



ARTISAN CASE STUDY COMPILATION

Series on

Traditional Skillforms of Uttarakhand



DUNGAR RAM

(KHOLI ARTISAN)

Dungar Ram is a 60 year old Kholi and Woodcraftsman from a small town of Almora. He has been into the artform for most of his life just like his father and grandfather.



Involvement

Dungar Ram's father and grandfather used to build Kholi and that used to be their main source of income. Dungar Ram used to work as a jailor for a while but he had to leave that work for some reason. When he came back to his village, he started working with his father building Kholi and got involved in the art form. He later decided to make this his main source of income as well. His father and grandfather were quite famous in their area and used to get a lot of jobs building Kholi and once he started working with his father, he started getting a lot of jobs too.

But with time, house building got more modern and Kholis are becoming a lost art. He rarely gets any jobs these days. Some resorts which were looking for creative aesthetics used to contact them for some work but even that stopped during the pandemic.

It takes almost a month to make a Kholi and hence he can work on one kholi per month. He earns around 800 per day, so his monthly income is approximately Rs. 24000.

Support Received

He hasn't received any noticeable financial support so far.

Perspective and Challenges

When asked, Dungar Ram said that he wasn't interested in passing on this artform to his children. The work is too hectic and requires a lot of concentration and the income is not worth the effort these days. Lack of awareness and interest in the artform is also resulting in a lot less demand for it. The construction industry has evolved a lot over time and Kholi is not something that people are looking for. He also considers this a job where you can get injured a lot. Because of all of this and the fact that he suffered financially for most of his life, he doesn't want to pass this artform to his children. He believes that if the government promoted the artform more, they could save it from becoming lost forever.

PANJI RAM

(KHOLI ARTISAN)

Panji Ram is a 40 year old Kholi and Woodcraftsman from Lamgarah in the district of Almora. He started this as a hobby but soon turned it into a full time profession.



Involvement

Panji Ram got involved in Kholi making as a hobby. But over time he became so skilled that he decided to opt for it as a means to support his family. He is now fully involved in the artform and does this full time.

Though the sales usually depend on his hard work, the climate plays a major role in it. Sometimes, the weather does not support the working conditions and so the timeline is pushed back which affects sales and ultimately his income. The quality of wood also plays a huge role in his work.

Over time, with the advancement of technology and modernization of home building, kholi is becoming outdated and hence jobs these days are limited. Panji Ram says that as the time passes, Kholi usually fades and loses its charm and then is replaced by more modern designs.

It takes almost a month for him to build one Kholi and he has built up his skills enough to get paid Rs. 700-800 per day and so his monthly income usually amounts to Rs. 20000-24000.

Support Received

In spite of his hard work, his talents have mostly gone unrecognized and so he hasn't received any support, financial or otherwise.

Perspective and Challenges

Panji Ram used to teach the art of Kholi making to his children and wants to pass on this art form to even more people and the future generations. He believes that due to the youth's inclination towards technology and lack of interest and awareness, it is even more crucial to spread the word about this artform. Because there is so little awareness, the opportunities are quite low. And the profit margins are low because Kholi is considered outdated. He believes if the government would provide a little more help promoting the artform so that they could get more work, he would be able to support his family.

NEETA SHAH

(AIPAN ARTIST)

Neeta Shah is a 45 year old Aipan - Peeth artist from Almora. She is a housewife and got involved in the artform due to her interest after seeing the elders around her do it.



Involvement

Neeta learnt this artform from the elders in her family. She used to see her family make aipan - peeth on Diwali and it used to fascinate her. She learnt it and started doing it as a hobby. Earning through it was never her aim. She believes aipan - peeth is an important part of Kumauni culture and is a way to show their gratitude towards gods and goddesses and have faith in them. She says that the aipan is a way to welcome them to our home. All this shows how passionate about her art form she is.

Even though she doesn't do it for income, she actively participates in any local events that involve the artform. The earnings through it vary depending on the number of events that take place in a month.

Support Received

Due to lack of awareness, any kind of support has been next to none.

