

Rajasthani Kathputli : Livelihood Generation Through Creative Economy

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Abstract

The Rajasthani kathputli making is one of the heritage arts and is a part of Rajasthan's rich culture. It still carries the legacy to produce handcrafted kathputlis. At different stages, there are lots of people involved in the kathputli making process. The study revealed that even though there is demand for kathputlis, the economic status of artisans is poor as the market is unorganized. The study assessed the financial supply chain of Rajasthani kathputli making. The study also looked into the problems and solutions. The study contributed to the value chain analysis of the dying art of Kathputli making.

Keywords : kathputli making, value chain, livelihood, supply chain management, labour productivity, job satisfaction, well-being, marketing

JEL Classification : I31, J24, J28, M31

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Colourful and attractive kathputlis, which give a glimpse into the rich heritage culture of Rajasthan are not only a delight for the viewers, but also give livelihood to rural folks of Rajasthan. The word '*kathputli*' is made by joining two Rajasthani terms, one is *kath* which means wood and another is *putli* that means doll. As wood acts as a core component for making the traditional Rajasthani kathputli, it is popular by the name of kathputli. One of the interesting meanings of kathputli is given by Puran Singh, who said that the word kathputli originated from *kath* that means story and putli termed as doll. According to Mr. Singh, a kathputli is a doll that helps in storytelling. The traditional performing art of kathputli plays an essential role in preserving and promoting the traditional stories of Rajasthan as well as creating awareness about the moral and social issues like dowry system, education, cleanliness, unemployment, and so on (Government of Rajasthan, 2014). The traditional stories take the viewers to imagine the storyline behind the kathputli performance. The word kathputli could also be interpreted as a wooden object (*kat*) which is given life when our eyes (*putli*) imagine it as a life form. Since the art of Rajasthani kathputli comes from the ancient period, it has turned into an unceasing piece of Rajasthani culture and custom.

The credit to initiate and popularize the traditional profession of kathputli as a string puppet - its workmanship and formation goes to the Bhats, the agricultural laborers of Rajasthan or also identified as tribes of Rajasthan (Kakkar, 2008). The Bhats community originally belongs to the Nagar area in the Marwar region and used to travel across the country to show their talent and carry forward their conventional line of work (Rajasthan Tourism, n.d.). Due to the intrusion of Mughals into Rajasthan, the kathputli lost its glory over time. However, some of the oldest organisations founded during the initial years of freedom like Rupayan Sansthan, Jodhpur and Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal, Udaipur are working in this field - protecting and advancing the specialty of the kathputli. The Bhartiya Lok Kala also has a puppet theater and puppet gallery to help conserve the diminishing art

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of kathputli. The art of kathputli is not a standout amongst the most prominent performing crafts of Rajasthan, but also a source of livelihood to the thousands of rural people of Rajasthan, especially in dry seasons when no cultivation is possible. Jaipur and Jodhpur are the central places where the master pieces of kathputli are carved by the traditional artists. Jaipur is a popular destination for tourists across the world, and kathputlis are a centre of attraction for them. Due to the high demand of kathputli's among tourists, Jaipur has evolved as the biggest hub of kathputli making and performing arts business. Apart from the Bhat community, other communities like Sindhi's and Muslims are also a part of this business, where the Muslim community is working as artists, and the Sindhi's are active as middlemen.

Historical Background

The kathputli and its stories are not only found in Rajasthan, instead these are believed to be around since the time of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro civilizations dating back to 2300 BC (Punja, 2010). Not only in the oldest civilizations, the kathputlis are also mentioned in our epic - the *Mahabharata* as popular entertainment including the art of puppetry and shadow theatre. The word '*kathputli*' is also mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*, where the three characteristics found in human beings (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) are said to be the three strings pulled by the Divine to lead man throughout everyday life. Similarly, the kathputli reference additionally comes in traditional regional theater too, where the narrator is known as a *sutradhara*, who actually is the holder (*dhara*) or controller of strings (*sutra*). It is additionally believed that the art of Rajasthani kathputli started a millennium ago, when the Bhat people started to practice this workmanship. It is also a strong belief that the art of kathputli may have originated from Nagaur or any other surrounding areas. Patronized by many royal families in the state, it before long developed into a noteworthy work of art of the area. Kathputli is one of the antiquated works of art that has turned into an interminable piece of Rajasthani culture and tradition.

