

# Workshop relevance in sustaining Craft Practice: A Case Study on Mashru Weaving of Kutch

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**Abstract**—Space plays a crucial role in nurturing creativity. In handloom weaving, ease, quality, and efficiency of work is significantly influenced by the nature of workplace as various pre- and post-preparatory processes are integral to the overall weaving process. However, each process requires specific space setting. Being in that live-work space, artisans are in constant interaction with their space, which unknowingly shapes their thought processes and creative expression. The entire process of weaving involves several hands of experts where the associated pre- and post-loom processes often becomes a vital socializing activity for artisans; fostering a vibrant atmosphere where music, dance, gossip, food and community life can thrive. Handloom weaving typically takes place in a cottage setup, providing a conducive learning environment for the weaver's children. Through observation and hands-on experience, their children learn the intricacies of weaving and allied processes at an early age. These facets associated with space transform workshop into a more meaningful, multifunctional dynamic space, making it a living testament to tangible heritage. This study was done to understand the role and need of traditional workshops/spaces for artisans. For this study, two weavers specializing in Mashru weaving from the Kutch region in Gujarat were selected: one from Bhujodi and the other from Don Village. Data for this exploratory study were collected through participant observation and interview. Mashru weaving was selected for this study owing to its status as a languishing craft, highlighting the need for research to sustain this cultural practice. The study majorly focused upon relevance of workshop in terms of value of interconnectedness of home and workshop to embark creative endeavor, importance of workshop in weaver's home for sustainability of craft community and in building equality, the cultural value of workshop and its association with craft. This study can be helpful in spreading awareness about need of traditional workshops and its role in motivating next generation in inheriting traditional occupation strengthening &

sustaining local resources & wisdom, and in overall development of craft communities to boost creative economy.

**Index Terms**—Mashru weaving, craft practice, textile heritage, Space, workshop, Creativity, Socialization, sustainability.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Workshops in house hold settings are traditional place of practice, occupation, and education for an artisan across the lifespan. Artisans consider their workshop as place of worship and their skill not as the accumulated skill of ages, but as originating in the divine skill of Vishwakarma. For a traditional Indian craftsman, crafts and worship have a symbiotic relationship (Coomaraswamy, 1909). Viewing it from shallow perspectives is not enough to understand its nuanced impact. It needs multifarious approach. Workshops are live place of a living tradition that has several connotations attached to it. In an elaborated fashion, it is traditional home-schooling system for artisan's children; a place of meditation and worship for artisans where their aspiration turns true in form of product. The significance of space or workshop in craft practice is often underestimated although it is a vital component of traditional craftsmanship. This study was undertaken to bring attention to the need of preserving traditional spaces to sustain cultural heritage and support artisan communities. While pursuing my Ph.D. in handloom craft, I experienced that workshop is very crucial element in weaver's life that carries cultural, social and economic importance and has the aptitude to improve their living condition. To conduct this study Mashru weaving of Kutch of Gujarat was taken as case. Mashru is a vibrant-multi

coloured handwoven mixed fabric of silk and cotton in satin weave where silk lies in warp and cotton in weft. This craft exemplifies the intricate interplay between cultural heritage and spatial environments. The term Mashru, in Arabic means “permitted” (Ali, 1900) and in Sanskrit means “mixed” (Kacker, 1994). This fabric emerged as a unique solution to a religiousconundrum and as remedy for the scorching climate of arid regions. According to Muslim ceremonial law, wearing silk was forbidden, to navigate this restriction, Mashru fabric was ingeniously crafted with silk on the outer surface and cotton on the inner side, ensuring that silk did not touch the skin directly. This innovative combination, symbolizing the concept of "mixed" in Sanskrit, became distinctly prized in the arid parts of India. Its fame increased not only due to its cooling features but also due to its vibrant, colorful bands that adds a striking visual appeal to the place devoid of colors in nature. This fabric, thus, became a reflection to cultural innovation, aesthetic elegance and regional necessity (Kumari, 2021). In fact, the role of surroundings can be observed the origin of Mashru and its design language.

