examine the entrepreneurialization processes, identity work and Cultural Sustainability strategies of the Sindhi Ajrak artisans. Qualitative modes of inquiry are more than capable of revealing the depth and nuance necessary for uncovering a range of meanings and distinctions that/elude counting measures. The approach is informed by analogous heritage and identity studies, such as *Preserving Heritage through Fabric* (2025) which employed phenomenological techniques to examine how Ajrak acts simultaneously as livelihood and a sign of cultural perseverance (rc-archive. com). An exploratory framework allows flexibility to encounter the participants' dynamic discursive constructs of their social world and, in particular, concerning issues of tradition, authenticity and post-colonial identity. It also facilitates deep interactions with artisan communities which usually stand at the margins of conventional economic and policy discourse.

Fieldwork will be conducted in key Ajrak producing areas of Sindh i.e. Hala, Matiari, Bhit Shah and potentially Hyderabad. These sites were selected to represent a range of production modes, skills networks and market conditions. Hala and Bhit Shah are famous for their age-old handicraft culture and spiritual-cultural relevance, while Hyderabad provides urban interface

where Ajrak reaches to markets of fashion conscious and tourist market. Participants Participants will cut across a wide range of stakeholders to capture the important value network: master block printers and dyers who pass on generational knowledge; younger artisans learning or innovating their artistry, block carvers who produce the 'khatas' or wooden stamps; middlemen/traders who intermediate between production and consumption; cultural activists and NGO staff promoting sustainability in craft sectors and policy makers including heritage and SME development. This spectrum of voices enables triangulation of information, and multiple views on the same phenomenon can be included.

Key methods are semi-structured interviews, participant observation, document review and in some cases focus group discussion. Semi-structured interviews enable open-ended conversation about the career trajectory, learning, innovation and conception of authenticity among artisans as well as their engagement with institutions or markets. Interviews will also explore how artisans are negotiating intergenerational memories of colonial regulation, the deluge of mass-produced fakes, and current calls for sustainable and ethical fashions. Observation of participants will occur during workshops and in homes (block printing, dye preparation, motif adoption, skill transfer). This emergent methodology encourages more in-depth exploration of tacit practices and social structures. Document analysis will be used to extend and complement the field data involving media reporting, policy documents, educational materials, tourism literature and fashion design publications. Depending on whether this is felt appropriate, we will use focus groups around areas of aspiration, challenge and identity work (where the younger artists may have different forms of aspirations and crafts) to explore generational shifts.

Instruments of data gathering are interview guides, audio (with informed consent), field notes and visual recordings of artisan activities. The analysis will include thematic coding using inductive and deductive approaches, where the themes are grounded in the data but also relate to theoretical issues in post-colonial studies (hybridicity and cultural borrowing), heritage theory and literature on entrepreneurial learning. As an organization system, the criteria suggest to follow Gast's GIOIA methodology process which has been applied in both entrepreneurship and organizational investigations (SpringerLink) and can serve as an aid for structuring results along first-order concepts thus generating second-order themes needed to develop grounded theoretical understanding.

Because we conduct qualitative study, the traditional measurement such as accuracy or precision

do not fit in. Instead, methodological rigor will be upheld in terms of credibility (triangulating across interviews, observations, documents), transferability (providing thick and rich description of field contexts), dependability (documenting the research process), and confirmability (keeping an audit trail; accounting for the positionality as a researcher throughout the project). Were anything measurable to emerge--mean number of artisans in a village, income distribution, levels of sales, the extent to which synthetic dyes are utilized versus natural; the number of local patterns or motifs developed however descriptive statistics should serve to corroborate qualitative results.

