



Preserving Heritage and Threads of Identity: An Ethnographic Exploration of Jaunsari Art and Craft Traditions in the Kalsi region, Uttarakhand

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Abstract:

The material and non-material art and craft traditions of the Jaunsari tribe in the Kalsi region of the Dehradun district of Uttarakhand are examined in this ethnographic study. The study investigates how weaving, woodcarving, metalcraft, basketry, music, dance, ritual symbolism, and oral traditions collectively articulate Jaunsari cultural identity through mixed-methods fieldwork that includes one hundred semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and photographic documentation. The study shows how material production is entwined with spiritual belief and community organisation by placing artistic practices within the ecological context of the Western Himalayas. Four recurrent dimensions are highlighted by thematic analysis: ritual performance, gendered transmission of artisanal knowledge, ecological adaptation, and the influence of market forces. While modernisation and youth migration pose challenges, the findings show that adaptive innovation and cultural pride support resilience within the craft sector. By offering a comprehensive record of Jaunsari artistic heritage, the study advances Himalayan anthropology. It emphasises the necessity of policies that safeguard



intangible knowledge systems and craft livelihoods as interconnected pillars of cultural sustainability.

Keywords: Jaunsari Tribe; Traditional Crafts; Handloom Weaving; Woodcarving; Folk Dance and Music; Cultural Sustainability.

Introduction:

A community's creativity, identity, and social history are embodied in art and craft, which constitute an essential component of cultural heritage. They cover a wide range of handcrafted crafts, including weaving, ceramics, wood carving, metalworking, basketry, and traditional ornamentation, and they go beyond simple aesthetic appeal. These artistic forms are important resources for comprehending the cultural development of a society because they have a strong connection to the local ecology, social norms, and belief systems. Every craft technique reflects intergenerational learning and collective wisdom by carrying symbolic meaning, function, and traditional knowledge that has been passed down through the generations. By boosting household income, empowering women, fortifying community ties, and encouraging cultural tourism, art and craft play a crucial economic and social role in many communities. By preventing indigenous skills and motifs from disappearing in the face of modernisation and industrial mass production, these practices also act as instruments for cultural preservation. From a research standpoint, studying art and craft offers insightful information about gender dynamics, identity formation, socioeconomic change, and sustainable development. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate the study of traditional art and craft into academic discourse to support cultural documentation, preserve cultural heritage, and develop policies that protect artisanal knowledge and livelihoods. One of the most profound manifestations of indigenous cultural identity, creativity, and traditional knowledge systems is found in tribal art and craft. These artistic practices, which have their roots in centuries-old traditions, translate social beliefs, mythologies, rituals, and everyday life into rich visual and material forms, embodying the close relationship between tribal communities and their natural environment. Every motif, method, and choice of



materials reflects not only aesthetic value but also ecological wisdom, spirituality, and collective memory. Tribal art and craft are at a critical crossroads, requiring scholarly attention to preserve, document, and comprehend their significance as modernisation, commercialisation, and cultural homogenization accelerate. Examining these customs offers important insights into community livelihoods, cultural sustainability, and the rich legacy of India's indigenous people. The Jaunsari tribe primarily resides in the Kalsi block of Dehradun district, Uttarakhand, within the Jaunsar–Bawar region of the Western Himalayas. The Indian Constitution recognises them as a Scheduled Tribe. A unique cultural ecology has been formed by the region's topography, mountainous terrain, river valleys, and temperate forest ecology (Thapliyal, 2006). The socioeconomic structure of the Jaunsaris is based on pastoralism, subsistence farming, and specialised craft customs. Their artistic expression is a part of a larger Himalayan continuum where art serves as a medium for social communication, ritual practice, and ecological awareness in addition to being an aesthetic production. Jaunsari art has two sides: it is both material, as seen in weaving, woodwork, and metalwork, and expressive, as seen in folk songs, dances, oral stories, and ritual symbols. These dimensions are inseparable in Jaunsari cosmology, where artistic acts are imbued with spiritual meaning and social significance. This paper examines these traditions through an ethnographic lens, analysing how artistic and craft practices express identity, convey cultural knowledge, and respond to modern challenges.