Before the invention of electronic and digital gadgets like televisions, radios, computers, and mobiles, storytelling was one of the cheapest sources of entertainment where the kathputli played an important role to narrate the local tales and spread education and awareness about the social issues like the dowry system, women's empowerment, education, poverty, joblessness, and hygiene among the rural folk (Sarma & Devi, 2013).

The performing art of Rajasthani kathputli not only began, was popularized, but is also kept alive in the heart of India by the Bhat community. The tribal community - the Bhats - not only craft the fine pieces of kathputlis, but also perform with them by traveling from one village to another during the non - cultivation season to earn their livelihood. The Rajasthani hand crafted kathputlis are commonly 2 feet in height having a wooden face with gigantic snout and large eyes (The Crafts and Artisans, n.d.), while the body structure of the kathputlis is made up of customary (Rajasthani) vivid and splendid bits of material and stuffed clothes. The kathputli has a long string attached from the head which reaches the manipulator to control its movements during performances. Apart from Jaipur and Jodhpur, the kathputli is now also crafted in Ahmedabad and Surat cities of Gujarat state.

Reformation of Traditional Dying Art of Rajasthani Kathputli

The traditional kathputli has also reformed with the passage of time. Apart from Rajasthan, the dying traditional kathputli art is still alive in the states of India like Gujarat, West Bengal, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, etc. Similarly, we also have glove puppets, made up of wood, paper, terracotta, and cloth. Such puppets have no body only face and the rest of the body is covered with long costumes. Such puppets are generally found in the states like Kerala, West Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. One can also find the traces of rod puppets in states like Orissa, West Bengal, and Jharkhand. The rod puppets perform with three dimensional wooden figures that are manipulated with rods for storytelling. There is another form of puppets,

shadow puppets, that evolved in theatre, to visual dramatization, to puppets in the form of figures placed between light and a screen. Moving the figures creates the impression of moving images on the screen and helps to narrate a story in an interactive way. Shadow puppets are popular in India, China, and Indonesia. The traditional kathputli performing art is now dying and is being replaced by modern gadgets, media, and technology. Indian businesses are also transforming themselves from brick and mortar to the digital platform. The government is taking various initiatives to promote handicrafts and provide better marketing for handcrafted puppets on e - commerce platforms like Flipkart, Amazon, etc. (Yadav & Mahara, 2018).

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the paper is to analyze the supply chain of kathputli making in Rajasthan and assess the value it adds to the lives of the people working in the profession of carving traditional Rajasthani kathputlis. Further, another objective of the study is to assess the socioeconomic status of the artisans working in the different phases of kathputli crafting and trading business. The study also suggests ways to improve the economic conditions of the poor artisans.

Methodology

The study is based on the secondary data analysis extracted from the official reports, leading newspapers, and research papers published in reputed journals. The data analysis is done using Microsoft Excel 2007 and SPSS 21.0 version software.

Analysis and Results

(1) Production Process of Kathputli Making

Key Players
1. Face makers
2. Painters and Tailors
3. Tailors
4. Middle men
5. Complete puppet makers
6. Retailers, wholesalers, and exporters

The elegantly handcrafted, dressed in bright colors Rajasthani kathputlis, which we buy from the market, go through various production phases. The different artisans at every phase of kathputli production creatively shape the kathputlis to give them life. However, there are also certain artisans who are expert of all phases. Such artisans sell the finalized kathputli rather than the semi - processed kathputli. The steps which are involved in the production of a kathputli are discussed below:

There are different classes of makers engaged with the puppet making business. These classes are face producers, painters and tailors, tailors, complete puppet creators, middlemen, retailers, wholesalers, and exporters.

