

Research Article

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Indigenous Cultural Handicrafts Under Threat: A Marxist Analysis of Kalasha Artisans in Rumbur Valley, Lower Chitral, Pakistan

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Abstract: This study explores the indigenous handicrafts of the Kalasha community in Rumbur Valley, Chitral, Pakistan. The main objective is to examine their cultural significance, economic value, and the challenges the Kalasha culture and its artisans face. Kalash Valley has undergone tremendous changes in the socio-economic structure and functional modalities of traditional crafts. Using Karl Marx's alienation and commodification-related concepts. The research explores the displacement of traditional crafts by Kalasha craftswomen, using qualitative methods, interviews, and field observations, revealing their skill in creating intricate handicrafts from local materials. However, their craft is threatened for various reasons, including insufficient access to the market, absence of training centers, poor infrastructure facilities, increasing production costs, and waning interest in the young generation towards these crafts. The commodification of handicrafts by tourism has led to economic marginalization and alienation of artisans from their labor and cultural identity. To address this, the research suggests community-led training initiatives, improved market accessibility, and policy-driven support for artisans. Implementing online sales platforms, recognizing artisans' contributions, and integrating cultural preservation efforts into local governance can sustain Kalasha handicrafts and empower them economically. By applying Marxist theory, this study highlights how external economic pressures shape traditional crafts, offering insights into preserving Indigenous heritage in the face of modernization. Without systemic interventions, Kalasha handicrafts risk becoming mere commodities for tourist consumption, eroding cultural heritage.

Key Words: Indigenous Crafts, Kalasha Handicrafts, Chitral Cultural Heritage, Handicraft Decline, Economic Development, Alienation (Karl Marx), Commodification (Karl Marx)

Introduction

Handicrafts are artefacts created with skilled manual labor, often without heavy machinery. These crafts hold immense cultural significance because they preserve and promote cultural heritage and symbolize the identity of a culture and nation. These handmade crafts are classically made from natural materials using traditional techniques. Handicrafts not only sustain cultural traditions but also contribute to the economic value of a society. It is important to study handicrafts to understand cultural heritage, understand traditional skills, and foster economic opportunities.

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Handicrafts have a rich history spanning continents and reflecting diverse cultural values. For instance, the Arts and Crafts Movement, which began in England in 1888, responded to the Industrial Revolution's impact on traditional manufacturing methods.

Handicrafts, as defined by (UNESCO & ITC, 1997), refer to products crafted by artisans either entirely by hand or with the assistance of hand tools or basic mechanical equipment. However, the defining characteristic is that the artisan's manual skill remains the most significant aspect of the final product. These crafts hold unique value due to their functional, aesthetic, artistic, and cultural attributes. Additionally, they often carry traditional, religious, and social symbolism, making them more than just utilitarian objects but also representations of heritage and identity. Edwards (2006) highlights the role of crafts produced in homes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, showing how they served as artistic expressions, family obligations, or financial necessities, depending on the social and economic context. Similarly, in Finland's pre-industrial city of Turku (Åbo), handicrafts played a critical role in providing daily necessities, mainly clothing and footwear. They offered livelihoods to both men and women while reflecting the gendered nature of labour (Vainio-Korhonen, 2000).

In ancient civilizations such as the Indus Valley, archaeological evidence demonstrates the production of jewelry, pottery, and idols. Pakistan's rich history of handicrafts continues this tradition, with skills passed down through generations. Pakistani embroidery, such as Sindhi, Balochi, and Phulkari needlework, is renowned for its intricate patterns and artistry. Handicrafts also play a vital role in providing income, especially for women in rural areas who create crafts in home-based settings (Shah, 2023). However, the rising costs of raw materials, migration trends, and shifting career preferences are causing artisans to abandon these trades, resulting in the decline of traditional skills.

District Chitral is famous for its handicrafts like long cloaks (*Chugha*), woolen goods, lady hats (*Suiru Khoi*), men's caps (*Pakol*), and carpets (*Qaleen*). These handicrafts have a cultural significance, but they face challenges such as inadequate government and non-governmental organizations support, rising production costs, and a lack of market accessibility (Shahab et al., 2024). The Kalasha tribe, living in the charming valleys of *Rumboor*, *Bumburate*, and *Birir*, holds a unique place in Pakistan's cultural landscape. They are known for their vibrant dress and artistic traditions. Kalasha artisans create intricate handicrafts like "*Susit*" (minor headgear) and "*Kupas*" (major headgear), decorated with beads, buttons, shells, and feathers. These crafts represent the deep cultural heritage of the *Kalasha* people but remain confined to local markets due to limited access to global platforms (SOCH Outreach Foundation, 2023; Latif, n.d.).

