

Natural Dye: A Journey towards Craft Conservation and Economic security

URMUL Natural Dye Cluster, Rajasthan



Natural dyeing in Bikaner district of Rajasthan dates back to early 1990s when villages around the harsh desert of Thar got hit by a major drought creating a surge towards livelihood generation activities. The Meghwal community of Phalodi and Pokaran, knew weaving and spinning wool whereas the migrant communities of Bahawalpur and Sindh especially women residing near the Indo-Pak border were well versed with traditional hand embroidery known as Khasida.

Naseem Banoshafi was in class 11th when she first received natural dyeing and embroidery training from URMUL as part of the 'Income Generation Programmes' (IGP) started in Bajju region as this was seen as an opportunity for the women to sustain their livelihood. She practiced the craft regularly and often visited villages with a master trainer to train other women. She would show the women sample designs made by her, gave visual demonstration on natural dyeing and emphasize on the income she generated from pursuing this craft that helped in financially supporting her family. *She recalls the time when men and the elderly wouldn't allow women to go out and work but now it gives her immense happiness when women learn the craft from her, continue to practice it and then teach it to more women.* The real change for her was when, earlier she had to take her samples to the market and sell her produce; but with time as people got to know about her work, they started coming directly to her house to buy her produce. Her parents have been a constant source of support and motivation right from the beginning. Today, she is a master trainer at URMUL and her work motivates many young girls and women in her community to step out of the social barriers.



Figure 1 Ms. Naseem giving hands-on training on Natural Dye to women artisans

IMEDF identified a Natural Dye Cluster in Bikaner under SFURTI, with an aim to skill more and more women, introduce regular design interventions and preserve the traditional technique of natural dyeing by making sustainable use of water and natural colors. Today it has proudly incorporated 650 artisans of the region in the cluster out of which 600 are women. Embroidery and natural dyeing which earlier used to be part of the women's *wedding trousseau made during their* leisure time, has eventually translated into a source of generating income for the migrant communities of Rajasthan.

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