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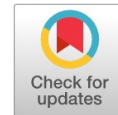


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### The Socio-Economic plight of Artisans in the Bangle Industry - A Comparative Study of North India Firozabad (Glass Bangle) and South India Hyderabad (Lac Bangle)



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# THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PLIGHT OF ARTISANS IN THE BANGLE INDUSTRY - A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NORTH INDIA FIROZABAD (GLASS BANGLE) AND SOUTH INDIA HYDERABAD (LAC BANGLE)

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**Abstract.** The study's objective is to examine the socio-economic existence of the artisans in both the Glass Industry Firozabad (Uttar Pradesh) and Lac Industry Hyderabad (erst. Andhra Pradesh). This study will also assess key socio-economic indicators like literacy, gender parity, distribution of wealth, social stratification, casteism, social security etc. The research will aim to take a close and balanced holistic approach to the role of family, traditions, and inheritance in their choice of livelihood and skillsets. This research will be conducted by using a questionnaire, participant observation, case study to explore the cause and consequences of social issues of artisans in the bangle industry. Indian bangle, a hand ornament, has been part of its cultural practices from ancient to contemporary times. Already known as a country of vibrant colours, bangles add a different dimension to it with their varied sizes and shapes. Bangle Industry in India comes under Microenterprises and plays an important role in our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In a nutshell, the artisans need to understand the value of this craft, and therefore, they should demand their rights to keep this art alive. They need to stand up for what is due to them, and therefore, it becomes the duty of the government and social agencies to help this group of people.

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**INTRODUCTION**

From mythology, history, folklore, Indian literature to popular songs and stories of Bollywood movies, no ornament has had a more prominent role and imagination capturing power than the Indian Bangle. The bangle is an ornament used since ancient Indus valley civilization. A replica of a dancing girl wearing a bangle on her left arm from that era can be seen in the National Museum of New Delhi India. In Asian countries, the bangle has significant value in different cultures. India is amongst one of those countries where wearing bangles comes under one of the important customs of different communities. Bangle making is an art and it is available in many shapes, colors, and materials. Indeed, it is a pride of the woman. However, behind this beautiful ornament is the unseen hard work of many children and ladies. In this paper, we are going to throw light on some of the aspects of this Industry which are very important to shape the future of any country. A comparative analysis of two different states is done where children and ladies are engaged in bangle making art and craft (Nasir, 2013).

**Objective of the Study**

The overall objective of this research is to analyze the socio-economic existence of artisans in the field of bangle making in Firozabad and Hyderabad. Behind the dazzle and shimmer

of the beautiful bangles lies the fact that these ornaments are the product of the exploited labor of men, women, and children. Our aim is to examine the entrenched problems in their lives which they encounter on a day to day basis and the ordeals they face for their survival in this industry. This study attempts to bring to light and portray the meager and poverty-stricken existence of the crafts persons in the Glass and Lac bangle industry. Child labor, lack of opportunities, poverty and lack of good education and basic amenities like food and shelter are the major issues they face. This research aims to objectively analyze the data collected during the field visits, interviews, and references and present a verbal and visual portrayal of the various social and economic parameters associated with the livelihood of bangle craftsmen. The study then further discusses the various steps that must be taken to rescue this fading trade and help improve the standard of living of hundreds of thousands of bangle-making community members.

**Research Area**

To collect the information from the grass root level, we went into the local community areas in both the cities of Firozabad as well as Hyderabad. The areas we have covered during our research in Hyderabad were amongst the oldest areas like Laad

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bazar, Talab Katta, Vattapally, Misri Ganj, Bhawani Nagar etc. The areas we have covered in Firozabad town were Sadar bazar, Moholla Sheeshgran, and Suhag Nagar. The people involved in this craft are living in communities amongst these areas and in most of the houses, all of the family members are engaged in this craft for their livelihood.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

From a viewpoint of sociology, not enough detailed and all-encompassing research is available on the glass bangle industry in Firozabad so far, despite the fact that this district town has been a major producer of glass products. Presented below are the viewpoints of authors and writers who have done their research on a similar topic earlier. In his paper "Health and Environmental Impacts of Glass Industry (A Case Study of Firozabad Glass Industry)" Dr. Prashant Agarwal and Shilpa Varshney discussed the environmental perils and effects on the artisan's life. It's not the workers in this area but also the flora and fauna that have been the silent victims of this industry (Agarwal & Varshney, 2014).

