

Role of Non-Government Organization towards the upliftment of traditional embroidery craft of Barmer

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Abstract

India is a land of rich culture and traditions. Each state of the country holds importance towards its traditional craft. The skill of handicraft is transferred from one generation to another as an important part of the family legacy. Rajasthan is one of the states wherein the Barmer district is known for its intricate traditional embroidery craft. This craft is majorly practiced by the women artisans of Barmer residing in the small villages. Due to lack of education and knowledge, these artisans are facing many challenges. The presence of middlemen in the marketing chain is one of the constraints in the handicraft sector. However, there are NGOs that are contributing to the development of the artisan community. A study was conducted to assess the role of NGO in the upliftment of traditional crafts and artisans of Barmer. This research paper is a case study of an NGO named Gramin Vikas Chetna Sansthan working under the guidance of Mr. Vikram Singh and President awardee Dr. Ruma Devi who are rigorously working towards the upliftment of women artisans. This paper will give insights into the steps taken by NGO towards development in form of social changes and upliftment of the traditional embroidery craft of Barmer.

Keywords: Craft upliftment, embroidery, women artisans, traditional craft, Non Government Organization.

Introduction

In India, *Rajasthani* culture is known for its diversity and so is Indian craftsmanship. Every community in Rajasthan excels in its specialty. Flamboyant embroidery is an age-old tradition of Rajasthan and it has been conserved with sincerity and dedication by the artisans.

Barmer is one of the massive but underdeveloped regions on the map because of climatic conditions, limited resources for agriculture, and poor literacy rate. The handicrafts here are mainly the creative work of the financially weaker sections of society. These artisans of embroidery craft are suffering because of a disorganized market, lack of education, inadequate funds, lack of knowledge of the latest technologies, deficiency of market knowledge, etc.

Artisans form the backbone of the handicraft sector and are delivering their best through hard work as well as unique skills. Even though these artisans have to face many challenges in providing a supportable living for themselves and their families in the existing economy.

Few of such challenges are the growing cost of producing goods, insufficient working capital, transporting raw material from other places, non-existence of appropriate training amenities, feeble marketing approach, little remunerations of the hard-working artisans, competition worldwide, and negligence by central and state governments and absence of interest by succeeding generation.

The NGOs though worked for the upliftment of the artisan's difficult circumstances. Still, there is a need for these organizations to function more rigorously in the modern marketing environment. More NGOs, need to step forward and support the artisans to withstand the changing form of challenges being thrown by the system.

The objective of the study is to explore the role of NGO towards the upliftment of traditional embroidery craft by the women artisans of Barmer Rajasthan.

Review of Literature

Ojha and Mishra (2013), examined the probability on opportunities, exposure and support with the help of non-government organisation named as URMUL. The study aimed to understand the initiatives indulged by URMUL on embroidery craft artisans in Bikaner city of Rajasthan. The case study method was used to analyze five cases that were selected using the purposive sampling technique. The findings of the study stated that there are visible changes concerning the socioeconomic status of women artisans. These women artisans are getting assignments and projects on a continued basis resulting in income in their hands. URMUL also ensures regular payments and wages to be received by the artisans for their hard work.

Middlemen in the supply chain are now negligible leading to fewer earnings in terms of profit. The women artisans with help of URMUL developed the capabilities of self-radiance self-sufficiency through the training of skill development.

Jhadhav (2015) examined the role of NGO in rural development. The study aimed to understand the holistic and collaborative approach of NGO working for the benefit of rural artisans. The rural areas of Rajasthan were selected to study wherein the descriptive conceptual mode method was followed to collect detailed information. The study results revealed that rural population is connecting through the world through the mode of NGO efforts. They are being introduced to the new technologies and modern changes beneficial for the rural population to uplift their living standards. NGOs are also creating awareness among the rural population concerning various schemes designed by the government for their development.

Shah and Patel (2019) conducted a study about various non-government organisations working for the promotion, revival, and preservation of the handicraft sector. The study was conducted in the Surendranagar district of Gujarat. The data was collected from rural artisans involved in various handicrafts practiced in this locality. Around 400 artisans were selected through a random sampling method and an interview schedule was used as a tool for data collection. The results of the study stated that the rise number of projects and programmes organised by Government organisations but very few have knowledge about it. Therefore, non-government organisations are coming forward and creating awareness about schemes that are beneficial for the artisans. There is scope to fill the gap between Government organisation and rural artisans, hence NGOs have to work hard to act as a bridge between these entities.

