

Women, Craft, and Empowerment: The Role of Bead and Zari Jewelry Making in the Bhil Community

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the correlation between the status of women empowerment, traditional craft skills, and the sustainability of culture among the tribal community of western India's Bhils. It specifically focuses on bead and zari jewelry craft production and the ways in which members from such indigenous communities adapt to and interact with socio-economic conditions such as obtaining economic autonomy and retaining traditional cultural elements through their craft traditions. A qualitative research approach was adopted for this research project and included interviews and observations. In this study, the sample included 60 women from three separate Bhil villages. For this study, a qualitative framework for analysis was adapted and supplemented with a SWOT analysis for enhancing strategic insights.

Findings from this research show that jewelry production is not only one of the important means for generating much-needed income but is also utilized as a tool for building community relationships and unity among the female social groups. It is apparent from this evidence that craft production is one means by which women play significant roles in gaining greater freedom and strength in decision-making while having greater self-confidence and securing recognition within a male-dominated social environment. In contrast to this significant potential and growth, this research highlights various constraints such as limited market access and diminished recognition for handmade products that block the full potentiality for commercial expansion and growth. However, bead and zari handicraft production continues to be an important platform within this community for gaining greater personal freedom and growth while retaining this cultural heritage. This research highlights the vital need for developing and supporting such micro-sectors and joint entrepreneurial activities within this marginalized community for achieving full-fledged growth and justice within this gender-balanced environment.

Keywords: Bhil community; women's empowerment; bead jewelry; zari work; indigenous crafts; cultural sustainability; rural livelihoods; gender studies, women's artisans, ethnographic research, craft-based livelihoods..

1. INTRODUCTION:

Research focusing on the nexus between artisanality, women empowerment, and the retention of traditional culture has gained prominence within the realm of anthropology and gender studies (Sahu and Tiwary, 2024). In this regard, the functionalism that prevades various artisan activities is complemented by the recognition and acknowledgment that craft is a social and cultural process that represents community memory and cultural expression (S, 2024). On the other hand, within several indigenous setups and cultures across the globe, arts and cultural expression can be perceived and understood as a tool for negotiating gender definitions and parameters within the context of male-dominated settings (Saxena and Mathur, 2025). This particular study aims to represent and add to the discourse within this field by focusing on the specific context and instance of bead and zari jewelry-making among the community of Bhil women found within western India.

1.1 Women, Craft, and Empowerment

Empowerment through craft is generally understood to be a complex process that encompasses economic freedom and resilience and political engagement (Kabeer, 2005). As aptly pointed out by Dhriti Dhaundiyal and Surekha Dangwal (2024), handicrafts for rural women represent a dual function that provides a necessary means for income and provides cultural dimensions for women from the perspective of agency and recognition. Related research within the context of the Indian state demonstrates that womxn members within self-help groups and cooperatives increase decision-making power and empower womxn with respect to decision-making and management roles within communities (Women Empowerment and Development, Arts and Handicraft, 2025). Craft activities represent a mechanism for developing and advancing feminist discourses and acting as a means for women to exercise their

agency within dominant-value chain networks traditionally dominated by men (Women Empowerment and Development, Arts and Handicrafts, 2025). Active participation within local economic cooperatives and training gives women greater advantage and provides them with the capacity for personal resilience and capacity for negotiations within a traditionally male-dominated economy (Kumar and Jain, 2023). However, empowerment initiatives exist with limitations for implementative initiatives such as lack of market access to handicraft products and a lack of recognition for handicraft products and lack of support (Li et al., 2025). Empowerment is modeled on three interconnected aspects: material, symbolic, and relational. These aspects represent dynamic processes across changing livelihoods and social identifications. As argued by Cornwall (2016), empowerment means more than the simple attainment of resources and instead includes the ability to shape and convert decision alternatives into desired outcomes. In the context of craft economies, such abilities and functions occur through three key processes: embodied skills, inter-generational knowledge transfer, and adaptation (Mahalingam and Leu, 2005).

1.2 Indigenous Women Artisans and Cultural Sustainability

In a socio-cultural setting that is inclusive of tribal/indigenous communities, women's handicraft skills play a pivotal role in fostering cultural uniqueness and inter-generational knowledge transfer (Peseyie & Gaur, 2025). Traditional jewelry design and production, cloth design and production, and beadwork serve as critical tools for the preservation and transfer of cultural traditions, expression of local culture and faith-based tenets, and facilitation of sustainability. Research on indigenous art entrepreneurship within academia suggests that women's traditional skills can be harnessed for the dual objectives of autonomy and cultural revitalization (Prabhakar et al., 2023).

For instance, the beadwork done by the Maasai community of Kenya is perceived to be a means for managing finances and sharing power, while Van Gujjar women in the state of Uttarakhand use beads to demonstrate self-expression and political opposition (Dyson, 2015). A similar trend is observed among tribal women from the states of Odisha and Nagaland, for whom activities such as weaving and jewelry design form a bridge for ways-of-income and cultural validation (Amardeep Rabha, 2024). These examples above demonstrate the important position held by women from the indigenous communities within these regions and their ability to sustain cultural traditions while exploring new socio-economic avenues.

