

Kantha Stitch as Indigenous Ecological Knowledge: Women-Led Regenerative Tourism and Rights of Nature in West Bengal

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Abstract

The present study examines Kantha embroidery in West Bengal as a form of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK), moving beyond its traditional definition as a craft-based livelihood activity. Using a two-stage qualitative design, the study integrates document analysis of policy frameworks and institutional initiatives with semi-structured interviews conducted with intermediaries who work closely with artisan communities in Birbhum and Bolpur. The findings show that Kantha embodies material reuse, intergenerational knowledge exchange, and everyday ecological ethics. Rather than following high-volume tourism models, artisans and facilitators prefer slower, community-based forms of engagement that protect cultural continuity and environmental sensitivity. The paper also situates Kantha within emerging discourses on the Rights of Nature through a complementary perspective on the rights of craft, arguing that craft traditions should be recognized as socio-ecological systems rather than as market commodities. In doing so, the paper positions women artisans as dynamic custodians of ecological knowledge and contributes to current discussions in sustainable tourism, feminist environmentalism, and cultural policy. The policy implications are aligned with service governance and with SDG 5, SDG 11, and SDG 12.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Smart Governance; Climate-Resilient Tourism; Data-Driven Policy; Sustainable Tourism; Adaptive Governance.

1.0 Introduction

Kantha stitch has long been associated with domestic craft traditions in West Bengal, often construed as a form of textile reuse practiced within rural households. Quilts, covers and ritual textiles are sewn out of layers of worn saris and fabrics, as both a motivating need and an aesthetic expression (Saha, 2023; Kumari et al., 2024). Although the practice is often placed within discourses of handicraft or informal livelihood, such framing can understate the knowledge systems embedded within it.

In essence, Kantha represents a set of practices based on material conservation, intergenerational education, and ecological awareness in everyday life. Reusing textiles is more than just an economic approach but a component of a larger cultural rationale in which waste is reduced and things continue through transformation (Agrawal & Sharan, 2018). The patterns stitched on Kantha are significantly shaped by surrounding environments, flora, fauna, and symbolism that suggest deep interconnections between lived experience and creative expression (Nag, 2025). These details place Kantha within a wider range of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK), where sustainability is practiced through routine activities rather than externally imposed interventions (Joshi, 2021; Ens et al., 2021).

Craft traditions such as Kantha, although valued for their economic potential, become vulnerable when they are framed only through policy and market systems. In most cases this translates to an ornamental treatment or income generation, export value or tourist attraction, and ecological and cultural considerations are often only partially considered (Dhar et al., 2024; Tang & Xu, 2023). These practices risk alienating the craft from its original context and introducing standardization, loss of meaning and unequal distribution of benefits amongst the artisans (Ghose & Ali, 2023).

Along with these trends, greater appreciation has been given to the presence of Indigenous knowledge systems in environmental governance, especially concerning discussions on the Rights of Nature. These views challenge extractive models of development by emphasizing relational understandings among humans, culture, and the natural world (Mustonen et al., 2022). Placing Kantha within this emerging discourse offers a way to reconsider craft practices as more than merely economic resources.

This paper builds on this viewpoint by analyzing Kantha embroidery as a manifestation of IEK in rural West Bengal. The study focuses on the socio-economic contexts through which knowledge is transmitted, adapted, and negotiated (Palit & Debnath, 2022; Roy & Sharma, 2019). It also weighs the reasons behind tourism and market expansion affecting the practice, and

It also examines whether alternative community-based models can produce better outcomes for both livelihoods and ecological values.

By combining insights from sustainable tourism, feminist environmental thinking, and cultural policy, the paper contributes further insight into how the knowledge systems of people in a particular area can be better integrated to enhance development. The study views Kantha as a dynamic practice that continuously creates and is created by the communities that keep it alive and vibrant.

