

SURVIVAL OF AN INDIAN ARTFORM- FIELD TRIPS TO PRODUCTION SITES OF PUNJA DURRIES

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ABSTRACT

Panipat, in Haryana is one of the largest exporter of a special kind of durrie, the panja durries which are different from carpets. The paper aims to study the making of this 'commodity' which before the designers like Neeru Kumar, Shyam Ahuja existed in a different form and was also a part of bride's trousseau. The process of making durries involves the use of small or medium sized weaving frames, where the weaver inserts the coloured yarn that forms the weft. The introduction of handloom durrie further changed the process. The government publications and findings are supplemented by the field notes from a visit to Raj Overseas, an exporter of rugs made of cotton, wool and jute in Panipat. Meena Menon (2017) writes that during colonial times, the link between growing and weaving cotton broke and that agriculture underwent 'privatisation' to boost textile production. The paper aims to study the evolution of this traditional product into an international bestseller, taking one panja durrie as the object of study. It seeks to assess the determinants of the economic value of a product in a commodity market-the choice of raw material(cotton), method of production (tools or machines) and the designing process. The aim of the paper is to know who decides the making of a product-the cotton grower, the weaver, the manufacturer or the selling company.

Keywords: handloom sector; production; cotton manufacturing; marketing; Panipat

The Indian carpet and durrie industry is one of the largest in the world with a large raw material base and manufacturing strength across the value chain. India is the largest producer and the second largest exporter of cotton in the world. A sociological analysis of a commodity of this industry, the panja durrie, calls for an in-depth study of the whole chain. The journey from its raw material to its marketing, which witnesses a detachment of the product from the hands of the weaver in the market from where it travels seven seas. Presently, many international brands like Marks & Spencer, JC Penny, and FabIndia acquire large amount of their fabrics from India. Various kinds of rugs produced in India are namda (felted rugs), gabba (embroidered rugs), cotton rugs etc. India is the only country that makes handmade carpets and durries that start from 16 knots per square and can even go on to 2500 knots per square inch. Regions known for durrie making are Panipat

in Haryana, Jaisalmer and Barmer in Rajasthan, Bhavani in Tamil Nadu, Navalgund in Karnataka and Warangal in Andhra Pradesh. While panja durries had also existed in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh but they retained some unique weaving style which could be found only in Panipat.

LOCATION OF STUDY: PANIPAT, HARYANA

Panipat is the biggest centre in the country for exporting handloom cotton durries and has also won the Gold trophy by the export promotion council for the highest export of woollen hand-tufted carpets. There are many manufacturers like Bharat Carpet Manufacturers (BCM), started by Madhukar Khara, which on its website mentions that their workshop complex "reminds one of a more laid back time, when handcrafting was a way of life and not the production driven industry that it is today in Panipat". However, Bharat Carpet manufacturers

and other such companies have stopped making punja durries, and so the demand driven economy works to make products with least costs. The popular reason given by these manufacturing companies evokes the same idea that, "they will produce whatever the buyer wants." As a result, in Panipat, only two companies Palliwal group and Rajoverseas make these punja durries. The products, however are not made for domestic market but for foreign countries, especially America. The recent trade negotiation between India and America have benefited these companies as they have to pay less duties. On the role of Indian government, no significant steps have been taken to boost this dying artform. The exporting companies complain that after Goods and Services Tax (GST), they are deprived of the benefits which the handloom sector earlier enjoyed. Before GST, the exporting traders claimed to have gained an additional 5 percent drawback by the government for generating employment among weavers, enabling Indian exports and promoting this industry. The taxation policy however, now only gives a tax return on what

he sells to the supplier, while the additional incentive has been withdrawn.

