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Women As Creative Custodians Of Jammu And Kashmir's Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

Women and culture are intricately linked, as culture plays a significant role in shaping generations to come. The role of women in preserving the culture as lived experiences is monumental. Despite so many lacunas and disparities in gender, women artists continue to shape the artistic panorama and contribute significantly to the rich and varied heritage of our nation. Women in Indian diaspora have historically acted as a preserver of culture and identity by portraying themselves and their culture through medium of arts and craft. The present paper also presents the various art forms practiced by women in UT of Jammu and Kashmir such as Parolaa art, preservation of Dogri script Takri, artistic Basohli painting styles of Nainsukh and painting Nayikas on small wooden blocks called Basohli miniatures, the beautiful craft of making Binna Straw Mats: A Local Craft of Jammu, visual artists and painters of Kashmir, mural artists, different embroidery forms like tilla, work of fardhs and shawls. The objective of the present paper attempts to shed light on ; firstly, identifying various women artists in UT of Jammu and Kashmir and secondly, significant contributions of women artists as custodians of culture and as culture heroes in UT of Jammu and Kashmir in fostering cultural development and aims to put forth that preservation of cultural heritage by means of art and craft so as to achieve the goals of cultural sustainability, which is an essential element of sustainable development. The present research paper attempt to put forward the magnitude and capacity of women artists as guardians of culture in instilling the sense of rootedness towards art forms and our culture.

Key Words: Culture Custodians, Women Artists and Cultural Heritage.

Introduction

Culture defines and shapes our identity. Creative industries and cultural infrastructure are valuable resources for generating livelihoods. This is especially true in developing countries that have a wealth of creative industries. Furthermore, a substantial percentage of those employed in culture sector activities are women, claims Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5) that focuses on Gender Equality (**The UNESCO Courier, 2017, April 11**).

NEP 2020, Part III, 22,22.1, P. (54) majorly focuses on art and cultural wealth and acknowledges it as a high priority and focus area for the country, since art and culture truly define a nation and is greatly important for the nation's identity as well as for its economy.

NEP 2020, Part III, 22, 22.19, P. (57) also lay impetus on preserving rich local arts and crafts through recordings of (especially elders telling stories), reciting stories, showcasing local crafts and folk ways like dances, folk songs and folk plays.

Indian women artists have played a monumental role in shaping the culture, art and heritage economy of India. Ever since the earliest times to the present-day world, women have served as the vanguards of artistic expressions, preservation of culture, and creative and ingenious entrepreneurship. Indian women have been instrumental in preserving and promoting traditional art forms. They have been custodians of cultural practices, passing on ancestral knowledge and skills from generation to generation. Be it any classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, traditional folk song genres like Bhaakh and Chakri, or traditional crafts and art work like embroidery, pottery, or weaving, women have played a vital role in keeping these art forms alive and vibrant. Women artists, artisans, and performers have taken the herculean task of preserving the rich cultural heritage by practicing and as well as teaching traditional arts, so as to pass on the legacy to future generations. Their dedication and expertise have contributed to the sustainability and growth of traditional art forms, ensuring that they continue to thrive in the modern era (**Sinha, A. 2023, May 19**).

Women as Guardians of Culture and Heritage in UT of Jammu and Kashmir

When a woman embraces her artistic spirit, she not only paints colors on canvas but also leaves an indelible mark on the tapestry of our cultural heritage.

As quoted by Sinha in her article, "The Role of Indian Women in Shaping the Art and Cultural Economy of India", on May 19, 2023, it can be clearly understood that women have always been the torchbearers and saviors of our cultural fabric that binds everyone together. Women have been breaking the shackles from bonds of stereotypes and redefining their artistic taste and expression through the medium of art and, relentlessly working on saving the local craft, tradition and customs, that are on the verge of extinction. Women in UT of Jammu and Kashmir have outgrown their talent with their outstanding leadership and advocacy skills. These are not just artists but, beau ideals of aesthetic world. Their novelty and freshness in approaches have not only transcended the realm of business but, have also largely contributed towards cross cultural exchange. It is

immensely crucial to know the women artists in UT of Jammu and Kashmir to understand their role in shaping the artistic and vibrant landscape in various fields of art and culture. It is equally important to celebrate their talent and success, providing them equal access and opportunities worldwide by creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment for women artists of UT of Jammu and Kashmir.

As correctly and aptly described women artists of UT of Jammu and Kashmir as “**CREATIVE CUSTODIANS and CULTURE HEROES**”, they have greatly managed to cut a dash in several artistic fields. Women artists in UT of Jammu and Kashmir have successfully managed to inspire the future generations by behaving as role models, and motivating the future artists to become cultural enthusiasts and performers.

The women artists of Jammu are majorly focusing on preserving the local crafts, artistic skills, and art like Parolaa that was used to decorate the houses in villages that were particularly made through mud and white clay, preservation of Dogri script Takri that has already been included in the list of extinct scripts, keeping alive the treasure of artistic Basohli painting styles of Nainsukh and painting Nayikas on small wooden blocks called Basohli miniatures that have attained GI tag as well, the beautiful craft of making Binna Straw Mats; A Local Craft of Jammu, reviving Dogri Bhaakh and promoting the SHILPKARI in form of local craft.

