

State Policies and the Socio-Economic Transformation of Artisans in Telangana: A Ground-Level Analysis

Dr. Raju Chaketi^{1*}, Dr. Swati Nupur Tigga², Dr. T Seikhotinthang Haokip³

^{1*}Assistant Professor in Political Science, Guy Peters Department of Politics, Policy and Diplomacy Studies, School of Liberal Arts & Humanities, Woxsen University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.
raju.chaketi@woxsen.edu.in Orcid: 0000-0002-0346-6389, Scopus ID: 59913847800

²Assistant Professor in History, Department of History, School of Liberal Arts & Humanities, Woxsen University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India. swatinupur.tigga@woxsen.edu.in

³Assistant Professor in Business Studies, Department of Economics & Business Studies, School of Liberal Arts & Humanities, Woxsen University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India. seikhotinthang.haokip@woxsen.edu.in

***Corresponding Author: Dr. Raju Chaketi**

*Assistant Professor in Political Science, Guy Peters Department of Politics, Policy and Diplomacy Studies, School of Liberal Arts & Humanities, Woxsen University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.
raju.chaketi@woxsen.edu.in Orcid: 0000-0002-0346-6389, Scopus ID: 59913847800

Abstract

This paper examines the socio-economic transformation of traditional artisan communities in Nalgonda district, Telangana, following the state's formation in 2014. While Telangana's political leadership has introduced targeted welfare schemes to support backward castes and traditional occupations, the actual impact of these policies on ground-level livelihoods remains underexplored. Based on mixed-methods fieldwork—including household surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions—the study investigates how caste, gender, and social capital shape artisans' access to state resources and markets. The analysis is framed through developmental state and social capital theories to understand both policy design and community-level dynamics. Findings reveal significant gaps between policy intent and implementation. Dominant artisan castes benefit disproportionately due to stronger organizational networks, while smaller and weaker caste groups remain excluded. Gender-based disparities further marginalize women artisans from schemes, cooperatives, and training programs. Despite these challenges, some communities exhibit resilience through informal networks and NGO collaborations. The paper concludes with ten policy recommendations aimed at creating an integrated, inclusive, and future-oriented artisan development strategy. It contributes to debates on subnational governance, caste-based welfare, and inclusive rural development in post-statehood Telangana

Keywords: Telangana; artisan communities; caste and livelihood; rural development; welfare policy; social capital; gender exclusion; developmental state; Nalgonda district; informal economy

1. Introduction

The livelihoods of traditional artisans in India, particularly those belonging to socially marginalized communities, have faced significant disruptions in the wake of globalization, mechanization, and shifting policy priorities. Despite being celebrated for their contributions to cultural heritage and village economies, artisans often remain excluded from the benefits of formal development schemes. This contradiction—wherein artisans are simultaneously romanticized and neglected—underscores a critical policy gap in contemporary Indian governance. Traditional artisan communities are generally embedded within caste-based occupational systems and operate in the informal economy, which limits their access to institutional support, financial credit, social

security, and market access. Consequently, they face multifaceted socio-economic challenges including declining demand, technological obsolescence, low incomes, and social exclusion.

In Telangana, the formation of a new state in 2014 brought with it aspirations for socio-economic equity, particularly for backward castes and communities engaged in traditional livelihoods. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), which spearheaded the statehood movement, promised to correct the historical neglect of marginalized communities under the erstwhile unified Andhra Pradesh administration. In its post-formation governance, the TRS-led government launched various schemes aimed at socio-economic upliftment—ranging from caste-based welfare programs and artisan development funds to occupational subsidies and infrastructure investments. However, the extent to which these policies have effectively transformed the lives of traditional artisans, especially those in rural and backward districts like Nalgonda, remains insufficiently examined.

Nalgonda district presents a unique case for studying the intersection of state policies, caste structures, and artisanal livelihoods. It is one of the most backward districts in Telangana in terms of human development indicators such as literacy, poverty, and access to services. The district is home to numerous artisan castes including Padmasalis (weavers), Kummaris (potters), Vadrangis (carpenters), and Medaris (basket makers). These communities have historically sustained village economies but are now facing existential threats due to neglect, lack of modernization, and market competition. Understanding their socio-economic condition and the role of state intervention is crucial not only for regional development but also for designing more effective public policies across similar contexts in India.

This study aims to evaluate the socio-economic transformation of artisans in Nalgonda district through a critical analysis of state policies. It investigates whether welfare initiatives have improved artisan's livelihoods, reduced their vulnerabilities, and enhanced their agency in local economies. Drawing on field-based evidence collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, the paper seeks to uncover the structural barriers that hinder policy effectiveness. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive development, rural governance, and caste-based inequalities in India.

To frame the inquiry, the paper adopts two theoretical lenses: developmental state theory and social capital theory. The former examines the role of the state as a proactive agent of economic transformation, while the latter foregrounds the importance of community networks, trust, and collective action in development processes. Together, these frameworks enable a comprehensive understanding of both top-down policy mechanisms and bottom-up community dynamics. The paper also highlights the intersectionality of caste and gender in shaping access to resources, thereby offering a nuanced account of rural artisan livelihoods in post-formation Telangana.

By focusing on the lived experiences of artisans in Nalgonda, the study aims to bridge the gap between policy rhetoric and grassroots realities. It addresses key questions: How have state policies impacted the economic conditions of artisans? What role does caste play in mediating access to welfare schemes? Are women artisans adequately included in policy frameworks? And to what extent do community networks influence artisans' ability to mobilize resources? The answers to these questions hold significant implications for public policy, social justice, and regional development in Telangana and beyond.

2. Literature Review

The scholarship on artisans in India is diverse and multi-layered, intersecting with studies on caste, rural livelihoods, informal economies, and state policy. Yet, much of the existing literature often treats artisans as a homogeneous group, neglecting the intra-community variations shaped by caste hierarchies, gender dynamics, and regional disparities. This section reviews key strands of literature to contextualize the study, highlight research gaps, and establish the novelty of the present inquiry into Telangana's policy frameworks and their impact on marginalized artisan communities.

