

Bandhani

Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge in Traditional Bandhani

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Abstract

The preservation of traditional Bandhani craft knowledge- Bandhani is more than just a form of decorative textile art; it is a living archive, reflecting the history, culture, and beliefs of the communities of Gujarat and Rajasthan that have perfected it for centuries. This paper looks at how the labour-intensive process of tying thousands of minute knots by hand provides both cultural continuity and livelihoods to rural households, especially women. By examining the daily routines and life of artisans working in Bandhani, the paper argues that the craft itself is a language of identity, with patterns and colours narrating the story of one's heritage and status. It also argues that this ancient art form is currently at a precipice, with cheap, machine-produced copies threatening to erode its existence. Preserving traditional Bandhani is, therefore, not merely about safeguarding a beautiful textile art form but a crucial step toward sustaining a viable economic system and a human legacy. Through a combination of on-the-field observations and interviews with the artisan communities, the paper seeks to highlight the need for fair wages, better markets and recognition to help ensure the continuation of this 'art of the knot' into the future.

Keywords - Tie-Dye, Artisan Communities, Cultural Heritage, Rural Livelihoods, Sustainable Craft, Textile Identity.

1. Introduction

There is immense importance attached to the preservation of indigenous knowledge in traditional Bandhani in today's rapidly modernizing world. Bandhani, or Bandhej as it is known by some people, is a well-established textile art form that has been practiced in different parts of India for hundreds of years. It has become a popular folk art particularly in the regions of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Traditional Bandhani involves tying patterns onto fabrics with threads and dyeing them to create different designs. However, more than being a form of fabric decoration, Bandhani is a representation of a distinct culture, heritage, and craftsmanship which has been passed down through generations. Indigenous knowledge refers to traditional skills, understanding, and knowledge acquired by individuals over time in the context of local environments. In Bandhani, indigenous knowledge includes the process of tying, using different colours (both natural and chemical dyes), creating different designs (patterns) and mixing dyes to achieve the desired shades. This knowledge is normally neither written down in any format nor transferred through formal education but rather through informal, interpersonal transfer from elderly artisans within family structures. From childhood, artisans are typically exposed to and trained in Bandhani craft. The transfer is experiential, learning by watching, observing and then performing the skill from mentors at home. Bandhani connects the past with the present in the form of this living tradition. Every Bandhani pattern holds specific meaning and cultural significance in relation to rituals, festivals, special ceremonies etc. Some Bandhani designs are used by brides (e.g., colours red and yellow are auspicious and indicative of the marital joy). Some Bandhani designs denote social status or community belonging. The art form is therefore a narrative form not just a means of wearing an artistic piece of fabric. The biggest concern is that much of the knowledge relating to this craft is not written or recorded but confined to the hands and minds of the artisans. If they are unable to transfer their skills and knowledge to younger generations, this heritage might just be lost forever. However, some initiatives have been taken to help protect Bandhani: Government organizations, art organizations and fairs organize exhibitions that promote Bandhani craft. The work of designers who try to incorporate Bandhani patterns into

modern fashion also contributes to the popularization and preservation of this art form. The objective of these endeavours is primarily to promote the traditional art and support the artisans that practice it. In conclusion, preservation of indigenous knowledge in traditional Bandhani art is vital to sustain and respect human heritage. Not only is it a symbol of the skills and hard work of artisans but also an economic sustenance and a window into the rich culture of India. Supporting handmade products, promoting the craft worldwide and spreading awareness about its significance can help sustain this art for many more years to come.