Ssurrounding space gives hidden insight for creative work. Now a days, lot of emphasis is given on craft studies in schools and higher education institutions. Traditional work-live setups provide good opportunity to students to closely observe, experience and learn craft and associated sensibilities. The vernacular aesthetics of these places has attribute to ignites mind of craft lovers, students, and enthusiasts who comes to understand and experience craft closely. This often leads to the possibility of co-creation with artisans. Additionally, it offersa place of serenity to outsiders away from the hustle of everyday life. That is why we also see upsurge in craft tourism.

Decline in traditional setting of workshop is a matter of concern for craft. Workshop helps in shaping social behaviour, attitude, and diverse socio-spatial practices which foster creative thinking, inclusive design, community building, idea sharing as well as versatile space usage. The role of physical space in craft practice is an often overlooked yet crucial aspect of traditional craftsmanship. This study was undertaken to emphasize the need to preserve these traditional spaces to sustain cultural heritage and

support artisan communities. This led to requirement of comprehensive study that how spatial understandings are shaped in a spatial planning framework that includes craftsmen. The aim of this paper was to gather knowledge about role of home cum workshop (work-live) in traditional weaving and to understand the relationships between workshop and social behaviour of artisans in order to recognize judicious employ of space for socially sustainable outcomes. Hence, the objective of the study were to explore the significance of workshop location in relation to the interconnectedness of home and workshop spaces and their impact on creative processes, to examine the role of having a workshop within a weaver's home in promoting the sustainability of craft communities and fostering equality, to investigate the cultural value of workshops and their intrinsic association with craft practices and to provide insights that can inform effective spatial planning, strengthen local resources, and support the sustainable development of craft communities.

The study initiated with the exploration of relationship between craft and space, particularly role of space in creative activity. How does it differ based on nature of work, socioeconomic status, age, gender. Why spatial arrangement is needed to optimize space utilization. Plücker & Beghetto, (2004) has rightly said that “Creativity is the interaction among aptitude, process, and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context”. From this reference we can very well understand the importance of environment (both natural and manmade environment) in context of weaving as it is a creative activity. The variation in craftsmanship is evident based on regional distinctions. However, not just the regional differences but the existing physical space or the nature of activities carried out in the place becomes equally important to shape that craft. In this context, Caves (2004) has stated that Spatial planning should not just focus on land use planning, or the design of the physical form of cities or regions, but also should address the more intricate subjects of the spatial connection of activities like employment, homes and leisure uses. This view pointcan be observed well implemented in traditional places. Weaver’s workshop cum home is such a place where there is

deep inter-relatedness among collective spatial practices and the practice of craft. Lot of tangible and intangibles associated with spatial practice is being shared. Thus, individual, and collective work of varied nature aiming towards a common objective elevates the usefulness of the associated space. The execution of different processes like dyeing of yarns, spinning, warp preparation, weaving etc. being done in same work-live space is a good example in this context. Understanding experiential need of the craft practice is important to sustain the need of traditional, indigenous workplaces.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed an exploratory research design to understand the significance of physical workspace in influencing artisan's creativity, income generation, intergenerational learning, sustainability of craft community, building equality, and in maintaining the cultural value of workshop. Here, data were collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews in order to enable an in-depth understanding of everyday practices and lived experiences of artisans. Mashru artisans were identified using snowball sampling techniques. Two artisan's workshops were considered for the study, one from Don and other from Bhujodi village of Kutch.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study have been discussed under following heads.