Methodology

Using both, primary research and secondary sources, the study uses a mixed-methods approach to create a thorough understanding of the Jaunsari tribe's arts and crafts. To gain a thorough understanding of the methods, equipment, and cultural significance associated with their traditional crafts, primary data are gathered through field investigations, including interviews with artisans, local leaders, and elders. Secondary Information, drawn from relevant literature, archival materials, and previous research, is integrated to contextualise and support the primary findings.



Data Collection

The research methodology incorporates semi-structured interviews to enable artisans to articulate their personal histories, craftsmanship techniques, and the symbolic meanings embedded in their artistic practices. Participant observation is employed to gain a first-hand understanding of the production processes and social contexts in which these crafts are created and used. In addition, photographic documentation and detailed field notes are utilised to record artefacts, tools, and crafting techniques, thereby ensuring accurate visual and descriptive representation. Furthermore, secondary data derived from the District Census Handbook, Dehradun (Census of India, 2011) and relevant ethnographic literature are analysed to provide contextual background and to complement the primary field findings.

Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews, field notes, and observations were organised and repeatedly reviewed to identify common ideas. Similar responses were grouped into themes related to crafts, rituals, ecology, gender, and market influences. Photographs and field observations were used to verify the accuracy of descriptions, and the findings were then compared with existing literature to support interpretation.

Area and People

Uttarakhand, located in northern India, is a Himalayan state recognised for its rugged topography, diverse ecology, and distinct cultural history. It was established in 2000 as India's 27th state, and it is divided into two major cultural regions: Garhwal and Kumaon. It shares international boundaries with China (Tibet) and Nepal. The state's high-altitude topography, forest cover, and river valleys have formed the livelihoods and cultural identities of its



indigenous groups, many of which still practice subsistence agriculture, pastoralism, and artisanal crafting.

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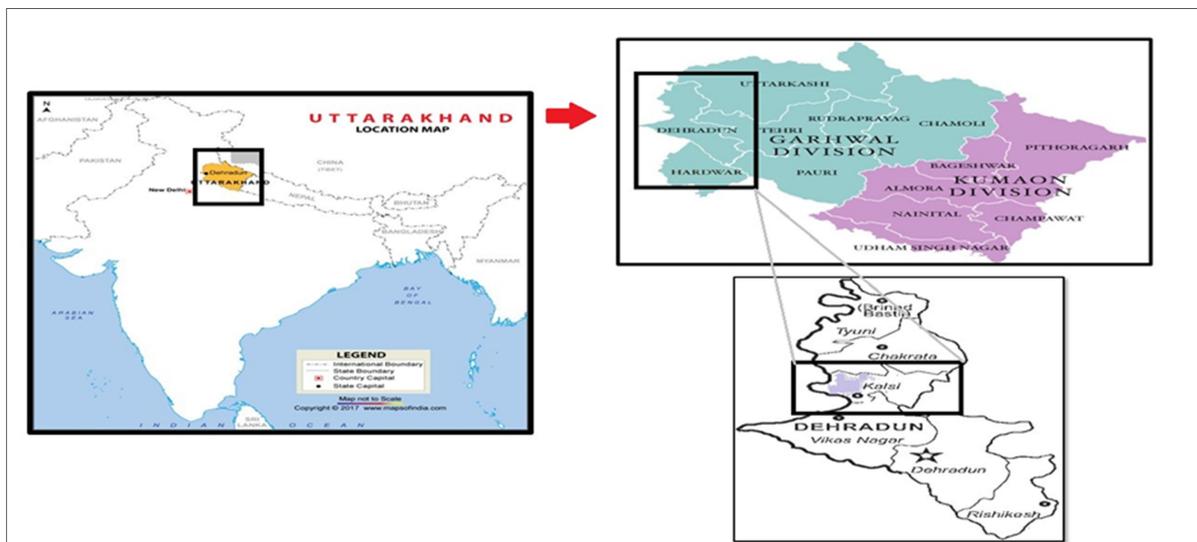


Figure 1: Location of the Study Area: This figure presents the multi-scale mapping of the study site, showing (i) the position of Uttarakhand in India, (ii) the location of Dehradun district in Uttarakhand, and (iii) the specific location of the Kalsi Block selected for the study.