Perspective and Challenges

She thinks that aipan - peeth takes a lot of effort and that is why the youth today are not that interested in the artform. It also comes down to the lack of awareness. The art form is not that much in demand anymore and hence the profits and earning is quite low.

She strongly believes that this art form should be passed on to the younger generations as she believes it to be an important part of her culture and feels that learning about this artform will keep the youth connected to their culture.

She feels that nowadays people just want quick solutions without a lot of effort and so they opt for readymade stickers of aipan instead of making it by hand. She feels that the sacraments of Kumauni culture and the process of making aipan are slowly fading away.

RITA CHAUDHARY

(AIPAN ARTIST)

Rita is a 42 year old Aipan - Peeth artist from Almora. She is a part time artist and this isn't her main source of income.



Involvement

Rita used to watch her mother make aipen - peeth on every Diwali. That is where she learnt this artform. Her mother taught her how to make aipen and she fell in love with it and opted for it as a hobby. She doesn't always make it for earning purposes. She also just performs it just for the sake of exhibitions.

Aipen - peeth is not her main source of income but she does earn a little depending on how many paid events she attends.

Support Received

There isn't a lot of interest in this artform anymore and hence there hasn't been a lot of support for her yet.

Perspective and Challenges

Rita feels that lack of profitability and lack of interest and awareness among today's youth is one of the reasons that aipen is becoming a lost art. She wants to pass on this art form to the future generations so she can keep the art form alive and help them connect to their culture.

Even during the pandemic, she used Facebook to post her aipan art and helped spread more awareness about the artform and received amazing response. Tourists are also becoming fascinated with the art form and hence a lot of resorts are opting to showcase her art in their aesthetics.

BAAKE LAL TAMTA

(TAMTA COPPER CRAFTSMAN)

Baake Lal Tamta is a 65 year old copper utensils maker from Dugalkhola, Almora. His family has been in this business for generations.



Involvement

Baake Lal comes from a family that has been involved in this artform for generations. His great great grandfathers used to make copper coins for kings. Since then this artform has been passed on from generation to generation in his family. Baake Lal initially tried to apply for a government job after graduating high school. But when that did not work out, he decided to get in on the family business. Now, Baake Lal's art has evolved from just coins to making copper utensils, water dispensers and many more things. Since this is his main source of income, he chose to diversify.

But in today's world the demand for handmade copper items has drastically decreased. People rarely want them and so the sales are at an all time low. He doesn't even make enough to have three meals a day. Whatever sales he used to get, they too stopped during the pandemic.

Support Received

Any kind of support so far has been really lacking.

Perspective and Challenges

Baake Lal is not interested in passing on his work to the future generations as he doesn't believe that this artform has any kind of future. Utensils made by machines are so much better with a lot more finesse that people never go for handmade utensils anymore.

But he still believes that since this is an artform that has been passed on since the dynasties, the government should promote it more so that people know more about it. If people are more aware, he might get more sales and could continue with his work rather than being forced to quit due to financial issues.

DEV RAM

(CHHOLIYA DANCER)

Dev Ram is a 51 year old Chholiya Dancer born and brought up in Petshal, Almora. He is a part time performer and works several other jobs to support his family.



Involvement

Dev Ram learnt the art of Chholiya Dancing from his father and grandfather. He started performing at a young age so he could earn some income and help with finances. Now he works as a part time performer and also performs several other small jobs including working as a laborer so he can support his family.

The main factor that affects his income is the availability of events he gets called to perform in. He performs in several events and marriages but each event offers upto Rs. 10,000 which is barely enough to support a family. If during certain months there are no events, he doesn't earn anything through Chholiya and has to depend on other sources. So the income is very unpredictable. Since there were no events during the pandemic, he couldn't depend on this source of income anymore and hence suffered even more financially.

Support Received

Since the dance form is not that well known, any external support has been minimal.

Perspective and Challenges

The biggest challenge he faces is the low income due to less opportunities. This is mainly due to the fact that there is barely any awareness regarding this dance form. If there were more awareness, he would be able to get more jobs and hence earn more and support his family better.

In spite of this, he wants to teach the art form to his children and pass it on to future generations so that the art form stays alive.