2.0 Research Focus and Objectives

This paper brings Kantha embroidery into the field of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK), specifically discussing how this practice can be viewed as a repurposing practice or a material reuse practice. Going beyond its viewing as a craft or livelihood activity, the study examines how Kantha can be regarded as a socio-ecological system that is influenced by the women artisans in rural West Bengal.

The research also takes into account the influence of such practices by tourism and systemic integration, especially in reference to commodification and standardization of practices as well as the change of meanings. By doing this, it is involved in exploring new rights-based approaches so as to understand the possibility of recognising craft traditions such as Kantha within a wider set of environmental and cultural governance practices. The following are the most important goals:

- To explore Kantha as a form of indigenous ecological knowledge.

- To evaluate the contribution that women artisans made to maintaining and passing this knowledge down.
- To determine how tourism and market influences affect the practice.
- To enquire into how the rights-based approaches come into play in the recognition of craft as a socio-ecological system.

3.0 Research Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative research design in its attempt to evaluate Kantha embroidery as Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) among rural communities in West Bengal. The methodology is exploratory in nature in its attempts to know how the ecological values, cultural practices, and skills of livelihood are incorporated in regular craft production.

A two-phase research design was used. In phase one, secondary data were collected and analyzed using various sources, which included government policy documents, reports provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and online platforms that have been involved in promoting and marketing of Kantha products. The stage helped in laying the institutional and policy foundation for Kantha, particularly in the field of sustainability, rural development and tourism.

The second stage involved primary data collection through semi-structured telephone interviews. Ten participants were selected by purposive sampling to represent their involvement with Kantha-producing communities. The sample was based on the NGO facilitators, self-help group (SHG) leaders and market intermediaries, which play an important role connecting the rural artisans with the urban and international markets. The research was more specifically on cluster production, which is the active practice of Kantha production of Birbhum and Bolpur.

Verbal consent was obtained from the participants before an interview was conducted, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured. The interviews were done in a flexible format whereby the participants were able to discuss their experiences and perspectives in their own words, while ensuring that important themes of relevance to the study were covered. Data obtained were transcribed and analyzed by the inductive thematic method. A manual coding process was used to help identify any recurring patterns and/or meanings within the answers. Thematic areas, which were identified as a result of the analysis, comprised ecological ethics, the practice of material reuse, gendered aspects of craft production, livelihood practice, and the consequence of commercialization through tourism. The analysis continued to be based on the participant stories to preserve the context with depth and reduce researcher bias in the research.

In analyzing the data, the research uses a multidisciplinary analytic lens, which incorporates the perspectives of gender studies, sustainability discourse, and cultural economy. This will enable a more

nuanced perspective of Kantha as a means of livelihood, as well as a knowledge system based on social, ecological, and economic processes.

4.0 Kantha as Indigenous Ecological Knowledge

4.1 Kantha as Ecological and Cultural Knowledge

Reflective of a locally incorporated system of ecological knowledge in the West Bengal weave as practiced by rural women is Kantha embroidery. Old discarded cotton saris and dhotis are reused by being overlaid, cross-stitched into a quilt or a household textile, illustrating a kind of reuse that goes back further than the modern discourse of sustainability (Kumari et al., 2024; Saha, 2023). It is not simply functional but rather a practical method towards conservation of resources whereby instead of disposing of the materials, the materials are stretched in usage.

These practices are consistent with more general conceptualisations of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) in which environmental responsibility is not seen as an intervention per se (Joshi, 2021; Ens et al., 2021). Stitching, when considering Kantha, constitutes an extension of knowledge across the generations, often in rather informal domestic settings. Women acquire techniques, patterns, and meaning through observation and participation, and through this method, both skill and values relating to the skill are maintained over time (Agrawal & Sharan, 2018).

Along with its material aspect, Kantha also serves as a means of cultural expression. The patterns sewn into the cloth system (trees, animals, geometric shapes, and so forth) often correspond to the objects in the immediate surroundings and in daily life (Nag, 2025). These patterns are not normalised but fluctuate across regions and households, suggesting a strong connection between the experience of living and the creation of creative output. In this respect, Kantha can be perceived as a type of embodied knowledge, in which ecological knowledge is imprinted in the artistic practice.