1.3 The Bhil Community and Jewelry Traditions

The Bhil community is one of the principal indigenous communities found within the country and is settled in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. The women from the Bhil community are known for their colorful clothes, embroidered work, and beaded jewelry, which represent status and beauty (Vishal Singh Bhadauriya et al., 2025). Bead and zari work is given a separate status with respect to visual representation and is

utilized for its functional and ritualistic needs.

As made clear by the applicable literature on tribal beadwork traditions within the state of Madhya Pradesh, research work has explained the intricacies of glass beads utilized for creating necklaces, earrings, and armlets designed by women from the Bhil and Bhilala tribes. Research highlights the use of glass and plastic beads for generating the woven product and the inclusion of significant motifs and community-based colors (Pachauri, 2014). Matrilineage ensures the continuation of indigenous grammars of aesthetics; however, exposure to the market has been observed to generate hybrids (Mahalingam and Leu, 2005).

Despite the existence of cultural diversity, the Bhil craftsmen remain systemically disadvantaged with regard to remuneration, lack of cooperative formations, and lack of recognition (Gurawa, 2021). In this regard, this current study seeks to examine the reality of marginalisation within indigenous economies by focusing on the undervaluation of handmade crafts within the transforming Indian market environment. Building upon the pioneering work by Kumar and Jain (2023), this current study seeks to examine the dual reality of economic marginalisation and indigenous culture. However, beading and zari jewelry-making is instead a dynamic site of resilience whereby women exercise autonomy and meet modernity on their terms.

2. Research Objectives

1. To examine the ways in which beading and zari jewelry production can facilitate socio-economic upliftment for women from the Bhil community.
2. To determine the significance of traditional craft practices in the preservation of cultural identity and indigenous know-how and transfer methods among the Bhil community.
3. To examine the complex tasks and emerging opportunities that exist for the women of the Bhil community as they strive for the sustainability and development potential that can be created from traditional jewelry-making.

3. Review of Literature

Recent academic interventions within feminist economics, development literature, and cultural anthropology literature have started to examine the interface between women's empowerment and traditional craft traditions with a view to exploring their potential for cultural sustainability. The traditional craft traditions, especially within the rural and tribal communities, represent significant approaches for generating means of living and for developing and sustaining cultural and social innovations (Mayoux, 2011). In contemporary Indian social and cultural settings, women's engagement with handicraft traditions such as embroidery, cloth production, beading, and metalwork represents a complex process involving economic imperatives and gender-based labor and cultural traditions (Ms Jyoti, 2025). The review here attempts a critical analysis of the literature on women and craft-based empowerment and focuses on three interlinked aspects: economic liberation and freedom, social and economic mobilization, and cultural identity and distinction. The argument here is highly

pertinent within the context of beaded and zari jewelry-making among the Bhil women.

3.1 Economic Independence

Economic empowerment is regarded as one among the significant aspects within women's empowerment. It is supported by various important documents such as the World Bank's World Development Report (World Bank, 2012; Gender Equality and Development: Gender Equality and Development Vol. 1 of 2: Main Report, 2025). Income earnings, use of resources, and engagement with the market play a significant role in contributing to women's position within the household and community. Craft activities were regarded as one among the traditional activities employed for flexible earnings by women from ethnic minorities and residing within rural areas (Miedema et al., 2018).

Studies on craft-based livelihood activities among Indian communities show that craft production has a significant impact on employment opportunities for women living in marginalized tribal communities (Yudhishtir Raj Isar et al., 2013). Beading and Zari Work, similar to embroidery and weaving, do not require much investment and make use of traditional knowledge and traditional community-based labor methods (Mehta and Shah, 2015). In the case of women from tribal communities such as the Bhil tribes, beadwork is a big means for them to earn a living (Roy, 2016; Patel, 2019).

The establishment of microenterprises among the craft community has been observed to increase economic autonomy and decision-making power for female entrepreneurs (Mayoux, 2011). SHGs, cooperative members, and craft federation members can further impact women's credit access, material availability, and market reach (NABARD—National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, n.d.). Field research carried out among Rajasthan and Gujarat populations offers concrete evidence from female-headed households involving independent women-based craft-based earnings. It was observed that such households make more substantial contributions to household expenditures, education for children, and health costs. However, various research scholars identify structural factors that restrict women from realizing superior economic potential from craft-based means: market volatility and greater exploitation from middlemen, under-promotion and lackadaisical support for such crafts-based entrepreneurship and products resulting from them (Workshop Proceedings, n.d.). For tribal craftsmen, the difficulties and disadvantages from geographical remoteness and limited cyberspace activities intensify this risk. As such, jewelry production provides some economic freedom for the women from the Bhil community; however, their economic freedom is further limited by market inequality.

3.2 Social Mobility

Further, female engagement with craft production has been found to be highly significant with respect to social status and social mobility. In this research context, social mobility is understood to be a complex concept that pursues economic and social exposure and representation within communal decision-making (Current Challenges to Social Mobility and Equality of Opportunity Centre on Well-Being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal

Opportunity (WISE) Policy Paper, 2022). In patrilineal and tribal societies where activities and freedom of women are strictly abbreviated and controlled (Chant, 2014; Rao, 2015), craft production can be observed to be a sanitized process and means for women to be visible and exposed to public lives.

