

# **MODERNIZING TRADITIONS: STANDARDIZING A RURAL HERITAGE CRAFT OF THE PANJA DARI MAKERS OF HARYANA**

**Shweta Sharma**

The author is HoD, Textile Design Department, NIIFT, Mohali

**Dr. Meeta Gawri**

The author is HoD, Fashion Marketing Management, NIIFT, Mohali

## **Abstract:**

The ‘Panja Dari’ or hand woven mats of the pre-Independence Punjab (currently comprising the areas of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh today) are a vibrant piece of its heritage that has been virtually hanging by a thread in the past few decades because of several reasons with not the least being lack of patronage. The colourful, very practical ‘dari’ had been in great demand in the days of yore and continues to be so among rural households even today. There are many uses of the quintessential ‘panja dari’. Rural socio economic life of the region has been dependent upon the village and cottage based even household based crafts. This craft is gradually dwindling in the villages today because there is a need to give it a new direction, new usage and a conversion identity that will make it compatible with the demands of the current years. The world stands at a crossroads of negating everything that leaves a carbon footprint and reclaiming all those practices that have made a connection with healthy environmentally conservative practices. This paper examines the recreation of a weaving story that can find tremendous usage acceptance among the ‘Green Brigade’ as also make a fashion statement on the front of home décor across homes in India and abroad. This would entail the process of training, skill building, capacity enhancement, design development under the mentorship of experts with a vision to making this local product domestically and globally. These are processes that can be taken up on mission mode in a directed manner.

**Key words:** Dari, industry, craft, heritage, patronage, colourful, reclaim, environment, household, crossroads.

## **Introduction**

This paper has been divided into two sections. Section – I is an account of the initial stages of the Self Help Group movement in Haryana while Section – II gives the overview of the state of the traditional crafts of the state with a special emphasis on the daris that are hand woven and have been a thriving part of the heritage of the State. It examines the possibilities of its resurrection in a more standardized, eco friendly and globally acceptable form.

## Section – I

In Haryana, SHGs are being promoted through the Women and Child Development Department. The Haryana Forest Department has promoted SHGs under the Haryana Community Forest Project as also the Integrated Natural Resource Management and Poverty Reduction programme. The NABARD and DRDA are also promoting SHGs under the Swarnjayati Gram Swarajgar Yojana or the SGSY which has now been converted to the National Rural Livelihoods Mission or the NRLM. The Mewat Development Agency or MDA is also promoting SHGs in the Mewat district.

### Strength of Self Help Groups (SHGs) Movement in Haryana

About a decade ago the total rural population in Haryana was 15868322 with the total number of rural households being 3159222 and the total number of BPL households being 858389. There are a number of microfinance schemes operational in the region namely the:

- (i) Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojna (SGRY)
- (ii) Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)
- (iii) District Rural Development Agency (DRDA)
- (iv) Mewat Area Development Project (MADP)
- (v) Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)

All these schemes are coordinated and nurtured through functionaries of a number of Non Government Organizations (NGOs).

Table 1 gives the progress of SHGs formation and the nurturing of SHGs over half a decade in Haryana.

**Table 1: Progress of SHGs in Haryana State**

Sr. No.	Years	Number of SHGs (In Lakhs)	Savings Amount (Rs. Lakhs)
1	2007-08	23570	1365.15
2	2008-09	33257	2547.93
3	2009-10	36762	10762.55
4	2010-11	35319	9920.45
5	2011-12	44184	3678.35
6	2012-13	42580	4030.70

**Source:** NABARD's Reports on Microfinance in India in various years (Compiled by Authors)

The SHG formation initiatives were at their peak during the five years enumerated in the Table no 2. These SHGs participated in these varied programmes. The following Table 2 is a depiction of the participation of various areas in the SHG movement.

