

Sustainable Co-creation and Co-learning for Craft Appropriation: An Experience with Mashru Craft of Gujarat

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ABSTRACT

The word 'craft' itself symbolizes a construct of sustainability. Though, the extent of sustainability depends on numerous factors like material, production technique, product quality, fair wages and many more. Today we can see a tremendous upsurge in demand of indigenous products. These consumers are more sensitive and mindful not only towards product but also towards product production process and associated narratives. Due to this, greater number of artisans and designers are coming together for cocreation which is opening new avenues for craft appropriation and co-learning. This is changing the traditional pedagogy of knowledge sharing, knowledge creation and helping in foundation of better-knit, self-sufficient inclusive society. In this study, researcher has shared her lived experiences of cocreation with a Mashru weaver - Babu bhai Manodia from Bhujodi village of Kutch district of Gujarat. The entire narration is based on a socio-ecological prototyping of Mashru fabric where a small motif was developed to understand its technical know-how and design possibility. Due to limitation of shafts in existing pit loom, this frugal approach was adopted. With the existing materials from immediate surrounding, product prototype was created. It was an experiential approach of inclusive cocreation that foster indigenous innovation and combine technical, social, and ecological component for interventions that deepen equity, resilience, and sustainability. This experience enabled smooth sharing of tacit and design knowledge between the artisan and designer at same level and space. It helped in appropriating knowledge and skill from simple to complex level.

Keywords: Sustainability, Co-creation, Co-learning, Mashru, Craft appropriation, Skill appropriation

INTRODUCTION

India has a rich legacy of art and craft since ages. It has aimed to provide self sufficiency in its place of practice. The notion of craft as a sustainable construct is grounded in its integrated factors like materials, techniques, and equitable labor. Indian craft aesthetics and lucrative trade had attracted several foreigners in past. Due to this many of the Indian textiles were considered as trade textiles like Saudagiri block prints, Mashru, Chintz etc. Later, industrialization, changing lifestyle has posed several challenges in its growth. However, many crafts have survived till today in slow and steady manner due to its inherent features. But in today's time, it is getting strength by rise of mindful consumers who are seeking environment friendly, authentic production process and narratives. This shifts has given rise to progressive pedagogies of knowledge sharing and new knowledge creation from hierarchical to collaborative approach to foster more inclusive societies. In this paper researcher has presented her lived experiences of co-creation with Mashru weaver - Babu Bhai Manodia from Bhujodi village, Kutch, Gujarat where a prototype of Mashru design was developed using local materials available in surroundings. Mashru is a mixed handloom textile with silk warp and cotton weft in satin weave. Traditionally, it has incorporated several techniques like ikats, brocades but today, it is mainly known as multicoloured striped fabric (Kumari, 2021). Therefore, for co-creation, a Mashru design

with a butti was selected. The existing loom was lacking the required number of shafts as per the requirement. So, to explore it technically and to understand its design feasibility for Mashru fabric, this frugal approach was adopted. The selection of design was simple with respect to technique but the idea behind selection of specific weaving technique was to explore any lesser used and obsolete techniques. Here, the collective approach of co-creation laid emphasis upon socio-ecological prototyping, indigenous innovation, skill appropriation from simple to complex level, enhancing technical precision and ecological thrift.

Also, in contrast to the situation arisen by industrialization; globalization and digitization are now helping in regenerating and disseminating the value of craft among craft enthusiasts and mindful consumers. This will further help in supporting cosmopolitan localism. Previously, local meant as something isolated, relatively closed within own culture and economy. In fact, it synthesizes the peculiar attributes of its place and community of origin with new phenomena generated and supported globally and by cultural, socioeconomic interconnection (**Manzini, 2009**). Today the approach of balancing local and global nuances in craft based products by virtue of co-creation by artisans and designers are supporting sustainable development of local resources, appropriation of indigenous techniques, designs and socioeconomic growth of indigenous communities. According to **Appadurai and Manzini (1990 & 2009)**, Cosmopolitan localism is the outcome of a specific status characterized by the balance between being rooted and being open. Co-creation plays a major role in this concern, it can give a global outlook to traditional product with attribute of indigenous culture, community and content that matches global sensibility. It is also important to maintain high quality in product. **Manzini (2009)** indicates that it can be achieved only when the place, community to which these products are associated needs to be alive, thriving and of high quality. Designer and artisan together can enable it through socio-ecological cocreation. Craft has a multi-layered function in socio-ecological shift through co-creation. In today's time where sustainability is not just a desire but a need owing to environmental concerns, traditional craft can be seen as hope to combat these challenges. Artisans are custodians of indigenous wisdom encompassing generations of resource stewardship, ecological knowledge, and sustainable material use. Having practiced sustainable approach since long, they prioritize local & renewable resources in order to minimize waste, and regenerate natural systems at grassroots level—making their skills a model for eco-friendly-indigenous innovation.

