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Who are the Artisans: A case for their creative and cultural identities

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Abstract

Background research and Research Issues: With the rise of eco-consciousness in consumers, craftsmanship and artisanship have been on the upward trajectory, this emerging interest in meaningful connections with the material, where handcrafted products are regarded as a sustainable alternative and an embodiment of cultural heritage, produced with minimal waste and use of natural material, is seen as a direct response to environmental issues within the industry (Mamidipudi, 2018) and a part of the "slow movement", challenging the mass-produced and homogenous styles (Fletcher, 2010). Designers in today's environment with their heightened sense of social responsibility (Papanek, 1985) have taken upon a strategic role of preserving and aiding the same handicraft industry.

Although on one hand interest in crafts has led to its popularity, on the other it has led to the reduced skill level of artisans (Scrase 2003), as the artisans now reproduce simpler designs for an "alien, volatile" market, often far away from their cultural context, reducing their role to that of a producer or labour (Scarse, 2003; Mamidipudi, 2018), pushing the younger generation of artisans to see future in the craft industry as impractical and the perception of crafts in society problematic (ibid). This creates a binary setting where the artisans occupy the place of struggling old traditional group, in a need of an upgrade or modernisation. These mainstream craft narratives in the fashion industry focus largely on innovation and reformation through new technology and modernisation of traditional practice, shifting the ownership of craft knowledge from practitioners to designers, creating hierarchy in the system, stripping the artisans of their knowledge and failing to recognise craftspeople in the creative sphere as creatives.

Therefore, the focus of this research is to explore a grass-root solution for the alleviation of artisan's status, to consider them not just as technical experts or skilled labour but appreciate their intangible knowledge, manifested through their products in design collaborations, disrupting the power hierarchies observed in the current model. The research thus explores how craftsmanship and the position of artisans engaging in community-based craft activities can be re-contextualized and valued in the present system.

Methodology: This is achieved through an investigation of the interaction of textile artisans, practising in communities belonging to a traditional knowledge transfer system and a formal design education system, and its impact on their

creative outputs, further forming their creative and cultural identities. The research takes an interpretivist paradigm, through a case study of Somaiya Kala Vidya, a design school for artisans in Gujarat, India. Qualitative methods like ethnographic fieldwork; analysis of crafts practised by the students in the institute; semi-structured interviews of alumni and current students; participant observation of both groups of artisans; examination of artefacts in museums, material culture in local shops and retail, providing an empirical context for the study.

Conclusions: The research concluded that the new developments in design education for artisans have a positive impact on their confidence in seeing themselves as unique powerful creatives in the industry. Through a socio-cultural model, the research highlights the creative and individualistic aptitudes of the artisans capable of encouraging a shift in craft research. The dichotomies present between traditional and modern, in craft collaborations can be addressed if only the architects of the practice have the social agency to translate, shape, and transform their craft. With access to a broader array of craft and locations, this model can be used as an educational and sensitisation tool for both the artisans to unpack meanings and for designers and urban design students to gain a deeper understanding.

Keywords: creativity; cultural identity; artisans; design education; tacit knowledge transfer

Article Classification: Research Paper

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen an increased recognition and advocacy of culture in the international development discourses on sustainability/sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). British Council (2020) released a paper study with Nordicity on the Missing Pillar: Culture in the UN Agenda 2030, aimed to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Culture so far has been neglected as a pillar in the sustainable development discussion, alongside the social, environmental, and economic pillar. They attempt to highlight the positive impacts of cultural programmes and activities on the social and economic aspects of development via education, protection, and promotion of tangible and intangible heritage as well as digital engagement and technologies.

Clothing and textile cultures across the world hold a unique position in the fashion industry, with this increased interest in culture as a potential pillar towards topical sustainable growth, textile communities: craftsmanship and artisanship have been on the upward trajectory. To dispel confusion and ambiguity with regards to the use of the term craft, following definition by UNESCO (1997) is used: products either made by hand or with help of tools, where manual contribution outweighs mechanical aid possessing particular features mentioned above, contributing to the cultural heritage of the practising communities.

Craftsmanship in the materials world has highlighted meaningful relations between the author, the work, and nature, where the creation is an embodiment of cultural heritage, produced with minimal waste and use of natural materials addressing several environmental issues in the fashion industry (Mamidipudi, 2018). They often engage with the social and natural environment with an intention to appropriate nature and recycle ideas and materials in their practices. Nakshi Kantha is one out of the many practices in the craft industry, embodying maximal resource use, where blankets are made stitching layers of old saris together using threads from even older saris to embroider them together. Another example being of Kala Cotton, referred to as Rammol, an indigenous rain-fed strain of cotton grown in in arid regions of Kutch, India, receiving as less as 40cm rainfall (Jha, 2018).

Moreover, craft fits in the 'localism' landscape, a proposed view by Fletcher and Tham (2019) for positive fashion action within the earth logic. It contributes to localism and as well as benefits from it, with its focus on local resources, locally symbiotic capital, local knowledge and community interdependence and self-reliance (Curtis, 2003). The reliance and use of locally available raw materials and variation in scale as compared to large-scale industries, which requires long-distance trade, is capable of inherently solving problems like environmental degradation (Bofylatos, 2017). At the same time, small-scale production leads to power revision between the producer and the consumer, with a focus on purposeful relationships between different stakeholders in the fashion economy, strengthening community dependence on ecosystems for sustenance (Fletcher and Tham, 2019).