The current study in Dehradun district focuses on the Kalsi Community Development Block in the Jaunsar-Bawar region. The block is distinguished by steep valleys, mixed coniferous woods, and mild climates that facilitate agriculture, animal husbandry, and craft-based cottage businesses. This anthropological research is centred on a town such as Purani Kalsi, which is largely populated by the Jaunsari tribe (a Scheduled Tribe acknowledged under the Indian Constitution). Kalsi is known not just for its rich creative legacy, which includes weaving, woodcarving, basketry, and metal adornment, but also for its historical and cultural

significance, as evidenced by the Ashokan rock edict (3rd century BCE) near the junction of the Yamuna and Tons rivers.

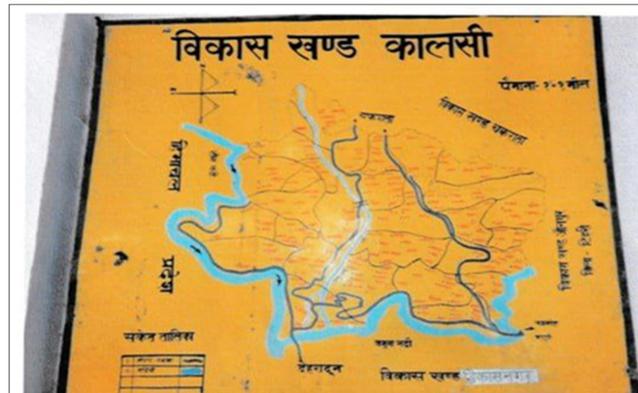


Figure 2: Map of Kalsi Block

Socio-Demographic Profile of Kalsi Block (Census 2011)

Indicator	Total	Male	Female
Population	46,712	23,939	22,773
Rural Population (%)	91.0	—	—
Scheduled Tribe Population (%)	31.0	—	—
Literacy Rate (%)	72.4	80.9	63.2
Sex Ratio (per 1,000 males)	—	—	952
Main Workers (%)	42.6	56.1	28.4
Cultivators among Workers (%)	63.7	—	—

Table 1. Data extracted from District Census Handbook – Dehradun: Village and Town Directory, Series 06, Part XII-B (Census of India, 2011). Figures correspond to the Kalsi Community Development Block, Dehradun district, Uttarakhand.

As per the Census of India, 2011, Kalsi block has a total population of 46,712, out of which 23,939 are males and 22,773 are females. The literacy rate is 72.4 per cent, and approximately 31 per cent of the Scheduled Tribe population inhabits the block. Most local people subsist on agriculture, animal husbandry, and traditional craft production.



Town Kalsi-

Kalsi is a Town in Kalsi Block in the Dehradun District of Uttarakhand State, India. It is located 31 km North of the District headquarters, Dehradun. It is a Block headquarters.

Field	Details
Locality Name	Kalsi
Block Name	Kalsi
District	Dehradun
State	Uttarakhand
Languages Spoken	Hindi, Sindhi, Punjabi, Garhwali, Urdu
Current Time	06:57 PM
Date	Friday, Nov 28, 2025 (IST)
Time Zone	IST (UTC +5:30)
Elevation / Altitude	648 meters above sea level
Telephone / STD Code	01360

Table 2 -Geographical and Administrative Details of Kalsi, Uttarakhand

It is beautifully situated at the convergence of the Yamuna and Tons rivers. Nestled between looming mountains and low plateaus (Kalsi lies in the buffer zone between 40 Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh), with thickly wooded silver-oak and sal forests, and a river flowing through, this is a good spot to visit for its natural beauty. The wide, winding roads of the area are cycled through with ease as traffic is largely absent. Mountain hikes are undertaken and leisurely picnics are enjoyed beside the river, and opportunities for mahseer fishing are also presented. However, most tourists are drawn to the site for the Ashoka rock edict located here, which is dated to 253 BC. The pear-shaped quartz rock, measuring 10 ft in length and height and 8 ft in width, is engraved with the outline of an elephant along with inscriptions in Brahmi and Prakrit script that promote the message of nonviolence and love. During the visit, the Asan



Barrage, constructed in 1967, is also often explored. Water from the Asan and Yamuna rivers is harnessed here to form the Dhalipur lake, which supports a wide variety of fish and bird life.