Research Methodology

The western part of Rajasthan was selected for conducting the study, specifically Barmer district located in the region of Thar desert. One non-government organizations were selected to collect the data. The Case Study method was used to collect the data from organization, focusing on functions to support the embroidery craft and artisans of Barmer.

Results and Discussion

Gramin Vikas evam Chetna Sansthan (GVCS), a grassroots NGO aimed at

promoting the craft work of women artisans was founded in 1998 in the city of Barmer. It was founded by Mr. Vikram Singh, a social activist, and Secretary. This organization is a non-profit and non-political association of socially inclined members who are working for the upliftment of women from *dalits* (people belonging to the lowest stratum castes in India) and marginalized communities of Barmer.

The NGO is working for the overall development of the women population of Barmer who are deprived of basic necessities of life without any discrimination on the cast system or community biasness. The main focus area is to uplift and improve the livelihood of women artisans by giving them assistance and up-gradation of already existing traditional embroidery skill among them.

Rooted in the handicraft center of Rajasthan, GVCS empowers skilled women artisans by connecting them to urban markets where their talent and skill are appreciated. The organisation has collectivized women, and artisans, through the medium of Self Help Groups (SHGs). These SHGs enact as platforms for knowledge building, where women artisans are trained and oriented to develop quality designs through workshops, training, and meetings. Along with knowledge sharing; SHGs are federated into a Central Womens' Manch which works for collective marketing of the products developed by member women through liasoning with buyers and craft houses The organisation is working with more than 22,000 women artisans from the villages surrounding the Barmer district of Rajasthan.

Along with working on its core focus which is women empowerment by helping them attain financial independence through the promotion of handicrafts that offer viable home-based employment to women, the organisation also works on other programmes which include; SHG formation, disaster management, and relief work, fodder supply for drought-affected livestock, adult literacy and education programmes for women. Due to its strong women-centric programme, the organisation also encourages equitable participation of both sexes in panchayat and village governance activities allowing for the participation of women in decision-making processes. Their vision is the creation of an equitable society devoid of exploitation and deprivation of any kind.

Handicraft Programme: The key programme of the organisation is enabling women to achieve financial independence through ugh collectivization of women artisans in SHGs, upskilling them on the basis of market

needs through training and workshops, and market linkages with buyers thereby eliminating margin-eating middlemen and ensuring that women get a fair price for their hard work. Women artisans use traditional techniques of applique-cut work and patchwork to develop intricately embroidered garments. This traditional application of designing is re-calibrated according to market demand and the women artisans are trained on these market-driven designs through the organisations' workshops and training. The products developed by women artisans associated with GVCS are recognized by Craftmark and Fair Trade India.

The organisation possesses an in-house workshop and training center for the skill development of artisans. The network of women SHGs ensures that GVCS has a reasonable production capacity allowing for delivery of products in stipulated timelines to linked buyers.

The profits earned in the process are used to upscale the project by linking more women artisans and ensuring wider community outreach and development. While GVCS ensures that the artisans get a fair price through the organization-rooted orders where the artisans work on predefined wages; it also empowers SHGs to develop direct linkages with buyers.

Initially, the organisation struggled to convince women to join SHGs and work for a living as women in Rajasthan's male-dominated society are not accorded many choices or rights. The purdah system makes matters worse. Rural areas of Rajasthan indeed present a paradoxical situation where on the one hand women are expected to practice the purdah system in front of male members of the family and society but at the same time due to a lack of toilets and baths, they have to bathe in open spaces. It was an uphill task to convince women and their families to participate in this income-generating activity. However, the NGO workers preserved and developed a network of women SHGs through constant encouragement.

Women artisans now participate in outdoor training and meetings and are even recognized on urban fashion platforms for their work. Another struggle that the NGO fought was ensuring that the artisans got recognition for their work. While the big companies had started placing orders with GVCS, they still wanted the artisans to be in the background. To allow the artisans to get their fair share of the limelight and recognition for their efforts, the NGO arranges for the participation of its artisans in various trade fairs, exhibitions, and even fashion shows. A journey that started with 10 women in an SHG of *Rawatsar* village has now covered 75 villages and 22,000 women. These women earn an average of INR 10-15,000 per

month as compared to INR 2000/month which they earned previously when middlemen were involved in the system. The payment terms are decided by the group leaders of each SHG as the group representatives. The secretary, Mr. Vikram Singh reported that they never want to demotivate and discourage any women artisan because of monetary reasons as it is one of the objectives of the organisation to support and empower women artisans of Barmer. Therefore, they try to convince and satisfy each group to work as well as take orders with motivational conversation and counseling.

regularly reaches its ever-growing network of artisans, the NGO has streamlined a weekly system whereby a designated day is fixed for each village enroute of the organization's mobile van. The women from the respective village gather at the predecided spot where they submit their previous work for which they are paid and are provided new assignments. This system ensures that the artisans have regular work and earnings. It also guarantees that the existing orders get completed within the stipulated time.

