



# CULTURE AND CONFLICT

## UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub

**A Reflection By Aamir Ganaie**



## Women, Art Craft & Culture (J&K)

Jammu and Kashmir, a region with an extraordinary past, intertwines its art, craft, and culture. Women have dedicatedly guarded the customary art and craft of Jammu and Kashmir- a significant ingredient of its rich culture.

The territory is well-known for producing exceptional handicrafts through conventional skills and techniques. Papier-mâché products, Pashmina shawls, carpets, embroidery as well as woodwork are amongst the most sought-after handicrafts made here. The women from this region have been paramount in preserving these handicrafts while promoting them worldwide.

The womenfolk of Jammu & Kashmir possess incredible talents in a variety of crafts. Several among them came together to form cooperatives and self-help groups to lend support to one another while endorsing their masterpieces. These groups have played an essential part unfurling opportunities for womenfolk to showcase their abilities along with marketing their goods using various platforms.

In Jammu and Kashmir, crafting delicate and exquisite shawls from the wool of Pashmina goats is a renowned handicraft. Highly skilled female artisans in this region use traditional techniques like handloom weaving and embroidery to craft unique designs and patterns on these shawls. These skilled craftspeople also engage in papier-mâché, an art form that has been passed down for several generations by practicing detailed designs with a mixture of water, glue, and paper pulp.

Jammu and Kashmir is renowned not only for its artistry but also for its culinary excellence in addition to handicrafts. Unquestionably, the region epitomizes itself with a rich and flavourful gastronomy, including savoury delights like Rogan Josh, Yakhni, and Wazwan. With their irreplaceable contributions, women have been the driving force behind preserving these age-old dishes and popularizing them among upcoming generations

## About Craft & Culture Project

The UK government has set its sights on establishing a research and innovation system that is truly exceptional with the ambitious program, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), now launched. The aim is to create an inclusive environment that enables everyone to contribute and benefit from it. One of UKRI's ambitious mission is the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). This unique initiative strives to address some of the most pressing problems faced by developing countries today.

The London School of Economics (LSE) has applied for the GCRF, and Yakjah is one of the principal strategic partners of this project.

The "Culture and Conflict" project places a great emphasis on the important resource that is the women artisans' hidden stories. These experiences are crucial to understanding crafts not just as objects, but also as sites of identity, healing, transformation, and peace. The project recognizes the significance of using feminist theory, peace-building practice and experiential methodology to create a comprehensive framework for transformational learning. In so doing, it establishes a robust foundation for individuals to embark on their personal journeys towards growth and development



## Mobilising the Women Artisans

This was the first step for us as an organisation to mark something big. So mobilising was the first challenge and Urzeeba (Community Mobiliser Yakjah) was the person who started the search and came up with a group of women.

## Camera and the Women Artisans

I had the opportunity to meet and interact with several women artisans who were working diligently to create beautiful handicrafts. It was inspiring to see how these women were not only preserving traditional arts but also creating sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families.

As My Role was to Document the whole thing From FGD's to Training to Research I made a prenotion that they must be camera phobic, But I got the answer after the design training workshop, If you need to know Read The Whole.

So It was the first day I was with my camera and was traveling towards Urzeeba's home where all the women artisans from Srinagar were gathered for the first intro meet and FGD.

I almost reach there at 09:30 in the Morning and I opened my camera and accessories, All Ladies were already present there. While I was about to start Capturing the Session, one Kashmiri aunty told me " Mai aeen Zae ni Kehn" Don't Shoot me while I am talking. So I said Ok Aunty. And Moved my camera to other direction.

While Ashima (Project Head "Culture & Conflict" ) was opening the session, One of the women artisans told me " Yi Cha Nebremm" Is Ashima from outside Kashmir. I Smiled and said no She is a Kashmiri. She gave me a look and then said Acha Acha.

So all of them one by one opened up by questioning me like this. In the meantime the kashmiris enery drink Kehwa Arrived and everyone was enjoying the kehwa and were discussing about the project

Except for a few, it was difficult to capture the feelings and moments of the women artisans. When they began singing together in unison, I had a completely different experience, and I started crying because they weren't satisfied with their pay but continued to work for sustaining Kashmiri art.



## The Design Training Workshop Kashmir & Jagti Group

This was the first time when our two Kashmiri groups One From Jagti Jammu and One From Srinagar were together for design training held on the shores of Dal lake mentored by Piyush & Neelam (Bio).

As now I was familiar with one group only, The Women in Jagti group were very happy as they visited their Birth place after a longtime, I went almost in evening before the day workshop started. So it was dinner time when Jagti group was waiting for the meal. I entered and greeted all of them and introduced myself in urdu language. So one of them said “Ess ti chi kashir. Ess seeth kar kashir paeth kath” We are also Kashmiris, Talk to us in Kashmiri and she laughed.