Census Parameter	Census Data
Total Population	1546
Total No of Houses	273
Female Population %	44.6 % (689)
Total Literacy rate %	69.0 % (1067)
Female Literacy Rate	26.6 % (411)
Scheduled Tribes Population %	43.4 % (671)
Scheduled Caste Population %	34.2 % (529)
Working Population %	31.9 %
Child(0 -6) Population by 2011	181
Girl Child(0 -6) Population % by 2011	47.5 % (86)

Table 3: Demographic profile of the Jaunsari Tribe in Kalsi town based on census data (2011)

The Jaunsari people, recognised as a Scheduled Tribe of Uttarakhand, inhabit the Jaunsar–Bawar region of Dehradun district and possess a distinct cultural identity shaped by their Himalayan environment, ritual belief system, and clan-based social structure. Anthropologically, they represent a mixed Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman lineage, forming part of the Himalayan middle-zone racial complex. Morphologically, many Jaunsaris exhibit a medium to tall stature, mesomorphic build, wheatish to light-brown complexion, and facial features such as broad foreheads, prominent cheekbones, and oval to round facial outlines, although variations occur across villages and clans. Social life in Jaunsari villages is organised around pattis (clan-based hamlets), extended family networks, and community-led institutions such as the devta sabha, which regulate religious and social decision-making. The community speaks a Central Pahari dialect known as Jaunsari, retaining a rich corpus of songs, vocabulary, and oral narratives. Their material culture, particularly handloom weaving, woodcarving, basketry, and silver ornamentation, reflects ecological adaptation and lineage pride, while rituals,



folk dances, and festivals dedicated to Mahasu Devta reinforce the spiritual foundation of community life. Although increasing migration, education, and markets are reshaping livelihood patterns, Jaunsaris continue to maintain strong cultural continuity, with cooperation, respect for elders, and reverence for nature remaining central to their identity.

Literature Review

Beginning with the groundbreaking work of D. N. Majumdar in 1962, whose Himalayan Polyandry laid the foundation for the first systematic ethnography of the Jaunsari tribe with extensive fieldwork on kinship, economy, and material culture, the scholarly engagement with the Jaunsar-Bawar region of Uttarakhand has developed through successive anthropological and ecological frameworks. In this, Majumdar's treatment of polyandry and social organisation provided a foundational contribution for understanding the structural underpinnings of Jaunsari society. Though not grounded in actual fieldwork in Jaunsar-Bawar, later interpretations drew on more general anthropological theories, most notably L. P. Vidyarthi's concept of the sacred complex, which promised a helpful theoretical framework for analysing the integration of religion, ecology, and art in Himalayan societies. Continuing this line of thinking, Thapliyal (2006) examines the Western Himalaya's Cultural Ecological System and how the interdependence of the natural environment and ritual symbols forms the basis of the Jaunsari worldview and the art of wood carving and weaving. However, Pant (2003) adopts a different perspective by examining the evolution of handicrafts. He claims that in an era of globalisation and modernisation, handicrafts like metalworking and weaving serve as both cultural and economic markers of identity. Finally, even though market forces are constantly shifting, Rawat & Mehta (2015) documented how Handloom Weaving practices continue to flourish in Uttarakhand because the original skills, symbolism, and social structures are still creating connections between Women Artisans and the marketplace. According to Kala (2015), ecological concepts, particularly through the lens of biocultural diversity, established a better understanding of the material culture of the Himalayan regions. Using this framework, the author



demonstrated that traditional arts and crafts serve as a foundation for environmental ethics and a way to sustain livelihoods. When combined with the body of established literature, this demonstrates how Jaunsari arts and crafts incorporate aspects of both tangible and intangible heritage, such as the need for ecological stewardship, the production of an object, and its ritual or symbolic nature. Despite the importance of these contributions, little ethnographic research has been done to date on the social, demographic, and ecological contexts of Jaunsari art forms. Therefore, using direct interviews and participants from the Jaunsari tribe in the Kalsi region of Uttarakhand, the current study attempts to investigate the material and non-material artistic expressions.

Findings

Tangible Art and Craft Traditions

Handloom Weaving

The Jaunsari community in the Jaunsar–Bawar region of Uttarakhand relies heavily on handloom weaving as part of their traditional way of life and cultural identity. Indigenous knowledge and skills are passed down through the generations in rural households, where the craft tradition is typically practised. Warm clothing that is appropriate for the Himalayan climate is frequently woven using wool from sheep and goats. The most distinctive and concrete craft tradition is weaving. Women make textiles like Pattu (shawls), Pichhora (ceremonial wraps), and Thulma (thick blankets) using pit looms and locally sourced wool.