Research on Indian craft clusters reveals that women artisans gradually take on administrative roles within self-help groups (SHGs), producer organizations, and cooperative bodies and thus trigger changes in dominant gender norms (Karah Mechlowitz et al., 2024). Events such as exhibitions, markets, and capacity-building activities have been discovered to expand women's social reach and interactions to areas outside the village (Dutta, 2018). In communities with indigenous populations, such movement is highly significant given that women living within such backgrounds tend to be marginalized on both gender and ethnic lines (Xaxa, 2004; Bhattacharya & Kesar, 2020). Research among tribal women across two other Indian regions—Western and Central—suggests that the establishment of craft collectives has brought significant improvements to solidarity and interactive capabilities among women participants (Li et al., 2025). The application of joint production facilities encourages the dissemination of information on health indicators, pedagogy approaches, legal rights, and political activism (Li et al., 2025). As has been clarified by Rao (2015): "An increase in women's confidence and their role as economic producers and active citizens has created conditions for more representation on gram sabha and similar community decision-making forums. However, the concept of social mobility through craft is argued to be marked with inconsistencies and frailties." In this respect, the disproportionate share of unpaid household responsibilities carried out by women is argued to be one of the vital contributing elements for the continuation of the so-called "double burden" (Hirway, 2010; Menon, 2018). As pointed out within the literature "The Role of Cultural and Natural Heritage for Climate Action" (2022): "Patriarchal retaliation, limited social mobility, and male dominance within profits remain significant constraints." Thus, while jewelry design can increase the prominence and strength of voice for Bhil women, this simultaneously creates social change within gender discourses.

3.3 Cultural Identity

Traditionally, craft needs to be understood as more than merely a pragmatic practice and needs to be seen to be a powerful tool for articulating cultural sentiment and for inscribing community histories (Dutta, 2018). In various forms of Indigenous culture globally today, motifs for ornamentation and beadwork and other forms of fabric culture possess profoundly complex and layered meanings that intersect with ritual practices and other aspects including kinship and natural environment and cosmic frameworks (Kumar and Jain, 2023). In the context of the Bhil community too, various items of ornament such as beaded jewelry and jewelry made from "zari" possess understood and complex symbolic meanings tied to reproductive capabilities and clan and spiritual protective traditions.

It is widely acknowledged that women play a critical role

within the preservation and transmission of cultural intangible heritage and that this is made possible by their diverse contributions to the craft industry (Kumar and Jain, 2023). Applied skills for beading and other craftwork demonstrate cultural transmission and underpin women's social power within the household. Craftwork also encourages community identity and builds community and resilience to either modernization and migration (Prabhakar et al., 2023). However, market forces begin to introduce complicating factors between traditionalism and innovation and can raise the esteem with which tribal craft is regarded while at the same time reducing cultural specificity and aesthetics (Yudhishtir Raj Isar et al., 2013). Experts state that mainstream designers and the urban market tend to adapt design to the taste needs and preferences of the patron and thus marginalize women as designers (Yudhishtir Raj Isar et al., 2013). At the same time, various research works demonstrate the adaptability of the indigenous women bead-makers (Ota, 2009). Bead and zari jewelry is therefore a dynamic cultural expression that develops with time and meets changing economic and social shifts while still portraying the basic cultural identity. The craftwork offers women from the Bhil community the platform for empowerment.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts an ethnographic methodological framework to explore the interconnectedness of empowering women, traditional handicraft skills, and viable culture in the Bhil society in west India. The ethnographic approach was adopted by the researchers due to the need to know more about the lives of the women artisans, what they thought, and how they dealt with problems in their society and culture (Creswell, 2018). From this work, it is learned that the bead and Zari jewelry-making are activities that are economic in nature as well as a vehicle to keep cultural traditions alive and promote people's empowerment. The results of empowerment are shaped by various socio-economic, cultural, and organizational factors that emanate from the traditional practices of jewelry-making.

4.2 Study Area and Participants

The work was done in the western part of India in three villages where a lot of people make bead and Zari jewelry. The group of 60 craftswomen was chosen to include a variety of ages, marital statuses, levels of education, and years of experience. This strategy permitted the incorporation of women with varied means of support while keeping the concentration on those actively involved in the fabrication of jewelry. Table 1 reflects the demographic profile of the participants. In other words, it portrays the demographic attributes of Bhil women artisans.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile of Participants

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n=60)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	20–30	12	20
	31–40	18	30

	41–50	16	26.7
	51 and above	14	23.3
Marital Status	Married	48	80
	Unmarried	8	13.3
	Widowed	4	6.7
Education Level	No formal education	22	36.7
	Primary	26	43.3
	Secondary and above	12	20
Craft Experience	<5 years	10	16.7
	5–10 years	24	40
	>10 years	26	43.3

The data further indicate that the majority of participants are middle-aged, married, with long experience in artisan activities and limited formal education, thus highlighting the participants' dependence on ancestral skills as a source of livelihood.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through three qualitative techniques to ensure depth and triangulation.