4.2 Symbolism, Spirituality, and Craft Pedagogy

These symbolic components that can be observed in Kantha textiles also strengthen the previously stated fact: Kantha can be considered connected to the ecological and cultural knowledge systems as well. Symbols such as the lotus, birds or the tree of life are generally known as signs of nature's balance, continuity and interconnectedness (Bardhan & Bhattacharya, 2022). While each of these interpretations may change or differ depending on the context, they all suggest a worldview that sees a relationship between human life and the natural environment.

The relational and participatory approach to learning too has an impact on the making of Kantha. This learning is typically between family members or within a community, with the younger ones learning through participation in activities by sharing experiences without formal education (Brubacher et al., 2021). The involvement in such teaching allows not only for the maintenance of the

technical skills but also for the maintenance of the cultural content so that this practice remains flexible and maintains its values.

Notably, these forms of learning and production are in contrast to the industrial strategies, which value swiftness and standardization. The manufacturing of kantha takes time, and thus the day depends on the supply of raw materials and the frequency of day-to-day life. This reduced speed represents a different emphasis on production where value is estimated based on durability, care, and continuity and not on volume or efficiency (Sethi, 2012).

Collectively, these attributes establish Kantha as a tradition that transcends the craft tradition. It is one of the systems where the understanding of the ecology, the expression of the culture, and the transmission of knowledge are tightly interwoven. By identifying Kantha as part of any Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, it becomes possible to think more broadly about how sustainability could be integrated into the day-to-day practice.

5.0 Women Artisans as Custodians of Rights of Nature

5.1 Feminist Environmentalism and Craft Stewardship

Kantha embroidery is closely linked to the daily activities of women in rural areas of West Bengal, where production, care and resource utilisation are interwoven in the daily life of women. An act of reusing used textiles into functional and aesthetic products reflects a type of environmental decision-making, which is applied in everyday practice rather than explicitly and formally structured environmental planning (Saha, 2023; Agrawal & Sharan, 2018). In this scenario, women artisans participate in types of stewardship which follow principles of continuity, restraint, and material sensitivity.

Related practices can be found in the Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK), a body of discussion in which environmental responsibility is understood through lived relations with resources and place (Ens et al., 2021). Kantha, as a practice, does not distance ecological concern from livelihood but instead incorporates reuse, memory and utility as a single process. The experience one would require to undertake this work is taught informally and includes intergenerational learning, which strengthens the skill and ecological consciousness among the community structures (Nag, 2025).

Even though these contributions have not been acknowledged in the formal level of environmental governance, they agree with the emergent thinking that decries the conventional focus on knowledge systems of sustainability as a highly formalised and generalised form (Mustonen et al., 2022). By placing Kantha in this context, women artisans could be seen not just as manufacturers but as actors who ensure a good ecological balance through their daily practice.

5.2 Collective Agency and Livelihood Structures

The organization of women artisans into a self-help group (SHG) and community-based cluster in regions such as Birbhum and Bolpur has helped in new forms of collective agency. These groups provide access to markets, coordinate production and support the exchange of knowledge, and also reinforce the role of decision-making at the community level (Palit & Debnath, 2022). These units do not always play an active role as a production unit but are often a space of the overlap of economic, cultural and ecological problems.

Their involvement in these networks has seen women connect with wider value chains but still have some aspects of local control over their labour. Simultaneously, the increase of market linkages promulgates the pressure that is associated with standardization and volume and therefore can be at odds with a more process-driven and slower nature of Kantha production. According to the existing research, it is clear that, although craft-based livelihoods may provide more income opportunities, there is a risk that they will also exclude artisans in an unequal distribution of the market (Roy & Sharma, 2019; Dhar et al., 2024).