METHODOLOGY

This study has employed qualitative, practice-based research approach which is rooted in experiential learning and participatory engagement. Here, case study framework of research has been used to gain and reflect in-depth, nuanced understanding of co-creation experience with the artisan Babu Bhai Manodia of Bhujodi village of Kutch, Gujarat. This frugal approach of prototyping was a very unique event which was not possible to document through qualitative approach only. As this allowed exchange of dialogues, in-depth understanding of craft techniques, material exploration and its adaptation for newer intended purpose and overall tacit knowledge, implicit skill exchange during prototyping process. This helped in encompassing in depth participation and experiential inquiry, where artisan and researcher were actively and collectively engaged in the making process together rather than observing and coordinating remotely, otherwise it often remains undocumented in conventional research (**Sennett, 2008**).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Handloom weaving of Gujarat holds a great value in domestic and overseas market due to its exclusive design, colour and diversity. Its products carries diverse craftsmanship as well as unique sense of aesthetics. Gujarat is such a place where art and craft had been deeply rooted in its daily life and societal setting. It's a matter of distress and exasperates that belonging to such a productive place for crafts, why Mashru had been left behind? Why with time, competency & versatility of Mashru artisans haven't been polished & innovated according to demand and environment? Pattern of consuming clothes have changed, so technique and materials need to be harmonized accordingly. Why the unique aspects of Mashru had not been utilized efficiently to meet present

demand? Why the sense of pride in consuming Mashru had been diluted at local level? Why the most colourful and vibrant textile of Gujarat has turned dull and spiritless. These all questions gave rise to study Mashru & co-create with artisan for its sustainability. During review of literature it has been found that collaboration between artisan and designer leads to better outcomes. **Fletcher (2016)** stated that co-creation synthesizes artisan's tacit knowledge with designer's aesthetics that yield sustainable outcomes with low-waste and durable products. Sustainability of craft thrives on co-creation, where artisan and designer navigate constraints in collaborative fashion to appropriate traditions for contemporary relevance (**Bhowmick, 2019**).

Today's consumers are conscious of materials with what the product is made up of, their physical and sensual appeal, their source, importance, cultural connect and impact upon maker, user & environment, who made them & how they were made. For extending the craft expressions and aiming contemporary markets for Mashru, The indigenous innovation combined with frugal Co-Creation between designer and craftsperson became a major means for this study. Utilization of indigenous knowledge to develop effective solutions has been consistently observed across developmental literature. Of course commercialization of solution has never been the primary intention earlier but the indigenous communities have always been innovative. It always aims to deliver the best solutions for local problems (**Puffer 1995, Mehta & Punekar 2008**). Utilizing existing available resources and indigenous knowledge, Babubhai was able to bring feasible and smart solution.

Sample Loom Setting with Frugal Approach and and Craft Immersion

Traditionally in cluster, for Mashru weaving minimum seven to eight shafts are used due to warp faced satin weave structure. However, satin weave can be done with minimum five shafts also. In Bhujodi, Babubhai was using seven shafts for each block of satin weave. In addition to this, the number of shafts varies depending upon the complexity of the design like number of satin blocks, or if dotted pattern has to be added. So, usually in seven shafts striped designs are made. In earlier times, Mashru weaving has also incorporated ikat and motifs either made through extra yarn or with ground yarn using specific movement of warp and weft yarn as per design. Few Mashru weavers are doing small danedar designs using higher number of shafts, however, it was possible with lesser number of shafts also with very little lustre difference. In order to utilize the shafts in more efficient manner we decided to explore one butti i.e. small motif design along with satin using five shaft satin for each block of weave after discussion.

To achieve this we needed twenty shafts and the existing weaver's loom had lesser number of shaft. In order to pursue the discussed design, Babubhai responded in very frugal manner and brought nearly available objects like small cradle hanging stand which is locally called Ghodiyu, branches of few shrubs and prepared a frugal sample loom structure. This reflects jugaad principles of frugality enhancing resilience (**Radjou et al., 2012**). The entire process of loom setting, warping and weaving can be seen in fig. 1 & 2 where artisan and designer are co-creating the fabric prototype.



