

## Empowering the rural women artisans

Rajasthan, known for its rich cultural heritage and vibrant craftsmanship, is home to a community of skilled women artisans who are breaking barriers, challenging gender norms, and creating a sustainable future through their artistry. These women artisans, with their exceptional skills, creativity, and resilience, are making a mark in the traditionally male-dominated world of artisan crafts, and their stories are an inspiration for all.

Artisanal crafts such as hand-block painting, embroidery, tie-dyeing, and jewellery-making, always have been an integral part of Rajasthan's culture for centuries.

Many women in Rajasthan earn their livelihood as artisans. The women of dandkala village in Kolayat block of Bikaner district in Rajasthan are class apart. Although they are refugees from the Sindh province of Pakistan, they have fought displacement by taking ownership of their traditional embroidery skills.

Located 140km from Bikaner district in the Thar desert with harsh, arid, and tough climate and extreme temperatures, the life of rural women is not easy here, but this does not stop them.

One another group of empowered women artisans is the all-women cooperative called "Kala Chaupal" which is based in the village of Bagru and is known for its hand-block printing. It was founded in 2015.

Similarly, in the village of Bhikamkor, a group of women artisans have formed a cooperative called "Aavaran," which specializes in traditional embroidery. These skilled artisans are keeping the dying art of "Rajasthan Gota Patti" embroidery alive, which involves intricate threadwork and embellishments using metal ribbons.

What makes these women artisans in Rajasthan truly exceptional is their ability to blend traditional craftsmanship with modern design sensibilities. They are not only creating beautiful and unique products but also catering to the evolving demands of the global market.

Many women are also engaged with Lehariya and Bandhej sarees as we know that Rajasthan is a land of colours, traditions, and exquisite crafts, and is known for its vibrant textiles that are a reflection of the state's rich cultural heritage.

Lehariya is derived from the Hindu word "leher" meaning waves. It is a traditional tie-dye technique that originated in Rajasthan. This technique involves creating beautiful ripple-like patterns on the fabric using a resist dyeing process. The fabric is first folded into a long, narrow strip and then tied at regular intervals with threads. These tied portions resist the dye, creating a wave-like pattern when dyed in bright and contrasting colours. The result is a stunning saree with a unique, swirling pattern that resembles the waves of the ocean.

Bandhej is also known as Bandhani is another traditional tie-dye technique that has been practised in Rajasthan for centuries. Bandhej involves tying small dots on the fabric with threads and then dyeing the fabric with vibrant colours. The tied dots resist the dye, creating intricate patterns on the fabric. The dots can be tied in various shapes and sizes, resulting in a wide range of designs, from simple dots to complex motifs. Bandhej sarees are known for their intricate designs, bright colours, and fine craftsmanship.