1.1. Positioning Craftspeople in Today's World

Increased interconnectedness has opened new avenues to the craft practitioners but at a cost; abandonment of time-consuming techniques to meet the deadlines leading to reduced skill level; exposure to a volatile and ephemeral market (Scrase, 2003). Industrialisation and scaling up of crafts production demand a fast turnover and increased reliance on labour, skilled workers for the economically sound 'master artisans' (Haynes E., 2000; De Neve, 2005), altering the structure of the artisan societies from horizontal to vertical (Frater, 2019). Artisans, the custodians of the intangible cultural heritage, rarely enjoy the position of creative practitioners and only work as gatekeepers of communal craft knowledge, heritage, and tradition. This classification takes the focus away from the capabilities of the individual in that collective.

Designers are observing a strategic role these days with heightened social responsibility (Papanek, 1985) but, these interventions often lead to passivity and a reduced role of the artisans in these interactions. These models at times do alleviate the status of craftspeople but, it could be argued they make artisans dependant on these groups moreover they disregard artisans' creative voice and knowledge and merely reduce them to a status of a producer (Scrase, 2003).

1.1.1. Power Dynamics

The Fashion industry is founded on class differences and social distinctions, an integrant of the 'industrialist-capitalist' society (Simmel, 1997 cited in Bhatt, 2018), at the global level, currently, appropriation is an outcome of this unchecked power dynamics. Greru and Kalkreuter's (2017) case study of Sanganer block print looked into Fabindia and Anokhi, two leading brands working with Indian artisans and craftsmen, whose design team adopted an 'intervention' role, focussing on the economic development of artisans through the wages, sometimes extending the role to an 'interaction', a constructivist view where the artisans shared their socio-technical knowledge with regards to the production (Mamidipudi, 2018). The study also highlighted artisans' flexibility and adaptability through "fertile hybridization of traditionality and modernity" (Prime and Delcourt-Itonaga, 2010) when adapting themselves to the global trends, concluding that a successful design intervention depends on the "tradition-bearer" direct as well as direct involvement in development and growth of their heritage, when negotiating with stakeholder, like designers, and businesses.

Design Interventions, although noble in nature give rise to craft and tradition revivalists and cultural elites, displacing the narrative from the craft practitioner (labour) to people heading the projects/initiatives (the driver) (Mamidipudi, 2018). These drivers either encourage the preservation of designs and technology deemed 'original' and 'authentic' to maintain the craft's culture (Ghose, 1989) or impart modern approaches interventions to modernise the crafts for the contemporary markets, focussing on the tangible aspects of the craft, namely, the colours used, the design layout, motif, and raw materials.

> "The introduction of design as 'intervention' began a process of separating concept and execution, resulting in the perception of artisan as worker." (Frater, 2019).

Design collaborations and initiatives by the governments are either set out with the aim of modernising the craft, especially from the material and technological aspects, to allow its sustenance in the contemporary world; or to preserve the perceived "traditional" colours, motifs, and materials (Dewan, 2001; McGowan, 2009), staying in the realm of 'interaction', failing to capture the duality of tradition. These measures make tradition seem like a rigid singular entity, whereas, tradition is constructive and, in a continuum (Negus and Pickerring 2004).

Furthermore, from the view of technological progress, modernisation and development, handcrafted products are seen as unproductive and pre-modern (Mamidipudi, Syamasundari, Bijker, 2012). These notions are quick to disappear if we look into Ajrakh artisans during the '70s and how they withstood the extinction of their practice brought upon by industrialisation and the following introduction of synthetic fibres (Edwards, 2005). It showcases their adaptability, and flexibility thrived throughout changing markets.

Craftspeople through 'naturalization' (Wilk, 2001, p.115), interact and operate on unspoken shared understanding and physical perception. This experience-based learning leads to tacit knowledge: a 'material consciousness' and expertise that cannot be transferred through oral instructions or even memorisation of the information structures (Varila, 1994 cited in Puusa, 2010). This knowledge is dependent on the artisans' cultural and social working environment, on 'face-to-face interactions' impacted by spatiality and geographical proximity (Appardurai, 1988, p.2015) and the community, ascribing agency to the practitioners Polanyi and Sen, 2009).

Formerly craft was a small-scale closed-knit affair, offering services and meeting the demands of the local community, where the artisans personally knew their clients or whom they were making clothes for, often functioning on the barter system (Frater & Hawley, 2018).

In 'Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds' Holland et al's (1998) define figured world theory; as "socially constructed realm[s] of interpretation in which 'particular set of characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others'", in crafts industry these figured worlds would be sites giving birth to new identities, where artisans figure out who they are through various activities and in relation to the social types that populate these figured worlds, aiming for 'celebrated subject positions' (Carlone et al., 2014)

1.1.2. Creativity

Although cultures can inhibit or facilitate creativity (Lubart 1999; Zha et al. 2006) creativity research so far has been focussed at the individual rather than at the cultural level (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). While there is no standard definition of creativity, followed across the globe, creativity bears a few core characteristics: originality, imagination,

intelligence, and individuality (Niu & Sternberg, 2002). Collectivist cultures like in India place the self in a social context, with group ties, valuing technical mastery over experimentation and rule-breaking (Dineen & Collins 2005).