**Table 2: District-wise Self Help Groups (SHGs) Credit linked Status of five years Upto 2013**

Sr. No.	Nam of the District	Disbursement Under SGSY			Disbursement Under SGSY		
		No. of SHGs	No. of Members	Since Inception of the Scheme	No. of SHGs	No. of Members	Since Inception of the Scheme
1	Ambala	848	8602	140481	260	2590	24026
2	Panchkula	636	6386	61155	165	1702	17634
3	Yamuna Nagar	1684	18074	347112	744	7708	22357
4	Kurukshetra	1557	16702	221611	25	302	7180
4	Kaithal	1500	15054	311785	8	80	290
5	Jind	949	9490	381658	446	4460	6490
6	Karnal	1163	11936	191303	286	3235	28897
7	Panipat	827	8270	158165	148	1510	18452
8	Sonipat	1841	20403	249207	781	8199	33045
9	Hisar	1025	10255	201933	296	2960	7895
10	Bhiwani	963	9714	315065	508	5932	40098
11	Fatehabad	1053	10815	144920	13	130	15656
12	Sirsa	1078	11024	130423	26	256	4637
13	Rohtak	427	4674	84432	215	2456	15334
14	Rewari	1065	11661	158645	635	6968	16923
15	Jhajjar	591	6461	124064	114	1276	18673
16	M.GARH	958	11296	132229	539	6059	38365
17	Gurgaon	467	5172	48012	1615	18779	174171
18	Faridabad	383	4775	35411	507	6632	39460
19	Mewat	927	8988	127600	4250	46558	301716
20	Palwal	505	4882	39700	798	8189	35300
	Total	20447	214634	3604911	12379	135981	866599

**Source:** LDMs (Compiled by Authors)

**SHGs under the Haryana Women’s Development Corporation (HWDC)**

The Haryana Women’s Development Corporation was started in 1982 under the name of the Haryana Economically Weaker Sections Kalyan Nigam Ltd. In 1987, it had, a women’s wing set up. In 1991, it was converted into the WDC which in turn was renamed as the HWDC. Under the aegis of the government the programme for Rural Women’s Development and Empowerment (Swa-Shakti) was implemented through the Women’s Development Council. It was assisted by the World Bank (WB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Government of India (GoI). The Project covered three districts, 23 development blocks and 643 villages. In this project a total of 1,550 SHGs were formed. These SHGs had 22,009 women members.

In the first decade of its functioning the HWDC had implemented a loaning scheme for women to set up their own enterprises. It was designated the Micro Credit Scheme. The progress made under the scheme is depicted in Table 3 which depicts the performance of the SHGs through the period 2000 to 2008.

**Table 3: Progress under the Loaning Scheme of the HWDC**

Sr. No.	Year	No. of Cases	Total Loans (in Lacs)
1	2000-01	881	217.36
2	2001-02	1634	422.22
3	2002-03	2010	545.77
4	2003-04	2021	580.77
5	2004-05	3808	1187.30
6	2005-06	8642	2603.54
7	2006-07	10332	3531.33
8	2007-08	5961	2070.34
9	Grand Total	29328	9089.16

**Source:** <http://www.HaryanaWomenDevelopmentCorporation.htm> (Compiled by Authors)

In 2011, a restructured scheme emerged which came to be called the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), and has subsequently been designated as “Aajeevika” literally meaning livelihoods. This scheme is currently being implemented in mission mode across the country.

The quality of SHGs has been graded as per rating norms on the basis of their performance several indicators have been evolved by international and nation bodies to

ascertain the viability of these groups of women. Table 4 gives a glimpse of the status of SHGs made in Haryana over a period of more than a decade from the year 2000 to 2013.