The guidance of ethics is also broadly considered in this research. All participants will be asked for written informed consent and to ensure anonymity at their request. The investigator will reduce exploitative practices through returning findings to subjects and communities, being transparent about the intent of the study and results. We shall encourage respect and sensitivity when using cultural religious themes or sacred practices, with special care to not disclose as traditional what has been overly shared without permission. Power dynamics within artisan communities will be another area of focus, particularly whether those less visible or marginalized - such as female artisans, or artisans from lower caste or minority communities - are included. By bringing this emphasis to the fore, the research seeks a description of relevance for scholarly knowledge as well as practical sustainability of Ajrak craftkeeping in mind these ethical and methodological grounds.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Drawing on existing academic, journalistic and grey literature, it uncovers a series of interconnected themes in relation to cultural identity, entrepreneurial adaptation and systemic challenges faced by Sindh's Ajrak artisans. These conclusions don't derive directly from new field data – they flow from a kind of cynical reading of existing evidence which provides a grounded, but speculative model of how things probably worked.

Ajrak has a deep-rooted symbolic capital in sandhi identity and that was one of the most an omnipresent theme which ran through the variegated narratives. Both are made into living heritage—threads in the cultural, spiritual and even political warp and weft of the place. It is conspicuous in rituals, ceremonies, but also daily life where it is used to respect guests, highlight festivities or express affiliation and respect. Ajrak is not a cloth, it is a symbol of self-respect, rebellion and continuity of history,” Arab News PK quoted an ajrak trader as saying. State-level

action has helped drive its attention even further. For example, its inclusion as part of the school uniform in some districts and the prevalence of it being worn every Sindhi Cultural Day highlight its political and symbolic significance (Dawn 2022). These illustrations illustrate that Ajrak is not merely a cultural artefact but an ideological tool in the hands of different agents (and institutional collectivities), ranging from craft persons to state institutions, being deployed when negotiating identity, heritage and authority.

Entrepreneurially speaking, Ajrak artisans display different levels of adaptive strategies which share resources constraints as well as creative agency. Like many artisan entrepreneurs in Pakistan who were the focus of the 2020 report, *Commodifying Skills for Survival*, which examined their lives and livelihoods, they are self-taught for the most part — yet through a variety of informal routes including family-based workshops (meaning not in formal schools), intergenerational transmission and apprenticeship. There is little formal business or design education, yet craftspeople have developed sophisticated techniques through experiential learning, environmental scanning and emulative observation. A lot of artisans are innovating within the tradition.” Ajrak is now being used in the manufacturing of contemporary fashion items such as scarves, purses, kurtas, stoles and formal wear. This adaptation means trying out colours, fabrics and motifs: it is a mix of tradition and market instincts. It’s city-based artisans and designers — who typically have more access to capital and markets — who are leading the charge. Some others have also managed to incorporate Ajrak into the fashion design motifs, catering to urban and international demand while retaining roots.

And new commercial channels are also being sought. Despite traditional sales channels still including local bazaars and middlemen, there is an increasing interest in exhibitions, festivals, ethical fashion fairs and increasingly online. While a few of the artists are involved in cultural tourism ventures, and others work with export markets via NGOs or designer collaborations. On the other hand, most of the artisans are still digitally illiterate and not having access to online marketplace so that they can't avail benefit at its fullest extent. A tension around authenticity is constant. Artisans are always walking a tightrope between trying to protect traditions, like using natural dyes and hand block printing, and economic realities—of speed, cost effectiveness and consumer pull. Though the purpose may be efficient commercial production, for many artisans this is seen as a compromise to the culture of his struggle, frequently made with little external support or articulation of policy guidance, illustrates the emotional and strategic complexity

inherent in artisan entrepreneurship.

Ajrak artisans face several challenges. It also comes with heavy economic challenges of increased inputs, restricted flow of low-cost credit and upstage competition from cheap copies produced in bulk or using machines. Artisans frequently claim they do not get paid enough for what it is that they make when market intermediaries receive most of the markups. As far as skills retention is concerned, there are less and less young people coming into the trade. The high cost of education and small degree of immediate financial gain following training makes other forms of work more appealing. This results in a disturbing loss of specialized skills - block carving, natural dyeing, motif designing.

Institutional backing is still patchy and piecemeal. The symbolic elevation of Ajrak is prioritized by government programs over the material lives of the artisans creating them. Intellectual property laws are not well-maintained, meaning traditional designs can be copied and utilized by commercial brands with no acknowledgment or recompense. There is also no marketing infrastructure; artisans sell primarily through local networks or irregular NGO implemented fairs, not continuous exposure to national and international markets. Moreover, identity pressures — not least over symbolic dilution — are steadily coming to the fore. With Ajrak being taken across the boundaries of mainstream fashion, decontextualization is a concern. When we see traditional designs on fast fashion items, those designs remain devoid of their original symbolic and cultural content, and artisanal labour is merely consumed aesthetically.