Creativity is dependent on other systems for meanings, namely an interplay of the person (genetic pool and personal experiences), field (social system) and domain (system of symbols, related to the idea of culture) (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), highlighting its contextual and generative nature (ibid). A few years later, Runco and Jaeger (2012) defined creativity as a process to generate new, original, and useful effective products.

The social nature of crafts reflects the 'We-paradigm' of creativity; creativity with a focus on social and group creativity, build on human interaction and collaboration (Montuori and Purser, 1995) as opposed to the I-paradigm (the creative person) and the He-paradigm (the lone genius) (Glăveanu, 2009). Glaveanu (2009) proposes a framework in which new artefacts are constructed in emergence within the dynamic and 'tensions' between self (creator) and others (community) situated in dialogue with existing artefacts over time.

2. PROJECT APPROACH

The study was conducted to gain insights into creative psychology of artisans in a socio-cultural setting based on Glaveanu's tetradic framework, aiming to understand the role of design education in the realm of cultural studies in community-based craft activities. Unravelling artisan's identity and creativity, a conception that draws on the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1981) in the socio-cultural framework (Glaveanu and Tanggaard, 2014), built on Rhodes' (1961) 4P's; Product, Place, Process and Press, and Glaveanu's (2013) 5A's; actor, action, artefact, audience, affordances.

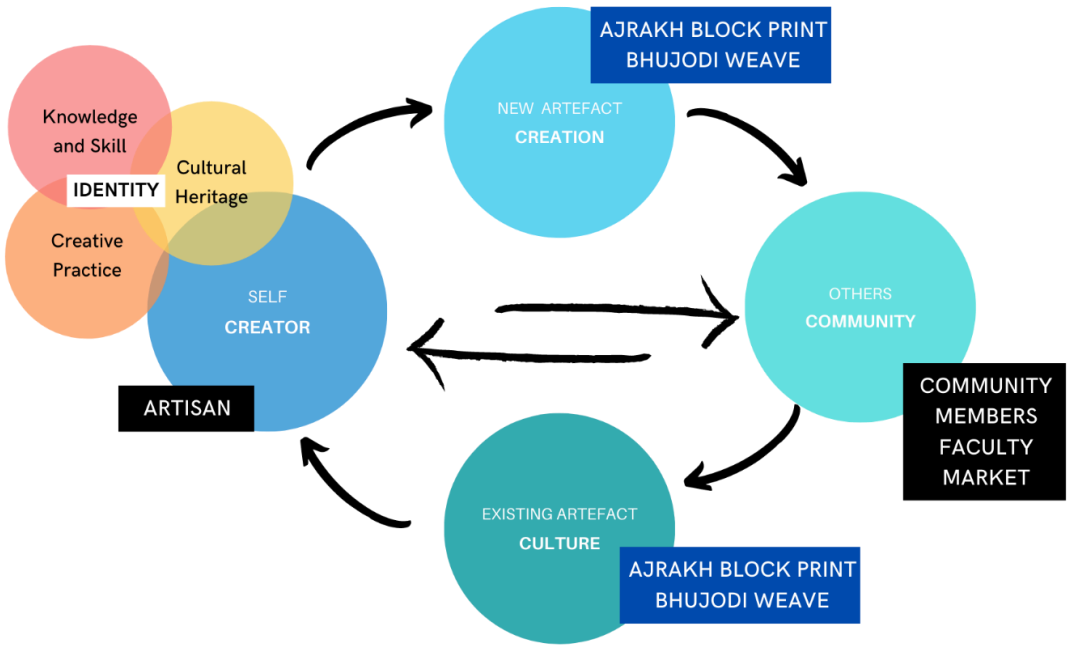

Figure 1 Framework based on Glaveanu's tetradic model of Creativity (2018)

The impact of formal education can come to the foreground by comparing the two cases: students of Somaiya Kala Vidya, a design institute in Kutch; and practitioners of the craft in Kutch and artisans for the United Artisans of Kutch, an NGO platform for independent artisans along with the local material culture.

An ethnographic approach, studying what 'people do' and 'say' in a context (Hammersley, 2006) in addition to the case study allows to understand, capture and analyse the identity of members of a culture sharing group, and to contrast the dynamics of crafts and transfer of knowledge through participant observation. Further qualitative interviewing was essential to understand the beliefs, attitudes, values, and motivations of the artisans in their social context (Gaskell, 2000). The study was conducted in participants' natural setting, divided into two categories, based on the local socio-cultural system of knowledge exchange: the traditional knowledge exchange sites, comprised of multiple locations and local villages where craft communities were situated, namely, Ajrakhpur, Bhujodi, Nirona and Bhuj in Gujarat, India; and the design institute, one permanent site in Gandhidham, Gujarat. Artisans included current students, and alumni, members of the teaching faculty and founder of the design school along with artisans trained informally.