GIRISH RAM

(CHHOLIYA DANCER)

Girish Ram is a 35 year old Chholiya dancer from Petshal, Almora. He performs in a lot of events and weddings and performing is his main source of income.



Involvement

Girish learnt the art form from his grandfather. He used to watch his grandfather perform with this Chholiya dance group and it used to fascinate him. Eventually he too joined the group because he liked the art form and it helped him support his family better.

He mainly earns money during the wedding season. He approximately gets 8-10 events in one wedding season and every event pays approximately Rs. 8000- 10,000 which is barely enough to make ends meet. Since performing at events and weddings is his main source of income, he suffered a lot of financial issues during the pandemic.

Support Received

There hasn't been any significant support for him and his artform yet.

Perspective and Challenges

According to Girish, the opportunities are low and so the profitability in this field is very low. But he still wants to pass on this artform to the future generations.

BHAGWAT RAM

(CHHOLIYA DANCER)

Bhagwat Ram is a 30 year old Chholiya performer from Petshal, Almora. He is a part time performer but depends on performing for a major part of his income.



Involvement

Bhagwat Ram is the son of Anand Ram who is also a Chholiya Dancer. He learnt the dance form from his father. He got involved in art from a very young age and when he grew up, he also started teaching his children so that they could continue the legacy and also perform with him.

Chholiya dancing is a part time job for him since the main performances occur during the wedding season only but it is still his main source of income. He performs in around 10-13 events during the wedding season. But the pandemic really affected his financial situation as the events were banned and his main source of income got taken away from him.

Support Received

There hasn't been a lot of moral or financial support due to lack of awareness.

Perspective and Challenges

Bhagwat Ram believes that culture is art and art should live on forever. And that is why he teaches the dance form to his kids which he learnt from his father who learnt from his father and grandfather. Keeping the dance form alive is really important to him. But he knows that there is barely any demand for it these days and so this can't be a reliable source of income for the future generations.

ANAND RAM

(CHHOLIYA DANCER)

Anand Ram is a 56 year old Chholiya dancer from Guard, Almora. He learnt the art form from his father and grandfather and eventually turned it into his profession.



Involvement

Anand Ram learnt the art of Chholiya dance from his father and grandfather who represented the artform in their time. He later passed on the art to his son Bhagwat Ram who went on to teach his children. Hence the artform has been in their family for generations.

Anand Ram performs in around 8 to 10 events in a year but they mainly take place during the wedding season. So even though he is a part time performer, this is still his main source of income and that is why the pandemic hit him really hard because he was unemployed and couldn't get any work.

Support Received

Any major kind of support has been really lacking for his art form.

Perspective and Challenges

Anand Ram really respects the art form that has been in his family for generations. He wants his future generations to learn the dance form too. But he doesn't want them to take it on as a profession because he knows that there isn't a lot of awareness and so there is little or no income going forward. He believes if the government helps in promoting the artform that could be changed.

HARISH

(CHHAPELI DANCER)

Harish is a 26-year-old Chhapeli dancer, based in Almora. As a full-time student preparing for government exams, performances are his main source of income presently.



Involvement

Since his childhood days, he has had a keen interest in the cultural heritage of Kumaon. None of his family members are engaged in performing Chhapeli and his own involvement began only as an amateur. The monthly income from performances depends on the number of events they are asked to perform at, and it thus varies a lot. During Covid-19 the Chhapeli group was not called by anyone, the limited income they were getting by this artform was also stopped during pandemic.

Support Received

Their troupe sometimes performs in Mela Mahotsav which is organised by government. Non-Governmental support here basically means that sometimes they called up on the functions which are organised by people personally like in wedding, private school programme, resorts etc.

Perspective and Challenges

He sees the dance as less of an economic activity and more of a way through which he can stay connected with the culture and help in preserving it. He is also keen about passing the dance on to the next generation. Low profitability and lack of interest and awareness among today's youth as they are much into film industry not in their roots and culture are the key challenges Chhapeli dance faces presently according to him. He states that Chhapeli artform should be used or known like a profession work, this artform should be paid a little more so that anyone can feed their family member so that they don't flip or switch to other jobs which can feed their family. If the elder of our family or according to him right now as this artform is like a platform for him but a part-time due to lack of income. So, he wants a decent income so that he could see it as a full-time profession with interest and by seeing him his younger generation may also see it like a profession work with interest by this our culture transfer to other generation, because right now if someone is having an interest in Chhapeli but couldn't see it as a profession because of no scope and money as everyone has to look after their family.

