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Background: Contribution of Gramshree and Craftroots

About Gramshree
Gramshree was founded in 1995 by the first women CM of Gujarat Smt. Anandiben Patel with a prominent social entrepreneur Smt. Anarben Patel to empower and support marginalized women residing in rural and urban slums of Gujarat through income generation activities. The empowerment process was further strengthened and headed by Smt. Vandana Agrawal.

Gramshree aims to elevate the social stature of the women deprived of opportunities due to their geographical, family, and societal incompetence and make them self-reliable through teaching them skill-based jobs (e.g. handicraft, cooking, driving, nursing, and more).

With women forming more than 60% of the workforce in the handicraft sector, Gramshree significantly impacted the sector by employing vulnerable yet trained women to become artisans.

In the past 25 years, Gramshree has worked with 75000+ women in slums, lower-income areas, and the rural stretches of the country.

Craftroots: Enriching the lives of Artisans
In 2001, The Gramshree Women Empowerment gave the world of Indian handicrafts a warm and profoundly rooted establishment termed Craftroots.

During the wake of the Gujarat earthquake, a significant portion of the state, especially Kutch and Bhuj, was wrecked by the catastrophe. The team of Gramshree with Manav Sadhna reached the barren yet beautiful Rann and spent an entire year in the rural stretch of the state.

The underlying motive of the journey to Kutch and Bhuj was to revive the livelihood, rebuild the infrastructure and reinforce the zeal of the villagers. Volunteers from both organizations joined hands and worked in synergy to reconstruct roads, schools, homes, drainage systems, wells, dams, and toilets.

"Only by giving are you able to receive more than you already have."
That’s what happened to us. Spending an entire year in Kutch and Bhuj and nearby villages such as Ludiya and Gandhi nu Gam serving, we were fascinated by indigenous people’s lives, culture, and vibrant crafts. The divinity of the learning and experience sowed a thoughtful seed in our founder’s heart that led them to advocate for the Indian Handicraft.

Hence, the establishment of a platform where various stakeholders co-create and promote India’s treasures. Over the years, profits acquired from selling the handicraft products crafted by our artisans (the majority of which are women) support health, education, personal finance, and leadership training programs of the craft community.

**Today, Gramshree & Craftroots combined have over 25000 artisans spread over 45 crafts across 14 states through a circle of 15 NGOs enriched over the last 25 years.**

**Objectives**

The core functions at Craftroots are vital to staying true to its ideals. A sustainable, empowering, and compassionate approach is a must while considering to include any craft or textile into the database.

1. **Survey and Documentation:** By being a part of Craftroots, many artisans are benefitted from resources that make them capable of having a stable income source. These bonds are kept for long, with each achievement documented for the villager’s encouragement.
2. **Education and Awareness:** By education, Craftroots does not limit itself to just textbooks. It documents and presents stories of individuals who brought happiness back into their lives through their crafts.
3. **Design Development:** Craftroots is a platform that gives everyone a space to voice their opinions, challenges, and difficulties to come up with sustainable solutions. The design development aspect of Craftroots connects artisans with designers for the exchange of various ideas, leading to a unique outcome.
4. **Sales and Marketing:** The existence of craft traditions is dictated by the demand it has. Marketing the masterpieces as sustainable, traditional yet modern creations is the Craftroots way of engaging the audience of today.
5. **Social Services:** As per the feedback we receive through these programs, we cater to the particular issues unique to each village by creating initiatives for their betterment. These activities were also successfully conducted during the pandemic, maintaining the regulations and guidelines.

**VISION**

To nurture the mind, body, and soul of marginalized women through various programs that strengthen their self-reliance, promote sustainability, and enhance their quality of life which further benefits society.
MISSION

Encourage the holistic development of vulnerable women through vocational skill training, income generation activities, and education and awareness-centric ventures to foster women's self-reliance and integrity.

VALUES & PRACTICES

We inspire our people to participate in practices that ignite a human's fundamental generosity, thus catalyzing inner and outer transformation.