Historically, artisanal production has been examined through the lens of economic anthropology and rural sociology. Scholars such as T.N. Madan and André Béteille emphasized the embeddedness of artisanal work

within caste-based social structures and village economies. Artisans were viewed not merely as economic actors but as providers of essential services that sustained agrarian life. In more recent work, scholars like Jodhka (2010) have emphasized the socio-cultural underpinnings of caste-based occupations and their resilience and decline in the wake of globalization and liberalization. This scholarship has drawn attention to the double marginalization experienced by artisans: as informal workers and as members of socially subordinate castes.

Barbara Harriss-White (2003), in her influential work on informal economies, showed how caste and gender reinforce economic exclusion and limit access to state resources. Similarly, Jan Breman (2007) explored the dynamics of labor bondage, informal work, and caste hierarchies in rural India, which are highly relevant to understanding the artisanal economy. These studies demonstrate how the informal sector—where most artisans operate—is shaped by unequal social relations and institutional neglect, making targeted state intervention critical.

At the interface of rural development and artisanal production, David Mosse (2011) has argued for the importance of social networks and informal institutions in shaping access to development resources. His ethnographic work in South India shows that policy implementation is never linear but is mediated by local power structures, social capital, and everyday practices of negotiation. This insight is crucial for analyzing how Telangana's policies are received and adapted by artisan communities.

Focusing on policy, the Ministry of Textiles and Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has long produced reports advocating for modernization and financial support for artisan clusters. However, these documents often rely on a techno-bureaucratic framework and fail to incorporate local realities, especially those related to caste and gender exclusions. Independent evaluations of programs like the Integrated Handloom Development Scheme and Skill India have also pointed out that despite their scope, these schemes suffer from elite capture, lack of monitoring, and poor targeting (Chari, 2014).

Telangana-specific literature remains thin, but important. Balagopal (1983) provided early insights into the region's class and caste dynamics, including the role of backward castes in grassroots mobilization. More recently, Rao (2016) and Katiyar (2020) have explored the role of political rhetoric in shaping caste-based welfare policies post-Telangana formation. Their findings indicate that despite electoral promises, the state has not significantly altered the structural inequalities faced by marginalized communities, including artisans. However, these studies do not examine artisan communities in depth or provide empirical data on the outcomes of welfare schemes.

Gender remains an underexplored axis in artisan-related literature. Women artisans, especially from SC and OBC backgrounds, face layered disadvantages due to restrictive social norms, limited mobility, and lack of asset ownership. While some studies note the feminization of artisanal labor, particularly in textiles and beedi rolling, comprehensive gender-disaggregated analyses are lacking. The present study addresses this gap by including the perspectives and experiences of women artisans in rural Telangana.

Additionally, most studies fail to examine the role of social capital within artisan communities. Existing research tends to focus on economic capital and institutional support, often overlooking the informal mechanisms—like caste-based associations, kinship ties, and local cooperatives—that facilitate or hinder artisans' participation in development programs. Social capital theory, as developed by Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, offers valuable tools to understand how networks and norms influence access to state schemes and market opportunities.

A major research gap lies in the lack of district-level, micro-empirical studies that assess how artisan communities experience, negotiate, or resist state policies. Much of the policy literature operates at a macro level and assumes uniform implementation, ignoring the heterogeneity of outcomes at the local level. This study contributes to the literature by grounding the analysis in the everyday lives of artisans in Nalgonda—one of Telangana's most marginalized districts. It examines how local caste hierarchies, gendered labor divisions, and community dynamics mediate access to welfare, thus providing a nuanced understanding that macro-level evaluations miss.

In summary, the literature points to several important insights: (a) artisanal work is deeply caste-bound and embedded in social hierarchies; (b) state policies often overlook the informal and localized nature of artisan economies; (c) there is insufficient empirical work on how these dynamics play out in newly formed states like

Telangana; and (d) gender and social capital remain under-theorized in the artisan policy discourse. By addressing these gaps, this paper makes a novel contribution to the field of rural development and public policy in India.

3. Theoretical Framework

The socio-economic transformation of artisan communities in the Indian context is a multifaceted process that requires both top-down and bottom-up analytical approaches. To comprehensively analyze the case of Nalgonda's artisans within Telangana's broader development framework, this study draws upon two key theoretical lenses: developmental state theory and social capital theory. Together, these frameworks facilitate a holistic understanding of how state interventions are designed and implemented, and how communities themselves shape and respond to these interventions.

3.1 Developmental State Theory

The concept of the developmental state has traditionally been applied to analyze the success of East Asian economies—such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore—where strong, centralized states actively intervened in the economy to promote rapid industrialization and poverty alleviation (Johnson, 1982; Evans, 1995). At its core, developmental state theory posits that governments can, and should, play an entrepreneurial role in directing economic transformation, particularly by targeting strategic sectors and supporting marginalized groups. The state's role goes beyond passive regulation to encompass strategic investment, institution-building, and coordination across various actors, including civil society and private enterprise.

Applying this lens to Telangana, we consider whether the state's welfare schemes for artisans—such as the Integrated Handloom Development Scheme (IHDS), sheep distribution programs, and the promotion of caste-based occupational practices—embody the characteristics of a developmental state. The state government's rhetoric of empowering backward castes and traditional occupations suggests an aspiration toward developmentalism. However, this study interrogates whether such aspirations translate into tangible, measurable, and sustainable changes for marginalized artisan communities on the ground.

A crucial aspect of developmental state theory is its emphasis on bureaucratic capacity and political will. Scholars like Peter Evans argue that developmental outcomes are most successful when the state maintains what he calls "embedded autonomy"—a condition where state agencies are insulated from populist pressures but embedded enough in civil society to understand and respond to local needs. In Telangana, the challenge lies in whether government agencies possess the technical competence, resource mobilization ability, and transparency required to support artisans meaningfully. The theory also cautions against state overreach or elite capture, where policies designed for the marginalized end up benefiting politically influential groups. This phenomenon is evident in the uneven implementation of artisan-related schemes in Telangana, where dominant OBC groups often corner resources meant for broader communities.