The beauty of the Kalasha is reflected in their traditional costume and decoration. The *Kalasha* women wear colorful, loose-fitted "*Chaw*" or "*Paran*" dress with a belt at the waist called "*Patti*" with clusters of multi-layered beaded ornaments, often covered with "*Susit*" and "*Kupas*" headgear. This beautiful craftsmanship reflects the vibrant designs woven from the backstrap loom, and sheep shearing is a testament to their rich craftsmanship in textiles and design. In addition, they also produce other products, such as wall hangings, purses, earrings, baskets, etc. While artisans are wonderfully creative, their geographical isolation and limited resource access compel them to take their crafts outside their communities. Sadly, this has led to many traditional handicrafts being lost, such as the black woolen dress formerly worn by *Kalasha* women, which is now only displayed in the *Bamborat Kalash Valley Museum*. It is challenging to see a woman wearing a *chaw* in her routine life now, and therefore, it is impossible to witness this cultural tradition in its original form (Malik, 2015).

In recent years, the challenges facing *Kalasha* handicrafts have intensified. The younger generations want to pursue education and modern careers rather than learning traditional skills; there is little institutional support, while a lack of institutional support and community training centers further hampers preservation efforts. As Marx's concept of commodification suggests, handicrafts are now prepared for external markets or tourists visiting *Kalash Valley*, so these crafts are losing their cultural value. The lack of sustainable markets, rising prices of raw materials, and limited government funding have driven *Kalasha* handicrafts to the brink of extinction. These factors must be understood in order to devise strategies to preserve the cultural and economic value of *Kalasha* handicrafts. This research addresses these questions, providing insight into the challenges of *Kalasha* artisans and the broader issues related to cultural heritage preservation.

Literature Review

Handicrafts have played a crucial role in human evolution, dating back to the earliest stages of survival when Homo Habilis created tools and weapons from their surroundings approximately 2.5 million years ago. These items, such as spears and axes, were handmade and laid the foundation for artistic and functional innovation. Over time, handicrafts became integral to cultural and economic systems, reflecting various societies' creative and cultural heritage. Despite their historical and cultural significance, rural producers and artisans face challenges in marketing their goods due to poverty, lack of education, and reliance on intermediaries for raw materials, financing, and markets (Gobar, 2019). Besides providing employment and reflecting a nation's culture, traditions, and heritage, handicrafts serve as a means of self-expression for artisans. Thus, handicrafts contribute to the rural economy and play a vital role in preserving cultural identity, fostering peace, and promoting social harmony (Khan & Amir, 2013; Bhat & Yadav, 2016).

Globally, handicraft industries exhibit significant innovation potential. For example, Naidu et al. (2014) highlighted that distinctive design, cultural distinctiveness, and advanced technology drive innovation in Fiji and Tonga's handicraft sectors. However, the lack of formal training and market access often hampers sustainability, as mastering traditional skills takes years of dedicated practice (Khan, 2011). Similarly, women artisans in West Wallaga, Ethiopia, play a crucial role in sustainable development by producing tools and crafts essential to rural communities. However, these artisans face challenges such as inadequate support for indigenous technology and unstable rural markets (Wayessa, 2009).

Tourism and handicrafts are closely intertwined, as handicrafts serve as souvenirs and embody cultural heritage. MUSTAFA (2011) and Murray (2010) observed that handicrafts enhance tourist experiences and provide employment opportunities. In regions like India, the commodification of handicrafts often leads to the loss of traditional authenticity as artisans adapt to contemporary demands (Wilkinson, 2004). This transformation aligns with Marx's concept of commodification, where cultural artefacts lose their intrinsic meaning as they are shaped to meet external market demands.

In South Africa, handicrafts promote local economic development and cultural heritage. Rogerson and Sithole (2001) found that handicraft production in Mpumalanga is closely associated with tourism, although the industry underperforms due to a lack of resources and support. Similarly, Abisuga-Oyekunle and Filli (2017) identified the potential of microenterprise-handicraft connections to generate employment and reduce poverty, especially among vulnerable groups. However, despite their potential, traditional handicrafts in South Africa remain underutilized (Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015).

In South Asia, India's handicrafts exemplify the rich intersection of tradition and economic opportunity. Mitra and Paul (2017) identified entrepreneurial transformation as essential in supporting rural artisans and offering economic and social independence. However, artisans in India often face exploitation by intermediaries, limited access to modern technology, and insufficient formal training (Khan et al., 2023). Ghouse (2012) predicted that while the export potential of handicrafts remains high, small-scale production may decline due to competition and shifting consumer preferences.