In addition, one of the core practices of our ecosystem is that we commence our day with an all religion prayer and meditation to spur inner peace. Finally, our value-established ecosystem encourages our team to spread kindness by doing various acts of kindness.

Notable Milestones of 2017-18

Tattva: The Non-Textile Wing

Tattva, our non-textile wing of Gramshree gives employment to more than 15 artisans working on materials like Mild Steel, Brass, Copper, Wood, and Mud to revive the traditional art forms related to non-textile.
Over 200 designs and product lines were developed by the artisans associated with Tattva. Currently, artisans are also bringing in innovations in the following designs which are being adopted by renowned architects and interior decorators:

- Frames
- Murals
- Candle Stands
- Wooden Lamps
- Brass Plates
- Mirror with Hammering

Central Leather Research Institute: Leather Workshop
A 10 days leather workshop in association with Central Leather Research Institute was conducted with 15 artisans. The workshop was mainly a skill-building exercise for the artisans to explore more opportunities in leather design.

The workshop enabled artisans to bring innovation in the ancient craft of leatherwork by imparting the required knowledge and practical skills. Modern machinery for leather sewing, cutting, dyeing, polishing, and processing was also taught to the artisans.

Women Empowerment Centre
Gramshree and Craftroots believe that the empowerment of women in society is the path for the development of all. Several initiatives have been successful in nurturing women through healthcare, education, skill upgradation activities, and various awareness programs. The villages focused on are currently in and around Gujarat. Rudra, Patan, and Ludiya are some of the many centers where women are given holistic experiences to build their confidence and the potential to be the leading light for generations to come.
Patchwork in Rajkavadar

Gramshree Trust has established a women empowerment center in Patan which gives employment to 100+ women by training them in Patchwork, Aari embroidery, and Handwork.

Geographically, the center is located in the area named Rajkavadar with Muslim and Khatri communities belonging to the lower and middle class near Tyrenagar slums. The community of women practiced the art of making godhris (quilt) out of waste fabrics. These were used in their homes, while men were involved in recycling tyres for making footwear and toys. Patchwork was later incorporated with footwear to create beautiful designs. This enhanced the basic look of the products, making them a piece in demand among the villagers.
Aari Embroidery in Rudra

The men of Rudra were mostly cobblers, thus, to add on to the already practiced tradition, the women of the village were taught aari embroidery on shoes. Both the men and women of the community were benefitted from this cohesive practice.

For the training, Gramshree started with only five women for each work and later grew to be a big unit. It was only after Gramshree’s skill development training that the women got introduced to new designs and patterns to scale up their work. They learned the fundamentals of measurements and finishing with the help of Gramshree and their wages grew threefold in a short span of time.

Gramshree’s Rudra Women Empowerment Centre is a space that encourages and enables women of Ahmedabad's slum communities to be catalysts of sustainable economic and social change in order to strengthen their families and positively impact their communities.

As the women of the local slum experience great hardships and difficulties in their daily lives, at the Rudra Centre creates an atmosphere where these women can feel as though they are in the comfort of their parent’s home.
The women receive holistic values through their affiliation with the Rudra Centre. A few of these include joy, income (economic self-sufficiency), friendship, education, love from the community and staff. Overall, their time here provides them with great peace and positivity. It is particularly noteworthy that the Rudra Centre reaches three different generations:

1) Girls: We have recognized that these young girls will grow up to have the power to affect many decisions in the community. Knowing this, we strive to provide these girls with basic education on relationships, nutrition, self-esteem, etc. through what is formally known as the Adolescent Girls Program.

2) Women: There is a common belief among members of the slum community that once they have committed to marriage and childbearing, their lives are over in terms of personal growth and development. To develop the mindsets for the improvement of the community, we have reached out to many women on the basis of empowering them with means of income generation, and in the process, give them education on personal development, self-esteem, relationships, general knowledge through various camps, educational trips, etc. We find that empowering women in the given various ways also empowers the members of their community (husbands, kids, other relatives, and social circles).