In this context, collective organization is very critical in the negotiation of these tensions. Through keeping to collective norms in regard to production and design, the artisan groups help in maintaining the integrity of the practice in the face of changing economic conditions.

5.3 Artisan Perspectives and Lived Experience

Examples of how women artisans perceive their work beyond the economic principles of the time are presented. In their descriptions, the participants have continuously defined Kantha as the means through which individual histories, family relations and events in localities are articulated. The process of stitching was commonly linked to memory, continuity and emotional connection, which describes a more engaged devotion to the act as compared to traditional market-oriented accountancy.

The reuse and prudent management of resources were also highlighted as especially important in the process of learning and practice for artisans. These views support the Kantha as a kind of embedded ecological knowledge; such that the values of the ecology are internalised through involvement rather than being taught externally (Ens et al., 2021).

Simultaneously, participants have expressed their worries about how Kantha has been portrayed in the commercial space with its cultural and ecological senses diminishing to mere aesthetic characteristics. The problems are also in line with more general problems of cultural commodification in which the uncoupling of traditional knowledge systems and the loss of their original contexts have occurred (Ghose & Ali, 2023).

5.4 Regenerative Tourism and Community Engagement

Kantha-producing areas have also been incorporated as tourist places in the rural areas and visitors have an opportunity to participate in the craft activities. But how such engagement is manifested

is very important. The facilitators and artisans talked about their preference for smaller-sized and participatory models that help to interact, learn and exchange instead of big tourism which is consumption-oriented.

These approaches follow the emerging narratives of 'regenerative' tourism that are about relationships, local advantage and environmental sensitivity in relation to 'extractive' tourism (Samal & Dash, 2023). In the case of Kantha, the tourism sector can benefit both culture and livelihoods provided that it is planned in a manner that will not affect the local knowledge and production cycles.

The central position of women artisans in these models is important. They are not simply going to produce, but they also fulfil the role of the interpreter, the producer of knowledge, mediating between tradition and change. The identification of this role adds to a better insight into environmental stewardship that encompasses cultural practices as components of socio-ecological systems.

6.0 Tourism, Ethics, and the Revival of Craft Ecologies

6.1 Reframing Craft within Tourism and Ecological Ethics

In practice craft traditions such as Kantha are often deposited into the market as marketable cultural property, often with appreciation of their aesthetic and financial value. As much as such positioning may provide livelihoods, it is more likely to make complex knowledge systems into products to be consumed (Tang & Xu, 2023). This reductionist framing is dangerous in overlooking the ecological and cultural processes that are built into the practice, especially those relating to material reuse, transfer of intergenerational knowledge and production of goods within the locality.

In this context, kantha means more than a handicraft which has been used as part of the tourism circuits. Their past record of adaptive reuse of textiles suggests a change in the system of production that uses sustainability and resource conservation principles (Saha, 2023). Layering and stitching waste fabrics as a continued means of environmental management continue to act at the local level within the formal sustainability orders.

Nevertheless, when converting these practices into the tourism economies, these often become repurposed and are not standardised and scalable and thus can lose their original meaning and ecological intent (Dhar et al., 2024).

Rather than that, a paradigm shift towards ethical tourism offers another approach to the interpretation of Kantha. Ethical approaches consider craft, that is, processes of engagement, learning and respect for the local knowledge systems, rather than consumption of craft. This attitude is a part of the wider concept of sustainable tourism and of participatory tourism towards communities, a concept that puts emphasis on seeing the community as a source of knowledge and not a source of services (Samal & Dash, 2023). In such structures, Kantha is a form of expression of ecological values and cultural stories, not a form of representation.

6.2 Kantha within Rights-Based and Heritage Discourses

The increasing concern with the protection of intangible cultural heritage presents another conceptual framework for explaining the role of Kantha in tourism. The UNESCO Convention emphasises the need to include the communities in participation, passing the knowledge and safeguarding the cultural practices against distortion (Kurin, 2004). By applying this line of thought to Kantha, it can be argued that the value of the given project is not just the finished piece of fabric but also the processes, meanings, and relationships which allow maintaining the project under consideration.