In Pakistan, handicrafts embody the country's cultural heritage and support rural livelihoods. Embroidery reflects the region's artistic traditions, particularly Sindhi, Balochi, and Phulkari needlework. However, rural artisans face challenges such as low productivity, lack of education, and limited market access (Makhdoom & Shah, 2016). The decline of traditional skills and the erosion of centuries-old practices highlight the urgent need for regeneration and policy support (Shafi et al., 2021). Uddin et al. (2020), in their study *An Economic Analysis of the Handicraft Industry in District Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*, highlighted that handicraft producers in Chitral have a low standard of living. Moreover, they identified poor transportation infrastructure as a significant obstacle, restricting artisans from efficiently sourcing raw materials and delivering their finished products to markets. The study emphasizes improving transportation facilities for the handicraft sector's growth and sustainability.

The Kalasha Valley in Chitral provides an attractive example of the intersection between handicrafts, cultural heritage, and tourism. The Kalash Valley has long been a center of attraction for world-renowned authors and researchers who have extensively documented its unique cultural heritage. Scholars and



writers describe the Kalash as a resilient Indigenous community preserving ancient traditions amidst the pressures of modernization. Lièvre and Loude (2000) provide an in-depth account of Kalash winter solstice festivals in *Kalash Solstice: Winter Feasts of the Kalash of North Pakistan*, while Loude (2018) further explores their cultural resilience in *Kalash – The Last Infidels of Hindu-Kush*. Cacopardo (2016), in *Pagan Christmas*, examines the religious beliefs and rituals of the Kalasha people. Tarar (1996) and Alauddin (2015), in *Kalash* and *Kalash: The Paradise Lost*, highlight the community's struggle with modernisation, identity loss, and external pressures.

Meanwhile, Lines (2008) and Maggi (2001) focus on gender and autonomy in Kalasha society, emphasising the decisive role of women in sustaining cultural continuity. Robertson (1896) and Masson (1844) provide early colonial perspectives in *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush* and *Kalash Siaposh Kafirs History and Customs*, portraying Kalasha society as remarkably distinct and isolated from outside influences. In comic format, Loude's *Himalayan Festivals – The Last Kalash* (2005) offers a creative lens on the resilience of Kalasha traditions under external pressure.

Further enriching this literature, Khan Qamar (1997), in *Kalash: The Vanishing Culture*, describes the Kalasha as inheritors of one of Asia's oldest cultures—a fusion of ancient European and Asian traditions. He emphasises the persistence of their rituals, polytheistic beliefs, and especially the iconic headgear of Kalasha women as symbols of cultural endurance. Ashfaq (n.d.), in his Urdu travelogue *Kailash*, admires both the natural beauty and the unique lifestyle of the Kalasha, portraying their valley as a living museum of indigenous heritage. Similarly, Shaheen (2014), in *Kafiristan*, underscores the anthropological value of Kalasha traditions, warning that well-meaning but intrusive tourists hasten cultural erosion. He also notes that Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, moved by the valley's beauty and cultural richness, initiated the first significant road infrastructure to support the community.

Kalasha handicrafts, such as traditional dresses (*Piran*), headgear (*Susit and Kupas*), and willow baskets (*Sawew*), are unique to the Kalasha community and reflect their vibrant cultural identity. However, as Sheikh and Mohyuddin (2023) note, the Kalasha community faces isolation, lack of access to global markets, and limited training opportunities; therefore, preserving their traditional crafts becomes a challenge. Similarly, Shahab et al. (2024) identified diminishing interest among younger generations and inadequate infrastructure as critical factors threatening the sustainability of handicrafts in Chitral.

Despite their challenges, Kalasha handicrafts hold immense economic development and cultural preservation potential. As Marx's theoretical concepts of commodification and alienation suggest, integrating these crafts into external markets risks eroding their authenticity while simultaneously alienating artisans from their cultural heritage. These dynamics underscore the importance of sustainable practices and targeted interventions to ensure the survival of these valuable traditions.

Theoretical Framework: Karl Marx's Concepts of Alienation and Commodification in the Context of Kalasha Handicrafts

This study employs a Marxist theoretical lens, mainly focusing on alienation and commodification, to investigate the decline of Kalasha handicrafts. Drawing on Marx's theory of alienation, as outlined in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Marx, 1844/1978), the research highlights how artisans are increasingly disconnected from their labour, products, and cultural identity. This alienation is predominantly evident among the younger generations, who prioritise education and modern lifestyles over traditional crafts. This leads to a loss of skills, cultural continuity, and a weak intergenerational knowledge transfer. Additionally, Marx's concept of commodification, discussed in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I* (Marx, 1867/1990), provides insights into how these handicrafts, once deeply rooted in cultural and personal use, are now being transformed into marketable goods for tourists. This transformation often compromises the authenticity and symbolic value of the crafts as artisans adapt their designs and materials to suit external demands. The lack of proper markets, training centres, and institutional support further worsens the marginalisation of Kalasha artisans, leaving them economically dependent and socially vulnerable. By applying this framework, the study critically examines how external economic forces, tourism, and social changes contribute to the commodification of Kalasha handicrafts and the alienation of artisans from their cultural heritage.

