

Regional Traditional Indian Embroidery “Kasuti”: Key Success Factors to Reach the International Markets

Shubhapriya Bennur^{1*} and Laxmidevi Gavai²

¹214 HECO, University of Nebraska Lincoln, USA

²Vidya Dan Samiti Institution, Gadag- 582101, Karnataka, India

Abstract

Traditional embroidery with ethnic designs and motifs in brilliant colors bear a distinct hallmark of Indian textile design. This embroidery has its own regional identity and has crossed borders to be marketed in different parts of the world. This paper discusses the efforts made by artisans to revive and modify the ‘kasuti’ embroidery designs to cater the consumers in international markets. The study identifies its key success factors in international markets both from retailer as well as artisan’s perspectives.

Keywords: Kasuti; Regional embroidery; Key success factors

Introduction

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 [1]. 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. The favorite Indian embroidery styles among fashionist’s around the world are Chikankari and Kashmiri embroidery. Therefore, not all the Indian regional embroideries have made it to the international market due to lack of exposure to technology, marketing skills and competition. However, 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). ‘Menthi’ is cross stitch resembling fenugreek seed. ‘Gavanti’ is double running stitch used for creating verticle, horizontal or diagonal lines. ‘Negi’ is a simple running stitch and ‘Murgi’ is a zig-zag stitch. 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. The patterns that need to be embroidered are either marked on textile by pencil or charcoal. Sometimes the patterns are embroidered without any markings on the textile by simply counting threads which makes it laborious work. Figures 1 and 2 show different Kasuti motifs hand embroidered on silk sari including figures/ patterns inspired by everyday objects, nature and culture including elephant, geometric motifs, flowers, religious motifs etc.



Figure 1: Kasuti motifs hand embroidered on silk sari. (Photographed by researcher).

***Corresponding author:** Shubhapriya Bennur, Assistant Professor, 214 HECO, University of Nebraska Lincoln, USA, E-mail: sbennur2@unl.edu

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Method

The market assessment interviews were held with selected Kasuti artisan and traders from North Karnataka, India. Data was collected via in-depth interviews with 20 Kasuti artisan and 20 traders at Gadag, Hubli and 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. Qualitative analysis was used to determine the key success factors of Indian regional embroidery ‘Kasuti’ in international markets. A semi-structured interview was developed with open ended questions both for Kasuti artisans and retailers/traders. Tables 1 and 2 show the semi-structured questionnaire. The recorded interviews were translated, transcribed in English and entered into qualitative analysis software program NVivo10. Different themes emerged from the content analysis of the interview transcript. A deductive approach to the coding considered five dimensions that were identified in determining the key success factors of Indian regional embroidery ‘Kasuti’ in international markets. Later an inductive approach allowed the data to guide the occurrence of additional concepts and explanation for emerged themes. The five themes were 1) Customer specific designs and products. 2) Incorporating Global styles. 3) Working with exporters. 4) Participating in International fairs/bazars and 5) Online presence and social media marketing.

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).

An embroidery project on a sari takes about one month to complete depending on the richness of embroidery and the motifs. Other product like bag, folder, and greeting card takes 1-3 days to complete.

The interview 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 like scarf, home furnishings, greeting cards, invitations, folders, fashion accessories (bags, belts, shoes etc) 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.

1	Tell us where did you learn Kasuti?
2	Where do you seek inspiration for your Kasuti designs?
3	Is it embroidered only on Saree or other products? If yes what motivated you to take Kasuti to next level?
4	How many Kasuti projects do you complete within a week?
5	Tell us about the design process what skill sets are required.
6	Who offers you the projects?
7	Can you tell us about the supply chain of these products?
8	How much knowledge do you have about Kasuti consumers?
9	Can you tell us about experiences with making Kasuti for international consumers?
10	What is your age and income level?
11	Are you satisfied with the compensation?

Table 1: Represents semi-structured open-ended interview questions for Kasuti artisans.

1	Do you train Kasuti artisans?
2	Where do they seek inspiration for their Kasuti designs?
3	Is it embroidered only on Saree or other products? If yes what motivated them to take Kasuti to next level?
4	How many Kasuti projects do the artisans complete within a week?
5	Tell us about the design process what skill sets are required.
6	Who offers artisans the projects?
7	Can you tell us about the supply chain of these products?
8	How much knowledge do you have about Kasuti consumers?
9	Can you tell us about experiences with making Kasuti for international consumers?
10	Can you please describe the middlemen in the Kasuti products supply chain?
11	What are your Business strategies?
12	What is your age and income level?

Table 2: Represents semi-structured open-ended interview questions for Kasuti traders/retailers.

From the artisan's perspective

The artisans were women age between 20-55 years who preferred to work from home. The artisans indicated that the main motivation to work is having a freedom to be creative and also earn extra money to support their household. The artisans make very less amount than the traders. They are paid based on the project they under take. They would typically make between \$20-\$30 per 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 knowledge about marketing their products and lack of exposure to foreign markets. However, most of them knew that their kasuti work was sold abroad by the traders. Many artisans indicated that they like to embroidery on the smaller products like bag, mobile case, scarves etc. since it is easy and fast and they get paid more since these products sell in bigger cities and foreign markets.

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 and 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 and 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.

Reference

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