**Table 4: Grades and Economic Activities of SHGs in Haryana**

Sr. No.	Year	No. of SHGs that passed Grade – I	No. of SHGs that passed Grade – II	No. of SHGs that Took Up Economic Activities
1	1999-00	229	92	260
2	2000-01	642	181	171
3	2001-02	836	387	236
4	2002-03	1310	606	495
5	2003-04	1158	844	776
6	2004-05	1223	1050	1018
7	2005-06	1359	1197	1148
8	2006-07	1169	536	504
9	2007-08	1959	1619	2140
10	2008-09	2880	1796	2307
11	2009-10	2409	1124	836
12	2010-11	2581	1082	1595
13	2011-12	2278	824	1328
14	2012-13	2143	753	1247

**Source:** Annual Reports of Ministry of Rural Development, GoI

“The Self Help Group movement has flourished and spread out in India on account of the success of NABARD pilot project in 1992 and the main focus has been given to Self Help Group as a reliable instrument for women empowerment in the 9<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan” (Ghadge, 2014). It is “emerging as a cost effective mechanism for providing financial services to the ‘Unreached Poor’ (Shivakumar and Prabhakaran, 2012). This movement has helped rural women meet their immediate financial needs and has also strengthened their collective self help capacities. It has given a new lease o life to these poor,

marginalized, socio-economically deprived women and has consistently endeavoured in leading to their empowerment.

The overall performance of the SHGs in Haryana is shown in Table 5. It depicts the progress of the SHGs and the loans or bank linkage attempted by them across the period 1996 to 2013. The number of SHGs increased steadily as did the amount of loans taken by them from various banks.

**Table 5: Progress of SHGs under NABARD in Haryana**

Sr. No.	Year	Number of SHGs	Loan Amount
1	1996 - 97	7	-
2	1997 - 98	10	-
3	2000 - 01	537	15.57
4	2001 - 02	970	37.29
5	2002 - 03	1524	69.44
6	2003 - 04	2344	146.43
7	2004 - 05	3351	200.63
8	2005 - 06	9512	876.98
9	2006 - 07	17769	1864.72
10	2007 - 08	23570	2316.89
11	2008 - 09	33257	6383.91
12	2009 - 10	36762	4669.74
13	2010 -11	35319	6243.46
14	2011 - 12	44184	6198.93
15	2012 - 13	42580	5156.39

**Source:** SHG- Bank Linkage report, various years

**Note:** Numbers are Cumulative and Disbursement is in Rs. 10 Lakh Units

Many of these SHGs have also gone in for refinancing. This scheme is being expressively promoted and financed by a number of government organizations and NGOs besides Commercial banks, Cooperative banks and RRBs.

#### **Mewat Development Agency (MDA)**

Special mention must be made of the work being done in one of the toughest areas of work in Haryana. That is the Mewat area. To deliver social and economic justice to this

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largely backward and under-privileged area the Government of Haryana set up the Mewat Development Board (MDB) in 1980. It was later transformed in 1995 into the MDA or the Mewat Area Development Project (MADP) in collaboration with the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD). The objective was to improve the economic and social well-being of the Meo community through:

- (i) Promote gender self-reliance on a sustainable basis
- (ii) To broaden the range of economic opportunities available to the community.

During the period of the Mewat Area Development Project the SHG was seen as the strongest vehicle for bringing about self reliance, confidence and socio-economic empowerment of the women of this region. It was a very difficult task as the conservative mind set prevalent there was not conducive to their women taking any long lasting steps towards their own empowerment. For many of the families the motivators were required to make repetitive orientation sessions and mobilization initiatives before they were even allowed to meet the women. It was with the greatest level of difficulty that these women could be induced to form SHGs and adhere to the norms long enough to be introduced to the Income Generation Activities (IGAs) so that they could set up some skill based idea as their micro-enterprise. Table 6 shows the various agencies that are at work in promoting the movement of women empowerment through SHGs during the Financial Year ending 2013.

**Table 6: SHG-bank Linkage Agency-Wise Position in Haryana in Financial Year 2013 (Amount in Lakhs)**

Sr. No.	Name of Bank	Total Loans disburse during the year	
		No. of SHGs	Loan Disbursed
<b>I</b>	<b>Public Sector Commercial Banks</b>		
1	Allahabad Bank	5	40.0
2	Bank of Baroda	2	2
3	Bank of India	13	35.60
4	Canara Bank	17	29.42
5	Central Bank of India	35	91.67
6	Corporation Bank	0	0
7	Dena Bank	18	9