JAGMOHAN AGARI

(CHHAPELI DANCER)

Jagmohan Agari is a 28 year old Chappeli dancer from Almora. He is a part time performer with his main source of income elsewhere.



Involvement

Jagmohan comes from a Kumauni family where Chappeli was a big part of their culture. Though the family wasn't professionally involved in the art form, Jagmohan had enough interest to opt for it as a part time job. He performs part time in events but has other jobs as well as his main source of income.

The income from Chappeli performances depends mostly on how many events they get called to perform in. Since the pandemic banned any kind of gatherings, his livelihood was affected deeply.

Support Received

The government organizes a lot of events where he gets a chance to showcase his art along with his group. This helps raise a lot of awareness for the art form. Getting invited to a lot of non government events, also helps with his financial situation

Perspective and Challenges

Jagmohan really wants to pass on the art form to the future generations. He believes that more and more people should know about it so their culture stays intact.

Since the dance form is not that popular, people suffer a lot financially as there isn't a lot of demand. He believes that if this dance form is given enough recognition and respect to be considered as a profession rather than just a hobby, it might help them earn more and they won't be forced to quit to find other jobs.

MANISHA ARYA

(CHHAPELI DANCER)

Manisha is a 29 year old Chappeli dancer who got involved in the artform because of her passion for dance. She was born and brought up in Almora.



Involvement

Manisha comes from a family of performers. Her mother was a singer and so is her sister. She got involved in the dance form because she was very passionate about dance since she was a child. Ultimately she started performing in events but still doesn't depend on them to support her livelihood. She also used to teach this art form to college students.

The income from Chappeli performances varies from month to month depending on how many events she gets invited to perform in. It is usually between 10-15 events in a year. This income completely stopped during the pandemic.

Support Received

She gets invited to a lot of local and non local events such as weddings where she gets to showcase her art form. A lot of local fairs as well as events in different cities organized by the government also help with promoting the art form and learning through it.

Perspective and Challenges

Coming from a family of artists, she understands the importance of passing the artform from generation to generation. And since this artform is so near and dear to her heart, she really wants to teach it to the younger generation and pass it on. She wants to keep this part of the culture alive. But she feels that the younger generation is not that interested in learning as there is very limited income in it due to low demand. But she tries her best and is determined to keep the art form alive forever.

POOJA BISHT

(CHHAPELI DANCER)

Pooja is a 21 year old Chhapeli performer from Almora. She is currently preparing for examinations to apply for government jobs and perform Chhapeli on the side.



Involvement

Pooja got involved in the artform because of her sister. Her sister is also a Chhapeli dancer and since Pooja already loved dance, she also followed in her sister's footsteps and joined the Chhapeli group. She performs for a part time income but her main focus is preparing for government exams so she can get a good job.

She feels that May, June and July are the most busy months when it comes to events for Chhapeli. They get a lot of opportunities to perform during these months compared to the rest of the year. She gets around 5-7 events per month but this number can vary greatly and hence the income varies month to month too. She and her team suffered the most during the pandemic because for a lot of her teammates this was their only source of income.

Support Received

Government tries its best to support the artform by organizing local events where she can get a chance to perform and earn money. It also raises awareness about the art form. She also gets invitees to perform in a lot of personal events.

Perspective and Challenges

Pooja got into the art form because of her interest and it has become so personal to her that she wants it to become famous all over India. She wants to pass this on to future generations and also try and perform in different states so that everyone gets to see and appreciate Chhapeli dance.

Since she wasn't dependent on this for income, she didn't suffer a lot financially. After Covid, her group got a chance to perform in various colleges as well. Now she is really enjoying the dance and is connected to 2-3 groups.