Fertility symbols and mountain vegetation are common geometric design motifs. According to Negi (2016), weaving promotes both the economic sustainability of households and the growth of maternal kinship-based family ties. We discovered through speaking with those who worked in the industry that older weavers view weaving as a spiritual vocation: "This is our goddess," a 62-year-old village artisan said, referring to the loom, "it provides us food and blesses us."



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 3 (a) Thulma Shawl: blanket is specialised for its fine quality, hairy effect, bright colours and fascinating motifs. (b) Pichhora shawl: worn by women during weddings (c) Sadri; made by a local tailor.

Image source- Captured by the researcher during fieldwork.

Traditional Jaunsari Attire

Traditional Jaunsari attire reflects the culture of the Jaunsar–Bawar region of Uttarakhand, blending practicality with rich regional identity. Men typically wear a woollen pyjama known as a Jhangel, paired with a long woollen robe called a Chora, fastened with a woollen belt known as a Manjan, and topped with a distinctive woollen cap called a Digua. Women traditionally wear a pleated woollen skirt called a Ghagra, along with a blouse or Jhagga, complemented by a headscarf called a Dhantu for warmth and modesty. Bright colours, hand-woven wool, and heavy silver jewellery are key elements of their clothing, often adorned during festivals, weddings, and cultural events. The craftsmanship in tailoring and weaving showcases the community’s connection with their mountainous environment, where the attire provides warmth, durability, and cultural symbolism.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 4 (a) Traditional Jaunsari Attire of women (Field Photograph)-woollen skirt called a ghagra, along with a blouse or jhagga, complemented by a headscarf called a dhantu. (b) Jaunsari man in traditional attire-woollen pyjama known as a jhangal, paired with a long woollen robe called a chora, with a woollen belt-manjan, and a woollen cap called a digua. Source: Photograph sourced from the personal album of a respondent. (c) Researcher dressed in Jaunsari traditional attire. Source: Photograph taken by a community member during the field visit.

Woodcarving and Architecture

Woodcarving and architecture in the Jaunsari region represent a deep artistic legacy shaped by the Himalayan environment, spirituality, and community identity. Traditional Jaunsari architecture is primarily characterised by multi-storeyed wooden houses built with stone bases and intricately carved timber, designed to withstand the harsh mountain climate. The use of deodar and other locally available hardwoods is common, giving structures both strength and aesthetic value. Temples, village houses, and community buildings display beautifully carved doors, windows, and pillars depicting floral patterns, mythological figures, animals, and geometric motifs that carry symbolic meanings.

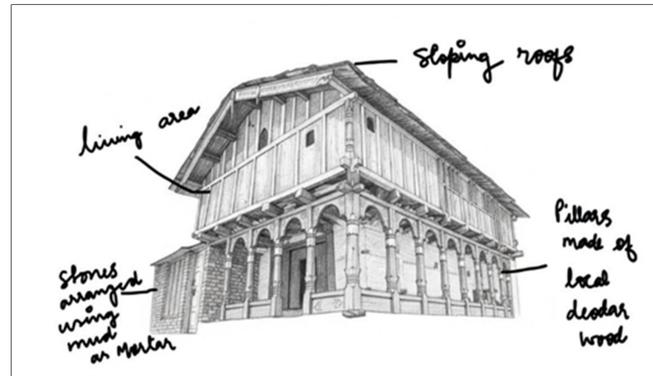


Figure 5. Traditional Jaunsari house; typically built in Kath-kuni style using local deodar wood and stones. They are often two or three stories high, with ground floors (Goth) for livestock and storage and upper floors for the family, with sloping roofs and wooden carvings. Note- sketch of a traditional Jaunsari house layout by the researcher.

Woodcraft is primarily a male domain. The Jaunsari carpenters (badhais) work with deodar and pine wood to carve doors, pillars, and temple facades. Intricate floral and zoomorphic designs adorn village temples dedicated to Mahasu Devta. As Thapliyal (2006) notes, these carvings embody both artistic skill and religious devotion, transforming architecture into ritual space. Interviews revealed intergenerational transmission of techniques, but declining availability of timber and reduced patronage threaten this heritage.