So I started talking in Kashmiri and for making them comfortable Uzeeba Started acting like she is making a vlog, She started with “Asalam u Aliakum Salaam Namaste Aaj Hamare saath Jammu ka group hai aur inko yahan aake bohot acha lagg raha hai”. All of them were laughing with this act of Urzeeba.

On next morning, I started recording the process of workshop and the first session was of Piyush about Colors. Two of the ladies from Srinagar group were talking to each other having pencils in their hands “ Ess travikh zann schools manz” (Translation). I asked them you will learn a lot. One of them replied “ Wi kya karos Budith” (Translation).

During their design training, women artisans in Jammu and Kashmir learned several skills, such as colour combination, creating designs, and using colours and graphs. Traditionally, the craft has relied on Chinar, leaves, and Quranic calligraphy designs for decades. However, there is now a pressing need for innovation and new designs to expand their work. Using new designs can help keep the craft fresh and exciting, making it more appealing to a broader range of people.

All of them were Comfortable after day ist, and were also walking, working, learning together. I think this all happened due to sharing the same space where Yakjah and team Played an important role.

What I feel disconnects a human to other human is Lack of empathy and understanding. If people don't try to understand each other's perspectives or emotions, it can be difficult to form deep connections.

So Yakjah as an organisation always played an important role in fostering human connections and bringing people together.



## Growth of Entrepreneurship in Jammu & Kashmir

Kashmir region, which was transformed into two union territories in 2019, hopes to foster infrastructural and entrepreneurial development. It isn't that Kashmir didn't have entrepreneurs before the abrogation of Article 370.

The emergence of an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) marks a significant milestone towards the holistic economic development of the region. Gradually, there has been a proliferating appreciation for entrepreneurship's latent potential to generate employment opportunities, spur innovative inclination and propel economic progress. Initiatives have taken shape in J&K that aim to foster conditions conducive to the growth and sustainability of enterprises.]

It's safe to say that there is still a ways to go when it comes to fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem in J&K, but recent years have seen substantial strides in the right direction. A burgeoning startup scene and renewed emphasis on entrepreneurship as a catalyst for economic growth underscores this progress.

## Entrepreneurship And Livelihood

Empowering women through entrepreneurship and livelihood opportunities is crucial for the overall economic development of Jammu and Kashmir. With its diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, this region presents unique challenges for women to access education, employment, or entrepreneurial activities. Thus, promoting female initiatives in business can not only contribute to their own economic growth but also act as a force multiplier to uplift the region's economy. Despite these merits, several barriers exist that prevent women from taking full advantage of such streams—for example, social restrictions on mobility etc.

The region is home to numerous efforts and associations that endeavor to uplift women and encourage entrepreneurship. For instance, the Jammu and Kashmir Entrepreneurship Development Institute (JKEDI) supports aspiring female entrepreneurs through various means such as training, mentorship, and financial assistance. These initiatives aim to empower women by providing them with the necessary resources to establish successful businesses.

It is important to recognize that there are a multitude of organizations that place emphasis on promoting opportunities for women's livelihood and entrepreneurship in



various regions. Non-profit entities, community groups, and social enterprises alike all converge towards this purposeful goal. With combined efforts focused on skills training, market accessibility, and financial resources allocated towards women entrepreneurs everywhere, their chances for successful business ventures skyrocket when compared to being unsupported. Now more than ever it is paramount to support these organizations as they play such an integral role.

Yakjah is one of the organisation which is helping the women artisans to upgrade the design thinking, mentoring them with entrepreneurial skills including Marketing the product and Social Media Marketing.



## Scope for Women Entrepreneurship for artisans

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is well-known for its rich cultural heritage and handicrafts. There is a significant scope for women entrepreneurship for women artisans in J&K, particularly in the handicraft sector. Women artisans in J&K have been producing a wide range of handicraft products, including shawls, carpets, embroidery, pottery, and woodcarvings, for centuries. However, they face several challenges in terms of accessing markets, finance, and training opportunities.

In addition, there is a lot of room for female entrepreneurs to use e-commerce platforms to their advantage and expand their market. Numerous e-commerce platforms are now available due to the rise in internet and smartphone usage, giving women artisans the chance to market and sell their goods online. To reach a bigger market and grow their enterprises, female entrepreneurs can also work together with designers, retailers, and export firms.

## Strategic Partnership

Strategic partnerships can play a crucial role in promoting the entrepreneurship of women artisans in Jammu and Kashmir. Here are some potential strategic partnerships that Yakjah can consider:

1. Collaboration with government agencies
2. Partnership with financial institutions
3. Partnership with e-commerce platforms
4. Partnership with designers and retailers