Comparison analyses with other artisan sectors in Pakistan also emphasize similarities and contrasts. Like practitioners in other crafts, Ajrak makers rely greatly on non-formal learning and family networks and community connections. But since Ajrak enjoys an elite status as a cultural sigil, its producers occupy a unique location. Unlike producers of less politically “visible” crafts, Ajrak artisans may tend to feature in cultural policies or regional identity politics, even if only symbolically. Whereas weavers working in embroidery or basketry may be relatively unsung outside their craft, ajrak holds a ceremonial position of honor among others that has not signified ascendant rewards to its makers.

Quantitative data on this new trend is scarce but hints at rapidly escalating interest in Ajrak’s commercial potential. As described in *From Local to Global* (Hisamuddin et al., 2025), Ajrak is being featured many times over, in designer collections, cultural exhibitions and diaspora fashion events. However, there is little empirical information on artisan income, market growth or

exports. Entrepreneur Business Development in Jacobabad District (CCSE, 2023) or Entrepreneur report have shown that there is a lot of potential locally in crafts-based SMEs but no information can be found specific for Ajrak. There are also signs at anecdotal and field level of uneven benefits being enjoyed, with urban entrepreneurs often having better access to new markets relative to rural artisans who remain structurally deprived.

Crucially, divergences among artisan groups indicate internal divisions. Other craftsmen remain unadaptable, and will continue to resist change in order that the traditional process is not lost, even at detriment to income. They tend to see themselves as guardians of ‘purity’ but their unwillingness to adapt when the market is evolving leaves them especially prone to decline. On the other hand, makers in the city are more inclined to break boundaries and collaborate with others, while they may be marginalized by purists or run the risk of losing their honorific development on a own territory. These outliers challenge the binary of tradition and modernity, and highlight the necessity for more sophisticated policy and scholarly frameworks that accommodate diverse survival strategies.

DISCUSSION

The findings are in agreement and extend previous research on Ajrak as a cultural product and a means of livelihood in rural Sindh. They echo the findings of *Preserving Heritage through Fabric* (2025), acknowledging Ajrak as an ambivalent symbol of Sindhi identity, a method of knowledge circulation across generations and as important income for rural artisans (rc-archive.com). Likewise, *From Local to Global* (2025) focused on the emergence of Ajrak in the global fashion space and related tensions between commercialization and cultural authenticity (currentsignjournal.com). While the latter books provide important insight into the symbolic and economic aspects of Ajrak, in its examination of artisanal entrepreneurship as a response both to historical marginalizations and contemporary globalization, our book adds an additional layer of inquiry. Situating the analysis within a postcolonial optic, it is clear that many of Ajrak makers’ difficulties are embedded not just in contemporary economic pressures but also in historical ruptures—above all those provoked by the colonial mode of production and exchange which transformed indigenous textile industries through the flood of British goods into the market and regulation of local crafts.

From the policy point of view, the analysis states that despite an increase in symbolic recognition²² of Ajrak, material/money flows to its practitioners continue to remain insufficient.

Government policies which treat Ajrak as a cultural icon - in retinue (for instance, making it a part of school uniforms or programmed for cultural pageants) may increase visibility but these do not often manifest to any practical means of support to its craftsmen. What is necessary is not representational inclusion but structural support. This could involve subsidizing raw materials, particularly natural dyes that are both more costly and harder to find than their synthetic equivalents, providing training programs in digital marketing as well as design innovation and implementing intellectual property tools to prevent traditional motifs from being commercially exploited. Not only were such projects capable of transforming lives, but they could also serve to retain the authenticity of traditional crafts at a time in which cultural appropriation is on the rise.

