


A SMALL ACT OF REVOLT BY REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN IN THE HILLS OF UTTARAKHAND THAN TRANSFORMED INTO AN INSTITUTION OF GLORY FOR THE STATE


 Shrish Ukhalkar

 9 min

Equal employment opportunities for women has always been a matter of major national concern in India. And this concern is aggravated when we talk about the hills, especially the regions of Uttarakhand. Traditionally, women in the hills are not allowed to work except for household chores. The routine household work of a woman in the hills begins at 4 am and ends at 11 pm which involves farming, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the kids, etc. At best, a few go for MNREGA work. This kind of set up never allowed women to enjoy higher social status. They could not speak up for any social issue or voice their opinions, neither did they have any financial power in domestic matters. There was a need for a push through a few women who were better informed and could take the courageous initiative to step out of this mundane lifestyle.

So in 1998, a group of local women decided to come together and do something to bring this viscous shackle. With the help of a local NGO, they were able to get trained in spinning, carpet making and then weaving. Commanded by Munni Mehta from the village Matena and Munni Bisht from Balta village, the group started approaching other women, going door to door. It was very difficult for families to be convinced. They were worried that if the women of the housework half the day, how will the house run? Most of the families couldn't imagine their daughters, wives and daughters-in-law going to work from 10 to 5.

However, over time, the NGO helped the revolutionary women to convince more women from more villages and with the combined effort, they were able to get them under one roof as a weaving centre. As the numbers were growing there grew a need for financial support. Uttarakhand Government supported the initiative, however, there were more requirements than just funding. The local NGO could not take it forward after a point of time so they approached The Hans Foundation (THF). The Hans Foundation (THF) is a charitable organization, which has been working in 26 states across the country in the field of Livelihood, Disability, Education and Health. Later in December 2016, The Hans Foundation took the complete responsibility of the weaving units and the women artisans.

The Hans Foundation found support from the state government and collaborated with them developed a 5-year plan with the

Government of Uttarakhand to address and solve social issues of the state. The Hans Foundation and Government of Uttarakhand came together with one vision of taking the weaving art of Uttarakhand to the world. This collaboration saw the transformation of the women artisans group into a newly branded entity named Himadri Hans Handloom. The Hans Foundation trademarked the brand as 'Himadri Hans Handloom' 'Uttarakhand Women Weavers'. Under the Himadri Hans Handloom, The Hans Foundation

of Uttarakhand, in Almora, Kasar Devi Road, Ranikhet, Mukteshwar and their products are also available in Kausani, Dehradun, Nainital, and New Delhi. They have recently launched an e-commerce website through which products can be purchased from any part of the world. "www.hanshandlooms.in". Himadri Hans Handloom wishes to cater to more European countries and other markets like Australia, Japan, USA, since they are one of the biggest importers of handmade clothes from India. They are currently approaching



has broadened its mission. They now plan to connect and empower 5000 existing women weavers of the state and create a unique identity of Uttarakhand for its handmade art and craft.

Himadri Hans Handloom works on Wool and Natural Fibres. The journey of a product starts from raw material, which then goes to the spinning unit, where the material is hand spun into a finer yarn. The yarn goes for natural dyeing or as per the requirement of a buyer. As per the designer's instructions, the yarn goes to warping drum according to the design and colour combinations. From there the yarn goes to the loom, and each weaver has a helper, both of them do the drafting and the weavers start hand weaving of the products. Production manager supervises the overall process. From the loom, the product goes for a Quality check. After washing and ironing, a final Quality Check is done. The product is finally shipped to buyers or sent to retail outlets.

Himadri Hans Handloom currently has retail outlets in Kumaon region



designer brands, boutiques, designers who wish to work sustainably and ethically. With their new collection in hemp, nettle, silk, cotton and bamboo yarn they are trying to cover the home and office-furnishing category with natural fibres.

The Foundation has had a fair bit of struggles to reach to the scale they are today. It was difficult to find the right market for handmade products from their weavers. The competition grew especially from power looms and machines, but the foundation stuck to their mission of empowering the women artisans, sustainably and ethically. To address the questions of authenticity of fabrics in consumer's minds, the foundations applied and received well-known certifications like Handloom Mark, Craftmark and Fair Trade, which gives an assurance to buyers.

The Foundation currently has 189 artisans, working at two centres in Almora, 95% of who are women. What started as a small act of revolt by revolutionary women in the hills has now transformed into an institution of glory for the state of Uttarakhand. As a community, they urge every citizen of India to purchase and empower the Indian craft sector which is slowly deteriorating.

Want to congratulate, contribute or collaborate with story subject? Please click the contact button to get in touch with them.


CONTACT