2.1. Research Setting 1 – Familiar Ways of Knowing

All the artisans interviewed during this research started practising their craft early on when they were around ten years old. One of the participants used to sit at the loom with his three older brothers when he was 11 when his father was away to learn the craft and spent majority of his time watching both his father and grandfather weave.

Craft and the knowledge of the practice is an embodied experience, the knowledge is built and shared experientially and experimentally. Skill development and knowledge exchange in the local craft industry, like any other industry is achieved through practice and repetition, starting with imitation of master artisans without any instruction, writer or oral, sharpening their skills of being aware of the surroundings and embedding and immersing them in that space, this visual and tactile guidance which captures the 'simultaneity' of practice, surpasses the use of language knowledge exchange in these apprenticeship models (Marchand, 2010).

Sinha (2017) while studying the Ajrakh block printers, Bhujodi weaver and Bandhani tie-dyers discussed the generational nature of the craft knowledge, how the practice was passed down an extensive line of inheritance and are a part of ancestral heritage. It was further evident in interaction with the Khatris (Ajrakh and Bandhani artists) and Vankars (Bhujodi weavers), where their crafts are tightly (closely) tied and associated with the community.

Living and Learning Design Centre's Gallery 1 exhibit: The Living Embroideries of Kutch was chosen as a part of the first research setting, to discuss the dichotomies between traditional and modern, between diverse ways of knowing. The eight-acre textile museum cum campus in Ajrakhpur, Kutch, inaugurated in January 2016 aims to train, educate, and support the craftsperson to practise their traditional crafts for contemporary markets so that they can earn a dignified

and prosperous livelihood. (LLDC, 2019). The exhibit was initially called ‘Design Centre on Wheels’ a part of the project ‘Pride and Enterprise’ run by the NGO Shrujan in Bhujodi. It displays a collection of 1150 pieces with 3 feet x 4 feet demonstrative embroidery panels, showcasing 42 distinct embroidery styles, handcrafted, and documented over the years by over 500 master craftswomen belonging to 12 different communities of Kutch.

Figure 2 Living Embroideries of Kutch. Photo courtesy : LLDC, 2018

“Rabaris during the commissions were apprehensive to use the colours provided rather than they customarily use, they feel that yellow and white are essential for stitching and should be used in a specific relationship to other colours claiming that the embroideries will stop being Rabari if they do not use these colours.” (The Living Embroideries of Kutch, 2016)

The 1150 pieces of craftwork are exhibited in the classic binary fashion of traditional vs modern, where the artisans made the traditional panels using the original colours and motifs, using historical text as a reference. And the contemporary counterparts were a result of a collaboration between the master craftswomen and members of the design team of the project where the panels used modern colours on traditional motifs to attract the new and younger market. In the Indian subcontinent, clothes can be seen as an adornment to attract gods, protect people and communities, identify ethnic groups as well as reveal the history and daily life of these groups (Fisher, 1993). The traditional embroideries have been a part of the social identities of both the wearer and the maker, sometimes abandoning, other times adapting age-old techniques to reinforce their social standing.

Figure 3 Work by women in Nirona on UAK swatches. Photo: Kuldip Gadhvi, 2019

Further artisans of United Artisans of Kutch, a team of local artisans in Kutch, Gujarat, founded by Kuldip Gadhvi, strives to help lesser-known artisans survive in the current market. Currently, Kuldip is attempting to bring all of them together as a collective by distributing swatches of block printed fabric with UAK's logo, requesting them to use their skills to complete the swatches. The work made by the women was high on cohesion and low on individualism and diversion, culturally sticking to one common theme, dictated by the available resources too.

2.2. Research Setting 2 – Other Ways of Knowing

Design schools in India were constructed in early 19th century following the recommendation of British officials (Balaram, 2005) with an aim to produce 'copyist' to serve the colonial agencies and to improve the 'native taste' (Mathur, 2011 p.44). This approach failed to capture the local epistemes of the Indian culture and the practices within, a place where applied art and fine art share the same space (Balaram, 2005), where both ‘alpana’ floral patterns made on the floor to celebrate auspicious occasions and the embroideries on clothing share the same definition of design. This inability to have a topical approach to design in the local Indian craft industry pushes the labour-intensive craft practitioners away from the design discipline. These interactions with the designers, marginalise the craftsman, damaging their confidence, the policy-driven education did not promote endogenous development (Ghose, 1995; Clarke, 2016).

To tackle this issue of decreased confidence and power hierarchies brought in by the formally trained designers from prestigious design schools, Judy Frater, in 2005 with support from UNESCO and the Development Commissioner Handicrafts, set up Kala Raksha Vidhyalaya (KRV), in Tunda Vandh, Kutch. After eight years she started Somaiya Kala Vidya, continuing with curriculum developed for KRV. The course runs over eleven months structured as six 2-week class sessions, with a goal of capacity building, educating them about the market. A visiting teacher teaches each class along with a local faculty member who stays with the students. Students come from the local communities practising Ajrakh, Bhujodi weaving, Bandhani, and suf and rab embroidery, and patchwork.

3. UNRAVELLING THE TWO IDENTITIES: CULTURAL AND CREATIVE

Glaveanu’s (2012) tetradic framework of creativity in socio-cultural settings lays the foundation of coming sections, where an interaction between the “creator”, “creation” and “audience” determines the creative identity.