THE FACTORY SITE: RAJ OVERSEAS

It is an international brand, which has been in the textile retail market since 1939. It has based its factories in Panipat and has pioneered through innovative products and a global distribution network. In the 1970s, the reins of the company were taken over by the second generation eyeing for global trade. Its current market base includes territories like Australia, Japan, America, Middle East and Europe. Its vision is focused on profitable, effective and responsible engagement with the customer through innovation and timely delivery. The products include carpets, dhurries, bath rugs, cushions, poufs and wall art. The dhurries are made of cotton, wool, PET yarn and other fibres and are available in contemporary, minimalist and traditional designs. Rugs by Raj, the exporting branch of the company advertises its rugs by the tagline, "Feel, touch, hear and see the craft in every thread."



Figure 1. Dhurries (rajoverseas)

The raw material cotton is brought from various places like Bikaner, Rajasthan depending on the desired quality of rug by the customer. This quality of cotton is measured relatively to its ability to stretch in longer threads. The good quality cotton stretches more and eases the machinery work. The raw cotton after being washed is processed into different lengths for different orders. Generally, a chain of industry begins from raw materials and ends with the buyer. But since the demand for punja durries is so scarce, it is the buyer who fully controls the production chain. It is the buyer who chooses and not the weaver who sells. The choices of colours,

designs, patterns, kind of cotton or wool are what the buyer informs the company beforehand. This industry therefore is not the traditional site of creativity, wherein the weaver had a control over what he created and could pass on to the next generations. The decay of the tradition can also be analysed through the cartography of the surrounding. The 'weavers' colony' around the factory area in Panipat was earlier a residence of the traditional weavers' families, but now is a residential quarter of the immigrant weaver labour working in the factory.

The locals from Panipat who once used to practice this traditional art form have opted out and are no longer attached to this industry. Since the urge for educating their children like any other family is prevalent, it is no more a traditional occupation that would sustain a family and hence could be passed on. No weaver in 'Raj overseas' is from Panipat, instead the production is held by an army of weavers from Bhadhoi, a city in Uttar Pradesh. The unskilled labour from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh come to settle around the factories, who then work in accordance with seasons. There are both kinds of workers-daily wagers and seasonal wagers.

The local markets are plundered with carpets, which are cheaper and require not much hand power in their making. The rightful reasoning given by the producers is that Indians are not much concerned about aesthetic value but only on its use value. The only purpose for which the domestic market absorbs these produces is for putting the dhurries under their beds. International trade is the only respite for surviving this art form, claim the sellers. The colours and patterns are dependent on the seasons and demands 'outside borders'. For instance, during Christmas, the most demanded colours are red and green. The 'original punja durrie' is nowhere to be found. The self-growth of this commodity, like all other commodities is diverted from what it was. Even the patterns are modified into the comforts and demands of the buyer's house. Although wool and cotton are combined in one dhurrie, the demand for wool is higher due to prevalence of winter seasons in foreign countries.

LIFE CYCLE OF AN ARTFORM

Uberoi (2008) contends that there are three lives of things: machine life, market life and vogue life. In the life cycle of Punja durries, the necessary objectives were fulfilled in their machine life, and was also used as bride's gifts. Initially in their market life, the consumers weren't divided and these durries were bought by all sections. It is the last stage that collapsed the industry. Since the market for carpets expanded and was able to provide cheap and attractive rugs to be adorned in houses, the durries became a part of 'obsolescence'.

Uberoi argues that the industry is still more powerful than commerce. In the scenario of Panipat however, Thorstein Veblen's distinction between commerce and industry is the key to understand the

decline of handlooms. Presently, the marketers sell machine-made carpets in the name of punja durries because the companies are based in a commercial activity wherein the purpose is to sell things within the competition. It is helpful in generating new demands.

Stephen Marglin (1974), contends that the capitalist organisation earns by moderating between the producer and consumer. In this circuit, the organisation extracts more for the expansion and improvement of equipment and industry. This surplus is much more than what individuals would earn if they controlled the pace of capital accumulation.