Furthermore, developmental state theory highlights the need for coherence across policies. Artisans do not merely need subsidies—they require infrastructure, skill development, market linkages, and social security in an integrated manner. A developmental state would align its industrial, educational, and welfare policies to create a nurturing ecosystem for traditional occupations. This holistic approach is often missing in fragmented welfare regimes where schemes operate in silos. Thus, while Telangana's state formation offered an opportunity to architect such coherence, this study investigates the extent to which this has been realized.

3.2 Social Capital Theory

To complement the macro focus of developmental state theory, the study incorporates social capital theory to analyze intra-community dynamics. Originating from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam, social capital refers to the resources embedded in social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust that facilitate cooperation and collective action. Bourdieu emphasized the role of social capital in reproducing social hierarchies, while Coleman focused on its positive impact on educational and economic outcomes. Putnam, in his

influential studies of civic traditions in Italy and the United States, argued that regions with high social capital have stronger governance and better development outcomes.

In the context of Nalgonda's artisan communities, social capital manifests in both enabling and constraining forms. On the one hand, strong intra-caste networks often facilitate access to informal credit, skill-sharing, and collective marketing. These networks help artisans survive in the absence of formal institutional support. On the other hand, the same networks may be exclusionary, preventing cross-caste collaboration and reinforcing occupational hierarchies. For example, Padmasali weavers may have strong internal cohesion but may not share resources with Kummari potters or Medari basket-makers. Moreover, women artisans are often marginalized within these networks, with men occupying leadership positions in cooperatives and trade associations.

The theory of social capital also provides insights into the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in supplementing state action. Where local civil society actors are active, they often serve as bridges between the state and artisan communities, enhancing the effectiveness of welfare delivery. However, in areas like Nalgonda where NGO presence is limited, the absence of such mediating institutions exacerbates isolation. This study, therefore, examines the density and efficacy of social capital across different artisan communities and assesses its impact on policy uptake and livelihood outcomes.

Another dimension of social capital relevant to this study is the concept of “bonding” versus “bridging” capital. Bonding capital refers to tight-knit, homogeneous networks that provide solidarity, while bridging capital connects individuals to broader, more diverse networks that offer new opportunities. In Telangana, artisan groups often have high bonding capital but lack bridging capital, limiting their access to markets, technology, and policy advocacy platforms. For instance, while artisans may pool resources within the village, they rarely engage with urban design institutions or national marketing agencies that could elevate their craft visibility.

By integrating developmental state and social capital theories, this study advances a more comprehensive understanding of how artisan livelihoods are shaped by both state structures and community dynamics. It also highlights the contradictions between policy intention and implementation, and between community cohesion and social exclusion. The analytical value of this theoretical synthesis lies in its ability to bridge the gap between macro policy analysis and micro ethnographic insights—thereby capturing the complexity of socio-economic transformation in post-formation Telangana.

This dual-theoretical approach also contributes to academic debates on rural transformation in India by offering a framework that is sensitive to both institutional structures and everyday social practices. While developmental state theory alerts us to the limitations of bureaucratic rationality, social capital theory reminds us that development outcomes are deeply relational, embedded in norms, identities, and histories. Taken together, these theories offer a powerful lens for analyzing the efficacy of Telangana's artisan-related policies and their implications for inclusive and equitable development.

4. Research Objectives and Questions

This study is situated within the broader discourse on inclusive development, particularly as it pertains to marginalized occupational groups in newly formed states like Telangana. The formulation of clear research objectives and questions is essential to guide the inquiry, structure the data collection process, and establish an analytical framework that bridges theory with empirical evidence. The research objectives of this study are derived from the dual necessity of evaluating state intervention and understanding community-level realities that shape the livelihoods of rural artisans in Nalgonda district. Each objective corresponds with a set of interlinked research questions aimed at producing actionable knowledge that can inform future policy design.

4.1 Research Objectives

The central objective of this study is to critically assess the socio-economic transformation of artisan communities in Nalgonda district following the formation of the Telangana state. This overarching aim is broken down into the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the extent and effectiveness of state welfare schemes and policy initiatives targeting rural artisan communities in Telangana, with a focus on Nalgonda district. This includes evaluating schemes such as the Integrated Handloom Development Scheme, artisan-specific subsidies, and caste-based occupational development programs.
2. To analyze the socio-economic conditions of artisans across different caste groups and identify intra-community disparities in accessing state support. The aim is to understand how caste status mediates opportunities for policy benefits, financial inclusion, and occupational sustainability.
3. To explore the role of social capital—both bonding and bridging forms—in shaping artisan livelihoods and facilitating or hindering access to state schemes. This includes examining informal networks, kinship ties, cooperative structures, and the presence or absence of civil society organizations.
4. To investigate gender-based variations within artisan communities, particularly in terms of access to resources, division of labor, mobility, and recognition within policy frameworks. The objective is to capture women's voices and reveal structural barriers to their empowerment within artisanal occupations.
5. To propose actionable policy recommendations that reflect the lived realities of artisans, aiming to make state interventions more inclusive, equitable, and effective. This includes suggestions for restructured scheme designs, monitoring mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives.

4.2 Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, the study is guided by the following primary and subsidiary research questions:

Primary Research Question:

To what extent have state welfare policies implemented after the formation of Telangana contributed to the socio-economic transformation of artisan communities in Nalgonda district?

Subsidiary Questions:

1. What are the key features of the welfare schemes targeting artisans in Telangana, and how are these schemes implemented at the district and village levels?
2. How do artisans across caste groups experience differential access to state resources and support mechanisms?
3. What are the socio-economic indicators (income, education, health, housing, etc.) that reflect transformation—or lack thereof—among artisans in Nalgonda?
4. How do social networks and community-based associations influence artisans' engagement with government schemes and market systems?
5. What are the gendered dimensions of artisanal work, and how are women artisans positioned within the policy landscape?
6. How do artisans perceive the effectiveness of state interventions, and what suggestions do they offer for improving these schemes?
7. What are the limitations of existing policies, and how can future interventions be designed to overcome these gaps in a context-sensitive manner?