Metalcraft and Ornamentation

Metalcraft and ornamentation in Jaunsari culture are not just decorative arts but an emotional expression of identity, pride, and heritage. The people of the Jaunsar–Bawar region have a deep connection with metal jewellery, especially silver, which is considered both auspicious and protective. Skilled local artisans handcraft ornaments with remarkable detail, shaping them into necklaces, anklets, earrings, bangles, and headpieces that reflect traditional motifs and beliefs. Traditional ornaments, nath, chandrika, bichhua, Pauje, signify marital and ritual status. Iron and brass utensils, often forged during communal rituals, are decorated with hammered motifs. Artisans expressed concern that imported machine-made items now displace handmade pieces, although local fairs continue to provide markets for silverwork.



Ornament Name	Description	Body Part
Bali	circular earrings made of gold or silver	Ears
Mund Mala/ Hansuli	Single or Multi-layered crescent-shaped silver necklace	Neck
Chudiyani	Glass or metal bangles	Wrists
Pajeb / Paizeb/pauje	Chain-style anklet with bells	Ankles
Galabandh	Choker-style necklace made of silver beads or plates	Neck
Nath	Large decorative nose ring worn during rituals and weddings	Nose
Kaanphool	Floral-shaped traditional earrings	Ears
Bicchua	silver ornament worn on the toes by married women	Toe

Table 4: Metalcraft and ornamentation in Jaunsari culture.



Figure 6: a) Galobandh (Galabandh) Gold choker necklace crafted on a vibrant fabric base, (b) Hansuli (Khagwali): a choker in polished silver, worn during weddings or festivals. Photo source- Field photograph (c) Kaanphool: Gold earrings with floral designs to cover a woman's entire ear. Photo source -Internet. D) Nath: gold ornament worn by women in the nose during weddings. (Field Photo).



Basketry and Fibre Crafts

The basketry of the Jaunsari community reflects their close bond with the Himalayan environment and their traditional lifestyle. Using locally available materials like ringal bamboo, kansa grass, and wild reeds, they skilfully weave baskets in various shapes for everyday needs, carrying grains, storing fodder, collecting firewood, and even transporting infants during seasonal migrations. Men usually gather and cut raw materials, while women specialise in fine weaving and decorative patterns. The designs are simple yet aesthetic, often featuring geometric motifs. Beyond utility, basketry holds cultural significance in Jaunsar, symbolising self-sufficiency, ecological harmony, and the transmission of ancestral skills across generations.

Local Name	Description	Main Use
Tokri / Tokra	Round or oval basket made from ringal bamboo	Carrying vegetables, grains, and household items
Dalia	Flat-bottomed, open basket	Collecting fodder, grass, and firewood
Kilta / Kilti	A conical basket worn like a backpack with straps	Transporting crops and wood from fields/forests
Sup / Soop	Flat winnowing tray	Cleaning and separating grains and pulses
Chhaj / Chhajli	Wide woven tray	Drying grains, rajma, spices, and chillies
Odwa	Large storage basket with dense weaving	Storing grains, potatoes, pulses, and household supplies inside homes
Girlo / Ghirlo	Semi-conical basket with shoulder straps	Carrying fodder, firewood, vegetables, and crops during field/forest work

Table 5: Basketry and Fibre Crafts of Jaunsari culture.



(a)

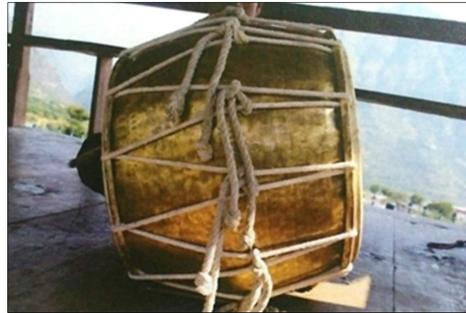


(b)

Figure 7: Traditional basketry of the Jaunsari community: (a) Odwa – a hand-woven utility basket used for carrying agricultural and household materials; (b) Girlo – a larger load-carrying basket traditionally used for transporting firewood, fodder, and farm produce. Photo Source: Captured by the researcher during fieldwork.