Research Methodology

This study focuses on understanding traditional handicrafts, their cultural and economic value, identifying obstacles to their sustainability, and the tools used in their preparation.

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Primary data was collected through interviews with artisans involved in Kalasha handicrafts. Secondary data was gathered from published reports, journals, and articles. The research focused on *Rumboor Valley*, targeting artisans who are actively crafting and preserving these traditional handicrafts. This area was chosen because it served as a center of Kalasha handicrafts, yet government institutions and researchers had overlooked it mainly due to its remoteness.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with specific knowledge, experience, and expertise in Kalasha handicrafts. This non-probability sampling technique is particularly suitable for this study as it ensures the inclusion of individuals who can provide rich and relevant insights. The sample size was determined using data saturation, at which no new themes or information emerged from additional interviews. The interviewees included a total of twelve participants, each case study is unique and represents either Kalasha handicrafts or the socioeconomic importance of Kalasha handicrafts.

Data collection involved obtaining consent to record interviews and asking structured, open-ended questions. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that identifies recurring themes, patterns, and concepts in the textual data. This method allowed for a systematic examination of the interview transcripts to uncover insights into the challenges and opportunities facing Kalasha handicrafts (Caulfield, 2019).

By employing this methodology, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and economic dynamics associated with Kalasha handicrafts, offering valuable insights into their preservation and promotion.

Thematic Analysis

Traditional Kalasha Handicrafts

The study revealed that traditional Kalasha handicrafts hold immense cultural significance, embodying the unique identity of the Kalasha community. These crafts include *Susit Ashow*, *Kupas Ashow*, bread baskets (*Sawew*), goat hair baskets (*Khawa*), and traditional shawls (*Charusti*). While some items, such as *Susit* and *Kupas Ashow*, are reserved exclusively for Kalasha women, others, like *Charusti*, are sold to tourists. Khatik stated, "We create several traditional handicrafts, including *Susit Ashow* and *Kupas Ashow*. These are heavily decorated with beads, buttons, and seashells, and while some are for personal use, others like *Charusti* are sold to tourists" (Personal Communication, December 2024). This selective commodification reflects Marx's concept of alienation, as the artisans are increasingly distanced from their traditional connection to their crafts due to external market demands.

Types of Kalasha Handicrafts

Kalasha artisans produce a variety of handicrafts, including traditional dresses (*Piran*), belts (*Patti*), bracelets (*Bazuban*), and ties (*Shuman*). These items are crafted for personal use and sale during festivals like *Yoshi*, *Uchaw*, and *Chawmos*. However, the lack of proper markets and online platforms restricts artisans' reach. *Masrat* commented, "I make various kinds of handicrafts like *Susit* (head cap) and *Shuman* (tie), which are worn during festivals. These items cost between 700 to 5,000 rupees, depending on the design and materials" (Personal Communication, December 2024). The absence of adequate infrastructure reflects Marx's commodification theory, as these crafts are increasingly seen as marketable goods rather than cultural artefacts.

The following table presents a list of traditional *Kalasha* handicrafts, each holding cultural and historical significance within the community. These handicrafts, crafted using indigenous materials and techniques, are essential to preserving the *Kalasha* heritage. The accompanying figures showcase handcrafted items documented through field visits and photography.

Pictorial Representation of Kalasha Handicrafts

Figure 1

Piran (Dress of Kalasha female)



Source: Photographed by Nazima Bibi

Figure 2

Patti (belt)



Source: Photographed by Nazima Bibi

Figure 3

Susit (minor headgear)



Figure 4

Maheek (necklace)



photographed by Nazima Bibi

Figure 5

Kupas (major headgear)

Source: Photographed by Muhammad Hassan



Figure 6

Wooden sculpture



Figure 7

Bazuban (bracelet)



Source: Photographed by Marjiana Khan

Figure 8

Purse (Handmade Bag)



Figure 9

Hanak (chair)



Source: Photographed by Wazir Ahmad

Figure 10

Khawa (basket)



Source: Photographed by Wazir Ahmad

Figure 11

Dahoo (drum)



Source: Photographed by Sarkar Ali

Figure 12

Sawew (willow basket)



Source: Photographed by Muhammad Hassan



Figure 13
Kalon (shoe)



Source: Photographed by Muhammad Hassan

Figure 14
Kupas Ashow



Source: Photographed by Muhammad Hassan

Figure 15
Shuman (tie)



Source: Photographed by Muhammad Hassan

Figure 16
Susit Ashow



Source: Photographed by Muhammad Hassan

Tools Used for Kalasha Handicrafts

Kalasha artisans use traditional tools like spindles (*Traku*), sewing machines, chisels, and hand saws. However, younger generations are increasingly unfamiliar with these tools. Noor Shali observed, "Young people today are not interested in learning how to use traditional tools like spindles and chisels, which threatens the survival of our crafts" (Personal Communication, December 2024).