4.3 Novelty and Significance of the Research Questions

The novelty of this research lies in its integrated approach to studying policy effectiveness through both a macro lens (developmental state) and a micro lens (social capital and gender). While most policy evaluations are either programmatic or statistical in nature, this study adopts a grounded, ethnographic orientation that foregrounds the voices and lived experiences of artisans. The focus on a backward district like Nalgonda adds empirical richness, offering insights into spatial disparities in development outcomes. By incorporating a gender-sensitive and caste-

disaggregated perspective, the research questions address gaps in the existing literature, which tends to homogenize artisan communities or overlook intersectional inequities.

Moreover, the study aligns its questions with both theoretical and practical concerns. It not only evaluates whether policy goals have been met but also explores the socio-cultural and institutional constraints that shape policy implementation and outcomes. This makes the research relevant not only to academics but also to policymakers, development practitioners, and community-based organizations seeking to design more inclusive rural development strategies.

5. Study Area: Nalgonda District

Nalgonda district, located in the southern part of Telangana, occupies a crucial position in the socio-economic and political landscape of the state. With a total geographical area of 14,240 square kilometers and a population of approximately 3.48 million as per the 2011 Census, Nalgonda ranks among the larger and more demographically significant districts in Telangana. Historically, Nalgonda has been characterized by its agrarian economy, backwardness in development indicators, and a high proportion of marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). These features make it an ideal case for understanding the interaction between state policies and rural artisanal livelihoods.

The socio-historical backdrop of Nalgonda reveals deep-rooted patterns of caste-based occupational hierarchies. Traditional artisan castes such as Padmasalis (weavers), Kummaris (potters), Vadrangis (carpenters), Kamsalis (goldsmiths), and Medaris (basket-makers) have played a vital role in sustaining rural economies and social structures. Despite their critical contributions, these communities have remained economically vulnerable and socially marginalized. With the advent of industrialization and mechanization, the relevance of these occupations has diminished significantly, exacerbating their marginality.

Post-independence, Nalgonda was integrated into Andhra Pradesh until the bifurcation and creation of Telangana in 2014. During the unified state regime, Nalgonda was consistently identified as one of the most underdeveloped districts in terms of infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The Telangana statehood movement, in fact, used Nalgonda's persistent backwardness as a key argument for state reorganization. Post-formation, expectations were high that the new state would prioritize development in historically neglected districts like Nalgonda, particularly by focusing on marginalized castes and traditional occupations.

Demographically, the district is characterized by a substantial rural population, low urbanization rates, and a heavy dependence on agriculture and allied activities. According to the 2011 Census, SCs constitute about 18.3% and STs 11.2% of the district population—figures higher than many other districts in the state. The literacy rate remains below the state average, especially among SC and ST women, reflecting deep educational and social inequalities. These factors create a structural context where artisanship is not only a means of livelihood but also a socio-cultural identity that intersects with issues of caste, gender, and rurality.

Occupational data from the 2011 Census and subsequent state reports show a drastic decline in the proportion of workers engaged in traditional crafts. Artisans engaged in household industries—such as weaving, pottery, carpentry, and blacksmithing—make up less than 3% of the total workforce in Nalgonda. However, this low percentage masks the critical dependence of certain communities on these crafts. For instance, many families still supplement their incomes through artisanal work even if not officially recorded under that category. This underscores the need to disaggregate occupational data at the caste and community level to understand the true scale of artisanal engagement.

The selection of Nalgonda as the study area is also justified by the region's active participation in state-sponsored schemes aimed at traditional occupations. The TRS government launched several targeted programs—including sheep distribution for the Yadava community, barber shop modernization for Mangalis, toddy tapping tax waivers for Gouds, and subsidies for weavers and potters. Yet, implementation has been uneven, and field reports indicate

that many eligible beneficiaries remain excluded due to bureaucratic hurdles, lack of awareness, or intra-caste disparities.

Furthermore, Nalgonda presents a rich context for studying the role of social capital. In many villages, caste-based associations such as Padmasali Sanghams or Kummari Unions still function, albeit with varying effectiveness. These associations can serve as informal intermediaries between artisans and state agencies but can also reproduce internal hierarchies and gatekeeping. The presence or absence of NGOs and cooperatives further shapes the degree of market access and scheme uptake.

Geographically, the district's semi-arid climate and periodic droughts affect agricultural viability, making non-farm occupations like artisanship even more critical. Yet, policy frameworks rarely integrate climate resilience with artisan welfare, missing an opportunity for holistic rural development. Moreover, artisans face infrastructural challenges such as lack of roads, electricity, storage, and marketing facilities that further constrain their economic mobility.

From a cultural standpoint, Nalgonda retains a strong artisanal legacy, visible in its traditional textiles, pottery, and woodcraft. However, the lack of formal documentation, intellectual property protection, and brand recognition makes it difficult for artisans to scale or commercialize their products. The tourism potential of the district—especially given its Buddhist heritage and temples—has not been leveraged to promote local crafts either.

In summary, Nalgonda represents both a microcosm of rural artisanal distress and a site of policy experimentation in Telangana. Its demographic composition, historical marginalization, and uneven development make it an appropriate and compelling choice for analyzing the intersection of caste, occupation, and state policy. By focusing on this district, the study aims to produce context-specific insights with broader implications for rural development and artisan welfare across Telangana and similar regions in India.

6. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to capture the complexity of artisan livelihoods in Nalgonda and assess the multi-layered impact of state policies. Given the inherently embedded nature of artisanal occupations within caste, gender, and rural socio-political structures, a purely quantitative or qualitative approach would have been insufficient to draw comprehensive inferences. Therefore, this research strategically combines structured survey data, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant observation to achieve both breadth and depth in analysis.

6.1 Research Design and Rationale

The mixed-methods approach enables triangulation of data from multiple sources to strengthen the validity of findings. Quantitative methods offer measurable indicators of socio-economic change, such as income variation, scheme coverage, asset ownership, and access to basic services. Qualitative methods illuminate the subjective experiences, aspirations, and constraints faced by artisans, allowing for a more textured and context-sensitive interpretation of policy impacts.

