

# Is this Artisans' 'Transformation'?

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*We owe the transformations in the craft business to the artisan community of Kachchh*

**On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May**, the Times of India ran an article "To counter Walmart, Amazon goes where no retailer has gone before"

[https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/to-counter-walmart-amazon-goes-where-no-retailer-has-gone-before/articleshow/64201385.cms?utm\\_medium=](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/to-counter-walmart-amazon-goes-where-no-retailer-has-gone-before/articleshow/64201385.cms?utm_medium=)

The summary of the article, and I quote, was

"Amazon is recruiting Rogan artists from Bhuj in Gujarat as suppliers as it prepares to fight over the market with Walmart.

With such workshops, Amazon aims to increase the appeal of its site by adding hundreds of exquisite handmade arts and crafts not available anywhere else online"

I just want to bring to light some facts about this entire exercise and roles of Amazon... Walmart... online business... crafts... "dying" crafts !!!

Amazon started the exercise of trying to create a handicraft/handloom category on their retail site as a project with DC Handicrafts of the Ministry of Textiles. I do not believe that its purpose was to counter any competition with Walmart.

The article has been published at a time when the Walmart-Flipkart merger took up much space in the media, and hence, Amazon was not in the news, and hence not reaching its customer, who today is a

curious being, who loves sensational news and has become a blind follower of the "popular" culture. So this, to my personal understanding, was just another of the marketing strategies that Amazon adopts to flash a story in the business section of the national daily to keep its visibility alive!

Now to come to the specifics - the article mentions that this workshop was held in Bhuj, Gujarat, which is incorrect, for it was held in Kukma, a village 15 kms from Bhuj, Gujarat. It was facilitated by a civil society organization based there working with the traditional artisan communities for more than a decade now.

The article also mentions that the workshop was a "classroom" session to teach the artisans how online business can be done. In fact, it was a session for the artisans to understand how the entire supply chain with Amazon will work, and was in no way a "classroom" session; it was a "marketing pitch" to get online.

Such mis-reporting upsets me, as that makes it another case of offering the public "news" which is edited, manipulated and packaged only for the benefit of the company, which anyway is the Public Relations (PR) agency's job – "MAKE US LOOK GOOD" "MAKE US LOOK COMPETENT" "BRING US MORE MARKET" even if it means they have to piggy ride on a false story involving a person or community unaware of their strategy.

I could quote more examples, but the point is to clearly inform those who want to really know what is happening in the online space, especially focusing on the business of crafts, that

- [Amazon was not the first to come to Kachchh with a proposal for online business, as claimed in the article. The pioneers were probably Gaatha.com, then came Jaypore.com, then Itokri, and many more. These online retail websites, have definitely changed the buying-selling pattern even for the craftspeople. Some of the most popular sites are Jaypore.com and Gaatha.com, which are not only into the business of crafts, but, also using very responsible tools like dedicating stories on their websites and creating exclusive spaces for individual crafts or craftspeople on their websites too. Their marketing strategy is clearly focused on promotion of the crafts. The companies also maintain a direct and one-on-one relationship with each of the artisans. These sites take time to curate the craft collections, conduct proper photo-shoots which highlight the qualities of the craft, rather than simply make the article of craft look like any other commodity for sale, online. As such, Amazon is just following the crowd and is probably the newest entrant trying to cash in on the handicraft story like every big business.](#)
- *The Rogan artisan who is mentioned in the article is not poor, does own a smart-phone and is one of the key artisans to have taught this art to many in his village. And the number of craftspeople, it is true, is small; but it is untrue to state that he is the ONLY one! Besides, he lives, not in Bhuj, but a village called NIRONA, which is west of Bhuj. The only reason that this particular Rogan artist is mentioned is probably that he is already famous since a Rogan piece by him was selected for presentation by our "honourable" Prime Minister to the former President of the United States, making it an easy story for Amazon to have the press carry, and, as mentioned earlier, to "piggy-ride" on the fame of the artisan to reach their potential customer. There was a time about a decade back, when Gafur bhai's family members were the only ones practicing this craft. But since then, with its promotion due to the above reason, as well as the boom in tourism in Kachchh, many more of the Rogan artists of Nirona, who had left the craft, are coming back to it, along with some youngsters. Women are also being trained in this skill, whereas traditionally only men did the painting work.*



A contemporary Rogan piece by a young artisan of Nirona village, in Kachchh.

- As civil society professionals, we too were present at the workshop, and noticed that when Amazon representatives were asked for clarifications on

[How Amazon is really going to add visibility to this sector on their main page,](#)

[How much is being invested by Amazon into this category of business,](#)

- [What is the marketing budget that Amazon has allocated for this category of business, Will the handcrafted section see Amazon making independent advertisements to go on prime media for publicity,](#)

[Will the main homepage of Amazon carry the handcrafted section story?](#)

**[THERE WERE NO ANSWERS!](#)**

[However, not only members of civil society, but members of the artisan community themselves are now demanding answers. For, during the workshop, many artisans who are already featured by Amazon, stood up one by one, with complaints and criticism on the functioning and operations of the site, and this is encouraging, for it shows that they are now becoming more aware of their importance, and will no longer tolerate being mis-represented by the external world or used by these so called retail “gurus”.](#)

Today, a great number of the craftspeople across India, and especially in Kachchh, as also members of the younger generation, have become tech-savvy, and are actually running their own parallel online businesses through means like Whats App! Ask any of the artisans how they are marketing their products directly, and they will definitely mention Whats App! This is in addition to their having being featured on sites like Gaatha or Jaypore.com for some time.

As in every walk of life, on the crafts scene too, there are some practices that flourish, while others need a larger patronage, and still others do fade away with the passage of time.



**Artisans of Kachchh have entrepreneurial skills, which retailers like Amazon need to recognize**

In my personal opinion, with respect to the e-commerce

, there is a pressing need for collaboration between the retail industry and the creative crafts industry. It is important to recognize the strengths that the crafts bring for these marketing platforms. And then, responsibly and consciously, to promote and educate the consumer about the richness of their traditional practices in order to build a market, going beyond simply promoting oneself as a socially responsible group.

In conclusion, I would like readers to understand that the article in The Times of India, dated 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2018, should not be used as a basis to understand the transformations that the crafts of Kachchh are undergoing; it is an article solely focused on promoting Amazon, which is probably feeling a bit insecure because of the upcoming merger of Walmart and Flipkart, that is all.

[Contact the author](#)