This reflects Marx's concept of alienation from the means of production, as modern influences distance individuals from their cultural roots. Many young people are unfamiliar with the local names of traditional tools, making it nearly impossible for them to engage in craft-making. While handicraft work could be a valuable skill or hobby, the younger generation is increasingly absorbed in digital distractions, spending significant time on social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat. Rather than fostering productive engagement, these platforms primarily serve the interests of international capitalists while offering little to no benefit to the local youth. Additionally, the lack of technical education further contributes to this disconnect. Schools and universities primarily emphasise theoretical learning, often focusing on historical subjects, with little to no integration of hands-on, skill-based education that could equip the younger generation with practical knowledge, including traditional craftsmanship.

Based on field observations, *Kalasha* artisans utilise various traditional tools to craft handicrafts. The following table presents an overview of these tools and their functions:

Table 1
Tools Used to Make Kalasha Handicrafts

Tools	Description and uses
Silai machine	Used to sew fabric and materials together with thread
Needle (sushi)	They are used to make bracelets (Bazuban), cups (Susit), kupas, and necklaces (Gadulai).
Kankaw	I am used to overlapping the threads, which makes it hard for items like (kupas a Show, Susit Show, and Charusti).
Tron	This tool is used for making (belts, Susit a show, Shuman, kupas shows, and charity). We twist the threads around both and of Tron, just like hanging, and then use varied materials to make these things.
Traku (spindles)	They are used to convert wool and cotton into threads and rolling threads. After rolling the threads, make off (belt, Susit a show, Shuman, kupas show, and charity).
Hammer (Satak)	They made designs on wood by hammering on chisels to carve the wood and inlay the wire in the carved design.
Handsaw (Gir)	Used to cut pieces of wood into different shapes.
Chisels (Chogun)	They are used for cutting, carving, and shaping hard materials like metal, stone, and wood.
Level (level)	They check if a surface is level (horizontal), plumb (vertical), or at a 45-degree angle.
Rasp (Darkhan)	Used to rub down the edges of wood and other hard materials.
Try square (Buniha)	Used to check and make right angles in construction work.
Mallet (Chota)	I used to hit a chisel.
Hand Axes (Wadok)	A hand axe is used to cut wood.
Plane (Randak)	Used to smooth surfaces and remove excess material
Hand drill (Barma)	It is used to drill holes, drive screws, and mix materials.
Tape measure (Fita)	It is a handy tool for measuring lengths, widths, and heights.
adzes Axe	Adzes are used for shaping, carving, and smoothing wood.
Shogun	It is used to make the nose, ear, and mouth sculptures.

Pictorial Representation of Tools Used in Kalasha Handicrafts

Figure 17
Stand (Tron)



Figure 18
Comb-like device (Kankaw)



Figure 19
Spindles (Traku)



Figure 20
Sewing Machine Silai machine



Figure 21
Needle (sushi)



Figure 22
Chisels (Chogun)



Figure 23
Handsaw (Gir)



Figure 24
Try square (Buniha)



Figure 25
Hand drill (Barma)



Figure 26
Plane (Randak)



Figure 27
Adze axe (Bhonki)



Figure 28
Mallet (Chota)



Figure 29
Rasp (Darkhan)



Figure 30
Hammer (Satak)



Figure 31
Tap Measure (Fita)



Figure 32
Hand Axes (Wadok)



Figure 33
Shogun



Figure 34
Tools



Source: Photographed by Hassan Ullah, except the last two that Zafar Ali Shah took

Pricing and Economic Value of Handicrafts

The pricing of *Kalasha* handicrafts depends on the materials, design, and size. For example, a *high-quality* *Susit* can cost up to 5,000 rupees, while simpler versions are priced lower. Wooden sculptures, such as deer and trophies, are sold at prices ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 rupees. *Rehmat Wali* explained, "The price of my sculptures depends on the size and materials. A large sculpture can cost up to 200,000 rupees, while smaller ones range from 100,000 to 150,000 rupees" (Personal Communication, December 2024).

This transformation aligns with Marx's concept of exchange value, where the monetary worth of an object overtakes its intrinsic cultural significance. Within the local context, these crafts are no longer regarded as symbols of cultural identity but are instead seen as commodities for sale. Traditionally, wooden sculptures were crafted to honour the deceased, and trophies were created as symbols of prestige for *Kalasha* festivals. However, with the increasing commodification of these artefacts, their original purpose has faded. They are no longer used for honouring individuals or as integral elements of cultural celebrations but are instead produced primarily for tourists. As a result, the profound cultural respect once associated with these crafts has diminished, leaving behind only their economic value.