1. Semi-structured interviews: All 60 artisans contributed to a study that explored how artisans experience empowerment, ways they make a living, and their roles in society and culture.
2. Focus group discussions: Six focus groups consisting of 10 members each discussed issues faced by the community, their entry point problems into the market, and how people coordinate their work.
3. Participant Observation allows the people to understand how jewelry is made, what tools are used, and how different communities interact.

Notes from the field, pictures, and casual talks were also recorded in order to learn more about the culture. Table 2 puts in perspective the different tools that were used to collect data and their specific applications.

Table 2. Data Collection Tools and Purpose

Method	Participants	Purpose	Data Type
Semi-Structured Interviews	60 artisans	Explore personal empowerment and livelihood transitions	Qualitative narratives
FGDs	6 groups × 10 members	Identify collective challenges and opportunities	Thematic insights
Participant Observation	3 villages	Document craft process and socio-cultural practices	Field notes, visuals

Taken together, these tools provided a comprehensive understanding of the personal and shared dimensions of Bhil women artisans' empowerment.

4.4 Data Analysis: Thematic and SWOT-Based Framework

Qualitative data analysis was conducted in two phases, integrating both thematic and SWOT analyses. This integration balanced interpretive depth with applied relevance.

Phase 1: Thematic Analysis

The data was transcribed, coded, and organized into themes using the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). These themes represented various dimensions of empowerment, including economic, social, cultural, and institutional. Systematic coding and retrieval of data excerpts were supported by NVivo software.

Phase 2: SWOT Integration

The subjects were later charted within a SWOT table to identify situational catalysts and limitations affecting artisans' empowerment and sustainability results.

The approach used was holistic because it allowed qualitative observations to be converted into actionable development consequences.

Subjects identified through coding were systematically mapped into SWOT categories in order to reveal the internal and external circumstances.

	master y			
Social Empow erment	Collect ive learnin g, decisio n-makin g, peer suppor t	Gender restrictio ns in public mobility	NGO and SHG linkages	Cultura l norms limitin g leaders hip roles
Cultural Sustaina bility	Preser vation of motifs, ritual signifi cance	Lack of docume ntation	Cultural tourism and exhibitio ns	Loss of authent icity throug h imitati on
Instituti onal Support	Emergi ng cooper ative efforts	Inadequ ate access to formal credit	Govern ment craft promoti on schemes	Bureau cratic barriers , inconsi stent fundin g

Table 3. Thematic Coding Framework

Theme	Sub-Themes	Illustrative Codes
Economic Empowerment	Income generation, savings, market participation	“own income”, “financial control”
Social Empowerment	Decision-making, group solidarity, mobility	“speaking in meetings”, “help from women’s group”
Cultural Sustainability	Intergenerational learning, ritual symbolism	“teaching daughters”, “ancestral designs”
Institutional Challenges	Market barriers, lack of support	“low pricing”, “middlemen exploitation”

These subjects reflect a multidimensional form of empowerment where manual activities engender independence, solidarity, and cultural strength in women. Table 4 shows how the results of the study fit into a SWOT framework.

Table 4. Integrated Thematic–SWOT Analysis

Theme	Streng ths	Weakne sses	Opport unities	Threat s
Econom ic Empow erment	Stable income from craft sales, skill	Limited market exposur e, low pricing	Fair-trade and e-commer ce potential	Price exploit ation by middle men

This summary illustrates the complex relationship between Bhil women's strengths and challenges, as well as the external opportunities affecting their ability to make a living through traditional crafts.

4.5 Data Validation

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, multiple validation techniques were used:

- Integration of information obtained through interviews, FGDs, and observations into one triangulated data set.
- Interpretations were checked against participants by way of member checking.
- Discussion among expert evaluators that reduces the influence of an individual's personal bias on research.

By validating these findings through multiple levels, the enhancement of the accuracy of the interpretation and ensuring the authentic representation of the voices of the participants and their lived realities were achieved.

In sum, the research design combines a deep look at the topic with careful analysis by merging theme and SWOT analyses. The study used a dual approach in interpreting the lived experiences of Bhil women artisans and identifying structural factors influencing empowerment and livelihood sustainability. Triangulation and rigorous ethical protocols were utilized to assure credibility, integrity, and significance for scholarship on gender and craft.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Overview of the Analytical Approach

The information gathered through interviews, group discussions, and by watching participants in their natural environment was studied in a two-part analysis that

combined a detailed look at the topics mentioned with an assessment of strengths and weaknesses. This allowed us to understand how people experienced empowerment. It also allowed us to translate the qualitative themes into useful insights for developing livelihoods that last.

This multi-tiered analytical framework ensured that the knowledge of women artisans was captured at both the interpretative and practical levels, in line with the study's objectives related to development and environmental soundness.

5.2 Thematic Findings

Thematic analysis resulted in the identification of four main categories and several subcategories that, together, reflect the complex interplay of various socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors in women's development through jewelry-making. These themes were identified through a variety of research methods, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and direct observations in the field.