The value of interconnection of home & workshop embarks creative endeavour: Artisan's work cannot be bound to specified tools and techniques only, furthermore, it is deeply impacted by the surroundings as well. A true craft either as product or experience can be derived from a multifaceted approach. The interdependence of different communities, processes, collaborative effort of family members provides its real essence. Hence, to achieve this, it is crucial to integrate entire space of the house in harmony to nature of work. This can be observed in traditional work-spaces. The other observation found during the study was that when we see an artisan's workshop then we can witness other crafts also in that area. Like in Bhuj, we can see mud

work in weaver's home which has aesthetic as well as ritualistic purpose. Now, here we can also see the similarities of motifs in mud work as well as woven crafts of the place like Dhabla, Kharad, Camel hair or Mashru weaving. This shows how space influences craft, one construct of the space influences other one. Nothing can be created in isolation. The spark of idea is influenced by our observation that later contour our creative expression. Usually, decoration of the home using different crafts are mainly carried out by women folk. This activity serves as a great means of rejuvenation and bonding with family members and community people. So, shared usage of workshop or any other corner of the home creates a feel of kinship in working together while experiencing creative action in the process of shared uses of objects and places.

The reflection of harmonious relationship between the weaver and their immediate space can be observed during the weaving process where motifs inspired from surrounding gets ingrained in fabric. Though the outcome and inspiration is different in terms of material but the essence of structure and creative expression relates them. Craftsperson's very approach of practicing weaving in synchrony with space can be experienced as immersive, expressive, and radical. This nonverbal, constant, and unconscious interaction with space can be well observed in traditional set up of workshops. This intuitive process makes the outcome creative and appealing. Sometimes, certain inspiration also sparks experimentation. Overall, it is good for unconscious, interdisciplinary collaboration and learning.

The importance of weaving in home ecology for sustainability of communities and building equality Weaving as creative practice is also a livelihood sustaining skill. Its vocational aspect is relevant due to its nature of employability. Textile industry is one of the largest employments generating sector in our country. The informal home-based training is necessary for sustaining the indigenous communities. An optimal workshop can encourage and sustain learning practice with fulfilling experience which is very much important for informal training. In fig. 1, the child observing Mashru fabric shows the informal learning happening through daily life chores. This has been possible due to placement of weaving workshop within artisan's home. In case of Bhojrajibhai, the weaving workshop is in his home's

outer courtyard as seen in fig. 2 and 3 where weaving and allied tasks are conducted. In fig.3 it can be seen that in Babubhai Manodia's home there is a separate shade at the centre of home to conduct weaving and allied processes.



Fig.1 Child observing Mashru fabric in home of Bhojrajbhai



Fig.2 Bhojrajbhai with his loom in his courtyard, Mashru weaver from Don village of Kutch



Fig.3 Rach making setup in the courtyard of Bhojrajbhai's home



Fig.3 Weaving workshop shade in Babubhai Manodia's home, a Mashru weaver from Bhujodi village of Kutch

This kind of setting allows involvement of women in the work as seen in fig. 4 as well as next generation learning as seen in fig.5.



Fig.4 Bhojrajbhai's wife involved in bobbin winding



Fig.5 Babubhai's daughter doing warp preparation

Interconnectedness of home can help in blending inquisitiveness in respect of nature or other objects or process of immediate surroundings. This further help in refining work quality, aesthetics and embody work with depth and wholeness technically, spiritually, and socially. "The enduring value of a craft as a practice of creation as well as community is illuminated as a framework for our individual human growth and humanitarian aim" (Weida, 2021).

The cultural value of workshop and its association with craft

Traditional textiles of any region represent the culture of that region. These products possess both economic and cultural value, providing the newer generation with opportunities to earn while sustaining their cultural heritage. These traditional practices remain alive largely because they are home-based, where workshops and the overall home environment play a crucial role in passing knowledge, skills, and techniques from one generation to the next.

Weaving is a complex process that requires hard work, patience, persistence, and experience. The

availability of a workshop in the immediate vicinity provides significant opportunities for constant conscious and unconscious learning for the young generation of the family. Learning while playing, talking, and engaging in other activities within the home is of utmost importance. According to UNESCO (2010), the social and economic value of transmitting this knowledge is relevant for community groups. Therefore, weaving or any craft practice can be considered a process of cultural value where workshops play a crucial role. It has been observed that a decline in workshops has also led to a decline in the craft and upsurge in downmarket products.