Selling Handicrafts to Domestic and Foreign Tourists

Tourists primarily purchase *Kalasha* handicrafts during festivals, but irregular visits and a lack of dedicated shops limit consistent sales. As Hasnain noted, "We sell our handicrafts mostly during festivals like *Chawmos*, but there are no shops or online platforms to store or sell these items regularly" (Personal



Communication, December 2024). This dependency on seasonal tourism creates economic instability, echoing Marx's concept of alienation, as artisans' livelihoods are increasingly tied to external buyers.

Field observations revealed that small artisans lack the financial resources to showcase their products in larger markets or list them on online platforms such as Daraz, Temu, or Alibaba. They struggle with funding and lack the technical knowledge required for digital marketing. As a result, these artisans rely on seasonal festivals and tourists, mainly foreign tourists, who are more likely to purchase their crafts at better prices. On the other hand, local tourists often lack the financial means and show limited interest in traditional handicrafts. This hand-to-mouth existence and economic dependency ultimately alienate artisans from the very products they create, reinforcing their marginalisation within the market system.

The reliance of Kalasha artisans on seasonal tourism for selling handicrafts reflects economic instability and alienation. In a capitalist system, as Karl Marx argues, proletarians lose control over their labour and depend on external market forces. Artisans lack economic stability when they do not have regular access to Markets. The source of income for small artisans is built on seasonal tourism. Their lack of financial capital and digital literacy compelled them to depend on foreign tourists, offering better prices. This economic reliance leads them to place market values above cultural values. Ultimately, through their failure to sell crafts independently, they become estranged from their labour and are then pushed to the fringes of the capitalist system. Without direct market access and financial support, Kalasha handicrafts risk becoming mere commodities for tourist consumption rather than cultural expressions.

Role of Government and NGOs

The study highlighted minimal support from the government and NGOs in promoting Kalasha handicrafts. While initiatives like the *Ayun Valley Development Program* (AVDP) have provided limited opportunities, most artisans lack access to training centres, financial aid, and market infrastructure. *Jamrat* shared, "The AVDP established one handicraft shop where women can sell their crafts, but it is not enough to support everyone" (Personal Communication, December 2024).

This neglect aligns with Marx's critique of capitalist marginalisation, leaving traditional artisans vulnerable. Artisans do not have the capital to establish their shops, and the fruit of their labour is taken away by those who do nothing but have the money. NGOs, INGOs, and the government often claim to promote and preserve Kalasha culture actively. However, the reality is quite different—many NGOs and INGOs fund staff salaries, office expenses, administrative costs, and publicity efforts. At the same time, only a minimal amount is spent on meaningful initiatives such as seminars or direct support for artisans. Even when activities are organised, they often serve as mere photo sessions rather than genuine efforts to preserve cultural heritage. Furthermore, these organisations are primarily staffed by non-locals who make decisions in distant offices. The officials of such organisations know nothing about the realities of the Kalasha community. Meanwhile, the Pakistani government is heavily focused on the most urgent matters, such as counterterrorism and negotiations with the IMF, leaving little room in its national agenda for preserving an endangered culture and its traditional crafts.

From a Marxist standpoint, the lack of government and NGO support for Kalasha artisans indicates capitalist marginalisation in which the proletariat, i.e., the artisans, remain economically vulnerable, and the ruling class controls the social resources. Despite development claims, the NGOs and INGOs prioritise their office administrative costs over community assistance within a capitalist framework that sustains inequality. Their interventions resemble neo-colonialism, where external actors dictate cultural preservation without truly empowering local communities.

The government's lack of interest further reinforces capitalist exploitation, as it prioritises economic and political interests over safeguarding indigenous crafts. This aligns with Marx's critique of the state as a ruling class tool, maintaining structures that benefit capitalists rather than workers. Without systemic change, Kalasha artisans remain alienated from their labour, and their crafts risk becoming mere commodities in a market-driven economy.

Raw Materials for Handicrafts

Kalasha artisans rely on natural and local materials like cedar and walnut wood, goat and sheep hair, beads, and cowrie shells—the rising costs of these materials present challenges. As *Khatik* explained, "The

materials we use, like goat hair and beads, have become expensive. For example, a packet of beads costs around 1,700 rupees" (Personal Communication, December 2024).

This aligns with Marx's concept of alienation from the means of production as artisans struggle to access essential resources. Due to the price hike and transportation costs of raw materials, artisans face difficulty making the finished products. From the *Lowari Tunnel to Kalash*, the road is in poor condition, which results in higher vehicle fares and longer travel times. Traders sell production materials at increased prices and often provide low-quality products at high rates.

Marx argued that capitalism deprives workers of ownership over the means of production, making them dependent on external forces. Kalasha artisans face this reality as rising costs and market dependency limit their control over their craft. They lack direct access to raw materials, relying on intermediaries who inflate prices while providing low-quality supplies. Once freely available resources, like wood and beads, are now expensive commodities, making production increasingly unsustainable. Poor infrastructure, such as the deteriorating road from *Lowari Tunnel to Kalash*, further drives up costs.