Musical Instruments

The Jaunsari community of Uttarakhand employs a distinctive set of traditional musical instruments that accompany their dances, rituals, and seasonal festivities. Among percussion instruments, the Dhol and Damau are the most prominent; the dhol being a large double-headed drum and the damau a smaller kettle-shaped drum. They are always played together, producing rhythmic patterns essential to Jaunsari folk dances such as Harul and Raso. Women often use the Thali (metal plate) and Manjira (small cymbals) during devotional singing.



(a)



(b)

Figure 8 a) Dhol (b) Goat skin used for making Drums

Wind instruments include the Ransingha, a curved brass trumpet shaped like a horn, and the Turhi, a straight trumpet; both are blown during temple processions and jatar festivals to announce the presence of deities. The Murli, a bamboo flute, is used in love songs and folk .storytelling, particularly by shepherds and village youths



Figure 9. From Left to Right -Dhol, Damau, Dafli, Ransingha; the Indian Trumpet Source: Photograph sourced from the personal album of a respondent.

Among string instruments, the Ektara (single-string lute) and Hudka (small hourglass drum with strings) are common. The hudka accompanies narrative singing traditions like Pandav Nritya and local ballads, while the ektara is carried by wandering bards during devotional performances. Together, these instruments embody the rhythmic and melodic heart of Jaunsari cultural expression, linking artistic creativity with ritual and social life.]



Intangible Art and Cultural Expressions

Oral Art and Folklore

Jaunsari oral tradition encompasses jagar (spirit-invoking songs), mangal geet (auspicious wedding songs), and narrative ballads recounting the exploits of deities and ancestors. Elderly informants described how singers act as ritual mediators between human and divine realms. These performances frequently coincide with life-cycle ceremonies and agricultural cycles.

Dance and Performance

Jaunsari Folk Dances - Dance in Jaunsari culture is a vibrant expression of community spirit, celebration, and shared identity. Traditional group dances are performed by the Jaunsar-Bawar people during festivals, weddings, harvest seasons, and religious occasions to represent joy and camaraderie, as well as to symbolise unity and fertility. The "Harul" and "Barada Nati" are two popular styles in which men and women create big circles or rows while moving rhythmically to the beats of drums, dholak, damau, and native flutes. The beautiful footwork, synchronised hand gestures, and powerful body sways create a lively environment, while traditional tunes tell stories about love, bravery, nature, and folklore. Participants wear colourful traditional clothes and jewellery, which adds to the visual appeal of the performance. Jaunsari dance is more than just entertainment; it develops social relationships, maintains oral traditions, and sustains cultural identity throughout generations.



Figure 10. Harul Dance - performed by both Men and Women in a cheerful and expressive form, narrating the stories about history, mythological epics like the Mahabharata. Source: Photograph sourced from the personal album of a respondent.



Another popular form, Raso, is a narrative dance-drama that depicts heroic and mythological tales, often recounting the exploits of the Pandavas or local deities such as Mahasu Devta. The Jhumeila and Chhopati dances are lighter, romantic performances that allow for expressive gestures and dialogues between male and female dancers, reflecting themes of courtship and companionship. During temple festivals (jatar), devotional dances known as Pandav Nritya or Mahasu Nritya are enacted as ritual offerings, blending performance with worship. Each village in the Jaunsar–Bawar region preserves its own variation of these dances, distinguished by local rhythms, costumes, and song dialects. The participation of the entire community elders, youth, and musicians, transforms these performances into living symbols of Jaunsari identity and continuity across generations.



Figure 11: Pandav Nritya, a theatrical dance drama performed in large open areas, large open areas that narrate themes of the Mahabharata. Source: Photograph sourced from the personal album of a respondent.

Ritual Symbolism and Body Art

Embodied art includes things like tattoos and symbolic clothing. Flower motifs were traditionally tattooed on women's hands and arms to symbolise endurance and fertility. Turner's (1967) notion of liminality in ritual arts is consistent with the ceremonial use of masks in Mahasu Devta celebrations, which suggests performative transition. The Jaunsari people's spiritual beliefs, clan customs, and close relationship to nature are all represented by symbolism, which is essential to their cultural identity. The majority of rituals include seasonal migrations,



agricultural cycles, and ancestral worship. Ornaments, clothing, colours, and ceremonial items all contain symbols.