There are two types of artisans, one who are wealthy and expert in all phases of kathputli making, and others who are engaged in one of the above mentioned phases of kathputli making (see Figure 1). The well off artisans prepare the entire kathputli by themselves for selling and earning profits.

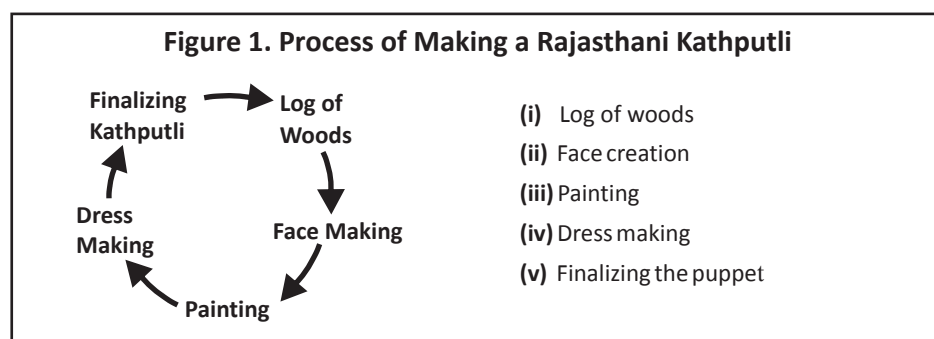


Table 1. Economics of Face Making

Quantity/Cost	1 Quintal	2 Quintals	10 Quintals
Cost of Material (₹ 200 per Quintal)	200.00	400.00	2000.00
Add: Transportation Cost (₹)	400.00	400.00	400.00
Total Cost (₹)	600.00	800.00	2400.00
No. of Faces Made	100	200	1000
Average cost per face (₹)	06.00	04.00	02.40
Selling Price per face (₹)	06.00	06.00	06.00
Earned Profit per face (₹)	0	02.00	03.60

Note. 100 faces are made on an average out of one quintal of raw wood.

(2) Face Makers : These are the people groups included just in making countenances of puppets. They cut out the faces of both male and female puppets in different sizes and design from the logs of wood and afterwards pitch the countenances to different craftsmen like painters, tailors, and middlemen for further handling.

The face making of the kathputli is dominated by the Bhat community as that is the only community who possesses the requisite expertise to carve the faces of kathputlis. As it is a craft work, so only the Bhat community has learned it from their ancestors and is practicing the same art. Carving the face of a kathputli requires a fine artisan and there is also danger of injury, which may occur due to sharp carving tools. The male members of this community are trained in the art of face making. The process is also known as *Chilaai*, where the craftsman through chisel and hammer carve the different facial expressions of the characters. The raw wood which is required to prepare the face comes from Kanota village, Rajasthan. Normally 100 - 150 faces are finished by using one quintal of wood. The cost of 1 quintal of wood is ₹ 200 and its cost of transportation is ₹ 400. The transportation cost remains constant for buying either 1 quintal or 10 quintals of wood. The artisans tend to buy at least 5-10 quintals of wood at a time to take advantage of economies of scale. The average investment involved is ₹ 2000 - ₹ 3000 to begin the face making work of kathputlis. The prosperous artisans make the face and sell it in the market to earn profits. However, those artisans who are financially weak and are not able to buy wood in bulk, such artisans work for mediators and receive remuneration on the basis of number of faces created on a daily basis (see Table 1). The wage rate per piece varies from ₹ 3 - ₹ 4 per face making.

(3) Painters and Tailors : After making the face, sandpaper is rubbed over it and a mixture of plaster of paris and turpentine oil is applied to fill the tiny pores to give a smooth texture to the face. Once the face is dried, basic paint is coated on the face followed by painting the face with a pale white colour matching the skin texture. The faces are further painted to inscribe facial features like eyes and lips.