Artisans cannot raise prices proportionately to material costs and, therefore, struggle to sustain their craft and remain impoverished. This process reflects Marx's view that capitalism erodes traditional cottage industries, favouring wage labour and mass production. Traditional labourers are forced to abandon handicraft-making for other livelihoods, accelerating the decline of indigenous craftsmanship. Unless systemic interventions counter the systemic exploitation of artisans and cultural erosion by free-market forces, Kalasha handicrafts may face the danger of extinction.

Time-Consuming Nature of Handicrafts

Creating Kalasha handicrafts is labour-intensive. For instance, making a single wooden sculpture can take up to three months. *Rehmat Wali* remarked, "Making wooden sculptures is highly time-consuming; it takes me two to three months to complete one item" (Personal Communication, December 2024).

Field observations revealed that artisans infuse their inner emotions and creativity into their work, making each piece a form of self-expression. However, due to a lack of recognition and financial rewards, many artisans eventually lose motivation and become disconnected from their craft, experiencing alienation, as described by Marx. Research by Yang et al. (2018) highlights that governmental recognition and incentives are also crucial for the sustainability of traditional craftsmanship and that while financial aid is undoubtedly necessary, artisans also look for recognition that they are appreciated as vital contributors to creative activity.

Because of the market-driven economy, the time and labour of artisans' work are not valued, which was in line with Marx's thought on exploiting labour. Kalash artisans spend days creating a single craft, but it is never compensated. Therefore, the artisans work endless hours and do not receive the actual compensation of time in the form of wealth, which leads to economic marginalisation. Furthermore, the shift from craft-making as a cultural and social activity to a market-driven commodity production reflects alienation; artisans invest a significant amount of time, yet their work is priced based on wealthy foreign tourists, not the time spent creating it.

Decline of Kalasha Handicrafts

The decline of Kalasha handicrafts is attributed to factors like the younger generation's focus on education, the influence of social media, and the absence of training centres. *Zainab Bibi* noted, "The younger generation prioritises education and social media over learning traditional crafts, which is a major reason for the decline of Kalasha handicrafts" (Personal Communication, December 2024).

This cultural shift aligns with Marx's notion of alienation as younger generations become disconnected from traditional labour and cultural heritage. It was noted during the field visits that the younger generation observes the struggles of their parents and their hardships, witnessing firsthand the difficulties their families have faced—whether in obtaining quality clothing, accessing proper healthcare, or dealing with unemployment. At the same time, they are exposed to portrayals of the elite class in dramas, where individuals with higher education enjoy comfortable and prosperous lives. This contrast leads them to



believe that by abandoning traditional crafts in favour of university education, they, too, can achieve a luxurious lifestyle.

Moreover, it was observed during the field visit that artisan in the Kalasha community earn only a hand-to-mouth living and do not want their children to pursue the same profession. A similar trend has been noted in other societies, as Shah et al. (2017) found in the Indian context, where artisans struggle with economic instability and view traditional craftsmanship as an unsustainable livelihood. Likewise, in Pakistan, Yang et al. (2018) observed that the younger generation shows little interest in handicraft-making, as they are more inclined toward employment in offices and other salaried positions. As a result, many traditional crafts, along with the cultural narratives they embody, have already vanished, and many more are at risk of disappearing in the near future. This pattern suggests that artisans cannot actively promote and preserve their cultural heritage without achieving social and economic stability. While *Kalasha* culture has gained global recognition, its actual creators—the artisans—remain economically marginalised and largely unrecognised. Consequently, they become alienated from their cultural heritage, unaware of the new challenges that may arise in their pursuit of modern aspirations.

Marx argues that in a capitalist system, workers become alienated from the products of their labour, the production process, their community, and even themselves. The younger generation has abandoned handicrafts for higher education, showing alienation from the means of production, i.e., traditional crafts. Artisans in Kalash Valley have lost control over their craft as they struggle economically. They get alienated from the labour they create but do not get the desired profit, hence feeling disconnected from their work. In the past, the artisans of Kalash Valley were making crafts because of their cultural or spiritual value, but now, with time, their artistic value has been diminished, and the sole purpose is to sell them to tourists for financial gain, so in a Marxist point of view, its alienation from cultural identity. Moreover, tourism-driven handicraft production turns what was once a cultural tradition into a commodity. Instead of being made for cultural or spiritual significance, these crafts are created for profit, catering to tourists rather than serving their traditional purposes. Marx argues that capitalism strips the inherent value of labour and reduces everything to exchange value.

