

Women empowerment, one knot at a time!

With entrepreneurship reaching the doorsteps of some of India's women weavers, they can work their own hours, even feeding a baby as they work or singing folk songs as they knot the rows that result in beautiful rugs



The women also have an exclusive range dedicated to their creativity, called Artisan Originals.

help with chores in the morning so she gets time to apply makeup. “I tell him I have to go out and bring back money for the house, so he should help with the kids,” she declares.



Shanti Bai has done well for herself. A victim of an abusive marriage, she now heads a team of women who work on the looms that she has set up in her home. A goat is tethered nearby, while a bangle-seller stops by to sell trinkets. As the women take a break and start picking earrings and bangles, it's obvious how empowered they feel. One of them has dropped in even though it's her free day, and is using sketch pens to create patterns on a card, which may accompany a rug to a customer, for that personal touch. As they squat at the loom, tying knots in the threads, one can't help but notice their flat abs. Our not so flat abs haven't gone unnoticed either, as one 'Bunkar Sakhi', promoted as a surveyor, shares fitness tips. Smartly dressed with a men's shirt over her sari, she tells us how just a few years ago, she stayed behind a veil or “ghoongat”, too shy to engage in conversation. “I even understand a few words of English now,” she remarks. With her newfound confidence, she now visits several looms in the village, taking stock of the work and correcting any errors she finds in the knotting.

Jaipur Rugs, along with brands such as Hands and Cocoon, accounts for 35 per cent of global exports from India to the hand-knotted rugs industry. Working directly with weavers, the company has on its rolls 40,000 artisans spread across five states in India with an average production of approximately 60,000 square feet per month of hand-knotted rugs.

The initiative has empowered the women in more ways than one. Mentored by the chief designer Kavita Chaudhary, the youngest daughter of owner Nand Kishore Chaudhary, the women also have an exclusive range dedicated to their creativity, called Artisan Originals. Sajana Devi, a cancer survivor, believed each knot represented her disease as she created a floral tapestry, inspired by the gardens of the hospitals she visited for treatment, titled 'Sona-Bagicha'. A young Bugali, who started weaving to support her family, titled her rug 'Meri Duniya', with a pattern at the bottom capturing the trunk in which she stores her jewellery. In another rug, titled 'Mera Lehariya', Bugali took inspiration from the popular Shakkarpara snack, creating stripes surrounded by flowers and leaves. Designer Kavita Chaudhary's collection 'Unstring', too, was awarded as Best Modern Collection 2017 at the Carpet Design Awards, held at Domotex in Hannover, Germany.

With entrepreneurship reaching the doorsteps of these women, they can work their own hours, even feeding a baby as they work or singing folk songs as they knot the rows that result in beautiful rugs. But more than anything, it's the financial independence that gives them a spring in their steps!