People involved in this stage are the poorest artisans. Certain Bhat craftspersons who lack funds to make faces

are sometimes involved in painting and decorating the kathputlis. As compared to face making, this stage requires comparatively less investment than face making. However, outsourcing the face making becomes an expensive affair. As it is a time taking process to paint and decorate a kathputli ; hence, the productivity is also low. The artisan outsources the face making to the Bhat community craftspersons and then paint, stitch dresses, and decorate the kathputlis to sell in the market. To make it look lifelike, apart from making the face, the artisan paints the face of the kathputli to give it fine facial features. The other materials like sari, gotta, nails, thread, waste cotton, ribbon, filling sari are used by the tailor to decorate the kathputli.

As per the Table 2, the average cost per piece is ₹ 36.7, while it is sold at ₹ 49.5 (approximately). The artisan involved at this stage normally earns somewhere around ₹ 1870. The artisans involved in this phase are sometimes too poor as they have to borrow even meagre amounts of ₹ 200 - ₹ 300 at interest of 5% per annum. All this makes the cost of production very high. Due to lack of funds, poor linkage with the market, and time taking process, it is a less productive phase. Sometimes, the artisans are too poor and in urgent need of money that they sell the kathputlis even at a loss to the middlemen.

Normally, the artisan family size consists of three family members and normally, every family member crafts five to six sets of puppets on a daily basis with profit share of approximately ₹ 13 for each set. We can see that low efficiency leads to low earnings. We can likewise say that families in this classification are underutilized because of their money related positions and their methods of selling the puppets.

(4) Tailors : The job of the tailor is to stitch the clothes for the kathputli and stuff it with cotton, cloth, and rags. This work is mainly done by women. The kathputlis are dressed colorfully as per the nature of the character. The kathputlis are further decorated with handmade jewellery, instruments like swords, etc. to give them a traditional look. If required, strings are also attached to make it convenient to hang them so that they can be used in performing arts.

The job of tailors is solely to stitch the dresses of the kathputlis. It is a seasonal job where there is almost no work in the summer time. Either the tailors work for the kathputli makers or the work is outsourced by them when there is high demand for the products. Generally, women are involved in stitching the costumes of kathputlis. The tailors get the payment of ₹ 5 per piece. Due to the above - mentioned facts, there are very limited families operational in the stitching job.

(5) Complete Kathputli Makers : Such class of people are involved in the entire process of kathputli making. Generally, all the members of a family get involved in whole kathputli making. They usually do not outsource any activity and do all activities - from face making to finalizing the complete kathputli. Being capital intensive and with involvement of the entire family in complete kathputli making work, only financially well - off large families

Table 2. Economics of Face Making

	For 10 Faces	For 20 Faces	For 100 Faces
Time Taken for Face Painting (Days)	2	2	2
Time for Stitching (Days)	1	1	3
Total Days	3	3	5
Cost of Production (₹ 18.35 per face)	183.5	367	1835
Selling Price (₹ 24.75 per face)	247.5	495	2475
Total Profit Earned (₹ 6.4 per face)	64	128	640
Average Profit per Day	21.33	42.67	128
			3 times

Table 3. Costing of Complete 50 Pairs of Kathputlis

Particulars	Quantity	Amount (₹)
Wood	1 Quintal	200.00
Paint		150.00
Sari	10	300.00
Gotta Broad	10	150.00
Gotta thin	10	80.00
Thread	5 gatte	25.00
Waste Cotton	5 KG	100.00
Nails		20.00
Farre	2 patia	70.00
Filling sari	10	100.00
Freight Charges		400.00
Total Cost		1595.00
Cost Per Pair		32.00

are involved in this work. A large family size increases the productivity. With no middlemen involved, such families also get the benefit of economies of scale and sell the crafted kathputlis directly to sellers or even exporters in huge quantities. The cost of making 50 pairs of complete kathputlis by a family is shown in the Table 3. The complete crafting of 50 pairs of kathputlis cost ₹ 1595.00. However, the cost mentioned could be reduced further by bulk buying of raw materials.