Similarly, the Kalasha crafts are no longer made for festivals or rituals but are sold to outsiders, reducing their cultural meaning to mere economic transactions. The generational knowledge of artisans in Kalash Valley is fading as parents are declining their next generation to carry the legacy of handicrafts and becoming artisans. This process is driven by economic compulsions rather than natural evolution. The Marxist theory explains that the essence of capitalism is to destroy the indigenous and traditional methods of production to impose wage labour and industrial mass production in the world, leading to industrialisation and cultural homogenisation.

Conclusion

The investigation of *Kalasha* Indigenous handicrafts in *Rumboor Valley* highlights the intricate relationship between cultural heritage and economic development. Through thematic analysis, this research has uncovered the multifaceted challenges Kalasha artisans face, including a lack of infrastructure, the time-consuming nature of handicraft production, shifting career preferences among younger generations, and limited marketing opportunities. These findings underscore the urgency of preserving these unique crafts as they are at significant erosion risk.

The thematic analysis reveals a rich tapestry of traditional methods, tools, techniques, and materials used in Kalasha handicrafts. However, the modernization has brought some changes in the thinking of the younger generations, they now focus on education and alternative careers. The easy availability of manufactured goods and industrialisation further diminish the role of traditional crafts in daily life. This transition reflects a broader trend of alienation from cultural labour, as described in Marxist theory. So, the research findings align with Marxist theory; the decline of Kalasha handicrafts reflects the alienation of artisans from their labour, cultural identity, and means of production. Thirty years ago, the *Kalasha* crafts were valued for their spiritual and cultural significance, but now these crafts have been commodified. Now these crafts are built only to sell them to tourists that visit the area in different festivals, and preserving the cultural heritage is not given any importance. Artisans prioritise money over tradition and culture due to their financial liabilities, while younger generations have abandon craftsmanship to pursue

formal education to get jobs. This major shift disconnects artisans from their creations and leads to the loss of centuries old generational knowledge. This all happens due to the capitalism's role in erasing indigenous production and replacing it with profit-driven industrialisation.

Moreover, the absence of any support from government institutions and NGOs regarding the promotion of Kalasha handicrafts has left them to decline even further. The Kalasha Indigenous handicrafts are claimed to be promoted by various GOs and NGOs, but the reality is different. Access to funds, skills, mentoring, training programs, and online platforms is sparse, making it hard for artisans to continue practicing their craft and access wider markets.

To tackle these issues, a comprehensive program that establishes training centers and funds mentorship initiatives alongside partnerships with designers, brands, and arts institutions is imperative. Kalash's artisans need government and NGO support to build a strong online channel and reach domestic and international markets. Such measures can preserve the cultural importance of Kalasha handicrafts and promote their economic sustainability.

Adopting a balance between traditional and modern elements will make Kalasha handicrafts sustainable. These initiatives can highlight traditional crafts in terms of beauty and cultural heritage and encourage younger individuals to practice and continue this ancient tradition. Such initiatives can attract sustainable visitors to *Kalsaha* handicrafts. It will also inspire the younger generation to embrace and carry forward the centuries-old rich cultural heritage.

Recommendation

To ensure the preservation and sustainability of Kalasha handicrafts, the following concise measures are recommended:

1. The Kalasha people have great potential, and it is time for the elders of the colourful community to take proactive initiatives rather than rely on foreign or domestic NGOs to preserve their cultural heritage. They should develop community-controlled soviets (or councils / cooperatives) to engage the younger generation to learn and practice traditional crafts. It will ensure the continuity of their rich and unique heritage. If these efforts are not undertaken, the risk of cultural erosion will increase, potentially leading to the permanent loss of their heritage. By fostering an interest in traditional crafts for cultural preservation rather than mere economic gain, the alienation described by Karl Marx can be mitigated to some extent.
2. Local government bodies, in collaboration with community leaders, should establish training centres where women can teach younger generations the traditional skills of Kalasha handicrafts, ensuring an intergenerational transfer of knowledge. The local government can fund its initiative from the entry fee taken from tourists and spent on preserving Kalash culture.
3. Government authorities should develop accessible local markets and support the creation of online platforms to enable artisans to sell their crafts directly to a broader audience, enhancing their economic opportunities. If the government cannot help monetarily, it should at least reward and recognise the creative work of the artisans for encouragement and growth.
4. Educational institutions and cultural organizations should initiate programs focusing on entrepreneurship and literacy to empower women artisans to manage and scale their craft businesses independently.
5. Buyers, whether retailers or individual customers, should recognise the immense effort and skill artisans invest in crafting handicrafts. Instead of giving money to beggars on the street, consumers should support artisans by paying them a fair price. Handcrafted products are made with limited natural resources and require significant time and expertise. Therefore, artisans deserve fair compensation that reflects the actual value of their labour, ensuring their economic sustainability and the preservation of cultural heritage.

By focusing on these actionable steps, spearheaded by government and community collaboration, the cultural significance of Kalasha handicrafts can be preserved while supporting the artisans' economic well-being.



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