In her 2009 paper "Child Labor a Study from Anthropological Perspective" Anjali Chandra mentioned with special reference to the glass industry, Firozabad about the role of culture and social environment in the growth of a child. She has thrown light on various aspects of this Industry to highlight the points which are coercing children to lead such a harmful life (Chandra, 2009).

There are very few academic articles that have been written on Hyderabad Lac Industry. A comprehensive and empirical research is required on Lac Bangle Industry of Hyderabad. In her research on Hyderabad Lac Bangles, Dr. Sadaf Nasir debates on many points of the Muslim community bangle maker's socio-economic conditions. Their daily life problems lead them to live a miserable life in this sector (Nasir, 2013; Kamran & Zhao, 2016).

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study is both primary and secondary and data have been collected by using these two methods. This study is divided into two groups: First where the formal survey was conducted followed by a questionnaire and later visits to different factories. The second comprised of an informal interview, observation and visits to different local bangle makers. Although the craftsman (especially women) and factory unit owners were initially reluctant to participate and provide the information required for the study, we emerged successful in collecting information by using qualitative methods. Interviews of skilled workers and unskilled workers were conducted in Firozabad as well as Hyderabad. We spent a few days with the workers and went to their homes and dwellings

where they were more comfortable in divulging the information. Children were curious and eager to talk but under the strict gaze and admonitions of their elders acted as a hinderance. Factory owners were not ready to accept that children were being employed for making bangles. This research paper has been striving to bring to light the problems of children and ladies employed in this sector. Our respondent pool size was limited to a sample of 200 in both the cities; Firozabad and Hyderabad. An in-depth study was done during the months of December 2015 in Firozabad and March 2016 in Hyderabad. A break up of all the information gathered during this period will be represented through different tables and charts in this paper.

### History of Firozabad

Firozabad is a district-town in the state of Uttar Pradesh located nearly 200 kms away from India's capital, New Delhi. It is a relatively small industrial town with a population of around 0.4 million. Firozabad is renowned for beautiful glass bangles and other glass products, so much so that it has earned the sobriquet of "City of Bangles" (Wikipedia, 2016a; Singh, 2005).

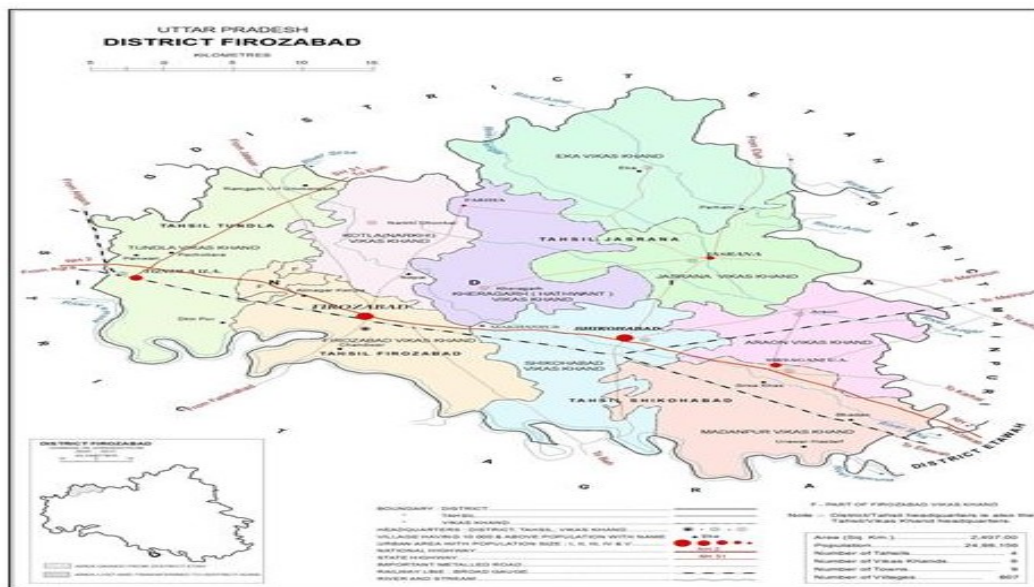
### Glass History in Firozabad

Known as the glass city of India, the trajectory of this glass city can be traced from the ancient period of India. When invaders brought glass articles to India and when these rejected glass articles were collected and melted in a locally made furnace called as "Bhanisa Bhatti" it was the start of the glass industry in Firozabad. Wood was the main fuel of the bhatti and these ancient historic furnaces are still used by people in Sasani near Aligarh and at Purdal Nagar.