6.2 Sampling Strategy

The study was conducted across three purposively selected villages in Nalgonda district—each with significant populations from artisan communities like Padmasalis, Kummari, and Vadrangis. The selection was based on preliminary visits and consultations with local officials and NGOs, with criteria including demographic diversity, concentration of artisan households, and active (or inactive) participation in state welfare schemes.

Within each village, a stratified purposive sampling strategy was employed to capture representation across caste, gender, age, and occupational variation. A total of 75 households were surveyed—25 from each village. These included primary artisans, part-time practitioners, and artisan households with youth engaged in alternative livelihoods. Women respondents were oversampled in households with multiple adult members to ensure gender-sensitive data.

6.3 Data Collection Techniques

1. *Household Survey:* A structured questionnaire was developed, covering variables such as household income, asset ownership, access to credit, education levels, health expenditure, occupational status, use of technology, and participation in government schemes. Data was collected through in-person interviews and coded into a database for analysis.
2. *Semi-Structured Interviews:* Twenty key informants, including village elders, local NGO workers, cooperative leaders, and block-level government officials, were interviewed to understand policy intent, implementation challenges, and historical patterns of artisan engagement.
3. *Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):* A total of six FGDs (two per village) were conducted—one with male artisans and one with female artisans. These discussions focused on themes like gender roles, inter-generational occupational changes, perceptions of government support, and collective action.
4. *Participant Observation:* Researchers spent a minimum of one week in each village to observe daily artisan practices, community dynamics, and the informal mechanisms through which artisans engage with local institutions. Field notes were maintained systematically.
5. *Document Review:* Relevant government policy documents, scheme guidelines, annual reports of the Telangana State Handicrafts Development Corporation, and budget allocations from the Department of Backward Class Welfare were analyzed. Secondary sources from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), Economic Surveys, and academic publications were also reviewed.

6.4 Ethical Considerations

All respondents were informed about the purpose and scope of the study, and verbal consent was obtained prior to participation. Ethical research principles were followed, including voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, confidentiality of responses, and anonymization of personal data. No financial or material incentives were offered. While formal institutional ethical clearance was not secured due to the timeline of the fieldwork, community-level permissions were obtained from Gram Panchayats and artisan associations.

6.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means, percentages, and cross-tabulations to highlight socio-economic patterns and disparities among artisan groups. Where applicable, inferential analysis (e.g., chi-square tests) was applied to examine relationships between variables such as caste and scheme access. Key themes included caste and occupation linkages, policy awareness, barriers to access, gender disparities, and informal support mechanisms.

6.6 Limitations of the Methodology

The study is constrained by its limited geographic focus and relatively small sample size, which may not allow for broader generalization. Additionally, the absence of formal ethical board approval could limit publication in certain academic outlets, although community consent was rigorously ensured. Seasonal fluctuations in artisan activity, especially during agricultural lean seasons or festival periods, may have also influenced responses. Despite these limitations, the research offers deep, grounded insights into the functioning and failures of welfare delivery to artisan communities in a backward region.

6.7 Novel Contributions of Methodology

This study's methodological novelty lies in its integrated, multi-scalar, and intersectional approach. By combining micro-level household data with meso-level institutional interviews and macro-level policy review, the methodology allows for a systemic understanding of rural artisan transformation. The explicit inclusion of women's voices, caste-based variations, and social capital mapping represents a methodological advancement over previous studies that often-treated artisans as a uniform category. Finally, the use of both spatial (village-level) and temporal (pre- and post-state formation) comparisons adds historical depth to the analysis.

7. Findings and Analysis

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, structured thematically in line with the research objectives. The analysis is informed by both quantitative survey data and qualitative insights drawn from interviews, FGDs, and participant observations. The discussion follows an intersectional approach, examining how caste, gender, social capital, and geography shape access to state schemes, influence livelihood outcomes, and reinforce or challenge existing structures of marginalization within artisan communities in Nalgonda.

7.1 Caste and Occupational Identity

Caste remains the primary organizing principle of artisanal labor in Nalgonda. Artisans typically inherit their occupations through generational transmission within caste groups. Survey data revealed that 82% of respondents identified their caste as directly linked to their artisanal profession. For instance, Padmasalis engaged in weaving, Kummaries in pottery, Vadrangis in carpentry, and Kamsalis in metalwork. These identities are not only occupational but deeply cultural, tied to pride, ritual duties, and social status.

However, the caste-based occupational system is undergoing stress. Among younger artisans, especially those under 35 years of age, there is an increasing tendency to diversify away from hereditary occupations. Around 41% of youth in artisan households reported pursuing alternative livelihoods, including daily wage labor, petty trade, or migration to urban centers. This shift reflects both a declining demand for traditional crafts and a perceived lack of future viability.

Despite the formal discontinuation of caste-based discrimination, subtle forms of hierarchy continue to manifest. Interviews revealed that schemes meant for "backward classes" often disproportionately benefit numerically dominant OBCs like Padmasalis, while SC and ST artisan castes such as Madigas and Yerukulas reported consistent exclusion. The Padmasali community, for example, has active Sanghams (associations) that lobby for funds, while smaller communities lack collective voice.

7.2 Gendered Exclusion and Participation

Gender emerged as a critical axis of exclusion. While women participate extensively in artisanal labor—especially in weaving, embroidery, pottery finishing, and marketing—their work is often undervalued or made invisible within official frameworks. Only 19% of surveyed women reported receiving any direct benefit from government schemes, compared to 47% of men.

FGDs revealed that women artisans face multiple barriers: limited mobility, lack of asset ownership, unequal pay, and exclusion from decision-making bodies like cooperatives and panchayats. In some cases, male family members collected benefits on their behalf. Women also have fewer opportunities for skill training or leadership in SHGs (Self-Help Groups) unless specifically supported by NGOs.

Despite these challenges, women showed strong interest in accessing livelihood resources, particularly loans and market access. Many expressed a desire to form independent collectives and explore digital platforms for selling crafts but lacked training and institutional support. These insights underscore the need for gender-mainstreamed artisan policies that move beyond tokenism.