Meanwhile, a new set of ideas dealing with the Rights of Nature and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge requires considering cultural practices as being part of more general environmental governance (Ens et al., 2021; Mustonen et al., 2022). In this respect, Kantha may be perceived as a part of a larger socio-ecological system in which cultural expression and environmental ethics can be seen as interrelated. The motifs, materials and methods related to the craft reveal an ecological knowledge that is non-extractive but relational, which strengthens the argument that cultural practices represent an affirmation of ecological continuity.

A more detailed understanding of the contribution of Kantha into the tourism sector can be achieved through positioning Kantha as the subject of both heritage and rights-based frameworks. It renews the emphasis of economic value to relational value, where the craft is meant to provide some continuation in a constant exchange between community, culture and environment.

6.3 Toward Participatory and Regenerative Tourism Models

The incorporation of the Kantha into the tourism business poses serious questions on how such a business can be done without any compromise to the business integrity. Traditional models of tourism have also tended to place special emphasis on visitor experience and earning, a strategy that can result in cultural practice becoming a commodity and the voices of artisans being sidestepped (Ghose & Ali, 2023). Participatory approaches, on the other hand, aim to involve local communities in the decision-making processes of their activities in order to structure the development of tourism on the priorities and knowledge systems of the local community (Li & Hunter, 2015).

In regions such as Bengal and Odisha, where the kantha is made, there is a rising interest in travelling over consuming kantha, which is gaining traction. These include community-led activities, storytelling, and workshops so that visitors can experience the process of craft-making. Not only can such models help to increase the culture of understanding about how this process can be managed and appreciated by audiences all over the world.

Ecologically, these strategies are a continuation of the regenerative tourism message, which goes beyond sustainability to restoration and strengthening of socio-ecological systems. Alternative pathways to development that foreground alternative consumption patterns and practices, such as re-use and slow production and collective knowledge sharing, can be promoted through Kantha-based tourism to strengthen sustainable long-term culture and nature (Samal & Dash, 2023).

6.4 Challenges of Commodification and Cultural Misrepresentation

There were still enormous obstacles, regardless of the possibilities. As it expanded and became a part of international markets, occurrences were noted of cultural appropriation, in which assimilation of artefacts, or Kantha products, in general, was done without any mention or appreciation to the artisans (Ghose & Ali, 2023). They render the economic viability of village life unlikely and isolate the craft, dividing it into cultural and ecological aspects.

Also, the market pressures of tourism and export demand may stimulate higher production and simplified design and curtail the in-depth nature and variety of traditional motifs. The change can be viewed as a continuation of the conflict between the timing rhythms of craft production and the changes desired by the modern market. As Moore pointed out in the publications of craft-based economies, the speed-up of the production process is usually linked to a decrease in the quality, meaning and sustainability of the production (Dhar et al., 2024).

To address these concerns, there exists a necessity to reorient tourism practices to be involved in ethical activities, fair trading activities and more respecting of the community rights. It is crucial to ensure that artisans are not mere actors but decision-makers in the tourism development process in order to uphold the cultural integrity as well as the ecological significance.

7.0 Challenges In Sustaining Kantha As A Socio-Ecological Practice

7.1 Cultural Appropriation and Epistemic Erosion

With Kantha becoming more prominent in both national and global markets, issues regarding cultural appropriation have been raised to an even greater level. The patterns and forms involving the tradition are frequently recreated in business situations but without much recognition of where they originated or which communities uphold them. It not only affects the economy of artisans but also diminishes the cultural value of the artisan that he/she has to offer the craft. Research on traditional knowledge systems highlights the possibility of the traditional knowledge being displaced out of context and redefined as part of the binary of dominant 'market' structures (Ghose & Ali, 2023).