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Sr. No.	Name of Bank	Total Loans disburse during the year	
		No. of SHGs	Loan Disbursed
8	IDBI Bank	0	0
9	Indian Bank	26	6.5
10	Indian Overseas Bank	0	0
11	OBC Bank	105	77.64
12	Punjab National Bank	735	1705.7
13	Punjab and Sind Bank	91	91.27
14	State Bank of India	407	752
15	State Bank of Patiala	140	320.30
16	Syndicate Bank	48	51.55
17	UCO Bank	15	16.77
18	Union Bank of India	23	14.01
19	Vijaya Bank	2	5
	Total	1682	3248.44
<b>II</b>	<b>Private Sector Commercial Bank</b>		
1	HDFC Bank	0	0
	Total	0	0
<b>III</b>	<b>Regional Rural Banks</b>		
1	Gurgaon Grameen Bank	1445	2005.07
2	Haryana Grameen Bank	611	755.00
	Total	2056	2760.07
<b>IV</b>	<b>Co-operative Banks</b>		
1	Amabal DCCB	1	0.5
2	Bhiwani DCCB	0	0
3	Faridabad DCCB	0	0
4	Fatehabad DCCB	9	15.10



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Sr. No.	Name of Bank	Total Loans disburse during the year	
		No. of SHGs	Loan Disbursed
5	Gurgaon DCCB	0	0
6	Hissar DCCB	35	86.77
7	Jhajjar DCCB	0	0
8	Jind DCCB	0	0
9	Kaithal DCCB	0	0
10	Karnal DCCB	17	4.65
11	Mahendergarh DCCB	9	13.35
12	Panchkula DCCB	1	.25
13	Panipat DCCB	0	0
14	Rewari DCCB	20	44.90
15	Rohtak DCCB	2	0
16	Sirsa DCCB	35	21.90
17	Sonipat DCCB	0	0
18	Yamunanagar DCCB	0	0
	Total	127	187.2

**Source:** NABARD's Reports

It can be observed from the Table no 6 that Punhana had the maximum SHGs as compared to other blocks in Mewat district. It was followed by Firojpur Jhirka, Tauru, Nuh and Nagina.

The progress of the microfinance programme in Haryana has been painstakingly slow. It is currently changing momentum as it is taking many shapes as a wholistic microfinance movement promoted by various organizations and agencies alongwith a number. All programmes like SGSY / NRLM and SBLP of NABARD.

Many of them focused totally on BPL families while the MDA focused on women empowerment with appreciable results. The introduction of initiatives involving microfinance has had extremely positive impact on income and employment levels of the rural poor people especially the women in Haryana. There is, however, need for some

innovative policies/strategies and initiatives to be taken in this region regarding microfinance programmes for the betterment of their livelihood.

## **Section – II**

The dari has been the mainstay of every household of Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh – the erstwhile undivided Panjab region.

The hand-woven dari of this region is popularly known as the ‘panja dari’ and had an inner appeal for both rural and urban populations at one time. However, the past half a century has seen a steady decline in the usage and ultimately even the production of the dari. The properties of the dari are incomparable. Some of them can be listed as:

- (i) The earlier daris were tremendously eco-friendly as they were hand dyed in natural dyes.
- (ii) The yarn was spun from locally grown cotton and were fondly woven for the homestead, for the daughter’s dowry or even for close relatives.
- (iii) The dari was conducive for all environments and climates. It could be used in summer and winter.
- (iv) It was easy maintenance and could be hand washed and dried.
- (v) The dari was versatile in usage. It could be used for bedding and even as flooring
- (vi) It creates a colourful, brilliant element in simple homes.

With changed needs and the easy availability of cost effective and less labour intensive alternatives the dari gradually became lost and unsung.