Bangles and small bottles were made at that time. A single bangle can be made at a time and without joints. These bangles were called "Kadechhal Ki Chudi". Since then Firozabad is famous for the glass industry. Colored glass pieces were used for making jhad, fanus (Chandelier) for the royal courts and nobles to decorate their Haveli (Mansion). Gradually, kadas, kangan and bangles became popular among the ladies and young girls. Soon there grew a high demand for the bangles on festive seasons. The popularity and demand became one of the major reasons for the survival of the existing glass bangle industry in Firozabad. Today, Suhag Nagar, an area famous for bridal bangle wear is fulfilling the demand of beautiful colored glass bangles for Suhagin (Married women).

Bangle-making is a household business with the traditional technique being passed on through generations (Hornell, 1915). More than half of the workforce in the town of Firozabad and nearby rural areas are engaged in the glass and bangle industry. Firozabad has been producing glass bangles for more than 200 years now and is the biggest manufacturer of glass bangles in the world.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Map of Firozabad**



Source: Census of India, 2011

### **Socio-Economic Status of Firozabad Glass Bangle Artisans**

Firozabad artisans are abundantly available skilled artisans and flexible labor pool. The artisans are mostly localized. However, the migrants from a neighboring country and other parts of India cannot be precluded. These artisans are trained from generation to generation, (Coomaraswamy, 1909). The artisans work as wage workers in large exporting firms. During the sluggish period these workers get busy in their own small firms. Their families are also involved in this business and this wonderful art is handed down to the succeeding generation. These trained workers also start their own independent small businesses and become producers. Generally, four to five years of training are required to train a person to make him a skilled worker. They initially acquire these skills at home from a very young age although it is far from perfection.

Child labor is rampant in the glass manufacturing sector of Firozabad. Dangerous machinery, sharp tools and toxic substances in the working environments of children affect them adversely. Child workers are involved in all steps of the production of small bangles with simple designs (Sethi, 2008).

Poor health and lack of safety is another major social affliction common in this sector. The combination of chemicals, heat, and glass used in this industry is a major health hazard for the workers who suffer from various medical disorders. Many workers across various age groups and gender suffer from tuberculosis or other fatal infections of the lungs and chest. Skin burns and allergies are also commonplace (Weber & Eldridge, 1972). There are many incidents of children burning their hands in the furnaces while shaping the bangles or embedding the stones.

Both women and children complain that sitting in one place throughout the day gives them a backache. Further, the need to concentrate their vision on the furnaces and stones causes eye pain and other problems and can take a heavy toll on their eyesight.

A majority of people in this industry have very low basic or no education at all. Young children prefer to learn this craft instead of going to school because there is no motivation and guidance available for them. They see their parents as their role models and believe in following their footsteps. Girls are mostly likely to stay at home as it is the general perception or notion that girls and women are safer in the confinement of their homes rather than working outside. They are considered privileged if they're allowed to learn these skills at home. Most of the male craftsmen work inside the factory or sell bangles in the shops. Bangle selling is the primary source of their livelihood.

### **History of Hyderabad**

Hyderabad is a city of Nizams and the joint capital of the southern Indian states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad was founded by Muhammad Quli Qutub Shah in 1591 on the banks of the Musi River. During his rule, he had the Charminar and Mecca Masjid built in the city. Post independence from British rule, the main city of Hyderabad was designated as capital of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. In 2014, when Andhra Pradesh was split to form the new state of Telangana, the government of India declared that Hyderabad city would be the capital city for both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh for no more than ten years (Wikipedia, 2016).



**FIGURE 2**  
**Map of Hyderabad**



Source: Telangana Tourism, (2016)

Modern day Hyderabad is a bustling metro city which is a powerhouse of biotechnology, pharmaceutical and IT and ITES service sectors in India. It hosts a large roster of MNC offices including giants such as Google, Microsoft, Oracle, and Facebook and has impressive service sector infrastructure in place. However, like rest of India, Hyderabad has a large informal economy that employs 30% of the labor force.