3) Elder women: Grandmothers and elderly women of the village hold the treasure trove of the culture and traditions of their community. Thus, it becomes important to include them in the decisions of the village taken up by the youth. Acknowledging their presence, we have created a series of constructive social activities for them, such as spiritual chantings, film viewings, songs and understanding of music, and storytelling events that don’t exclude any age group.

Case Studies: Initiatives and Individuals

Heart Pins

Heart Pins are a medium for Craftroots to express their gratitude towards all the artisans, customers, and advisories involved in the journey to grow together. The practice of making heart pins was started 14 years ago and employed women who started learning embroidery by joining Craftroots. This heart is made from waste cloth at various centers and has managed to reach the hearts of the people.

A true heart-to-heart connection is conveyed by the small gesture of these women, who are learning by showing their gratitude to society. People pay the price of a heart pin to express their desire, love, and spirit, which eliminates animosity and discrimination. It is a symbol of compassion inspired by the practice of making ‘tsunamika’ dolls offered to the victims of tsunamis.
Baluben Vaghela - Artisan

Designation: Production Head and Sampling (Home Furnishing Textiles)

Baluben Vaghela joined Gramshree in 2002. During that time she was skilled in making just quilts. Currently, she is the head of the patchwork and applique department and has trained other women artisans to earn their livelihood.

In her initial days, she gathered knowledge by observing fellow women doing running stitch. Soon thereafter she was introduced to Gramshree. By cutting cloth pieces for patchwork she developed her skills enough to lead a team of her own.

Her husband being a mason gives her the responsibility for earning a living as well. Thus, her economic contribution to the family is of utmost importance. Gramshree's Sahara Project also aided her in building a concrete home, which was previously just a hut. Baluben and Gramshree are mutual beneficiaries through the shared values they have for crafts.

Jayaben Khetani – Ariwork Artisan

Jayaben is an aari embroidery artisan working on her designs with Gramshree for the past five years. Aaari embroidery was a generational practice passed down to her, which has turned out to be a blessing as it helped her become self-sufficient through her skills. At 48 years, she is able to support herself and the education of her two sons.

In the unfortunate events of the Bhuj earthquake in 2001, she moved to Ahmedabad in search of a fresh start, which led her to join Gramshree. Jayaben currently works in the sampling department of sarees and dupattas.
Painting is akin to Satish Chitara, whose family has been into the art of Matani Pacchedi for ages. He joined Gramshree five years ago, working from home in the beginning. His mesmerizing designs require working for the entire year, and not just in festive seasons. Currently, Satish handles all the hand painting works throughout the Craftroots product base, be it creating samples or working by hand on various products to enhance their appearance.

He believes that Gramshree gave him the platform to experiment on his talents and creating something out of true passion each time he gets to work.

Iqbalbhai Khatri – Mashru Weaving
Iqbal Khatri belongs to a family practicing Mashru for ages. He has been learning the handcrafted mastery of Mashru since the age of 10. In Patan, he is the only artisan working on new designs and developments in mashru.

With six kids to support, he utilized his adept Mashru weaves to earn a living for his family, along with reviving the dying craft of Mashru. With Gramshree, Iqbal and his wife have attended various exhibitions and conducted workshops in the past 12 years, which have aided them to meet their customers.

Kaminiben - Handwork

For the past 14 years, Kaminiben has been working with Gramshree in the sampling department. By learning different types of weaves and embroidery, she slowly developed her expertise in handwork. Soon, her talents were utilized to empower other women in the village centers, where she frequently visits for training other women.

She mentions that being with Gramshree has given her a new life to nurture through handwork. With grit and determination, today she stands as an independent lady supporting her family and plays a huge part in handwork samples made at Gramshree.
2019: A Year of Exposure

In 2019, Gramshree and Craftroots aim to focus on the growth of individual artisans, and taking them one step closer to being ‘craftpreneurs’. Being financially sustained with the craft they’re practicing can help the artisanal families’ livelihood, as well as keep the craft traditions alive within generations.

Exhibitions, workshops, and inauguration events can be a great method to connect the artisans with their customers, and Gramshree provides the platform for the same, eliminating the discrepancies of middlemen and misinformation regarding the age-old craft forms.