There are also cultural factors attached to the sale of a commodity. According to a report by Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (2012) on the South Korean market, it is a country where handicrafts are not one among the common gifts. It is different from any other developed country because Koreans do not buy gifts for decoration purpose, they rather prefer gifts which are functional and can be used in daily use. This regional difference in consumption is central in understanding the larger forces of commerce and industry. These regional differences are however better understood by dominant players in the exporting China who create stiff competition for developing countries. The problems faced by Indian textile factory are similar to what the export sector in Senegal, Western Africa is facing. The Chinese competition in market has threatened both of them.

CAN HANDLOOM MATCH THE PACE OF MODERNISATION ?

Almost 87% of the handloom households hail from rural India and only 13% are from the urban areas. The handloom industry plays an important role in women empowerment. A similar development can be seen in the journey of Khadi, branded on Gandhian principles, which signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) for improvised design development. It has developed from being a representative of Gandhi's khaddhar to a fashion symbol in kurtas. To popularise the khadi brand, huge chakras have been set up at IGI Airport and Connaught place. The Charkha Museum and Khadi Haat have been also opened at Connaught Place in New Delhi. Syeda Hameed (2019), a Padma

Shri Awardee and a former member of the Planning Commission recounted her visit to the Rehwa Centre, built next to the Ahilyabai Palace in Madhya Pradesh. The weavers learnt the skill in 1765 after Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar introduced weaving in the nearby town of Burhanpur. In 1979, new colours were introduced and nauwari (nine yard) sari was

replaced with six yards. Presently, the weavers have brought diversity in their work, as some do their own work, some work for master weavers while all do their own designing. "Our town is the only place in the country where new looms can be profitably set up" told the weavers to Hameed.

Foreign Trade

Table 1

Export-import data bank of carpets and other textile floor coverings

Financial Year	Exports worth	% share in total exports	Growth compared to last year
2015-16	11,29,973.16	0.6538	—
2016-17	11,89,516.91	0.6432	5.27
2017-18	11,02,805.25	0.5637	-7.29
2018-19(Apr-Dec)	9,30,411.09	0.5468	-15.63

Note. Value in Rs. Lacs. Source: website of Department of Commerce

As can be seen in Table 1, the growth of the commodity 'carpet and other textile floor covering' between the financial years, 2015-16 and 2016-17 was 5.27%. This positive growth however stopped in the following year, i.e. 2017-18 wherein the share in exports was reduced to 0.5637% from the previous year's 0.6432%. It's interesting that how

after 2016, the exports of commodity drastically reduced. In 2017-18, the market was worst hit as the negative growth was significant, which followed up to the next financial year. The negative trade can also be seen in the exports of handicrafts in the year 2017-18.

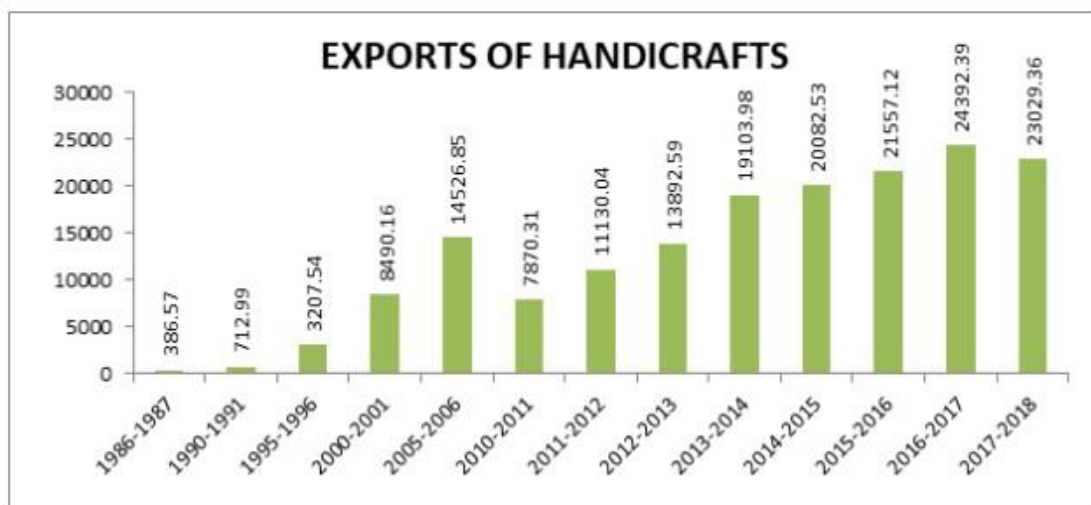


Figure 2: Handicrafts export data. export promotion council for handicrafts.