7.3 Market and Technology Constraints

Market access remains one of the most significant bottlenecks for artisans. Over 68% of respondents relied on local weekly markets or middlemen for selling their products. Less than 5% had ever participated in urban exhibitions, and none had direct experience with digital marketplaces or e-commerce platforms.

The absence of design innovation and lack of branding were also cited as challenges. Products often failed to meet evolving consumer tastes, especially in urban settings. Younger artisans reported frustration at using outdated tools and techniques due to the unavailability or unaffordability of modern alternatives. Access to electricity, storage space, and transportation was irregular, limiting productivity.

While schemes like the Handloom and Handicrafts Export Corporation theoretically offer marketing assistance, most artisans in Nalgonda were unaware of such avenues. Some respondents even doubted whether their crafts

were “modern enough” to qualify for state support. This self-doubt is symptomatic of a broader psychological marginalization that policies must address.

7.4 Implementation Gaps and Bureaucratic Barriers

A recurring theme across interviews and FGDs was the poor implementation of welfare schemes. Many artisans had heard about the sheep distribution program, tool kit subsidies, or cooperative grants, but few had benefited. Reasons cited include lack of awareness, absence of application support, irregular field visits by officials, and the role of intermediaries who demanded commissions.

Corruption was a consistent grievance. Several respondents narrated incidents of officials favoring politically affiliated individuals or dominant caste members. One potter noted that “even if the government announces a scheme for us, it never reaches us. It’s like the fruit is shown but never given.”

District and block-level officials admitted to limitations, including staff shortages, overlapping responsibilities, and a lack of coordination between departments. The digitalization of scheme applications—while potentially improving transparency—has ironically excluded older artisans who lack digital literacy.

7.5 Social Capital and Community Networks

Social capital played an ambivalent role in artisans’ lives. In some cases, caste-based associations helped in mobilizing resources, organizing festivals, or lobbying for grants. For example, Padmasali Sanghams played a significant role in channeling subsidies and organizing training programs. These groups had links with political representatives and used them to gain access to schemes.

However, such bonding capital often reinforced exclusion. Weaker artisan castes lacked similar organizational strength and thus remained disconnected from state mechanisms. Bridging capital—networks that connect artisan groups with external actors such as NGOs, academic institutions, or designers—was almost entirely absent in the studied villages.

Where NGOs had intervened, artisans reported better outcomes. One village that partnered with a Hyderabad-based NGO had formed a cooperative that received design training and participated in three urban exhibitions. This suggests that policy effectiveness is significantly enhanced when intermediated by credible civil society actors.

7.6 Intergenerational Shifts and Aspirational Mobility

The study found clear intergenerational differences in how artisans perceive their work. Older artisans expressed pride in their craft and a desire for state recognition and support. Younger members, however, were more skeptical. Many viewed artisanal work as economically unstable, socially stagnant, and incompatible with modern aspirations.

Nonetheless, there was interest in hybrid livelihoods—combining artisanal work with part-time jobs, education, or digital entrepreneurship. Youth respondents suggested that if craft could be linked to technology and branding, they would be more willing to continue the tradition. This offers a significant opening for policy innovation aimed at retention and revitalization of artisanal skills.

7.7 Summary of Findings

Overall, the study reveals that while Telangana has introduced multiple schemes targeting artisan welfare, these have not translated into consistent or transformative outcomes on the ground. Caste and gender continue to mediate access, and policy implementation is uneven, opaque, and often exclusionary. Community networks help where they exist, but also reproduce inequalities. Most artisans continue to operate in informal conditions, with limited access to credit, technology, or markets. These findings highlight the urgent need for an integrated, inclusive, and bottom-up policy approach tailored to the complexities of rural artisanal economies.

8. Discussion

The findings presented in the previous section underscore the persistent structural and institutional challenges confronting artisan communities in Nalgonda, despite the proliferation of welfare schemes post the formation of Telangana. This discussion section analytically engages with these findings using the dual lenses of developmental state theory and social capital theory to interpret policy performance, identify structural constraints, and offer broader insights into the political economy of marginalized livelihoods in regional India.

8.1 Policy Intent versus Ground Realities

Developmental state theory emphasizes a proactive and coordinated state apparatus that strategically mobilizes resources, directs investments, and builds institutional capacity for inclusive growth. Telangana's policy architecture, at least on paper, reflects developmental intent—targeted subsidies, welfare pensions, skill development, and caste-based occupational promotion. However, the reality in Nalgonda diverges significantly from this vision.

The state's interventions are fragmented, scheme-centric, and implemented with limited coordination across departments. There is no overarching framework that links artisan support with broader development agendas like education, rural infrastructure, or digital empowerment. Schemes like the sheep distribution program or weaving subsidies operate in silos, without complementary interventions in marketing, design innovation, or financial access. This bureaucratic myopia limits the state's developmental capacity.

Moreover, the lack of trained personnel at the block and village levels severely hampers delivery. Interviews with government officials revealed that functionaries often juggle multiple responsibilities and are rarely trained to handle artisan-specific concerns. As developmental state theory suggests, institutional capacity is central to successful intervention. Telangana's artisan policy suffers from a classic capacity-implementation mismatch.

8.2 The Role and Limits of Social Capital

While social capital—especially bonding capital within caste groups—has helped some artisan communities access schemes and create informal support structures, it is unevenly distributed. Padmasali Sanghams and similar caste associations have succeeded in leveraging their organizational capital, political networks, and historical visibility. However, smaller, dispersed, and socio-politically weaker communities like Kummaris and Medaris lack such representation.

This finding resonates with critiques of social capital theory that warn against romanticizing community cohesion without recognizing its exclusionary dynamics. Bonding capital, in this context, often reproduces caste hierarchies rather than challenging them. The near-total absence of bridging capital—networks connecting artisans to urban designers, digital platforms, or export agencies—isolates rural craftspeople from growth sectors.

NGO interventions have partially bridged this gap. Villages with NGO presence reported significantly higher levels of scheme utilization, market access, and skill enhancement. However, such interventions are project-based and geographically scattered, lacking the scale or sustainability to serve as systemic alternatives. This calls for policy mechanisms that can institutionalize bridging capital through partnerships between state, civil society, and private actors.

