



NEED FOR PRESERVING THE TODA WEAVING CRAFTSMANSHIP

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Abstract

Toda is an ethnic group of The Nilgris district of Tamil Nadu a state of India. As per the Indian census 2011 [1] the total population of the group is 2002 with 957 males and 1045 females. They are well known for their own unique handmade embroidery work known as “kuty” locally. Technological development and invention of modern machines were brought a strain in producing and selling their products. The aim of this paper is to analyze the works of the people and to propose measures to preserve their work. The steps taken to preserve their work improve their socio economic status and also prevent this art from destruction. It also helps to hand this precious knowledge to the next generation and encouraging them to learn this art.

Keywords: Toda community, Embroidery, Online shopping portals.

Introduction:

There are many ethnic groups in Tamil Nadu state of India [2]. Toda is a community in the Nilgris district of Tamil Nadu. The other ethnic groups in Nilgris include Badagas, Kurmbas and Kotas. The current population of the Badaga, Kurumba and Kota communities are 2,50,000, 59,000 and 1200 respectively. Earlier the Todas lived along with other ethnic communities like Kurumba, Badaga and Kota [2]. They also have a strong relationship with the other three communities' kurumbas, Kotas and Badagas. They followed barter system among these communities. Basically Badagas doing farming so they supply beans and grains to Toda people and other tribes. Kurumbas lives in deep forests and they supply honey to other tribes [3]. They live in group of three to seven thatched houses called mund. Many researchers have been conducted by anthropologists to understand their evolution and life style. Toda people are mainly in 5 taluks of Nilgris. They include Pandalur, Kotagiri, Udhamandalam, Coonor and Kundah taluks of the Nilgris. They strongly believe in equality among all in their group.

Economy of Toda People

Their only main source of income is from the cattle. The buffalos are the part of their family because they used it to earn money. They earn money through buffalo milk and byproducts of milk like curd, butter and ghee. Primarily they are involved in dairy farming for their livelihood. They are also experts in their traditional handcraft embroidery practice. They have gained the knowledge on this art from their ancestors.

Educational Status of Toda People

As per the Indian Census data [1] there are 1.63% are doing their graduation, 27.70% doing primary education, 28.30% are illiterates and remaining 44% are graduated. It is also observed that they are interested in living as nuclear family instead of joint family.

Toda Weaving Art

The unique embroidery of Toda people is called **“Pukhoor”** which means flower. This work is made exclusively by their women. They are not following any book for this art because they passed from ancestors. This work is done on a white cloth (not pure white half white cotton cloth) with red and black threads. Blue threads also used occasionally. The final product looks like woven cloth. They call this work in the name of “Kuty” or “awtty” which means stitching and the word “kutyvoy” means embroidered cloth. Their special embroidered cloth plays vital role in their rituals like temple functions, naming ceremony, funeral and marriages. They usually bury the dead bodies along with the cloth shrouding the body.

Design Patterns

The designs or patterns are related to nature and real life. The same product may have different designs or patterns. Figure 2 and figure 3 shows mobile pouches with different designs or patterns. The geometric patterns are done by counting the wrap and weft of the cloth. These are the basics of converting thread into art. Their embroidery mostly has astronomical objects shapes like sun, moon and reptiles, buffalo horns, animals etc than floral objects. Black triangle boxes, a symbol to honor their priest, are the most commonly used design pattern [4][5]. This art is unique to this people and others cannot easily reproduce by hand.



Figure 1. Making embroidery

Products of Toda people

They produce a wide variety of products. The following are some examples.

1. Mobile pouches
2. Shawls
3. Shoulder bags
4. Potli bags.
5. Pillow covers
6. Bed sheets etc.



Figure 2. Mobile Pouch (Pattern 1)



Fig.3. Mobile pouch (Pattern 2)



Fig. 4. Plotli bag



Fig.5. Potli bag



Fig. 6. Shoulder Bag

Internet & E-Commerce in India

As per the survey of Internet & Mobile Association of India [IAMAI] and Nielsen, rural India has 227 million active internet users which is higher than urban Indian population.[7]. This is the effect of cheaper internet connectivity. This study [6] also reveals that India is in second place after china in internet usage. In terms of internet penetration India lags behind US and China. The E-Commerce sites sell wide variety of products from small pins to large vehicles these days. The E-Commerce sites have drastically changed the way of doing business dramatically around the world. Google and Tata foundation signed a project called “Internet Saathi” which aims at improving internet penetration among rural women in our country.

This will greatly help in selling homemade products. This is also a motivation factor behind creating a website to sell Toda products. As per the India Brand Equity Foundation [IBEF] it is expected around 175 million people approximately will shop through E-Commerce websites [8].

Need for Preserving the Weaving Art

In ancient days due to lack of technology they are the sole manufacturers of their embroidery products. The embroidery is unique and received Geographical Indication (GI) certificate for the art [6]. This ID was given by the registrar of geographical indication to eliminate the price discrepancy of the product in different places; it ensures the quality of the product and also gives protection against selling duplicate products. The GI status restricts duplicate production of their product in any method and producing products in such a way will be treated as infringement of law. The GI status is owned by The Pompuhar (The Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation), an NGO Keystone foundation and the Toda Nalavaazhvu sangam of Coonor.

Information and communication technology can be used to preserve the craft from being misused by others. Machine made products can be sold at a low cost which can bring heavy loss to the Todas. The original handmade products are costlier than the machine made products. This leads to economical loss as expensive goods are not welcome by the consumers.

In this situation the need arises to preserve their product to empower them. Even though they somehow eliminated the duplicate sellers, their product reach is limited as their model of advertisement is word of mouth. Through the application of information and communication technology their products can be taken beyond the geographical limitations. The E-Commerce sites are the best way to expand their sales.

Anyone on the internet can purchase the product through this. They also get the authentic handmade embroidery product. It also enables the foreigners to get the authentic product through internet.

They E-Commerce site is dynamic in nature in the sense items are added, removed and modified often. Through developing an E-Commerce site using Content Management System (CMS) it will be easy to handle these dynamic operations. They can themselves handle the website with minimum effort without major modifications as it is not mandatory to master in any programming skills.

Conclusion:

This study reveals the importance of protecting their work using modern tools such as E-Commerce sites. The socio economic status of this community can be improved by preserving the ethnicity of the craft as that is the objective of the study. It helps this art from disappearing. It is also important to give the younger generation.

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