Weaving is a form of meditation where creating fabric is an outcome of patience, thoroughness, and concentration. A thriving workshop is needed to sustain the craft while generating livelihood, which in turn can define living conditions. Indigenous workshops also help recreate a sense of the past in the present by producing specific aesthetic that have a long history. They evoke a sense of pride and identity, connecting individuals to a certain place. Overall, maintaining a feeling of identity and continuity is essential for groups with common beliefs, histories, experiences, work-styles, memories, and identities.

#### Impact of Quality of Place over Craft Community

Manzini (2009) indicated that success of a craft product depends on place and community to which they are associated. Communities associated with traditional products that transcends spirit and history of a place and community to the user needs to be thriving, alive and of high quality in order to ensure good quality in their products. He further added that “double link needs to be established between the place, the community and the product: the quality of the place and of the community is a decisive element for a product’s success; vice versa, the success of a product, to be long term, needs to favor the qualitative regeneration of the place and community of origin. In a few words, the products of controlled origin require places and communities of guaranteed quality”. A thriving environment supports in sustaining interest of weavers, interpreting and transforming their skills for income generation.

Role of space in symbiotic integration of production process

A quality product bank on symbiotic integration of various pre and post loom production process. It facilitates effective and efficient production process at every stage leading to improved product quality. Though the varied stages of production process are different but their effective connection gives scope of economy in production. Symbiotic production process integration also helps in strengthening product categorization based on weight, width, techniques, end use and scope of product innovation. It can be understood through the finishing of stole observed at Babubhai,s home as seen in fig.6 which was similar to finishing of Kutch shawls.



Fig.6 Mashru fabric stole from Babubhai Manodia

In Bhujodi, the surrounding space has other woven craft artisans. Due to this, the Mashru artisan’s product shares few similarities with other existing craft. This also led to design innovation in weaving and its variety. To achieve an effective symbiotic integration, it is very crucial that each process should be appropriated, adequately improved and rediscovered if lost with time. Like, several production techniques - extra weft, ikat that were extensively used in Mashru needs to be rediscovered and appropriated. So, if we focus on these aspects, it can produce new value to the craft.

#### Call of new opportunities through space

Space is a very valuable resource to welcome project-based learning/co-creation and craft tourism. Several education institutes and designers collaborate with artisans for new product development. Many a times, it enables their stay, visit to craft workshops as seen in. A home-based workshop offers home kind feel to



visitor that facilitates rapport building, comfortable interaction as seen in fig. 7.



Fig.7 Researcher with Bhojrajbhai's family

This facilitates the easy transmission of knowledge and supports the dissemination of craft practices, while contributing to the economic and social development of both the craft and the artisan community. This further help in strengthening bottom stratum of the society by pursuance of inclusive, equitable, sustainable growth and development. United Nations/UNDP/UNESCO (2013) indicated that culture is 'driver and enabler' of economic, social and environmental development. In this regard, role of textiles becomes very crucial as it is a major entity of creative economy being the 2nd largest employment generator.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the spatial construct significantly influences the efficiency of weaving, next generation learning, creativity, product outcomes, family involvement, sustainability of the craft and overall creative outcomes. Additionally, the socio-cultural landscape has a substantial impact on the practice, preservation and continuity of the craft. The findings emphasize the need of understanding and preserving traditional craft spaces to support the sustainability of this unique cultural heritage.

In today's time, change in the lifestyle of people and shift of people from rural to urban or from urban to super urban places have impacted traditional textiles a lot. These kinds of studies are needed to address the importance of traditional workshop or spaces to sustain these traditional practices. Workshop is as integral part of weaver's life and their home where

knowledge is shared within family members internally and externally with designers, students, and craft enthusiasts. The multitasking of space for weaving related process as well as household task embark interest in their next generation, innovation for self, community, and society. Initiative with perspective and prospective vision is needed to revive, revamp and re-establish traditional spatial ecosystem that may help in reaching younger generation and in sustaining their interest towards their rich cultural heritage of craft.

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