3.1. CREATOR - SELF

Artisans, artisan-designers, and students, who have come from a generation of practitioners, where the skills are acquired and passed within the family, through interaction and collaboration between community members from an early age constitute the 'self' segment of this paper. These exchanges situated in physical, as well as social places affect the physicality of artefacts and ideologies of the creators, facilitating meaning-making for the intended community users. The presence of the creator and the community in one geographical place affects the visual appearance of the craft, which is re-invented within these local spaces and contexts by new practitioners.

The Batch of 2019 at SKV illustrate the importance of place in their creations and formation of individual creative identities through their final collection, with themes ranging from; A star in your eyes (Rizwanbhai); Date palm tree (Tosaifbhai); Tilling (Hamjabhai); Universe (Jabbarbhai); and Coolness/Peace (Nitinbhai), all based on their everyday life.

"I told my teacher I am not going to draw. He asked me why not, I said because I am weaver, this is not my work. You ask me to put this motif in the weaving pattern and I will weave and but I cannot draw ..... They asked us to bring over our traditional pieces next class and when we looked at those pieces automatically and immediately, we noticed these things, negative positive, inspirations from nature, proportion, mirror image, all these terms that we were learning were now in front of us." (Seji, 2019)

Figure 4 Student logos. Courtesy: Judy Frater, 2019

The student logos represent the past and the present, their aspirations firmly placed in the community with a strong desire to preserve and carry on their heritage, forming new identities, challenging the widely accepted dichotomy between traditional and modern presented in the craft industry. Two Ajrakh designer artisans, alumni of SKV were quick to draw a line between the traditional and modern Ajrakh, where certain motifs depict the heritage of Ajrakh

and, one could add modern elements to those finite styles, creating infinite opportunities, leaving the agency with the creators.

Figure 5 Khalid Khatri's unconventional tools. Photo: Megha Chauhan, 2019

Khalid Bhai proudly presented his unconventional tools for block-printing, merging them with the heritage blocks to create something new, explaining he is always looking for inspiration now.

Figure 6 Khalid Khatri's exploration. Photo: Megha Chauhan, 2019

"The change is, I am fond of making new things. What happens is, if an idea comes to me, if I see anything, I start thinking about how it could be used in Ajrakh. I do not think about the market. I focus on design developments because a market is always going to be there. I do not like too much production work." Khalid Khatri (2019)

Several cognitive and conative resources (person-centred factors) embodied by the self, determine the potential of creativity (Lubart et al. 2013). They are 'fundamentally related to the social and material elements that constitute the environment in which individuals are embedded' (Glaveanu, 2020), this varying person-environment system makes

creativity and potential dynamic within the sociocultural approach. No creative craft process can be realised if the latent potential of the individuals, artisans, in this case, isn't realised (ibid.) determined by the intrinsic elements, majorly through the development of neuroscientific aspects, cognition, emotional intelligence, and personality. Several students displayed high intrinsic motivation, a conative resource, with a high commitment to their work and perseverance, even using their practice as a way of expressing their emotions, aside from seeking recognition from the community.

3.2. OTHER - AUDIENCE

The term other is used to identify the members of society that interacts, directly or indirectly throughout the process, from production to distribution, with the 'self'. The market, especially the distribution channels led by the middlemen have a significant impact on the design process followed by the artisans, the degree of freedom in designs, and interests to develop these designs as crafts. Zittoun et al. (2003, p. 441) suggest that creations made using symbolic resources (cultural resources in this case) are attached to the creator through the gaze of the others. These members impact the outcome of practice and drive the choices of the creator, as creativity is contextual and generative (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988) highlights the importance of social as well as the historical environment.

The Indian Government and All India Handicrafts Board have initiatives to recognise and promote artisanship and craftsmanship in the country. National Award, one such initiative commends master craftsmen who display exceptional skill level and innovation in their craft and must be a 'socially responsible leader' and 'must contribute to the craft as a whole' (Venkatesan, 2009). Although a great tool to instil pride in the local community and to encourage the younger generation to continue using the crafts, the national award is now regarded as trophies that master artisans like to collect. Quite a few of the current students at SKV were responsible for the award-winning product but weren't recognised appropriately due to economic restraints. The creations made for these awards are greatly driven by the 'others' overshadowing the 'self', where the innovation needs to capture the traditional identity of the craft without being repetitive and old. It can be argued that the evaluations and expert judgements is to award the "promoted creativity".

3.2.1. Community Members

'Uniqueness was assessed in terms of technique; how much work went into a piece. Traditional clients could discern excellent quality and they appreciated it. It was they who judged."- Vishramji Vankar, 2017 (BorderFall, 2017)

Figure 7 Family Jury. Photo: Megha Chauhan, 2019

SKV acknowledges the role community plays in the artisan's practise and embeds it in their learning model. They conduct a 'family jury', where community members, family, friends, and alumni provide feedback to the students. This activity prepares the students for their jury with industry experts as well as acquaints them with the expectations of the community, nurturing the collective social community. Additionally, SKV has advisory members, who come in for guest lectures, sharing the rich history of the crafts "previous efforts, represented in a culture's products, models, technologies and so forth, are of enormous value to the creator" (Feldman, 1988, p. 288) aiding their creations and personal development. Through these efforts, students proactively aim to maintain their collective cultural identity and the collective status with their individualistic creative identity, enabling them to grow as independent creators.