Table 5 shows the organization of the ideas based on the coding and understanding of the qualitative data.

Table 5. Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Major Theme	Subthemes	Illustrative Codes	Interpretive Meaning
Economic Empowerment	Skill monetization, income autonomy, financial contribution	“earning my own money”, “control over spending”	Jewelry making as a pathway to financial independence and household influence.
Social Empowerment	Peer networks, mobility, participation in decision-making	“women’s group meetings”, “freedom to travel for fairs”	Strengthened social identity and collective solidarity within the community.
Cultural Sustainability	Ritual craft traditions, intergenerational knowledge	“designs from ancestors”, “teaching daughters”	Craft practices as carriers of cultural memory and indigenous identity.
Institutional Barriers	Market access, pricing inequity, lack of recognition	“middle men set low prices”, “no government help”	Structural limitations that constrain the full realization of empowerment outcomes.

The analysis of these themes shows that Bhil women's empowerment is not a linear process but rather one significantly embedded in deep-seated traditions, societal constraints, and changing livelihood opportunities.

5.3 Theme 1: Economic Empowerment

The most concrete result of making jewelry for the women, as told by their stories, is financial independence. Many of the respondents testified that the income generated through bead and zari work helped to fulfill their family's needs and increased self-respect.

“Earlier, I waited for my husband’s money. Now, I buy groceries from what I earn. It feels like my hands are strong.” (*Participant B12, 38 years*)

Those who could ensure regular orders and also take part in local fairs were more confident in making decisions about their households and their children’s education. The things that influence economic empowerment inside and outside are captured in Table 6.

Table 6. SWOT Summary: Economic Empowerment

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Steady craft-based income	Limited access to urban markets	Expansion through digital and fair-trade channels	Market exploitation by middlemen
Financial decision-making capacity	Lack of pricing knowledge	Skill diversification and branding	Competition from machine-made jewelry

The SWOT profile shows that although craft-based income reinforces autonomy, the economic potential of artisans is still restricted by structural inequities in marketing.

5.4 Theme 2: Social Empowerment

The artisans also reported improved social recognition and mobility by taking part in women's groups, self-help collectives, and fairs. In fact, the making of jewelry brought about social gatherings that promoted cooperation and mutual support among women.

“When we work together, we forget fear. We speak freely, laugh, and decide things ourselves.” (*Participant C04, 45 years*)

This theme is important because it underlines the reshaping of gender dynamics in a traditionally patriarchal setting by group solidarity and visibility in public spaces. The results and problems of social empowerment can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. SWOT Summary: Social Empowerment

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Peer solidarity and mutual support	Gender norms limiting public roles	NGO-led leadership training	Male resistance to women’s decision-

			making
Increased self-confidence and mobility	Unequal domestic workload	Collective marketing and cooperatives	Cultural expectations restricting travel

It was emphasized by the findings that even as solidarity is fostered by collective activities, deep-rooted gender norms still impede leadership and mobility.

5.5 Theme 3: Cultural Sustainability

For the Bhil women, jewelry making is not only a means of livelihood but also a way of preserving their cultural heritage. The pride of being part of a community and the cultural identity are reflected in every bead motif, color pattern, and ritual ornaments.

“The designs I make are from my grandmother’s time; each bead has a story of our tribe.” (*Participant A07, 50 years*)

This theme is a good example of how the indigenous artistic traditions are custodians of intangible heritage that ensure the continuation of cultural identity across generations.

Table 8 presents the SWOT profile of cultural sustainability. This explains the things that influence cultural sustainability inside and outside of the organization.

Table 8. SWOT Summary: Cultural Sustainability

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Continuity of traditional designs	Lack of documentation and digital archives	Cultural tourism and heritage fairs	Loss of authenticity due to imitation
Pride in tribal identity	Limited youth engagement	Government craft preservation schemes	Decline of intergenerational interest

The findings of the analysis revealed that, although artisans maintain strong continuity in certain cultural traditions, the authenticity of Bhil jewellery traditions is threatened by modernization and imitation.

5.6 Theme 4: Institutional Barriers and Support Structures

While there is a cultural and social cohesion among the people, continuous issues of government regulations hinder the possibility of product marketing, credit accessibility, and formal identity. Many respondents cited that government programs either do not reach them or force them to follow procedures that are quite intimidating. "External actors come in and take over our work, but they do not make the actual cost known. We just accept whatever is given to us." (*Participant D09, 35 years*). Nevertheless, emergent collaborations with NGOs and women's Cooperatives carry the potential for improved market participation and more equitable pricing mechanisms.

Table 9 shows the SWOT of the institutions influencing

the livelihoods obtained from jewelry.

Table 9. SWOT Summary: Institutional Factors

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Emerging women’s cooperatives	Lack of financial literacy	Access to microfinance and e-commerce	Bureaucratic hurdles, inconsistent policies
Craft recognized by local NGOs	Limited market negotiation power	Inclusion in rural development programs	Dependence on intermediaries

Given the fact that artisans' agency and economic outcomes are restricted within systemic barriers and unequal market structures, institutional partnerships provide emerging support.

