



How did the Regional Traditional Indian Embroidery “Kasuti” Reach the International Markets?

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Background and Rationale

India is the land of rich culture and diverse traditions. Almost every region of India has a distinct style of embroidery based on cultural history of the region. The ethnic hand embroidery is no longer the choice of occupation for the poor Indian artisans alone but is the weakness of the elite both in India and foreign markets (Naik & Vastrad, 2007). The international market for Indian embroidery products is estimated at about Rs.75 billion, with a growth rate of nearly 18% per annum. The major importers of Indian embroidered products include USA, UK, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, Africa, Middle East and Europe. These figures confirm that Indian embroidered products have created a place for themselves in the international market. However, not all the Indian regional embroideries have made it to the international market due to lack of exposure to technology, marketing skills and competition. Despite the tough competition and limited exposure to technology, some Indian regional embroideries like ‘Kasuti’ of northern part of Karnataka State, India has made its presence in international markets. While a significant amount of studies indicate the presence and demand for Indian traditional regional embroideries abroad, very limited research related to Indian regional embroidery exists. Given that, Kasuti is hand embroidered by women artisans at the vicinity of their homes as a leisure activity, as an extra income to support the family and children’s education in rural India. Less is known about as to how these rural women artisans got acquainted about the needs of the global consumers and were motivated to modify their embroidery styles to cater the needs of the global consumers. Further there is a need to understand through what routes do Kasuti embroidered product enters the international market to be successful. Based on this rationale, *the purpose of this study* is to examine the supply chain of Indian regional embroidery (Kasuti) and identify its key success factors in international markets.

Kasuti: Is traditional regional hand embroidery practiced by women in northern part of Karnataka state, India. It has been a main occupation and source of income for many rural women from that region. The Kasuti embroidery involves four kinds of stitches (menthi, gavanti, negi and murgi). This work encompasses embroidering very intricate patterns inspired by everyday objects, nature and culture of this region such as geometric motifs, figures of birds and animals, God and Goddesses’, temples, bullocks, horses, cows, chariots etc. It requires lot of patience; skill and intricacy since both the side of the embroidery look alike.

Method

The market assessment interviews were held with selected Kasuti artisan and traders from North Karnataka, India. After IRB approval data was collected via in-depth interviews with 20 Kasuti artisan and 20 traders at Gadag, Hubli & Dharwad. A semi- structured interview transcript was developed including respondent’s culture, aspirations, lifestyles, motivations, skills, business strategies, knowledge about the global consumers, the international market and their technological skills. The interviews were conducted in the regional language Kannada and were audio taped for further analysis.

Findings

From the trader’s perspective: The traders interviewed were all women and defined themselves as having a cottage industry (small business). Findings from the study revealed that the Kasuti embroidery made its way to the international markets through trader’s laborious efforts to revive the regional Kasuti

embroidery and make it available to other parts of India as well as abroad. The traders from a small town in India such as Dharwad many a times travel to bigger cities like Delhi and Mumbai to exhibit the Kasuti work and seek orders. They have a network of exporters who aid in exporting their products to countries like Australia, USA, Ireland, Dubai etc. The production typically is based on orders. Once the orders are placed, the artisans are assigned with the work. Each trader typically employs 30-35 artisans. Some traders conduct training camps for the artisans before employing them. Some others provide the artisans with a kit that includes needles, threads, motifs and explanation of design and color combinations to be used in the embroidery. Yet others leave it up to the artisans to embroider their desired motif on the products. Some of the traders revealed that in order to be successful in the international market they had tailor their products and embroidery styles to fulfill the needs of the global consumers. For example, 'Kasuti' style of embroidery was conventionally embroidered only on the pallav (end portion of the India drape: Sari) however the artisans have altered their conventionally style of embroidery to suit to the needs of global consumers. And today, Kasuti is embroidered on fashion apparel, stoles, baby clothing, quilts, home furnishings, greeting cards, invitations, folders, fashion accessories (bags, belts, shoes etc).

The survey revealed that networking and having right contacts is another major factor to be successful. It was also learned that in order to have their presence in International market it is important to have the kasuti embroidery on products other than Sari, because Sari's would sell more in India than abroad. The traders said that internet is a major factor to get their name out in the international market. Some of them indicated that they have a face book page and are selling through sites like etsy and amazon. However, most of them said their international orders come to them from exporters, relatives residing abroad and they have built network of contacts of friends who have relatives abroad. A trader said that her clients from abroad suggested her to have Kasuti on table runners with holiday motif, which lead her to modify the products and design.

From the artisan's perspective: The artisans were women age between 20- 55 years who preferred to work from home. The artisans indicted that the main motivation to work is having a freedom to be creative and also earn extra money to support their household. They are paid based on the project they under take. They would typically make between Rs. 1000- Rs. 1500 (\$20-30) for a Sari. Analysis of the survey shows that the artisans were less aware of the demand for Kasuti products abroad. The reason can be attributed to lack of exposure to internet, lack of marketing knowledge and lack of exposure to foreign markets. However, most of them knew that their kasuti work was sold abroad by the traders.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the key success factors of Indian regional embroidery 'Kasuti' include,

1. Customer specific designs and products: Today the market is driven by customers rather than sellers. Tailoring products and designs to customer taste is essential.
2. Incorporating Global styles: Developing products that embrace the concept of global style and yet remain distinctive with the traditional approach hand embroidery.
3. Working with exporters: Various exporters in India provide marketing opportunities for regional handicrafts.
4. Participating in International fairs/bazars: It is essential for traders & exporters to participate in international fairs in order to keep themselves abrupt with international clients and get a sense of international trends.
5. Online presence & social media marketing: Being present on social network sites gives an opportunity for seed virality. So that people are just a click away from sharing your business with friends.

References

Naik, S. D., & Vastrad, J.V. (2008). Protection and revival of traditional hand embroidery, Kasuti by automation. *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*, 7(1), 197-203.