3.2.2. Market

"I went to an Exhibition in Delhi in January. I had discussions with a few customers they said whenever people come with Ajrakh they come with limited colours, indigo, green, red, the same four-five colours. They said we like Ajrakh a lot and we wear it too but give us something new, be it colours or anything, some newness." Panchaan Seji, 2019

Craft now is more of economic activity than a cultural activity, earlier the creations were made for the local markets but now with bigger markets the key players have changed. To keep up with these changes, SKV has classes on Market Orientation and Sales Analysis providing them with the knowledge to market their products confidently and gain

business advantage without depending on middlemen increasing their agency and authority over their creations, and further, even create an appropriate market for their practice.

> "At first, we were afraid that if we do not put a border in the scarf, then no one will take it. Like if I was making a saree, I would make the pallu with perfect borders and then make the body, fill it completely, but now that's not the case." Khalid Khatri, 2019.

During one of the final presentations at SKV, most fellow community members used marketability as the lens for evaluation and feedback, where ease of production and saleability was the primary concern, reiterating the economic aspect of the craft activity. SKV alumni, as well as other craftsmen, have participated at several national and international events. This exposure to a dynamic market impacts their creation and the understanding of self, switching from a more topical traditional approach for the local market and aiming to understand the global trends for the international market.

3.3. PRODUCT and PROCESS - ARTEFACT

Creative potential in the process aspect of the creativity is highly dependent on the perspectives and affordances of the artisans (Glaveanu, 2018); and systemic potential (heavily impacted by intrinsic and extrinsic constraints) is dependent on resources (tangible and intangible) available to carry out the process, adopted strategies, though process and action of the stakeholders of the process, their background knowledge, and experiences, the specific domain of application, and the challenges to be faced (Corazza & Agnoli, 2015).

Vygotsky (2004) states that the imagination required to change things is constrained by the objects and what they're known for, this material focus highlights the construction of novel ideas' dependence on interaction with the physical environment. In order to understand the role education plays, creations of SKV students and alumni were the primary subject for material analysis, in contrast with the material culture of artisans of UAK. This comparison helps draw parallels, especially with regards to the materials key elements; colours, motifs, and raw material.

3.3.1. Original Artifacts

Raw Material	Primary consumers were the pastoralist communities; Rabaris and Maldharis in the Kutch region of Gujarat, who traded woollen and cotton fibres, which were then used by the Khatris and Vanakars to weave and make the fabric and dye.

Colours Extensive use of vegetable dyes to make blue; using the indigo leaves, red; obtained from the root of madder plants (Khatri, 2019, personal communication). Other natural materials include millet flour, tamarind, castor oil, myrobalan, gum Arabic and clay.

Motifs Ajrakh motifs are heavily influenced by the Islamic architecture details found in mosques, tombs amongst other architectural structures: Symmetrical geometry, Mirrored carvings, patterns, and colours. Ajrakh printed cloth follows a fixed layout in terms of printing, where the large central body is usually printed using square blocks, repeated on a tight grid to form the central jaal, whereas the horizontal and vertical borders and the end panels farming the central body use rectangle blocks. Traditional motifs are – dholak (drum), champakali (Magnolia bud), haanso (birds), chhedo (border), maleer (sunflower-like circles) designs. Square blocks are usually used for the body of the fabric, their outlines are kharek (date), mor (peacock), jalayab (sweetmeat), chakki (mortar), badaam (almond), isq, pech (knots of love), chalo (ring) and ghaleecho (floor covering). Whereas, the rectangle blocks have vegetative motifs like wal (vine) and kakkr (cloud) (Khatri, 2019)

Market Traditionally men were the primary users of Ajrakh garments: namely Safa or gamcha (shoulder fabric), lungi (lower wrap) and faintas (turban). Ajrakh printed on both sides of the fabric, called bipuri ajrakh, was usually worn for ceremonies like weddings to display their status (Anshu et al., 2017) but the changing social and economic status of these men resulted in a variation of Ajrakh: Ekpuri ajrakh: Printed on one side only for people from lower income groups.

3.3.2. New Artefacts

The Indian market has seen many changes since Independence in 1947, influenced by several socio-economic political factors, the introduction of new technologies that came with industrialisation and globalisation and further government initiatives to safeguard the local craftsmen communities and a new stream of tourism (Edwards, 2005). Artisans throughout these changing times have displayed agility and flexibility, adopting new ways, interacting with the external elements.

In 1995, due to inflated costs of production along with the amount of time taken to embroider a piece, hand embroidery was banned in the local Dhebari Rabari community. In response to this challenge, the women artisans, adopted technological means to sustain using an ingenious combination of machine, ready-made ribbons, and hand-stitched embroidery preserving their ownership as well innovating at the same time, reflecting their integral community identity aesthetically (Frater, 1995). This act of “conventional exploration of possibilities within a certain framework of rules” (Liep, 2001, p.2) to face he unforeseen changes in the habit can be seen as ‘improvisation

creativity' (Glaveanu, 2012) where the craftspeople are able to innovate within their set cultural boundaries due to their in-depth knowledge of the craft and the limitations.