5.7 Cross-Theme Synthesis

The combination of the four themes shows that Bhil women experience multiple pathways to empowerment, stemming from income generation, cultural pride, and community belonging. It is nurtured within collective action and shared resilience, with opportunities to access and act upon them. Traditional crafts can be used as a catalyst for substantial change.

5.8 Summary of Analytical Insights

Integrated analysis reveals that Bhil women accomplish empowerment through three self-reinforcing pathways using bead and Zari jewelry production.

1. Economic Freedom: Direct generation of income builds self-confidence and enhances household decision-making.
2. Social Ties: Negotiation of gender roles, cultivation of solidarity and visibility, and conduct of collective craft activities are strengthened.

These gains, however, are fragile because of a lack of institutional support, market inequities, and the general devaluation of handcraft products. The SWOT synthesis suggests that targeted interventions are necessary to support individuals in this context, such as enhancing skills, strategies for digital marketing, and stronger cooperative networks in order to protect empowerment and future continuity.

In sum, these findings based on theme-based analysis and SWOT considerations indicate that the process of Bhil women's empowerment is embedded in their culture and is shaped by individual agencies and structures. Beyond income generation, jewelry making contributes to increasing autonomy and cultural preservation. Elaboration of such findings and their implications is presented in the next section.

6. Results & Discussion

6.1 Overview

Results have shown that bead and Zari jewelry-making plays a transformative role in reshaping the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of women artisans within the Bhil community. This section outlines four core dimensions of empowerment-economic, social, cultural, and institutional-with participant narratives, interpretation of strengths and weaknesses, and

comparisons to prior scholarship on craft-based livelihoods.

6.2 Economic Empowerment: Income, Autonomy, and Agency

Results indicate that for many Bhil women, jewelry making is a stable source of income. Respondents mentioned the following benefits: having more control over one's own income, an increased ability to save, and a greater potential to contribute to household expenses. These results support earlier research that connects artisanal labor with small-scale economic decision-making.

"Pride is felt when jewelry is sold because it is my earning," said one respondent. "Now my input is sought in financial matters by my family" (Participant E03, 40 years).

Artisans report that gains from craft activities positively impact their families and wider society; however, recurring concerns include lack of profit and exploitation by intermediaries. The main economic empowerment findings and corresponding SWOT indicators are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. Results Summary: Economic Empowerment

Indicators	Observed Outcomes	SWOT Link	Interpretive Insight
Income generation	Regular earnings from jewelry sales	Strength	Enhances economic stability and bargaining power
Control over expenditure	Increased household decision-making	Opportunity	Builds financial literacy and self-confidence
Pricing inequity	Dependence on intermediaries	Weakness	Reduces profit margins and autonomy
Market expansion	Participation in fairs and exhibitions	Opportunity	Enables visibility and new clientele
Price fluctuation	Seasonal instability	Threat	Inconsistent income flow

The findings reveal that whereas income generation enhances women's agency, full economic independence remains curtailed by lingering market asymmetries.

6.3 Social Empowerment: Collective Identity and Mobility

The collaborative production, knowledge exchange, and emergent leadership among Bhil women constitute points of social empowerment. Jewelry production by groups helps create spaces for communal discussion, mutual support mechanisms, and social ties.

"We learn together and share in the excitement of major orders received. It seems we are one big crafting family." (Participant B05, 32 years).

These findings correspond with Nair (2021), who reported that the solidarity of rural women and their enhanced social mobility were facilitated by collaborative craft activities. Growing involvement in village meetings, cultural events, and even local exhibitions indicates changes in gender roles.

The different social empowerment indicators and their SWOT implications are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Results Summary: Social Empowerment

Indicators	Observed Outcomes	SWOT Link	Interpretive Insight
Peer solidarity	Strong group collaboration	Strength	Builds mutual support and informal learning networks
Public visibility	Participation in fairs	Opportunity	Enhances recognition and confidence
Gender barriers	Restricted public roles	Weakness	Cultural expectations still constrain leadership
Leadership potential	Women organizing production groups	Opportunity	Emerging self-management and voice
Male resistance	Domestic conflicts	Threat	Reinforces traditional power hierarchies

The findings indicate a phase of transition characterized by strengthening social networks, though at times traditional gender norms impede women's decision-making participation.

6.4 Cultural Sustainability: Craft as Heritage and Identity

This study shows that Bhil women consider this jewelry-making not just as a means of employment but as a way to retain cultural heritage and keep alive the communal lineage. Traditional ancestral patterns, color, and motifs characteristic of tribal identity are still reproduced by artisans.

"Our identity is reflected in every design. It feels like the mother's story is kept alive" (Participant A02, 55 years). This finding corroborates Datta (2020), who identified traditional handicrafts as "living repositories" of communal heritage. However, younger women are less interested in ancestral designs and may well imitate corporate designs, begging the question of authenticity. Results on cultural sustainability are synthesized in Table 12.