(6) Comparative Analysis : The Table 4 compares the economic parameters of two most popular producer categories of kathputlis - painters & tailors vs. complete puppet makers. The average cost per pair is 23.15% higher in case of tailors & painters. Complete puppet maker category artisans are able to sell three times more than what can be sold by tailors and painters. Due to the high cost of production and limited number of pairs crafted, the selling value is 48.5% more in case of tailors & painters. The production efficiency is double in case of complete

Table 4. Comparative Analysis of Tailors & Painters vs. Complete Puppet Makers

Particulars	Tailor & Painter	Complete Puppet Makers
Average Cost per pair (₹)	36.7	29.8
Average Pair Sold per Month (Nos.)	130	430
Average Selling Price per Pair (₹)	49.5	44.7
Average Family Income (₹)	1870	5074
Average Family Members Engaged (Persons)	3	4
Average Production Period to Craft 10 Pairs (days)	3	1.5
Average Winter Business Cycle (Days)	4.5	1.7
Average Summer Business Cycle (Days)	8	2.5
Sources of Fund (ML : MFIs : SF : AB)	45:20:35:00	53:23:12:12
Selling Strategies (Direct Selling : Indirect Selling)	35:65	18:82

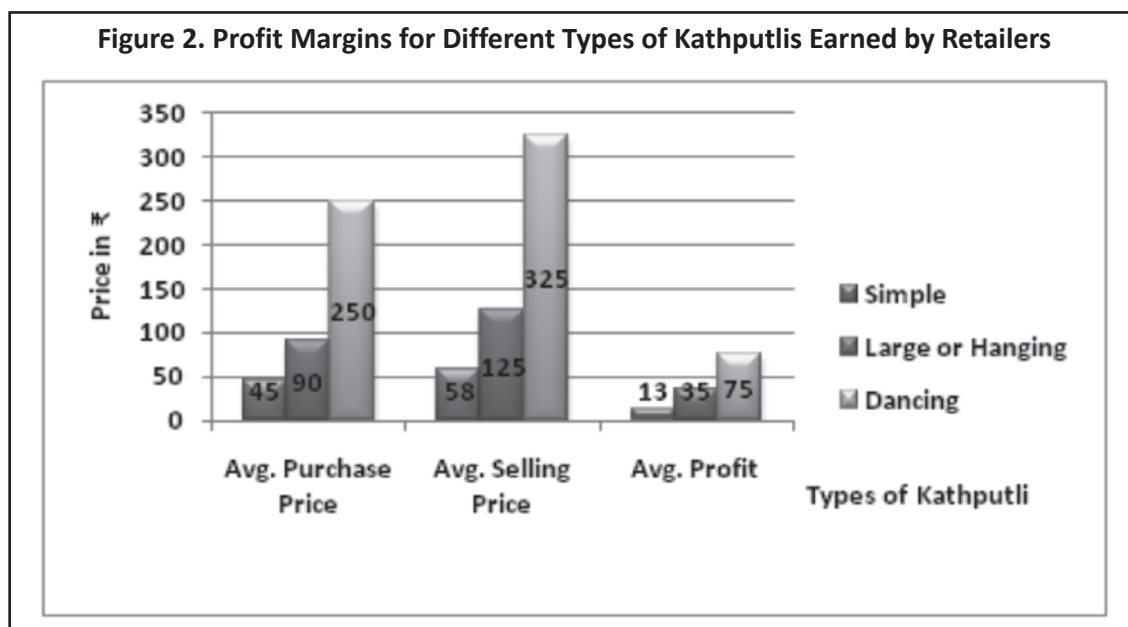
Note. ML-Money Lender, MFIs-Micro Finance Institutions, SF-Self finance, AB-Advance from Buyers

puppet makers. The tailors & painters opt for 35% direct selling and 65% indirect selling as a way of selling the kathputlis. However, complete puppet makers sell 82% by direct selling and only 18% through indirect selling. Tailors & painters have no option to take advance from the buyers. However, funds from buyers are available to complete puppet makers sometimes. Tailor & painters have, on an average, 35% self savings to invest in their work. Due to lack of access to funds from the formal banking channels, both the categories of kathputli makers heavily depend on money lenders, while one fifth of the funds the producers may raise from the local MFIs.