Source: Export Promotion Council of India

PUTTING YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD: MARKETING THE RIGHT WAY

The change in marketing strategy reflects the shift from production philosophy to product philosophy to marketing philosophy. In the production concept, there is focus on cheap products as the businessmen are convinced that consumers will only buy these. The market for low priced goods overshadows the finer features of that good. In the product concept, the good is at the centre and more efforts are put to produce a higher quality good. It is because the consumers appreciate quality features and are not reluctant in paying a higher price for the same. Finally in the marketing concept, the organisations changed their focus. It is a business philosophy under which organisations consider the wants and requirements of consumers as the guiding spirit. It is also called the consumer orientation for business growth. The consumer is brought at the

heart of corporate culture in such organisations. It is in this model that companies produce what customers want to both gain profits and consumer base.

The change in emphasis from selling to marketing is important while studying a manufacturing company's strategy formulation. While in selling, the focus is on the product, in marketing it is on the customer's wants. In the former, the company first makes the product and then drafts a plan on selling it. Management is based on the sales volume and stresses the needs of the seller. The management is profit oriented and stresses wants of buyers. So the success of any marketing or manufacturing company rests on how well it knows its customers. The environment in which a customer or a customer market is placed includes the resident's governmental policies and surrounding socio-political forces that shape the evolution of markets.

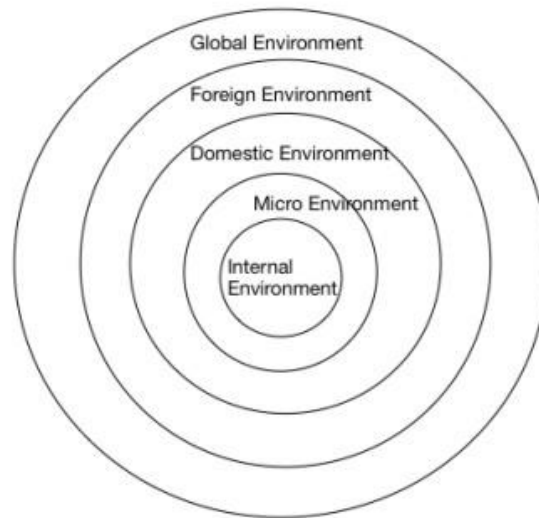
Determinants of sales and marketing

Figure 3: Environments for expansion of a trade

There are various determinants of a trading company which plans to diversify its products and consumer base to the global market, including domestic market constraints and a strategic vision. India has established EPZs (export processing zones), and hundred percent export oriented units which get tax benefits. Here the role of academicians and researchers become crucial in understanding the market and postulating a marketing ethnography.

The internal environment consists of the company's decisions which are completely made by the company and hence, changeable. The micro environment is the immediate environment which has direct influence over its decisions such as marketing intermediaries and advertising research agencies. The domestic environment is made up of the economic climate political influences which cannot be controlled by the company like lack of domestic demand. The foreign environment is made up of geographical, economic and other conditions which are prevalent in a foreign country. The global environment is the outermost circle which is confined neither to the national boundaries nor to the impacts of one particular country. This is a determinant for other domestic and foreign countries. It includes world-wide economic recessions, international stability and the working of bodies like World Trade organisation (WTO) and

mechanisms like Generalised system of preferences (GSP).

According to the Ministry of textiles annual report for 2016-17, handloom weaving is one of the largest economic activity after agriculture. Traditional weaving castes move up the status ladder, and their place in the woven cloth industry is taken by others, who's own traditional occupations no longer offer a good living like fisher people, cobblers, salt makers as well as many thrown out of work by downturns in the modern industries. In the middle of the twentieth century, there was enough confidence in the handloom industry to set up the largest cooperative in the country: The Yemmiganaur Weavers Production and Sales Society Limited.