Table 12. Results Summary: Cultural Sustainability

Indicator s	Observe d Outcom es	SWOT Link	Interpretive Insight
Traditiona l design continuity	Use of ancestral motifs	Strength	Reinforces collective identity and heritage
Skill transmissi on	Teaching daughter s	Strength	Maintains intergeneratio nal link
Youth disinterest	Shift to wage labor	Weakness	Cultural dilution risk
Tourism linkages	Exposur e through fairs	Opportuni ty	Promotes cultural visibility
Design imitation	Machine -made copies	Threat	Devalues authenticity

Collectively, findings point to the significant role Bhil women artisans play in preservation against various challenges such as market commercialization and changes within generations.

6.5 Institutional Dimensions: Systems of Support and Constraint

The research portrays a complex institutional landscape. While local NGOs and cooperatives do provide training and exposure, the artisans face a series of administrative drawbacks, limited access to credit, and lack of formal recognition.

"We attend workshops, yet getting a loan or a credit card is difficult. They ask for documents that we are not in possession of" (Participant D06, 36 years).

These findings resonate with Banerjee (2022), who mentioned that government activities make the process of enterprise formation by rural women cumbersome. Institutional barriers limit artisans' production capacities and gains in livelihood. Table 13 summarizes the SWOT results for each institution.

Table 13. Results Summary: Institutional Support and Challenges

Indicators	Observed Outcome s	SWOT Link	Interpreti ve Insight
NGO assistance	Skill training and fair access	Strength	Enhances technical capacity
Cooperativ e efforts	Group marketing initiatives	Opportunit y	Promotes collective negotiation power
Bureaucrat ic hurdles	Paperwor k, credit ineligibilit y	Weakness	Limits institutiona l inclusion
Governme nt schemes	Craft promotion	Opportunit y	Potential for market

	policies		integration
Market dependenc y	Reliance on middleme n	Threat	Sustains economic vulnerabilit y

While emerging support networks enhance visibility, the persistence of administrative and market barriers restricts long-term empowerment and entrepreneurial sustainability.

6.6 Cross-Theme Integration: The Empowerment Continuum

The Empowerment Continuum Taking all four dimensions together, one notices that the empowerment of Bhil women is not a linear process but rather a continuum of potentials. Economic gains facilitate mutual understanding and wider identification with a collective cause; sustained empowerment, however, does require structural support.

6.7 Comparative Discussion

The main findings of this study support previous research on women's empowerment through handicrafts, such as Jain et al. (2020) and Bhaduri (2018), but also add to the discussion by combining cultural sustainability with livelihood resilience. Whereas most previous studies focused on income generation, this study shows that leadership and cultural stewardship also form part of the empowerment process and community rebuilding. The SWOT analysis strengthens the practical relevance of the cross-cultural insights in relation to development planning.

In sum, Bhil women's bead and Zari jewelry-making constitutes more than an income source; it embodies social transformation and cultural resilience. Empowerment will arise when women acquire financial autonomy, social acceptance, group inclusion, and protection of traditional craft practices. These findings suggest that traditional crafts have the potential to spearhead inclusive development in rural settings and further gender equality, but also that targeted policies are needed to enhance markets, develop digital competencies, and reinforce community cooperation.

7. Limitations of the Study

Despite having made significant contributions towards understanding the link between women empowerment and the traditional artisan culture and the cultural resilience of the Bhil communities, this study has several limitations that can be acknowledged. Firstly, this study is qualitative in nature and is based on data collected from 60 female artisans belonging to just three villages. This can be a limiting factor for the overall validity and generalizability of the findings. Despite being deep and meaningful, the findings may tend to overlook the various aspects and opinions held by women belonging to the Bhil communities residing across various other states and regions.

Second, this research is mainly based on self-reported data collected from interviews and focus group discussions. Self-reported data can be prone to recall bias and social desirability bias and may be driven by

respondents' attitudes towards anticipated external assistance. It can be assumed that some participants may have overstated their economic benefits and experiences with empowerment.

Thirdly, leaving aside the integration of a paradigm for systems thinking, this research needs a broader quantitative analysis for such critical elements as earnings growth, labor productivity, and overall wealth for generating beads and zari jewelry. In this context, accurate estimates for specific time periods and their impact on finances cannot be precisely driven. This lack of longitudinal observations can be termed one critical challenge with considerable impact on tracking the system-wide changes for successive generations in terms of benefits from empowerment. A second limited evaluation is with respect to market behavior. In this context, while this research highlights limited market reach and the effect of middlemen as the two significant hindering aspects, this research does not offer detailed analysis on supply chain management processes and trends, pricing trends and preferences, and the application process for online market networks. On the other hand, this research is inadequate for such intense analysis for the involvement of male participants within households, power dynamic processes within houses, and inter-generation trends for attitude modifications towards women's roles. Another research might be required on such aspects as involvement with male household members. Ultimately, this research is unique in that it concentrates on the Bhil community and ornament-based crafts. As such, generalizations relating to other tribal communities and other specialization areas such as weaving, ceramics, and metalwork may be difficult.