Transmission of Knowledge

In the Jaunsari community, knowledge of weaving, woodcarving, ornament making, and ritual performance is primarily transmitted through observation and participation, rather than formal instruction. Children learn by assisting elders during household tasks and festival preparations, gradually developing skills through practice. As one elderly artisan explained, “Yeh kaam bolne se nahi, dekhne se seekha jata hai” (“This craft is not learned by words, but by watching”). Craft learning often follows seasonal rhythms—winter months are devoted to weaving and embroidery inside homes. At the same time, boys learn carpentry, instrument playing, and ritual responsibilities during community gatherings and temple festivals. Although modern schooling, migration, and reduced forest access have decreased the number of full-time practitioners, families continue to pass down basic techniques to ensure that cultural memory is not lost, even when the craft may no longer serve as a primary livelihood.

Discussion

The ethnographic findings demonstrate that Jaunsari art and craft practices are not isolated aesthetic activities but integral to social organisation, ecological ethics, and cosmological belief. The visible aspect of a larger symbolic system is represented by tangible crafts, woven textiles, carved wood, and silver ornaments. Its performative and communicative core is made up of songs, dances, and rituals from intangible traditions. Collectively, they represent what Kala (2015) refers to as biocultural diversity: the interconnectedness of ecology and culture. Although they offer opportunities for agency, gender roles also structure artistic production. While woodcarving and ritual performance validate male communal leadership, weaving gives women both economic independence and cultural authority. Adaptive continuity



rather than loss is demonstrated by the endurance of traditional motifs in the face of material changes (commercial silver replacing local smelting, synthetic yarns replacing wool).

According to Thapliyal (2006), the Jaunsari cultural landscape is a "sacred ecology" in which every creative act reinforces the reciprocity of the human environment. This is corroborated by field observations: craftspeople frequently started their work by making ceremonial offerings to Mahasu Devta and discussing the forest as a source and a spirit. These methods support Kala's (2015) theory that traditional ecological knowledge serves as a conservation ethic ingrained in cultural expression. Migration of young people and market penetration pose serious problems. Pant (2003) asserts that the value systems of Himalayan handicrafts are similarly threatened by industrial competition. Efforts to revitalise local crafts through government-sponsored training workshops may be hampered by younger Jaunsaris' conflicted feelings about their home and heritage (there is a sense of pride in their heritage, but also a desire for a more modern way of life). If sufficient funds are available to support the creation of sustainable business models, this could present a chance to strengthen cultural resilience through the creation of sustainable marketing channels for these crafts.

Limitations

The primary geographic focus of this study is Purani Kalsi, which may not accurately reflect differences throughout the larger Jaunsar–Bawar region. Observation of seasonal crafts and festivals was limited because fieldwork was done during a particular season. The viewpoints of young people who have relocated for work and education may be underrepresented, despite the large number of respondents. Due to ritual sensitivities, some craftspeople also refused audio-visual documentation, leaving some descriptive gaps. These limitations show the need for more extensive comparative and long-term research, but they do not lessen the significance of the results.

Conclusion



The Jaunsari tribe's art and craft traditions reflect a dynamic cultural system that is still intricately entwined with ecological knowledge, ritual belief, material creativity, and collective identity. The tribe's interaction with the Himalayan environment is reflected in tangible crafts like weaving, woodcarving, basketry, and metal ornamentation, while oral stories, dance, and music preserve social cohesiveness and intergenerational memory. Instead of operating separately, these artistic manifestations create a cohesive cultural continuum that supports community governance, spirituality, gender complementarity, and a sense of belonging. Even though production patterns have changed due to commercial markets, dwindling forest access, and changing aspirations, the community has shown resilience through innovative design, festival-based transmission, and a resurgence of cultural pride. Therefore, approaches that acknowledge Jaunsari heritage as both economic and intangible are necessary for effective preservation, safeguarding not only artifacts and craft outputs but also the ecological resources, ritual spaces, apprenticeship practices, and rural livelihoods that support them. Thus, maintaining Jaunsari craftsmanship is directly related to more general objectives of ecological conservation, rural development, and cultural diversity in the Western Himalayas.

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