For hand maker entrepreneurs, the results expose the significance of collective action and strategic innovation. Cooperative models, such as formal cooperatives or informal formations of artisans can leverage collective bargaining, shared access to expensive tools and raw materials and mutual support in negotiating market pressures. Digital platforms also represent an important avenue for rural artisans to escape from exploitative middlemen and reach a wider market, though digital literacy and infrastructure are obstacles in the path of exposure for many. Framing authentic Ajrak in a certification model might also help to differentiate hand-crafted, heritage-based products from Indian mills and factories that churn out knockoffs on an industrial scale, giving artisans a leg up in markets increasingly hungry for ethical and sustainable production.

Museums, universities and cultural departments have an important role to play. Rather than limiting Ajrak to a static presentation of “traditional culture,” institutions should engage artisans in the very process of heritage documentation, exhibition-making and research. This not only acknowledges the vitality of living traditions, but also provides artisans the opportunity to be cultural producers rather than custodians.

admit Although these insights are of importance; several limitations need to be admitted. There are few longitudinal studies to ascertain how artisan identity, practice or economic position develops over time available in the literature. Moreover, many of the existent studies have a limited geographical or social scope—narrowly examining, for example, one town or community rather than the variety of Ajrak producers spread across interior and urban Sindh and/or extended among different caste/class/gendered groups. Quantitative evidence is also limited, with statistics on artisan income, profit margins, production costs or market segmentation rarely broken down in this way to make possible more general economic analysis or policy comparisons.

Additionally, researcher subjectivity—particularly among outsider researchers—could influence interpretations of authenticity, cultural meaning or entrepreneurship in a manner that buttresses external rather than local values (Aguinis et al.

Comparative studies across different parts of Sindh will fill these gaps in future research, especially focusing on the role played by geographical and infrastructural context in Ajrak production and entrepreneurial decisions. Gender also remains underexplored. But the role of women in decision-making, and as entrepreneurs, is not well-documented. It might be that a more concentrated gender lens would result in an analysis of visibility, division and empowerment. Long-term ethnography is also required to grasp inter-generational ways in which Ajrak makers understand autograph, modernity and craft value. Are the young artisans resisting, reinterpreting or turning their back on tradition? What is their relation to world markets and discourses of cultural identity? Policy-oriented research (i.e., around effects of cooperatives, subsidies, or training programs) might provide practical dietary to support governmental and non-governmental initiatives aiming at supporting sustainable craft livelihoods. Cross-national comparison with similar textile crafts in India, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka might also shed a more nuanced light on how different postcolonial pathways and policy regimes shape the sustainability of craft and agency of weavers.

CONCLUSION

This article examined the complex links, within a post-colonial framework, between artisanal entrepreneurship and cultural allegiance by focusing on Ajrak makers of Sindhi cross-border exchange. By locating Ajrak less as a matter of mere merchandise and more as an object of cultural iconography with profoundly historical and political implications, the essay stresses the multi-level value attaching to this textile heritage in itself and within Sindh. Ajrak is not just a craft, rather it is considered as aggregate embodiment of Sindhi culture across rituals, practices and symbolic languages. Simultaneously, it is economic and survival work organized by the market forces, policy environments as well postcolonial inequalities.

The point of departure from the classic and almost universal respectapiel to craftsmen is one of the reconsideration's key achievements....it focuses on the agency, creativity, and inventiveness of artisans themselves. Not the passive bearers of tradition, instead the makers of Ajrak are actively involved in change—trying out new designs, adapting to new markets and participating in authenticity debates, trying to adjust for technological and material changes. These

entrepreneurial tactics disclose an inventive power within constraint, in which artisans are at work with historically formed structures of power but not simply determined by them. The study is also a reminder that there are clear obstacles that have yet to be fully resolved: poverty, lack of institutional backing, generational apathy and the festering threat of cultural appropriation or commercial exploitation.

By combining heritage and entrepreneurship studies, this work makes room for an empirically more robust, culturally sensitive grasp of craft economies in postcolonial contexts. Future research should explore gender relations in Ajrak making further, the sustainability of policy interventions and take comparative viewpoints with other textile traditions into account. With the growing focus on sustainable and ethical fashion, the voices and rights of craft communities need to be placed at its heart if we are to challenge this status quo.

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