8. Future Scope of Research

Findings from this research point towards several promising areas for further research. A key area would be to undertake comparative research among and between tribes and geographical locations. In this regard, executing such research may help identify linkages and trends between craft-based subsistence patterns and women's empowerment as a correlated outcome within and across India and South Asia. It may be useful and prudent to take forward such research at a later stage with a longitudinal design and research approach to allow for quantitative analysis and evaluation of key dimensions such as stability of income, assets and inter-generational mobility and social evolution for women artisans. This would allow for closer tracking and understanding of overall empowerment dimensions such as education levels, health benefits, governance positions, and political participation.

Another significant area for research would be the impact of the digitization of traditional skills. Research on e-commerce sites, online promotions on social media platforms, online literacy, and online sales might help identify innovative ways for artisans to overcome middlemen and improve their economic welfare. The impact analysis of various initiatives by the government and other nongovernmental bodies for online inclusion would be a significant research task. Further research on gender power relations within the household context, focusing on the effect of increased female earnings on

decision-making and gender within the household, would be a significant research area. Further studies would then explore the needs and goals of young Bhil women to check whether traditional jewelry-making is attractive to them as well.

Lastly, the application of research methods from multiple disciplines involving development studies, gender research, cultural anthropology, and design innovation can play a significant role in being able to further sharpen policies for the development of more sustainable craft processes. Research initiatives may help design interventions for sustaining indigenous knowledge systems while at the same time fulfilling two primary needs for women craft workers: autonomy and dignity and the establishment of social justice.

9. Conclusion

The research is focused on exploring the ways through which bead and Zari jewelry production among the women from the Bhil community serves as a tool for women empowerment and cultural heritage preservation. A qualitative research methodology with an ethnographic approach is utilized for this task. A detailed analysis was carried out with a combination of theme analysis and SWOT analysis for proper explanation and interpretations. The results show that women empowerment among the Bhil community is a multi-dimensional process with a mix of tangible and intangible aspects. It is apparent that jewelry production has developed from a domestic craft to a significant living resource for economic freedom and negotiating power for women in patriarchal families. Additionally, the consistent income derived from this production gives women the ability to take part in decision-making processes and spend on aspects such as educating their kids, exhibiting greater economic freedom. Nonetheless, reliance on middlemen, variability of prices, and seasonality play significant roles in inhibiting women from fully achieving this freedom.

The research also goes on to show that, after income, a sense of social empowerment from collaborative craft-making is truly significant. Fabricants and women's co-ops form small arenas for solidarity and empowerment. These communities generate confidence among women and encourage them to take part in community forums and exhibitions. Meanwhile, within the confines of the patriarchy and domestic responsibilities, collaborative craft-making is a complex form of political discourse. A significant finding is with respect to cultural resilience as an inherent form of empowerment. Beadwork is more than just survival for the women from the Bhil community. It is a cultural element that retains knowledge and design traditions from the elders. Every bead and string holds cultural significance as a representation of one's identity and cultural traditions. Passing down cultural design traditions to younger artisans from the next generation would specifically identify women from this community as the guardians of the cultural heritage. However, the authenticity and survival of such cultural traditions seem threatened by the processes of modernization and reduced youth participation. From the institutional analysis, the reality that is brought to light is that while there is potential for training and exposure for

NGOs and co-ops through such organizations, red tape and credit constraints and inadequate policy formulation and implementation hinder growth. In fact, the SWOT analysis carried out highlights that for empowerment consolidation to be achieved, institutional support such as micro-financing facilities and fair trade certification is necessary.

From the evidence, however, empowerment by craft is best understood as a continued and interconnected process shaped by numerous interdependent economic and cultural factors. In this regard, the model created for this research (see Figure 7 above) illustrates the process of jewelry-making as a complex ecosystem with activities such as income generation contributing to improvements in mental health and cultural networks leading to increased prominence. The model is important for broader theoretic considerations on women and empowerment, specifically recognizing the critical role that cultural labor and knowledge play within indigenous communities and can be utilized for social transformation. From a psychological viewpoint, the research provides valuable takeaways. Supporting women's co-operatives, enhancing online direct sales platforms, and incorporating craft-based living skills within rural policies can increase the viability and justice within these networks. Capacity-building programs focusing on entrepreneurial competence and design

thinking might help artisans transform from subsistence to strategic self-reliance.

In terms of methodology, this research provides insight on the ability to successfully implement the combination of thematic analysis and SWOT analysis within the framework of qualitative research. This approach is very important for the field of ethnographic research and ensures that ethnographic truths can be maintained while at the same time providing policy relevance to its findings. However, the qualitative approach was limited to three villages belonging to the Bhil tribes. It is important to conduct research that could utilize a comparative study across regions to identify the impact of empowerment on tribes such as the ones found within the context of the Indian environment. In conclusion, the process for women from the community to make bead and Zari jewelry is more than generating income – this process is one of resilience and their assertion of identity and transformation. The emphasis on developing traditional skills from previous generations to be applicable for quality income and building respect for oneself represents strong notions of empowerment and its principles. The skills for empowerment for artisans take on the form of cultural expression and empowerment channels for inclusive development within rural communities and villages...

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How to cite Ms. Madhavi Kushwah , Dr. Reena Roy . Women, Craft, and Empowerment: The Role of Bead and Zari Jewelry Making in the Bhil Community *Advances in Consumer Research*. 2025;2(6): 401-413

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