The organisation at any given time has 7-8 orders from different buyers. Exhibitions and trade fairs are important platforms for developing buyer linkages. The organisation takes orders for different products. The artisans actively develop many products in home furnishings and apparel categories. Popular among them are cushion covers, bed covers, saris, dupattas, and kurtas.

Due to the handmade nature of the products, the production duration depends upon the nature of the handiwork and product type. On an average, it takes upwards of three months to fulfill a large order. GVCS, however, maintains a stock of regular items which it can deliver within a few days of receiving the order.

GVCS has a streamlined marketing process that begins with selling through its own shops in Barmer and Jaipur cities. Along with regular orders from these two stores, another crucial aspect is developing buyer linkages which are done through exhibitions and trade fairs. The prices of products vary due to the diverse product range. The annual turnover of GVCS is over INR 2 crore, however, older SHGs associated with the organisation have successfully developed independent buyer linkages and undertake business individually.

GVCS constantly challenges norms from the orthodox social norms of

the village to the conventional middlemen-centric distribution system and now the form of traditional embroidery. Conventionally the applique work form of embroidery was performed on only cotton fabrics, but GVCS artisans experimented with other fabrics too. This embroidery work is now undertaken on silk fabrics also. This was well-received among the fashion community as the artisans have started receiving orders for embroidery work on all sorts of silk fabrics such as *Tussar*, *Maheshwari*, *Chanderi*, etc. along with other handloom fabrics too.

To fulfill orders and to develop quality products, the organisation needs quality inputs. These are sourced from various parts of the country. The needles and threads are sourced from Jaipur and Delhi and the fabrics are mostly from South India. Depending upon the orders received, GVCS places orders for the raw materials accordingly.

The organization conducts workshops from time to time for education and development of motif bank that includes various designs of motifs, patterns as well as layouts. Women artisans from various SHGs are selected based on their creative skills. The main aim of organizing such workshops is to upgrade the designing skills of women artisans by introducing them to the latest trends in the market demanded by existing customers. Experts from the field are called from the industry who conduct an interactive cum experimenting exercise which enable women artisan to understand the need of the market. These designs are recorded in form of a file book which is developed by the women artisans using basic tools like pencil, sharpeners, pens, erasers and scales. In the workshop, traditional designs are adopted and modified according to the need of the client. For participating in these workshops payment is given to women artisans as a stipend.

The motifs designs which were produced during the workshop by the artisans are sketched by master artisans of the group in proper proportions and measurement as per the requirements. The developed designs are converted into *khakha* (tracing paper with small holes are punched on the outline of the motifs) on tracing paper. Samples are prepared by the artisans using combinations of embroidery stitches which are further used to showcase in front of buyers/clients while receiving the orders.

The organisation has been successful in ensuring recognition of the talented local artisans at the national level and it is now working to enable artisans to earn international fame. Small quantities of products have been exported to the US and some countries in Europe.

GVCS has exhibited the works of its 22,000 plus artisans on various national and international platforms. Some of them are mentioned below:

- Heimtextil fair in Germany
- Singapore Craft Fair
- London Fashion Week
- Annual participation at Tribes Fashion Show
- Annual participation at IHGF Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter Festivals held at Noida

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that NGO, GVCS is relentlessly working for ensuring sustainable livelihoods, recognition of women artisans, and empowering them in carving out a unique identity for themselves. The NGO has in the truest sense led to emerging of women leaders from within the community. Women associated with GVCS have emerged as master artisans, entrepreneurs, and primary manufacturers. Not only do these roles require skill and knowledge but also professional acumen and business sense. The transformation brought by GVCS in the lives of these women is phenomenal.

NGOs are also contributing to supporting the women artisans of Barmer by assisting them to develop market linkages and offering finance mechanisms. It was reported by one of the officials from the NGO that they also conduct training programmes, workshops, and health check-up camps for the women artisans. To impart knowledge related to designing, assistance is provided by NGO, to develop products according to the commercial market. This helps women artisans to increase their sales and profit.

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