The artisan students as mentioned before came from a cluster of varied craft practise, ranging from dyeing to weaving to embroidery, this interdisciplinary setting and peer learning impacts their understanding of 'self' and eventually their practice.

Figure 8 Nitin weaving the colour blanket. Photo: Judy Frater, 2019

The artisan students at SKV especially from the weaving communities are required to make a colour blanket for their colour theory class. In 2014 Khalid Bhai, an Ajrakh printing student found the exercise intriguing and explored it, incorporating this design exercise into his design practice, while staying within the boundaries of the craft, without changing the essence of the Ajrakh, something never done before by the students.

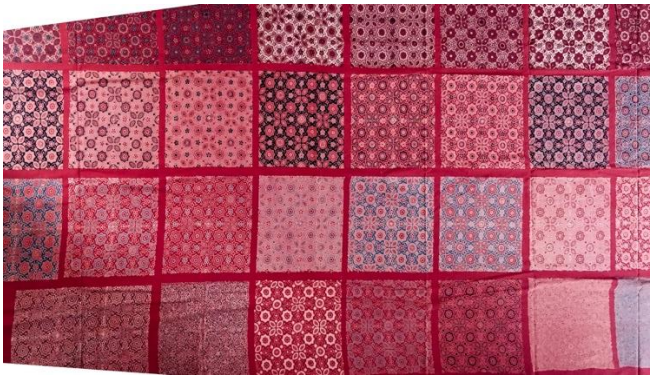

Figure 9 Khalid Khatri's colour blanket. Photo: Megha Chauhan, 2019

Material

Figure 10 Panchaan Seji's final design collection product. Photo: Megha Chauhan, 2019

"We were playing with our usual colours- black, white, brown, there were limitations. All these limitations were broken after I attended the classes." Panchaan Seji, 2019.

Traditionally materials acquired from local trade and exchanges were the main visual and tactile identifiers of the craft. Seji Bhai, an alumnus, and Bhujodi weaver transitioned from their traditional use of wool to alternatives like bamboo cotton. The change was brought in after his market research class, where he got to talk a local textile designer. He realised that restricting themselves to the material technological boundary of the craft wouldn't allow them to new markets. The transition was beneficial as it their craft's market value and filled the market gap addressing the biggest drawback of their current technology.

Seji Bhai, although had 20 years of experience weaving bhujodi artefacts never before SKV explored why their artefacts were coarse. Once he started studying and researching the history of Bhujodi weaving he understood these technological components. As Bhujodi weavers exchanged goods with Rabari community in exchange of wool, they

had to use a wider reed (loom comb) to accommodate thick pure wool fibres. Additionally, to tame the wool to prevent them from obstructing the mechanism of the loom, a mix of wheat and water was used, which along with sticking the fibres together made the yarn thicker and heavier. His research of the craft taught him that due to access to a wide range of materials they need not use this traditional wheat mix, especially for fibres like cotton, allowing him to use a finer reed resulting in a softer final product.

Colour

Bhujodi weavers colour palette was composed of dark natural colours, wool's natural colours. Nitin Kudecha, a student artisan for his final collection 'Coolness/Peace' went beyond these colours and experimented with colour theory, namely tints, tones, and shades, incorporating traditional motifs with unconventional colours.

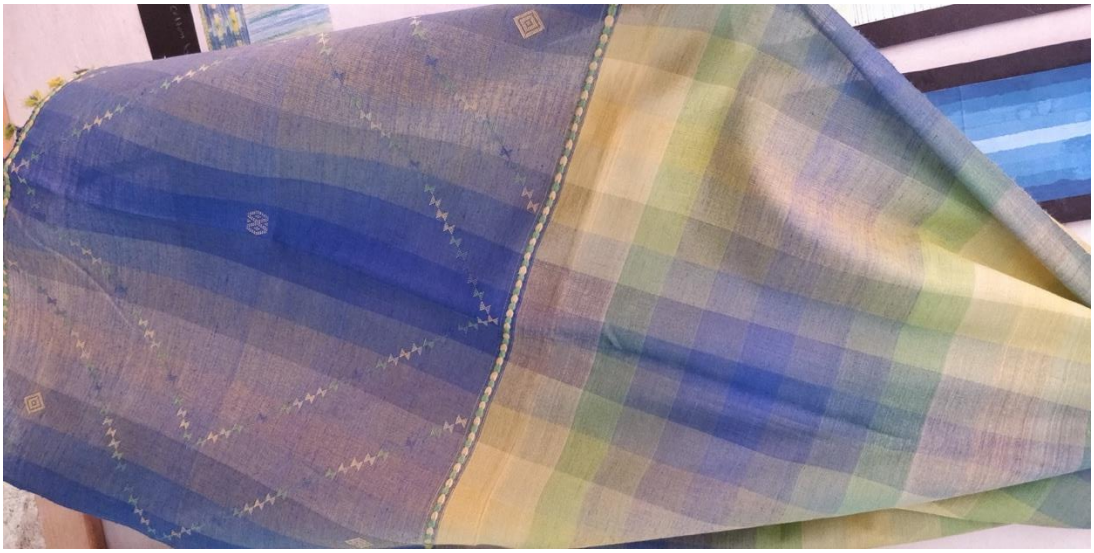

Figure 11 Coolness/Peace by Nitin Kudecha. Photo: Megha Chauhan, 2019

The education artisans receive from the design institute helps them regard their craft and skills as important in the global market and industry. Junaid Bhai, another 2014 alumni following his father Dr Ismail Mohammad Khatri, appreciates the importance of the heritage of the craft and is working on collection and reproduction of as many original historical Ajrakh blocks as possible and is invested in the dyeing process of the craft. While showing around his studio he mentioned his ongoing research to understand and document the process of achieving exact shade of the colour every time he dyes.