### **A Case for Revival**

Remnants can now be seen only in parts of the village identity markers in the rural areas of Haryana and Punjab. In Haryana, however the skills and the instruments of dari construction can be seen sporadically in the villages even today. The craft of dari making is a practiced rural industry that can be revived easily to become an income generation activity for the rural women. The points favouring this revival are:

- (i) Changed lifestyles of the current urban as well as rural populations.
- (ii) Living spaces have become reduced substantially. Flats, studio apartments or one room tenements are being favoured because of reasons of security and maintenance.
- (iii) There is a quest for aesthetic décor that is low maintenance, pocket friendly and versatile. Instead of the heavy carpets of large open spaces the quaint vibrantly colourful hand-woven dari is an appropriate replacement.

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- (iv) The world is becoming increasingly environment friendly after having been assaulted by chemicals in all forms of living and lifestyles. Thus, there is a call of 'back to nature' to ensure a case of supporting the use of environmentally viable alternatives.
- (v) Ease of maintenance is an added inducement for the use of the dari. It is easily washable and low on maintenance. It can be even machine washed given its dimensions and weight.
- (vi) Versatile usage is an added plus point because on just one 'adda' or frame or even loom, the daris that can emerge are:
  - a) Full size dari of 5ft by 3ft
  - b) Longitudinally to form two long runners.
  - c) Horizontally to make two mats sized to form a play station for a child or can even be used as a prayer mat or a yoga mat.

There is a need, however, for giving the daris being made by our rural women a marked facelift and this is where the objectives of the intervention come through. There is a great need to define the standardization of this daris in terms of

- (i) Size
- (ii) Structure
- (iii) Construction
- (iv) Design Development
- (v) Texture
- (vi) Aesthetic Appeal
- (vii) Colour Palette
- (viii) Quality Control Measures

There is a requirement of expert interventions that can help standardized the upgradable skills of the rural women through making them consciously aware of the opportunity they hold in their hands to become a brand name in the craft of hand woven daris. The authors have chalked out a road map for the future to ensure that this intervention takes the form of a cluster reality where over 500 women at the initial stage can be inculcated into the design workshops planned in a phased manner. These major inputs have to be implemented in the form of trainings and skill upgradation provided to groups of women that could be under the framework of Self Help Groups (SHGs) or even Joint Activity Groups (JAGs) across at least one part of the State like the Ambala region. The intervention could then be scaled up and replicated across all parts of the state. The dari may well become a brand of Haryana's hardworking women. They may well take this activity from the level of leisure time activity to an income generation activity (IGA).

## **Conclusion**

The ‘Panja Dari’ or hand woven mats of the pre-Independence Punjab (currently comprising the areas of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh today) are a vibrant piece of its heritage that has been virtually hanging by a thread in the past few decades because of several reasons with not the least being lack of patronage. The colourful, very practical ‘dari’ had been in great demand in the days of yore and continues to be so among rural households even today. There are many uses of the quintessential ‘panja dari’. Rural socio economic life of the region has been dependent upon the village and cottage based even household based crafts. This craft is gradually dwindling in the villages today because there is a need to give it a new direction, new usage and a conversion identity that will make it compatible with the demands of the current years. The world stands at a crossroads of negating everything that leaves a carbon footprint and reclaiming all those practices that have made a connection with healthy environmentally conservative practices. This paper examines the recreation of a weaving story that can find tremendous usage acceptance among the ‘Green Brigade’ as also make a fashion statement on the front of home décor across homes in India and abroad. This would entail the process of training, skill building, capacity enhancement, design development under the mentorship of experts with a vision to making this local product domestically and globally. These are processes that can be taken up on mission mode in a directed manner.

It is proposed that this dwindling craft be taken up to bring the dari back into the fold of essential household items especially in terms of urban usage. It can be used as a yoga mat, a children’s play field and fun activity area marker, runner making a style statement in a corridor or lobby or even as a full dari that is useful flooring that adds taste and colour to a small living space. To make it internationally viable the authors have a ready project to launch the intervention. They have the expertise and the knowledge for the ‘production of standardized’ sound quality and vast aesthetic appeal. With the approval of NABARD and adequate government backing this could be a new beginning in the field of micro-enterprise development that can make a major contribution through domestic sales as well as exports. The vision is that the Haryana collective of micro-enterprises would be ready to take on a global market.

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