This detachment is quite important in the case of Kantha since the craft does not confine itself to visual design but also has narratives, ecological references and intergenerational memory. Elided from these contexts, Kantha can be easily reduced to a surface feature, to a mere style, failing to acknowledge that it is itself a system of knowledge.

7.2 Market Pressures and Uneven Value Distribution

Similarly, growth based on the tourism and export-based economies is yielding new economic opportunities for the Kanthas, but the new opportunities come with structural problems. The time-consuming and personal nature of Kantha may not necessarily align with the scale, speed and uniformity considered important for the market system. Consequently, artisans can be pressurized to conform designs or produce more products, which is why they might decide to make the transition to the modern world more gradually (Dhar et al., 2024).

Simultaneously, value chains in craft economies are more likely to be uneven, with middlemen and retailers earning a higher profit margin than producers. Such a skewed system strengthens the existing inequalities and it reduces the ability of artisans to sustain their livelihoods without being affected by the existing differences. These trends are in line with more general criticisms of the commodification of culture in tourism where cultural products are incorporated into markets without a specifically designed system of distributing benefits fairly (Tang & Xu, 2023).

7.3 Temporal Disruptions and the Ethics of Production

Kantha represents a kind of slow mode of production, in which time is part of the process and definition of the art. Also, it is reflected in every piece of art as a result of accumulated labour, memory and skill, which are often gained over long periods of time. The modern market requirements, especially those connected with tourism, tended to support the policy of rapid cycles of production and standardization of the output. This brings a conflict between the time morals of making crafts and the logic of efficiency that is driven by business systems.

There is a risk that when production should be hastened to satisfy demand, the richness of craftsmanship and symbolism with which Kantha is produced are apt to be neglected. The move of production towards faster speeds not only changes the quality but also the experiential and pedagogical elements of the craft, where learning traditionally happens through continuity in interaction and observation.

7.4 Gendered Marginalisation and Informal Recognition

As much as women are at the center of practise and transmission of Kantha, the contributions of women have often been underestimated as far as official economic and policy frameworks are concerned. Such fact that Kantha can be considered as a domestic or unofficial activity only serves to reinforce the truth that Kantha has to be marginalized since it denies Kantha opportunities to receive institutional support, financial resources and spheres of decision making. Women led surveys of their

craft economies have shown that though these practices still provide a critical role in livelihood and cultural continuity, they are still marginalised (Roy & Sharma, 2019; Palit & Debnath, 2022).

Such lack of linkage between contribution and recognition points to the need to rebrand women artisans as active stakeholders and not peripheral players. In the absence of this kind of recognition, any attempt to establish Kantha as a tourism and development product faces the threat of creating more inequalities.

7.5 Policy Gaps and the Need for Community-Centred Governance

The general policy directions towards craft-based tourism have tended to center on promotion and expansion in the market, but there is very limited consideration of governance frameworks that can be used in ensuring cultural and ecological integrity. Although frameworks like intangible heritage safeguarding put community involvement to the fore, their application is biased (Kurin, 2004). Likewise, the discourse of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge emphasises the need to integrate local knowledge into environmental governance, but the practical mechanisms of doing the latter are still developing (Ens et al., 2021; Mustonen et al., 2022).

In Kantha, this creates a loophole between the identification and safeguarding. Policies do not necessarily guarantee fair remuneration, intellectual property rights or decision-making authority of the artisans to their cultural value of the craft. To fill these gaps, the paradigm shift must be made to community-based models of governance that aim to protecting the means of introducing new cultural values into the community.

8.0 Policy Recommendations and Frameworks

This study reveals that Kantha embroidery is not only a source of income but also a part of the ecological knowledge, cultural continuity and gendered labour systems. Current policy options tend to take up either of the two aspects individually – either economic promotion or heritage preservation – and fail to combine the ecological and community-based aspects. To meet the challenges posed by tourism from this sector, the policy direction outlined in this section is defined. As a reaction to the challenges that are posed by tourism related to this sector, the policy directions outlined in this section are defined that are aligned with knowledge preservation, sustainability and equity.