(7) Middlemen : Middlemen are the linkage between the producers and then they sell further in the line to the wholesalers, retailers, or export houses. They buy crafted kathputlis from the producers and sell at fixed margins to the retailers or exporters irrespective of seasonal variations. There are three types of middlemen. First, the one who gives unprocessed resources to the producers and gives payment to them for performing various processes. Such middlemen bear all business risk, investment, and wastage cost. Second class of middlemen provides raw material to the producer but after production is done, they buy the product from the maker subsequent to deducting the expenses of unprocessed resources. Third class of mediators buy kathputlis from the makers and settle the cost and all business risk, investment, and wastage is borne by the makers. Here, the makers pitch the puppets to the mediators for profit margins.

(i) Exploitation by Middlemen : The middlemen exploit makers by buying kathputlis at lower costs amid off season. Usually, small and medium size kathputlis are brought by the middlemen, while the large and dancing ones are made on special orders only. Middlemen earn a margin of ₹ 5-10 on an average over small pairs, while they make ₹ 20 - 30 on large sized kathputlis. There is no fixed margin in case of kathputlis made on special order. Thus, under such cases, the middlemen receive abnormal gains.

(ii) Retailers, Wholesalers, and Exporters : They buy kathputlis from mediators and sometimes straightforwardly from makers and after that, sell puppet from their shops to travelers or wholesalers or export to their customers. The average margin earned is more in case of customized dancing kathputlis (see Figure 2).



Social Issues

The kathputli face carving work is usually carried out by males. Due to the work carried out within the family, child labor is common in the profession. It was observed that men in the profession are illiterate and suffer from bad habits like consuming alcohol and spending all the earned money, which keeps the families trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. Initially began by the Bhat community, the profession of Rajasthani kathputli making is now adopted by many other communities too like Muslims and Sindhis. Being the new entrants, such communities have limited knowledge of complete kathputli making and they act as middlemen in the trade. Due to lack of efficient management and lack of team members who can lead, the idea to organize the trade failed. Financially weak families are commonly found working under middlemen on wage rolls to support their families and earn their livelihood. The major source of fund is money lenders as they are approachable. The funds raised through micro finance institutions are most of the time consumed by the borrowers for personal purposes or for repaying their old debts, instead of using that money for business purposes.

Managerial Implications

The study contributes to the value chain analysis of the dying art of Kathputli making. The study explored the working condition and financial status of the labours involved in the kathputli manufacturing business. The research suggests suitable strategies for reviving the kathputli manufacturing business of Rajasthan. The study provides a useful framework for the researchers and policy makers to work towards the ignorant areas of the rural economy. It is seen that the labourers are unskilled and suffer due to negative behavior patterns like devouring liquor that does not let their families escape the vicious cycle of poverty as they squander away the money. Due to restricted information of complete kathputli making, workers act as mediators in the trade. There is an urgent need to organize the trade and connect it to the digital platform so that the trade can flourish. The seed investments and marketing support also need to be provided to the kathputli makers to improve the economic status of the labourers involved in the business.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Policy Makers

Though there is demand for kathputlis, the economic status of the artisans is poor as the market is unorganized. Due to lack of trust among community members, everyone enters in the price war to sell their items to mediators and retailers, which prompts them to bring down the margins. Hence, there is an urgent need to organize the trade in the form of forming self help groups. The collective working of the artisans will help them in getting sufficient work throughout the year. This can further facilitate in linking the artisans directly to the big export houses. The self help groups can also get benefits of financial assistance from the micro finance institutions and banks. Selling the kathputlis online and on e-commerce websites would help to reduce the mediators and give a formal organized platform to strengthen the traditional art of kathputli making.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The study is limited to studying the production process of kathputli making, its economics, and the problems associated with the labourers. There is ample scope for the researchers and policy makers to conduct similar studies across India, where researchers can study traditional weavers and artisans and can come up with innovative solutions for revitalization of the dying arts of India to improve the financial status of the labourers involved in the various arts.

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