Figure 12 Khalid Khatri's experiments with the traditional motif. Photo: Megha Chauhan, 2019

Khalid Bhai shared an anecdote from his time in SKV, which has given him his unique identity in the community. During one of his design classes on geometrical shapes to create new shapes, which had led him to apply this theory into practice. He understood the importance of placement in Ajrakh and the basic principle of geometry in the craft. He tried something unheard of in the community and cut the square blocks diagonally giving him the freedom to experiment within his craft. He was proud to show his virtuosity in the craft and how fellow artisans struggle to understand the approach he takes to achieve his unique designs, without departing from the Ajrakh. Apart from experimenting with shapes and placement, he further explores scale, magnifying the existing motifs without attempting to modernise or change the same. All these experiments and innovations within the cultural heritage realm reveal the presence of critical reflection, empowering him to understand and deconstruct and reconstruct his practice, honed by SKV. His technical expertise in the craft and reflective thinking highlights the potential capabilities of artisans. As Glaveanu (2018), the creative potential of the individuals evolves with the changes in the mix of perspectives and affordances. Khalid Bhai in this case with this evolving perspective, fuelled by interaction with fellow peers as well as tutors, discovered a new “affordance”

4. CONCLUSION: Changing Narratives

It is evident from the study that in the realm of traditional heritage crafts, cultural norms drive artisans to take certain positions, facilitating some perspectives and obscuring others (Glaveanu & Clapp, 2018). Artisans who received exposure, peer feedback, interactions across disciplines, tend to show more potential of growth, as compared to those who didn’t.

Somaiya Kala Vidya was constructed in response to the current fashion system, aimed to challenge and dismantle the power hierarchies, and empower the artisans, encouraging them to see themselves as creatives and not just technical experts. The director states that in order to achieve a competitive edge, to create appropriate markets and to thrive, artisans should focus on developing their distinctive features and capabilities (Frater, 2010). The study has proved that SKV has followed through with their agenda. It is seen as an effective catalyst for the students to preserve their cultural

identities, their connection with the community while using it as a foundation to build their creative practice, respecting their history. Alumni success stories further has motivated the artisans in the community to continue to pursue craft as a viable sustainable economic activity, aiding the continuance of the communal craft with increased agency and independent voice.

The feedback system continues to place tradition at the apex, built around multiple actors, where the interaction between the creator, the other – audience and the existing artifacts informs creation of new artifacts, re-invention and adaptation of tradition to changed market demands, showcasing "problem-solving, inventiveness, and/ or imaginative expression" (Weiner, 2000, p. 158). The artisan designers showed that there is space for creative exploration in a tradition bound practice if one uses "memory and imagination, meaning and value, theory and practice" (Negus & Pickering, 2004, p. 104) and this creative thought process is a part of a cultural tradition even "when it breaks away from tradition" (Feldman, 1974, p.68).

Craftsmanship in this study is a community-based activity based on shared identities, anonymity, and collective efforts towards mastery of the skill, aiming homogeneity and continuance (Glaveanu, 2014). These characteristics paint craftsmanship as a problematic creative identity and situating it in socio-cultural frameworks or places of work help challenge the widely accepted and aspired conventional understanding of creativity, lauding the 'lone-genius'.

Although the artisan designers presented their individualistic creativity, they worked towards their collective identity helping the community flourish. They appreciate and encourage the novelties that transform their local craft landscape with powerful sense of ownership. Various design elements like colours, motifs and techniques create trends within the community taking the whole craft community to a new unchartered territory, re-inventing themselves. SKV students throughout their course, displayed higher intrinsic motivation as they were aware of the techniques leading to personal and professional growth, and genuinely believed in the potential of good practice, aided by design education.

The discussed new creations have material and social importance as they add on to the pool of knowledge and skills, as well as the active participation of artisans in these changes with increased agency creates new markets. This also displays the capabilities of handling various roles; tradition keepers when in in contact with the state and researchers; innovators within their communities, students, and businessmen when interacting with the market and they do not appear in isolation, they help shape new artifacts from existing, where these new additions have an imprint of 'self', encouraging younger generations to take up these crafts.

The purpose was to understand whether the artisans' knowledge can help them be present in a more fulfilling place. Acknowledgement of the importance of immateriality (knowledge) can lead to a new perspective of craftspeople and help unpack meanings and for designers and urban design students. The socio-cultural model highlighted the capabilities of the artisans. It is crucial to encourage a shift in craft research and to recognise not only artisan's

innovations but current system’s conception of the role of artisans and craft in the industry, innovation needs to take place in the current system.

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