8.3 Caste as a Structuring Logic of Policy Access

The findings highlight caste not merely as a socio-cultural identity but as a structuring logic that mediates access to state resources. Despite being nominally inclusive, most artisan-related schemes disproportionately benefit dominant OBCs. This pattern reflects what scholars term as “graded inequalities” within welfare states, where more organized, vocal, and politically connected caste groups mobilize resources at the expense of less assertive counterparts.

This dynamic contradicts the developmental state ideal of equitable redistribution. In fact, the system perpetuates inequality under the guise of backward class empowerment. Unless artisan policies explicitly account for intra-

OBC stratification and include disaggregated targeting mechanisms, they risk further entrenching caste hierarchies. Policies must go beyond blanket quotas and adopt community-specific equity measures.

8.4 Gender Blindness in Artisanal Policies

The data reveals a clear gender gap in policy outreach and benefit allocation. Women artisans, despite their central role in production and marketing, remain peripheral in policy design and delivery. This blind spot is partly due to the patriarchal structure of artisan households and partly due to the state's failure to design gender-responsive programs.

Existing schemes rarely account for women's mobility constraints, literacy gaps, or dual burden of domestic and economic labor. Training programs are male-dominated, and cooperative structures seldom include women in leadership roles. The state's reliance on male household heads as default beneficiaries further marginalizes women's economic agency. A truly developmental approach would incorporate gender audits, reserved quotas in artisan cooperatives, and dedicated credit lines for women artisans.

8.5 Intergenerational Aspirations and the Crisis of Continuity

The reluctance of younger generations to continue artisanal occupations signals a looming crisis of continuity. This is not merely a function of low income but reflects a broader cultural devaluation of artisanal labor. In a rapidly modernizing society, traditional crafts are seen as regressive, unstable, and lacking social mobility.

Yet, paradoxically, young artisans express openness to hybrid livelihoods that integrate craft with modern tools, digital marketing, and design innovation. This suggests that with the right institutional support, artisanal knowledge can be revitalized and repositioned within contemporary economic circuits. However, this would require a policy shift from preservationist to transformational approaches—where tradition is not romanticized but modernized through meaningful investment in education, skill upgrading, and market integration.

8.6 Toward an Integrated Artisan Policy Framework

The absence of an integrated policy framework is a key structural constraint. Telangana's current approach is reactive, scheme-driven, and politically opportunistic. What is needed is a cohesive rural artisan development strategy that aligns with state-level goals for employment, education, and inclusive growth.

Such a framework should include: i) A comprehensive database of artisan households across caste and gender categories. ii) Village-level nodal points for scheme dissemination and grievance redressal. iii) Mandatory inclusion of artisans in Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP). iv) Convergence with rural development, skill mission, and MSME policies. v) Annual social audits and participatory monitoring mechanisms.

8.7 Situating the Study within Broader Debates

This study contributes to ongoing academic debates on subnational development in India. It shows that statehood alone does not guarantee equitable transformation. Unless governance structures are democratized, capacity enhanced, and community dynamics understood, welfare schemes risk becoming performative rather than transformative.

In policy terms, the findings call for a shift from paternalistic welfare to participatory development—where artisans are not passive recipients but active agents in shaping their futures. Caste and gender-aware institutional design, strategic use of social capital, and long-term investment in artisanal modernization are essential for any meaningful transformation.

9. Policy Recommendations

Building on the analytical insights and empirical evidence presented, this section outlines a comprehensive set of policy recommendations aimed at addressing the systemic challenges faced by artisan communities in Nalgonda and, by extension, rural Telangana. These recommendations seek to move beyond piecemeal welfare interventions

and propose structural, institutional, and participatory reforms rooted in the principles of inclusive development, gender equity, and caste-sensitive policymaking.

9.1 Establish an Integrated Rural Artisan Development Authority (IRADA)

The current policy framework is fragmented and operates through multiple departments—Backward Class Welfare, Rural Development, Handlooms and Textiles, and MSMEs—with limited coordination. A dedicated autonomous body, the Integrated Rural Artisan Development Authority (IRADA), should be established at the state level to coordinate programs, streamline resource allocation, and serve as a nodal agency for artisan welfare. IRADA should have district-level chapters with decentralized planning capacities and representation from artisan communities, NGOs, and academic institutions.

9.2 Create a Dynamic Artisans Database with Caste and Gender Disaggregation

A major constraint in targeted delivery is the absence of a reliable, disaggregated database of artisan households. The state must conduct a comprehensive enumeration of artisans, recording caste, gender, occupation, skills, income levels, and market access. This database should be updated regularly and integrated with other welfare platforms (like the Praja Palana dashboard) to enable better targeting and monitoring.

9.3 Reform Scheme Design and Delivery Mechanisms

Most existing schemes are generic, underfunded, and poorly disseminated. Reforms should include: 1. Transparent, offline and online application systems with helpline support. 2. Local facilitation centers in each Mandal staffed by trained outreach workers. 3. Special enrollment camps for women artisans and SC/ST artisan households. 4. Real-time dashboards for monitoring fund disbursement and beneficiary satisfaction.

9.4 Gender-Responsive Policy Mainstreaming

Women artisans must be recognized as independent economic agents. Policy actions should include: 1. Reserved seats for women in artisan cooperatives and SHG-led federations. 2. Dedicated skill training programs during accessible hours and in women-friendly spaces. 3. Maternity-linked social security and childcare support at workspaces. 4. Tailored credit products from State Finance Corporations with interest subsidies.

9.5 Strengthen Skill Development with a Focus on Market Alignment

Artisan skill development must be forward-looking, emphasizing design, quality, and digital fluency. Key steps include: 1. Collaborations with National Institute of Design (NID), National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), and IITs for product innovation workshops. 2. Village Design Labs (VDLs) in artisan-dense regions to support experimentation and skill upgrades. 3. Accreditation systems for traditional knowledge and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) certificates to improve credibility.