CHANDAN KUMAR

(CHHAPELI DANCER)

Chandan Kumar is a 29 year old performer born and brought up in Almora. He likes to perform Chhappeli as a part time hobby and is actually a Drawing Teacher by profession.



Involvement

Chandan Kumar has been a creative person since he was a child. He was always interested in dancing and singing. As he grew up, he joined the Chhapeli dance group in his area and started performing but it was always for fun. He grew up to be a drawing teacher and that is his main source of income. He performs with his Chhapeli group as a part time dancer.

That part time income varies from month to month depending on how many events he performs in. This income came to a zero during the pandemic.

Support Received

The government tries to support the art form by organizing small-scale events like the MELA MAHOTSAV. He and his group get an opportunity to earn and showcase their art from. People who are aware call him and his group to perform in their weddings or private events.

Perspective and Challenges

Chandan already teaches this dance to his students and wants to do more to pass it on to future generations. He strongly believes that there is enough government support that this art form will never perish.

PRIYANKA BISHT

(CHHAPELI DANCER)

Priyanka is a 23 year old Chappeli dancer from Almora. As she is currently a college student, she performs part time.



Involvement

Priyanka comes from a family where no one was involved in the Chhapeli artform. But she was also interested in dancing and so she learnt the dance form and joined the local group. She also inspired her sister to dance.

She performs part time with her group but is currently studying in college so she can build a career and get a stable job as she experienced the instability of being a Chhapeli dancer during the pandemic when most of her teammates lost their only source of income.

Support Received

The government tries its best to organize local events so that she and her team have an opportunity to promote the art form. And people also invite them to perform in celebrations and events.

Perspective and Challenges

Being the older sister of Pooja Bisht, she performs with her sister. Like her sister, she is also involved in the dance form not because of compulsion but because of interest. She feels that this dance form has a bright future and people should perform more and spread more awareness about it.

SANDEEP LAL

(RINGAL ARTIST)

Sandeep Lal is a 38 year old Ringal artisan from Kiroli, Uttarakhand. He got into the profession because of his family's involvement in it for generations.



Involvement

Sandeep Lal started working with Ringal almost 18 years ago in 2004. He got into it because his family was involved in the art and so he took it up as a profession too. Earlier he used to sell basic tools like baskets and mats just like his father. He used to make flowers too. Since he got in touch with the Aagaas Federation based in Pipalkoti, he got trained to sell even more unique designs that serve the modern public. Earlier he had to go from village to village to sell his products but now with the help of the NGO, he is able to sell them to places all over India.

Support Received

The government has provided a lot of support with the marketing of the art and his products. Aagaas Federation is an NGO in Pipalkoti that has provided a lot of support to him in the form of proper training and

Perspective and Opinion

The work of Ringal got really affected during the flood of Uttarakhand in 2013 and the business basically stopped. But Sandeep Lal says that once it boomed again, it blossomed really well. The business was also affected by Covid but they are now able to get back slowly.

PRADEEP KUMAR

(RINGAL ARTIST)

Pradeep Kumar is a 33 year old Ringal artisan from the village of Kiroli in Uttarakhand. He loves what he does and is very fond of his work.



Involvement

The work of Ringal, Pradeep Kumar says, is an ancestral work. People in his family have been doing it for generations. He loves his work and is very happy doing it. He saw his father do it and learnt it from him. Later he refined his skills even further with more training and now designs more intricate designs. He earns approximately Rs.5000 per month through his work and this is his main source of income.

Support Received

The government's main form of support has been in the form of marketing. The non government support has mainly been in the form of Aagaas Federation which is an NGO. They train him and more artisans and are a bridge between the artists and the customers.

Perspective and Opinion

Pradeep Kumar is extremely happy with the work and says that he gets lots of business with the help of Aagaas Federation. He is very grateful for it. The only thing he has a complaint about is that he has to go really far to collect the Ringal wood. If that would somehow be more easily available, he would be able to work even more and make more products and in turn earn more.

BHARAT LAL

(RINGAL ARTIST)

Bharat Lal is a 43 year old Ringal artist based in Kiroli village of Uttarakhand. He got involved in the art as it is an ancestral tradition in his family.



