

Women Empowerment: Unlocking the Creative Potential

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ABSTRACT:

Textile industry for centuries have played a significant role in the society and the backbone of its evolution was played by the women whose contributions have largely been overlooked from several years. Empowerment of women to enrich cultural heritage hence becomes one of the most important aspects in today's scenario. Women artisans have played significant roles in showcasing their unique creativity and expertise in various crafts. Passing down their knowledge and expertise from generation to generation has weaved socio cultural development. The artisans' skillful representation of various crafts showcase their journey of time and also the journey of survival of crafts, which became off tracked from their roots due to lack of communication and financial support. This exploratory research based on prior studies and observations provides an understanding on the women artisans, those who are expert in hand embroidery/needle works, (like Kantha embroidery of West Bengal, Rabari Bharat of Gujarat, Phulkari of Punjab), their journey, evolution of craft through demand of time and also the question of survival, contribution of NGOs, Design Institutions, Government Schemes, Handicraft Fair and the role played by Fashion Designers.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Women Artisans, Kantha, Rabari Bharat, Phulkari.

I. INTRODUCTION:

A stunning work of art, made on fabrics by different kinds of threads and needle plays a deep impact on women empowerment and as well as cultural development of India. Embroidery with needle not only shows the beautiful design on different fabric but also convey the story of the community, their surrounding as well as their journey. The ceremonial based practice that

continues from generation to generation, where artisan never use drawing and tracing for the embroidery and needle is the only tool for them to express their creativity/narration through embellishment on the clothing with myriad forms. This is the subtle expression of the emotion and creativity of the makers.

Objectives:

The objective of the study is to understand the women's role in these craft practice and how these practice move towards commercialization through time, that actually helped the women to empowering themselves through economically.

The process, evolution and commercialization of Kantha, Phulkari and Rabari Bharat:

Kantha stitch: The legacy of West Bengal is practiced in different villages, mainly in Birbhum district of West Bengal. In this women centric practice old fabrics (Sarees) being used layered by layered with rows of running stitches to make traditional Kantha (The Quilt). Earlier the threads of the border of sarees used to use for the stitches. These creations generally used for ceremonial purposes, later on with the passing time the practice became commercialized and artisans started working on new fabrics and also started using new threads and designs, mostly geometric designs on different products. The traditional form of Kantha (Quilt) was mainly used for winter season, later on through evolution, the running stitch became popular in the products like Sarees, Kurtis, Tops, Skirts, Kurtas, Bags, Blouse pieces, Files, Folders, Coasters, Table linen, Notebooks etc. It is been observed that the hard work of these women artisans, those who practice the craft with their household works and how their practice transformed from ceremonial purpose to commercialization. This shift is clearly visible in

the designs of Kantha stitches. The geometric

design took place of traditional floral motif.



Fig 1. Traditional design -Kantha stitch



Fig 2. Contemporary design- Kantha stitch

Phulkari: The traditional embroidery of Punjab, that is integral part of women's life and also rich culture and heritage of Punjab. This traditional embroidery has started by the women at their leisure time activity of personal and ceremonial use. For this needle work artisan use Khaddar (hand spun fabric), silk threads to make different types of Phulkari like, Darshan Dwar, Vari-De-Bagh, Sanchi Phulkari etc.

The rapid growth of marketization transformed the practice in commercial activity. With the demand of contemporary market the handicraft, that was engaged in a practice of

generation to generation in hand embroidery, transformed to produce machine made Phulkari items. This affected the financial independence of women artisan as machine made Phulkari items continue to flood the market overshadowing handmade handicrafts. Many difference can be identified in both the embroidery. Though the perfection of form is present in machine made embroidery but the imperfect rhythm/aesthetic of handmade embroidery is more appreciable. As machine made Phulkari is more affordable than the handmade one so, the practice of traditional artisans became endangered.



Fig 3. Traditional handmade Phulkari



Fig 4 Machine made Phulkari

Rabari Bharat: The needle work by the nomadic community of Gujarat in women centric practice

that passed on from mother to daughter and its represents mythology, belief and culture of the life

of Rabaries through embroidery with mirror works. These embroideries are used for daily attire and also for ceremonial purposes where the artisans used to make different designs consisting of animals, artifacts etc. Over the course of time Bharat as a medium of dowry became a social taboo and the

issue largely affected the Dhebaries, so it was banned by the community. The contribution of NGOs, Kala Raksha and Shrujan plays a major role in reviving the extinct practice of Rabari Bharat. The women of this community started working again and started exploring the designs on new products.



Fig 5. Traditional Rabari Bharat



Fig 6 Traditional design on product

Impact of commercialization of Artisan's life:

The women-centric craft practice of three different parts of India conveys that how commercialization helped the artisans to empower themselves. Though the traditional practice of Phulkari was affected by machine embroidery, but the initiative of NGOs, self-help groups, trainings helped the Phulkari artisans to keep their practice on track. Artisans of these three practices got an opportunity to explore new designs, materials, local and international markets, education, to overcome poverty from commercialization.

Contribution of Craft Revivalist:

The generation-to-generation practice got benefited by the active participation of NGOs, those who helped the artisan to connect with the market (local, national and international), keep them focused on target customers, provide training to produce products based on market demand and to explore design and technology. Many NGOs working with the artisans to provide economic empowerment through formation of self-help groups, some of them have also developed a niche market for the artisans by forming a brand of their own and to conduct healthcare programs. The design institutions invite artisans for awareness programs, conduct workshops for students where artisans can teach, craft documentation by the students for academic purposes actually helps the artisans to promote their craft. Some organizations also provide micro loans to the artisans.

II. CONCLUSION:

Artisans, those who keep the tradition alive are the preservers of cultural heritage. It has been noticed that entrepreneurship makes a significant contribution to the economic and social development of the artisans to keep the craft practice alive. Through commercialization they are able to improve their lives. Many collaborative works with different fashion designers empower the artisans.

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