### **History of Lac Industry in Hyderabad**

Since mythological times, such as Mahabharat (an Indian Mythological epic) the mention of Lacquer (or in short Lac) has been an integral part of Indian folklore. In this epic, there is a very famous sub-story of a palace built of lac by villainous Kaurava clan to burn down with it the heroic Pandava brothers by deception. However, such depiction in mythology aside, Lac has traditionally been treated by Indian culture as a pious substance. Lac is produced by a type of insect *kerria lacca* (Wikipedia, 2016) which is mainly found on the branches of small trees. The large amount of waste which is produced by the insect covers the branches. After this insect, waste is seasoned during the rainy weather, it swells and becomes a source of lac. This wooden covering then undergoes a curing process with solvent evaporation that produces a hard, durable finish. This traditional material is natural, environment-friendly and it is the primary raw material for sallac products (Wikipedia, 2016). The leading producer of Lac is Jharkhand, followed by Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Assam states of India.

The craftsmen, engaged in Lac manufacturing and artisanship are known as either Lakhera (those from Hindu faith) or Manihars (from Muslim faith), both usually hailing from the Indian state of Rajasthan. People from a number of other communities have also joined this sector as workers, contractors, and traders. The new entrants who have increased over the past decade or so are from diverse cultures, caste and community backgrounds, including Syeds, Sheikh, Mughals, Pathans, Qureshis as well as Urdu-speaking communities.

Laad Bazar is located in Hyderabad right next to the historic Charminar. Situated on one of the four main roads that shoot out from the Charminar, it is sited in the old city area of Hyderabad. The term Laad in Hindi means “to love” or “to pamper” and hence Laad bazar literally denotes a marketplace where girls and women are showered with affection by bestowing beautiful bangles.

Also known as Hyderabad’s bridal bazar, this market is a bustling hive of vendors, patrons and bangle hawkers offering a dazzling and wide variety of beautifully crafted lac bangles. This area is not simply any marketplace but rather an important traditional identity of the city and its inhabitants. Though its foundations lie in the glorious days of the Nizams of Mughal period, present day Laad bazar is an amalgam of bright colour and lively activity of the market on one hand and a struggling, decaying array of small factories and exploited labour market hidden beneath the surface on the other hand.

About 500 lac bangle karkhanas thrive in Mecca Masjid camp and adjoining Mitti Ka Sher, Bhawani Nagar, Talabkatta and

Vattepally in Hyderabad. Each karkhana on an average employs 20-25 people.

**Socio-Economic Status of Hyderabad Lac Artisans**

In Hyderabad, bangle manufacturing is distributed under a large unorganized sector where production of bangles takes place both at Karkhanas (small factory units with usually 15-20 workers) as well as in homes. Male members typically work in factories, whereas children and women folk usually work within the confinement of their homes. The stone work on the bangles is mostly done by the women who are skilled and adept at creating different patterns, which they have learned and observed in their homes. The elderly ladies of the house mostly supervise the process and the younger and less experienced women of the house follow their directions.

Children and women are mostly engaged in decorative work (called Meenakari). As this is a minute and delicate work, it requires a lot of visual focus, combined with proximity to a heat source and poorly lit homes, this often results in impairment of eyesight and loss of vision (Cigno & Rosati, 2000). Apart from the cold winters, working near the heat with frequent power outages and absence of fans and air conditioners leads to a great amount of physical suffering.

Since most of the family members are engaged in the lac bangle production, the children are encouraged and many times forced to begin to learn this craft at an early age so that they can gradually master this art. The families usually dont have the money, resources, and inclination to support child education. As a result, most workers have basic or no education at all.

Lack of education, the absence of any meaningful recreational activity and the blind belief that having additional family members working will lead to an increase in daily wages are all contributing factors towards an increase in population among these communities (Weiner, 1991). The dominance of patriarchal tendencies also plays a significant part in population growth as the desire for more number of male children is prevalent. These workers live in small houses and having a large number of children in a family further exacerbates the economic and social problems they face. Their meager house income is mostly spent on their basic needs of food, clothes etc. Children and women are not entitled to get an education and nutritious food (Yoo, Lee & Lee, 2016).