Involvement

Bharat Lal has been involved in the making of Ringal objects since the last 15 years. Just like his father, he earlier used to make just the basic products but slowly when he got involved with the Aagaas Federation, they trained him and taught him a new variety of designs which were more complex and intricate and the demands of which were higher in the contemporary world. He even went to IIT Mumbai and places like Kerela to receive more training and then later on went to several places like Uttarkashi, Kumaon and many more to teach the art form himself.

Support Received

The marketing provided by the government has played a crucial role in the promotion of the art and its products. The Aagaas Federation is the main form of non governmental support for him. They provide a huge help in helping his products sell. They also provide a lot of training so that he can make even more detailed and intricate products.

Perspective and Opinion

Bharat Lal feels that the youth might be interested in the creativity of the artform if made more aware. He feels that the creativity of the youth might even help the art form find a place in the modern aesthetic. He definitely wants to keep the art alive and pass it on to the younger generations.

SHANKAR LAL

(RINGAL ARTIST)

Shankar Lal is a 40 year old artist who has worked with Ringal for almost 13 years. This art form has been a part of his family for generations.



Involvement

Shankar Lal has been involved in the artform of Ringal for the last 20 years. He calls it an ancestral profession passed on from generation to generation in his family. He comes from Kiroli village in Uttarakhand. The major problem that he faces is the abstraction of the raw material. They have to walk almost 13-14 kms and back to collect the Ringal wood and that is a very tedious process. Other than that his sales and skills really increased when he got associated with Aagaas Federation in 2004.

This is his major source of income and he earns around Rs.3000-8000 depending on season to season.

Support Received

The art and the products of Ringal are provided marketing tools and reach by the government.

The Aagaas Federation that opened in 2004 has been a huge form of non governmental support. They are associated with a lot of young people who come up with unique design ideas that the potential customers would want. These young people help train the artists for these new designs.

Perspective and Opinion

Shankar Lal feels that there is a vast scope for Ringal and there is a huge market as well. He thinks it's doing really well and will keep doing well in the future. He definitely wants to pass on the artform to the future generations so they can carry on the ancestral traditions.

GIRISH LAL

(RINGAL ARTIST)

Girish Lal has been a Ringal maker since the last 18 years of the entire 45 years of his life. He learnt the art from his grandfather.



Involvement

Girish Lal learnt the basics of the art when he was a child and got into the profession because that is what his family did. He underwent training provided by the Aagaas NGO when he got associated with them. And since then his art and skills have enhanced and he is able to make a lot more variety of products and hence sell more. This is his main source of income and he earns around Rs.6000-8000 per month.

Support Received

The government is helping in the promotion of Ringal and its artists in the form of marketing. The Aagaas Federation has been such a big form of support for training, promotions and marketing. The artisans used to go from village to village to sell their products but now the NGO itself sends a vehicle to collect the products and helps sell them all over India.

Perspective and Opinion

Girish Lal feels that his business really suffered during the 2013 floods of Uttarakhand and during the Covid Pandemic. But he also accepts that there is a very big potential market for the products. He just wishes that obtaining the raw material was easier.

About the Initiative

Uttarakhand, also known as the Land of the Gods, is a state with magnificent mountainous peaks, beautiful valleys decorated with the vibrant colours of its flowers, rapid white-water rivers and ancient places of worship immersed in divinity. As much as it is home to heavenly beauty and natural tranquillity, the culture of its two regions – Garhwal and Kumaon – is equally rich and glorious. The state is home to diverse traditional and folk arts, crafts, dances and music, many among which are barely known to the world. Sadly, several are even highly endangered and nearing extinction.

As part of the “Social Inclusion and IEC activities to build skill-ecosystem in Uttarakhand” project, Uttarakhand Skill Development Mission (UKSDM), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Kamtech Associates Pvt. Ltd. have brought out “Series on Traditional Skillforms of Uttarakhand”, an earnest attempt towards aiding preservation, documentation and development of the state’s six traditional arts.

The Artisan Case Studies in the Series is a compilation of stories of 20 artists engaged in the six selected traditional skillforms.

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