2 Rethinking Material Choices

2.1 Natural Fibres Beyond Symbolism

The significance of natural fibres used in traditional textiles goes beyond their symbolic value; they carry functional importance. In traditional Bandhani craft, cotton and silk fibres are fundamental because they create aesthetically pleasing and long-lasting fabrics for the designs to be crafted upon. The porosity of natural fibres helps them absorb dyes, making them rich and vibrant, a quality indispensable to tie-dye artistry, where dye absorption directly translates to successful pattern formation. In addition to providing an excellent canvas, cotton fibre is light, soft, and highly breathable, making it suitable for the tropical climates prevalent in the Indian subcontinent, while silk has a smooth finish and is reserved for special occasions and luxury products. Natural Fibers are inherently gentle to the human skin, unlike artificial Fibers that might irritate it. More importantly, natural Fibers have the advantage of being eco-friendly; they originate from plants and animals and are biodegradable, thus causing no harm to the environment. Combined with natural dyes, natural Fibers in the making of traditional Bandhani present a truly sustainable form of craftsmanship. Therefore, the choice of material in traditional textiles is both symbolic and utilitarian, making it an integral aspect of crafts like Bandhani.

2.2 Recycled Polymers as Transitional Strategy

Recycled polymers can be regarded as a helpful tool for transition and change within the industry of textile and apparel production. Polymers refer to all plastics, polyesters, nylon and so forth that are commonly utilized in the textile industry due to their strength, durability, affordability and overall versatility. Unfortunately, using plastics or synthetics that is virgin and manufactured from raw, non-renewable resources presents significant environmental impacts, primarily associated with fossil fuel consumption and lengthy decomposition times. Using recycled polymer provides an alternative; to create new synthetic materials from discarded plastic wastes or old synthetic apparel helps reduce landfill capacity and environmental contamination. Additionally, this reduces energy consumption and resource use, as production with recycled Fibers has a lower carbon footprint than with virgin Fibers. Put plainly, using recycled polymers assists in bridging the gap between commercialization and ecological sustainability. By choosing these materials, the industry makes a conscious step toward reducing its reliance on non-renewable resources and contributing to a healthier environment without compromising on production levels.

3. Manufacturing Intensity and Process Adjustments

Manufacturing intensity reflects the extent of resources, labour, energy, and time committed in the creation of an object. The manufacturing intensity of traditional textile art, like Bandhani, tends to be significantly low due to the skilled labour, manual techniques, and traditional processes involved. As the market demands grow, it often prompts the need for increased output in shorter time spans, consequently increasing the intensity of production. Adjustments in the production process, therefore, refer to modifications adopted in traditional art forms, without affecting the quality or nature of the product, in an effort to make them more effective and economical. In Bandhani, this could entail the improvement of tools to make tying quicker, use of improved dyes, and efficient organization of the process. Such modifications allow for a reduction in labour, energy, and time spent on production, which can positively impact artisan income and competitiveness. However, it is vital to establish a balance to avoid overwhelming the traditional essence and appeal of the craft and transform it into something machine-driven and soulless.

4 Circularity in Practice

, Not Theory Circularity in practice entails taking the principle of using, recycling, and renewing items, and actively putting it into everyday life as opposed to discussing it merely in theory. More basically, it means not throwing anything away after using it once, and finding means of continually using it instead. In the world of textile design, and crafts like Bandhani particularly, circularity can play a vital role in the development of a sustainable industry: In practice circularity can be observed through small but significant steps. Remnant cloth pieces may be used to create smaller items like scarves, patches or accessories instead of discarding them. Old Bandhani items may be repaired, re-styled or up cycled to make new ones. This not only ensures that they do not end up as waste, but it also continues the practice in a new and contemporary manner.

Artisans may integrate circular processes like using natural dyes, saving water in dyeing practices, reuse of dye baths where possible. Even packaging might become ecological and utilize cloth bags instead of plastic.

5 Practical significances

Practical significance refers to the actual utility and importance of something in real life. It is centred on tangible benefits and effects, and not solely on concepts or hypotheses. When associated with a traditional craft such as Bandhani, it highlights the utility and relevance of these practices to the artisan, environment and community. The practice of continuing traditional techniques helps the artisan, the environment and the community earn income, reduce environmental hazards and increase consumer awareness, respectively.

Artisan - livelihood through existing skills

Environment - reducing waste, pollution through sustainable processes and use of natural fibre

Consumers - Unique handmade item to purchase as opposed to mass produced goods, also raising awareness for traditional craft

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