9.6 Build Market Infrastructure and Facilitate Digital Access

To combat market marginalization, the government must invest in: 1. Permanent artisan haats and regional craft clusters linked to tourism routes. 2. E-commerce training programs and partnerships with platforms like Amazon Karigar or Government eMarketplace (GeM). 3. Mobile apps in local languages to connect artisans directly with buyers. 4. Branding support and geographical indication (GI) tagging for district-specific crafts.

9.7 Promote Inclusive Cooperatives and Cluster-Based Approaches

Artisan cooperatives must become vehicles of economic and social empowerment, not elite-controlled entities. Steps should include: 1. Caste- and gender-diverse cooperative mandates enforced through social audits. 2. Artisan cluster development programs with shared infrastructure, such as tool banks, quality testing labs, and packaging units. 3. Peer learning networks across clusters to exchange knowledge, innovations, and experiences.

9.8 Incentivize Youth Engagement and Innovation

To revitalize artisan occupations, younger generations must see artisanal work as economically viable. Proposed initiatives: 1. Fellowship programs for youth artisans to pursue business incubation. 2. Innovation grants for

artisanal startups that combine tradition with tech. 3.State-sponsored digital storytelling campaigns that rebrand crafts as aspirational careers.

9.9 Institutionalize NGO and Academic Partnerships

Bridging capital is best built through sustained partnerships. The state should: 1.Offer long-term contracts to NGOs for capacity-building, M&E, and grievance redressal. 2. Mandate university-led impact assessments of major artisan programs. 3.Establish Artisan Research Fellowships in public universities to build a knowledge base.

9.10 Integrate Artisan Development with Broader Rural Planning

Artisan welfare should not be isolated from broader rural development. All district and Mandal-level development plans must include: 1. Infrastructure support (roads, electricity, water) for artisan clusters. 2. Linkages with education (vocational courses), health (occupational safety), and housing schemes. 3. Caste-sensitive and gender-aware targeting across all departments.

These ten recommendations provide a roadmap for moving Telangana’s artisan policy from a reactive welfare model to a proactive, inclusive development strategy. If implemented with sincerity, political will, and adequate budgetary support, they can help restore dignity to artisanal labor, revitalize rural economies, and fulfill the unkept promises of statehood to Telangana’s most marginalized citizens.

10. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the impact of state policies on the socio-economic transformation of artisan communities in Nalgonda district, Telangana. By grounding the inquiry in empirical fieldwork and interpreting it through the dual lenses of developmental state and social capital theories, the research reveals the profound disjuncture between policy aspirations and ground-level realities. While Telangana’s post-formation period saw a proliferation of welfare schemes and caste-based occupational support initiatives, the intended transformative outcomes have largely remained elusive for marginalized artisans.

Artisan communities in Nalgonda continue to grapple with structural disadvantages tied to caste hierarchies, gender exclusions, market disconnections, and institutional neglect. State policies, though abundant in form, have often lacked coherence, inclusivity, and effective delivery mechanisms. Dominant OBC groups with organizational and political capital have benefited disproportionately, while smaller SC/ST artisan groups remain marginalized. Women artisans, despite their central role in production and marketing, are rarely acknowledged as direct beneficiaries, let alone empowered stakeholders. These patterns reflect systemic governance failures rooted in both bureaucratic fragmentation and socio-cultural inequalities.

However, the study also identifies points of resilience and potential. Social capital—especially where bolstered by NGO partnerships—has enabled some artisan groups to organize, access markets, and engage with state mechanisms. Younger artisans express a willingness to engage with technology, hybrid livelihoods, and market innovation, provided they are given the requisite support. These findings suggest that the crisis in the artisan sector is not simply one of decline, but of transition—a moment that, if addressed creatively and inclusively, could lead to a revival rooted in both tradition and transformation.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings affirm the importance of integrating structural and relational frameworks in development analysis. Developmental state theory helps identify the limitations of technocratic policymaking devoid of institutional depth, while social capital theory brings attention to the lived networks and informal institutions that mediate development outcomes. Together, they offer a robust framework to reimagine artisan policy as both a technical and political project.

The study contributes to broader debates on federalism, welfare, and subnational governance in India. Telangana’s formation was based on promises of justice, equity, and regional development. The unmet expectations of artisan communities highlight the challenges of translating political emancipation into socio-economic empowerment.

For new or reorganized states, the lesson is clear: political autonomy must be accompanied by institutional accountability, inclusive policy design, and sustained investments in marginalized sectors.

In terms of practical contributions, the study offers a set of actionable recommendations that, if pursued, can enhance the efficacy, equity, and sustainability of artisan welfare schemes. These include the creation of a dedicated artisan authority, data-driven targeting, gender-responsive planning, market integration, and youth-centered innovation programs. More fundamentally, the state must shift from a charity-based approach to one of co-creation and empowerment, treating artisans not as relics of the past but as vital contributors to a plural, inclusive economy.

Future research could extend this inquiry through comparative studies across districts and states, explore longitudinal impacts of specific schemes, or delve deeper into the role of digital technologies in artisan livelihoods. Moreover, interdisciplinary collaborations—linking public policy, design, technology, and anthropology—could help develop integrated solutions that are both context-sensitive and scalable.

In conclusion, the story of Telangana's artisans is one of struggle and survival, but also of endurance and potential. By listening to their voices, recognizing their value, and co-creating development pathways, the state can honor its foundational promises and build a more inclusive, resilient, and dignified future for its people.

Conflict of Interest Statement The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement Primary data available from the author upon reasonable request. Secondary data used from public sources.

References

1. Evans, P. (1995). *Embedded autonomy: States and industrial transformation*. Princeton University Press.
2. Harriss-White, B. (2003). *India working: Essays on society and economy*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Johnson, C. (1982). *MITI and the Japanese miracle: The growth of industrial policy, 1925–1975*. Stanford University Press.
4. Jodhka, Surinder S. (2015) *Caste in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Routledge, 252 pages
5. Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.
6. Rao, C. H. (2014). The New Telangana State. A Perspective for Inclusive and Sustainable Development". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(9), 10–13.
7. Vaddiraju, A. K. (2022). *Politics in the State of Telangana: Identity, representation and democracy* (Working Paper No. 397). Institute for Social and Economic Change