Whereas, women artists of Kashmir have used their paint brushes to answer the tightening laws and resistances from the government. GI tags to the whirring charkhas in Kashmir have brought back

Adept women artists to restore and rejuvenate the traditions of weaving beautiful shawls and intricate carpets with vibrant tapestry. GI tags have been significant in reviving the old and long-lost traditions in both Jammu and Kashmir (The Hindu, March 06, 2024).

Women Artists of Jammu

There are several women artists in Jammu, who, by the dint of their tireless effort have achieved the aim of preserving their culture and art. Women artists in Jammu have had a salutary effect on the minds and hearts of people of Jammu. Their work speaks volumes and hence, made them a true cultural enthusiast.



(Source: <https://waliaharry.wordpress.com/2020/09/06/medhavi-sharma-painting-vivid-shades-of-dogra-culture/>)

On the left can be seen ‘Bobo Ji’, used in Dogri to denote an elder sister., who is making ‘Kaleera’ for her nieces’ nuptial celebrations. On the right can be seen ‘Bobo Ji’ with her daughter ‘Durga’ celebrating ‘Bachh Dua’, a Dogra ritual for married ladies. **An artist from Udhampur district of Jammu Division, Medhavi Sharma**, aged 25, celebrates her deep bond and connectedness with her roots that is ‘Duggar Pradesh’ by painting vivid shades of Dogra culture. Her Facebook Page is dedicated to ritual of smearing ‘Parolaa’ (white clay) which uses white strokes and designs with peculiar patterns on outer walls smeared with mud, husk and cow dung. Today, even the houses in remote villages are rarely found adorned with parolaa (Walia, H.2020, September 06).



Sanchaita Pradhan Khajuria, a young enterpriser known for **her cult in Binna Straw Baskets and Mats and restoring the old Basohli Paintings** is strengthening the unique cultural and artistic heritage of Jammu and Kashmir through her cultural enterprise named as ‘Shilpkari Bazar’(www.risingkashmir.com).



(Source: <https://www.google.com/search>)

Shikha Magotra, a young research Scholar through her online classes called as ‘Dogra Mittar Online Classes’ and ‘Namay Akhhar’, has successfully **contributed in regenerating and reawakening of Takri script of Jammu region**. Withstanding its fading position, the young scholar has worked hard to revive the script in modern times as well (Magotra, S., 2023, October 29. *Underneath the Takri Iceberg*, Daily Excelsior).



(Source: <https://www.google.com/search>)

Notable **Dogri Lok Geet singer** also known as Bulbul-E-Kashmir and peace singer of India, Smt. **Seema Sehgal** has immensely contributed in promoting folk songs of Duggar land worldwide.

Women Artists of Kashmir

The women artists in Kashmir have been greatly emphasizing on paintings as the form of their resistance and revolt, traditional weaving and hand-spun yarn. These artists have created waves in the media by their unwavering efforts and dedication towards preserving their rich cultural heritage and crafts.



(Source: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Life-Arts/Arts/Kashmiri-women-use-art-to-resist-India-s-tightening-laws2>)

28 years old, **Hina Arif**, who lives in central Kashmir's Srinagar area, paints Kashmir's old architecture and people in traditional attire. She is solely working to preserve architecture and Kashmiri lifestyle and does not sell her paintings (Nabi, S., 2020, July 27. *Kashmiri women use art to resist India's tightening laws*. NIKKEI Asia).



(Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/gi-tags-bring-back-women-artisans-to-whirring-charkhas-in-kashmir/article67921923.ece>)

The hand-driven processes like dehairing, spinning, and weaving in Kashmir almost vanished in the past three decades due to the introduction of machines. **Nazima Jan**, residing in the old city of Srinagar is working in the direction of preserving and reviving traditional methods used in making shawls and carpets that emphasises on authentic hand-spun yarn. The whole idea is to safeguard traditional hand processes associated with these crafts, preserving their cultural significance and authenticity (Ashiq, P. 2024, March 06. *GI tags bring back women artisans to whirring charkhas in Kashmir*, The Hindu).



(Source: <https://www.google.com/search>)

In a far-off village in Baramulla, Puthaar is called Kashmir's Craft Village, where all women artisans in this village are associated with different embroidery forms be it sozni, chain stich or tilla work of shawls, saris, fardhs etc. (Greater Kashmir, 2018, March 20).

Conclusion

As we sit on the fence and move towards a world that is technology driven and a society that is now called a knowledge society, we have an easy access to education and jobs. The news feed on social channels like Facebook and Instagram, social media platforms is replete with digitized forms of art, artistic expressions, which hugely lay stress on digital photography, computer graphics, AI generated art and the list is increasing day by day. But, withstanding the merits of digitalization that technology has to offer, the minuses and the downside of it cannot be shrugged off. Technology may have shrunk the world globally altogether by the means of social media but it has severely affected and shocked the relationships among human beings, particularly in safeguarding our cultural ethos and cultural fabric of our society.

This is where women come into light. Women in art culture India are the custodians of our traditions, the visionaries of our future, and the storytellers of our past. To avoid the crisis of cultural identity and develop a sense of kinship and affinity towards one's own local culture among the children, preserving the culture and art play a consequential role in infusing the significance of local art, local culture, food and flavors, celebration of the unsung heroes and state warriors with historical importance, local music, folk-art, regional art forms like Basohli paintings, miming the local folktales with moral lessons, ramlleelas, local rubrics and heritage, women artisans in UT of Jammu and Kashmir are playing a consequential role in achieving the same.

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