COTTON TRADE AMIDST THE RISING GLOBAL PRICES

According to the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council (Texprocil), the export of cotton textiles could see an upward trend if the tariff disadvantage of 3.5% to 10% suffered by India in comparison with Vietnam, Pakistan and Indonesia on textiles was addressed. ("export of cotton textiles," 2019)

How well do the Indian policies perform ?

Meena Menon and Uzamma (2017) speculate on the existing lacunas in legal system for the artisan community. The reasoning provided is the National Textile Policy of 1985, lack of representation of the handloom sector in the Indian Parliament and a lack of political will to enforce the Handloom Reservation Act. Further, the fundamental right guaranteed to the Indian citizen against exploitation in factories, particularly those in the power loom sector is nowhere to be found in practice. The law of the land, which ought to reign supreme for protecting the dignity of the citizens becomes toothless in suppressing these illegal exploitative practices. The ever increasing segmentation of the mass markets have enforced innovation regimes. These factors combined have mandated new and still emerging legal and governance structures over which the erstwhile players have little control.

Interrelationships between occupation and gender

Each tool for the weaving profession has its specialist maker and their occupations become their social identity. This keeps constantly changing as one community gives up an activity and another takes its place. The contemporary trends in the indigenous industries make a domestic profession into a task for specialists and hence the job becomes part of the identity of a community. In the weaving centre of Chirala in Andhra Pradesh it is now the women of the Muslim community who are the specialists. Menon and Uzamma write of many communities who had been practicing hand weaving for generations like Tanti of Bengal, Julahas of the North India. The best known cotton weaver communities were the Padmashalis, who traced their descent to Markandya, the cloth makers to the gods.

The study of Chinnur

In the late 1990s, people in Chinnur and the villages still used the cotton cloth made in their neighbourhood by the previous generation of weavers. These weavers had direct relations with the local customers. The tradition of weaving survived even though it had become extinct everywhere else in the country. Since they had been selling their clothes locally, the weaving families here had never been dependent on a master weaver, and intermediaries would market their products in distant downs. It was the only place in the country

where a generation of weavers were still active who remembered buying their own yarn and selling their own cloth. Menon and Uzamma explore the story of cloth making in Chinnur to be a microcosm of the history of vernacular Indian cotton textile making. This community, wrote the authors, was perhaps the last surviving community in the country to have preserved their local cotton cloth for the local market.

WAY AHEAD

The British economist Joan Robinson wrote, "There is only one thing that is worse than being exploited by capitalists. And that is not being exploited by capitalist". Similar is the experience for the ones trying to enter the market. Since there is exclusion in the process, the stratified market will integrate some while marginalising others. Markets may exclude people as consumers, producers or both. Markets exclude people as consumers or buyers when they don't have sufficient income to exercise their purchasing power. A market can also exclude people as producers if they neither have assets nor capabilities. Hence the role of government becomes important since markets are not accountable to people. On the international scale, free trade preachers say that easy import of products from other countries increases consumer welfare. Consumers everywhere welcome a lowering of import barriers because it brings cheaper products into the market. Milton Friedman had observed that, in international trade, exports help companies and imports help citizens. Therefore the resistance to free trade does not come from consumers but from companies which cannot compete. This paper sought to study the Indian cotton and dhurrie industry, which was severely damaged by both the colonial policies and the modern State. This can be better understood using E.P. Thompson's quote, "There is not a thought that is being thought in the West or the East that is not active in some Indian mind". The modernisation of Indian cotton varieties in terms of seeds, machinery and processes has severely damaged the traditional dhurrie makers. An alternative proposed by this section is by urging the Indian State to shift some of the huge subsidies that are provided for costs of the electrical power and diesel used in operating machines to the handloom sector.

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