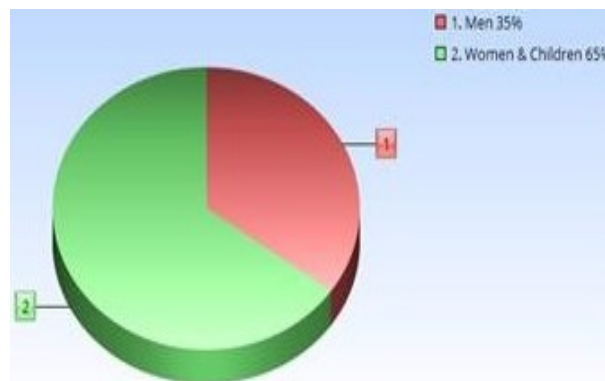
Bangle purchasing increases during festivals and marriage season, so their income is not steady. Living in confined space with large families often leads to quarrels, familial tensions, and discontent. Lack of education, absence of resources and opportunities force them to live a miserable life. Most of the workers live in the old areas of the town in communities where they are engaged only in bangle craftsmanship and they are not abreast of the current events and avails of modern life and are still living in a time warp.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

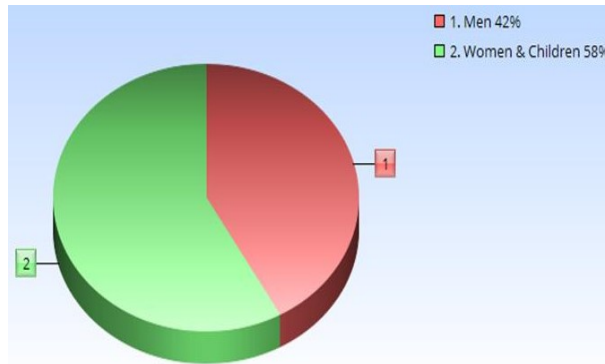
**Gender Workforce Distribution**

A closer look at the data indicates that women and children engaged in this Industry are outnumbering the male workers. It is shown in the chart below:

**FIGURE 3**  
**Gender Ration (Approx.) in Hyderabad Glass Bangle Sector**



**FIGURE 4**  
**Gender Ration (Approx.) in Firozabad Glass Bangle Sector**

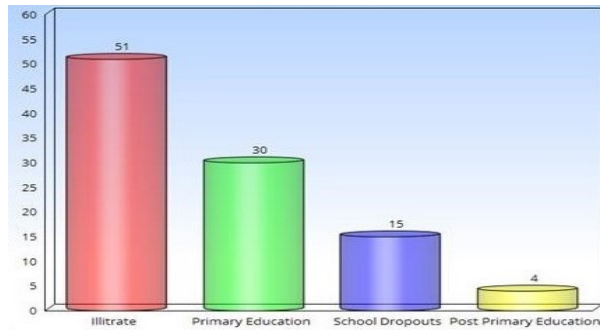


However, it is apparent that women and children work in the homes whereas men constitute nearly all of the workforce in small factory units and outdoor retail shops and vendor ship. Many children from neighboring slums and nearby poor areas are also engaged by bangle traders and workers as helping hands. They are paid very nominal daily wages.

**Education Levels**

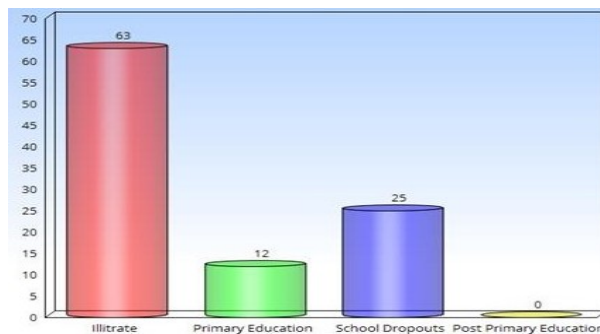
Education, another key indicator of social and economic empowerment, shows an abysmal trend. The majority of the population is either illiterate or with very minimum education. Many had opted to drop out of schools due to compulsions of being pushed in this trade at an early stage as shown in the graph given below:

**FIGURE 5**  
**Education Level (Hyderabad)**



Source: Respondent pool size <50

**FIGURE 6**  
**Education Level (Firozabad)**



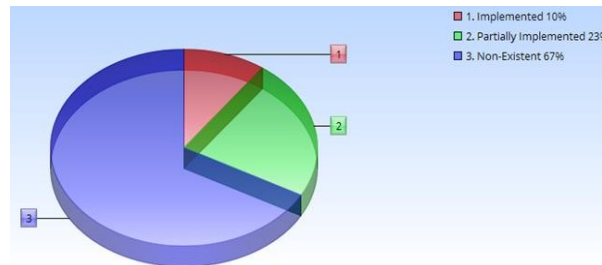
Source: Respondent pool size <50

### Factory Regulations and Welfare Implementations

We found that both in Firozabad and Hyderabad, the bangle producing sector is unregulated with basic worker welfare schemes

absent in the majority of cases. This does not include the manufacturing that takes place in households in urban and rural areas, but rather only the factory units.

**FIGURE 7**  
**Factory Regulations and Basic Welfare**



Source: Hyderabad bangle factory units

Minimum wages, safety, and health safeguards were mostly absent. Also, the employment during off-season dwindles so workers are forced to take up alternative jobs in construction and other sectors to sustain a livelihood.

### MAJOR FINDINGS

The observation and data yielded by this research provide convincing evidence that the bangle making communities are mostly leading a life of poverty and hard labor, where they are unable to afford even basic amenities like education, nutritious food, home etc. With their health deteriorating daily, as they work in the midst of noisy machines, sweltering heat and without any safety accessories, these craftsmen work hard to bring a smile on people's faces.

The current research paper seems to validate the view that bangle manufacturing is not a very profitable livelihood for these workers. Many artisans are eager to learn new skills, but with no facility, forum or economic means available to them, they are unable to do so.

Despite a long history of its existence, over the years, this unorganized industry has not seen a transition towards the use of innovative methods or modern machinery that would reduce the hazards involved in this trade. The once-thriving Industry that had developed over a period of time still employs traditional methods of production.

It is to be noted that the Indian government has implemented the laws of minimum wages, industrial policy, import-export policy and industrial licensing policy applicable to this sector. However, all these laws are on paper only and not observed and implemented in spirit.

Poor health and the adverse working conditions have not been taken care of. There is no provision of minimum salary made

available to craftsmen by business owners and the abundance of cheaply available labor pool often leads to bargaining of rock bottom wages for these workers which is tantamount to exploitation.

Artisans and laborers in bangle industry play a very important role in preserving and developing the Indian cultural heritage. There is overwhelming evidence corroborating the notion that bangle industry is not giving enough benefit to the workers for the value provided by them.

Another essential point to mention here is that there are schemes available in banks, for example, like- (Artisan Credit Card (ACC) Scheme) for these craftspersons but due to lack of education, they are not aware of the benefits they are entitled to. The major number of communities involved in this crafts belong to the Muslim community, however, people from other communities are also playing important role in this industry.

### Comparative Study

Comparisons of glass bangle industry in Firozabad and Lac bangle industry in Hyderabad show many similarities and contrasts also.

Similarities: The data gathered during the research period suggest that both bangle sectors (glass and lac) are unorganized sectors, which are poorly regulated with the absence of any labor welfare and safeguards. There is an urgent need of reformation in this industry so that the living standards of craftspersons and their families can be lifted to at least moderate levels. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of hygiene, poor health etc. are numerous common plights facing the labor force in this trade. In Firozabad the unavailability of regular power supply, poor road infrastructure, and transportation not only hinder the growth of glass bangle industry but also affect the daily life



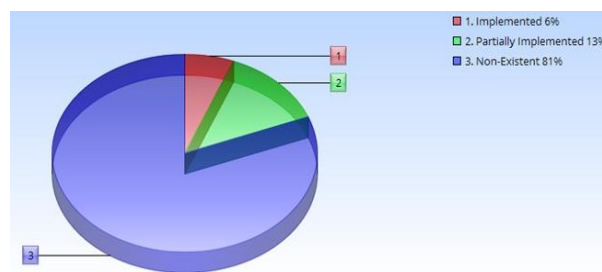
of artisans. Likewise in Hyderabad, these artisans live in old city areas cohabiting with domestic pets like buffalos, dogs, goats and barnyard fowls, usually unaware and unmindful of the diseases that they may be susceptible to.