Fig. 1 Fabricated Frugal loom structure at artisan's place, Source: Kumari, 2021, unpublished thesis, page no.252



Fig. 1 Stages of loom setting from nearby materials for Mashru fabric prototyping

Source: Kumari, 2021, unpublished thesis, page no.252



Fig. 3 Developed motif on Mashru fabric prototype

Source: Kumari, 2021, unpublished thesis, page no.252

Later he did warping with wool available at home. Three colours were used for warping - yellow, green and maroon as Mashru is a multicoloured fabric. The idea was to create quick and low fidelity prototype in order to understand the technical possibility of design. The developed fabric prototype can be seen in fig. 3. There, I was involved for two days of hands-on engagement with Babu Bhai from setting of loom to warping, to threading of harness to weaving of prototype. In Mashru, twill based satin is used, therefore we also explored the intended design with same weave structure. It was a very immersive experience, witnessing weaving rhythms and feeling loom vibrations of Bhujodi. I am reflecting my experience of co-creation through following lines:

Mashru, a fabric mysterious whose story untold In the shades of a weaver's home, its story unfold By virtue of co-creation, an endeavour to create Expecting its outcome to be great An entity of riddle, eauty, and grace Ready to embrace A new vision of joint creation Understanding its current situation A stream of collective knowledge Ready to overcome its blockage Together, it emerged with ease Like a satisfying breeze We lived in the co-creation Like a fellow companion After days, seeing the outcome We felt ndeavour turned awesome Our eyes sparkled with happiness When it captured attention of fabric's flashiness Stunning in multicoloured hues untamed With the pattern cautiously framed A symphony of colours with effort divine Around its arid place, ready to shine Under weaver's shade, laid a mystical sight Evoking its loud and graceful bright Being subtle and shy, it pursued our gaze Grasping all umble of awe and praise With passion, emotion, and open hand Together, we wove in the artisans' land sustainable co-creation, co-learning and craft appropriation

Kolb (1984) stated that experience is a source of learning and development and learning as a process creates knowledge through the transformation of experience. **Nimkulrat, (2010)** states that experience forms the basis of practice-based inquiry, where making generates knowledge. While co-creating the Mashru prototype, we learnt from each-other, the bidirectional knowledge flow led to co-learning and craft appropriation. Being a very experienced artisan, Babubhai was very good with his tacit skills that he has gained over years and the researcher had conceptual of designing. This led to experiential inquiry, technical adaptation, exploration of simple to complex knowledge through practice, illustrating that how material and technique improvisation strengthens resilience in crafts. One of the obvious outcomes was optimum utilization of shaft for design ideation. The other interesting aspect was dissolution of hierarchies which lead to equal participation of both. Like Babu Bhai helped in setting of loom, warping, threading and I contributed in motif development, shaft optimization, and weave notation. Relating this phenomenon with **Kolb's cycle (1984)**, it can be stated that our collective experience led to reflection in terms of possibility mapping that further lead to experimentation whose result was visible in form of Mashru fabric prototype. The exchange of knowledge also leads to adoption of each-other's vernacular and technical terminologies related to Mashru and its prototyping. Bidirectional exchange of knowledge and experience steadily shifted the conventional pedagogy of learning from mentor to peer community in a organic fashion that has potential to foster social equity, ecological thrift and self-sufficient ecosystems. The collective exploration for prototyping intercepted various cultural, social and ecological nuances of craft. Hence, it positions this co=creation as Socio-ecological nature of prototyping in real sense.

CONCLUSION

The co-creation experience in Mashru cluster with Babu Bhai Manodia reflects that frugal approach, indigenous innovation, collaborative learning and participatory engagement has huge potential to transform challenges into sustainable innovative pathways to ensure the relevance of traditional product in global market. The study not only demonstrated technical feasibility but also showcased adaptive capacity of social and ecological systems. Hence, the lived experience endorses craft as a living knowledge system where co-creation brings equity, resilience, and sustainability into self-reliant communities. By intersecting tacit knowledge with explicit knowledge; craft appropriation can be done for mindful consumers globally. Similar studies can be undertaken in other craft cluster for mapping possibilities, constraints and to weave modern lifestyle cultural fabric.

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