It is also apparent that bangles are an indispensable part of Indian customs and rituals. During the festivals of Eid and Diwali respectively both Muslim and Hindu ladies adorn their hands with colorful shimmery bangles (Deen, 1998). In both the cities of Firozabad and Hyderabad it has been observed that

a large number of consumers belong to middle or lower class families. The rich, educated and working women are only seen wearing bangles occasionally.

**Financial Disparity:** There is ample support for the claim that Firozabad artisans' conditions are worse than those of Hyderabad's artisans in terms of monetary gains. For example Mohd. Noor in Firozabad earns 150 INR in a day by performing skilled finishing work (called chaklai) on glass bangles.

**FIGURE 8**  
**Factory Regulations and Basic Welfare**



Source: Firozabad bangle factory units

On the contrary, in Hyderabad, performing decorative stonework on a bangle set, a female can earn 300-500 INR in a day. Although this business is on the peak for only 6 months in a year, these daily wages are still not enough to support their families. **Social Differences:** In general, the labor families engaged in bangle work in Firozabad seemed more traditional in bangle design craft than those in Hyderabad. We found that artisans in Hyderabad were willing to learn and apply evolving patterns and designs for lac bangles, whereas bangle makers in Firozabad prefer not to be innovative and submit to using outdated pattern and designs.

In social formalities, the populace of Hyderabad was more orthodox. In Firozabad, the women workers didn't hide their faces behind the veil while photographs were being clicked in their homes. However, in Hyderabad, the women workers would not allow us to go inside the hall where they were working on bangles and prevented us from taking their photographs with uncovered faces.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Indian bangle sector is not only an important part of its economy but also represents the culture and traditions of this country. The beautiful bangles of glass and lac depict many stories with their flamboyant colors and tranquil sounds. The artisans, who toil tirelessly in backbreaking conditions to keep this craft alive in the present world, need support to promote

and preserve this art.

Following are some of the suggestions this research can recommend for the upliftment of bangle trade and its workers:

**Economic Upliftment via Tourism and Exhibitions:** The bangle industry in Firozabad is near to Agra, which is famous for Taj Mahal (Seventh wonder of the world) and Hyderabad is renowned for Charminar Fort. Our government and private tourism sector can attract visitors via innovative schemes, discounts, and showcase these bangle areas, which will generate revenue that can be used to uplift the socio-economic status of these artisans.

Representatives from bangle artisans should be called for art residency programs or exhibitions in schools or corporate offices to show the beauty of this craft. It will expose them to the potential customer base, broaden their understanding of contemporary demand and will simultaneously improve their financial state.

**Economic Upliftment via Government and NGO Intervention:** Exploitation of workers by retailers, middle agents, and business owners should be immediately put to an end under the strict supervision of law and order personnel. Minimum wage rule should be enforced and safety and health regulations need to be implemented at grassroots levels. Retailers, business owners, and traders should follow the mandatory rules laid down by the government and adhere to them.

Many non-government organizations have led efforts to bring

bangle artisans under a single roof to boost marketing which has led to some improvement, but much remains to be done. A cluster approach will help the sector in exploring new markets as currently the units work independently and scaling up is therefore difficult.

Bangle industry needs to evolve into an organized and efficient industrial sector if it has to survive in the modern age. Investment in modern techniques, machines, marketing and research needs to be done to help this sector. It is essential for the craftsmen to learn innovative and new techniques and improve the quality of their design so they can attract International buyers. In this rapidly evolving technological world, artisans need to be more tech savvy in order to survive and thrive.

Social Upliftment via Government Policies and Regulations: These artisans should be entitled to all the basic facilities of life. Free education to children has been deemed a basic human

right in India. Awareness should be generated among labor population to enroll their wards in public schools. The quality of education should be enhanced and education should be made attractive and relevant to help reduce the tendency to drop out of school. An awareness should be created amongst the bangle craft community about the adverse consequences and hazards involved in this industry. Child labor, a punishable offense in India, should be put to an end in this sector.

In a nutshell, the bangle industry artisans need to understand the value of this craft and therefore they should demand their rights to keep this art alive. They need to stand up for what is due to them and therefore it becomes the duty of the government and social agencies to help this group of people. The government has to look at all these problems and help the industry as much as possible so that the domestic industry and workers can grow and compete in a healthy environment in the world market.

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