8.1 Integrating Indigenous Craft Practices into Environmental and Tourism Policy

The findings of this research make us believe that Kantha embroidery has a role to play not only with livelihood but also with eco-knowledge, continuity of culture and gendered labour systems. However, existing policy strategies focus on these elements in isolation and tend to use a multi-causal approach for ecological issues or a multi-causal approach for community problems without adequately connecting ecological and community concerns. In reply, this section presents a faction of policy

directions intended to bring craft-based tourism over the sustainability, equity, and knowledge preservation.

8.2 Incorporation of the Indigenous Craft Practices in Environmental and Tourism Policy

There is a lack of understanding of the role of traditional craft practice as a support to environmental sustainability, which is one of the policy gaps. The tendency and importance given to the reuse and conservation of materials are in line with the overall goal of sustainability that Kantha embodies. However, these often go beyond what is formally established via the environmental or tourism planning framework.

To incorporate Kantha into policy at national and regional levels, it is important to shift towards valuing craft as a part of a socio-ecological system and not necessarily as either a cultural or an economic asset. This corresponds with the research highlighting the significance of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge on the processes of environmental governance and sustainable development (Joshi, 2021; Ens et al., 2021). Policies may involve designating regions producing Kantha as eco-cultural areas, incorporating craft practices in sustainability reporting and sectoral coordination efforts across different sectors, including tourism, textiles, and rural development.

Not only would such integration support conservation-oriented practices; it would also help in strengthening the connection between cultural heritage and environmental policy goals, especially those relating to responsible consumption and resiliency of communities.

8.3 Towards a Rights-Based Framework: Linking Nature and Craft

Based on the emergent discourse of the Rights of Nature, this paper posits an extension of parallel ideas to the process of cultural practice by means of a Rights of Craft approach. This approach stems from an understanding of Kantha as a living system that embodies the ecological relationships, cultural knowledge and community identity – and, however, not simply a market-valued commodity.

The relevance of such a framework can be justified by the fact that scholarship into the role of community-based knowledge systems in the development of a sustainable future highlights the significance of these systems and their contribution to the process of forming a sustainable future (Mustonen et al., 2022). A rights-based approach would focus on legal and institutional frameworks that ensure that Kantha's material and immaterial elements (design, knowledge, process, and meaning) be safeguarded.

Policy instruments that would push it in that direction would be strengthened protection of intellectual property, extending the geographical indication (GI) system and protecting against cultural

appropriation. But most importantly, such measures cannot see rights move out of the community supporting the practise nor contribute to external appropriation but can rather strengthen local control.

8.4 Participatory Governance and Artisan-Centred Tourism Development

To make tourism related to Kantha sustainable and fair, government apparatus can no longer be based on the top-down planning models. The participatory approaches where the artisans are used to make decisions are very crucial in ensuring that the development of tourism is aligned with the local priorities and knowledge systems (Li & Hunter, 2015).

Practically, this might be in the form of the establishment of artisan-led councils or cooperatives that govern some aspects of tourism like visitor interaction, pricing, and telling of cultural stories. Already existing in most Kantha-producing areas, self-help groups (SHGs) can now center on facilitating such governance structures through organizational support and collective bargaining influence.

Also, it can be used to make the encounters of the visitors and the artisans more significant through the utilization of experiential forms of tourism i.e. workshops and community interactions. By putting the emphasis on active involvement, instead of passive consumption, they help to uphold respect towards the craft, as well as the knowledge that the craft embodies.

8.5 Capacity Building and Ethical Market Linkages

Although participatory governance should be a priority, other measures should support it, especially through capacity-building projects. Artisans face major difficulties, including access to such information digitally, ability to negotiate in a market, knowledge about tourism and commercial opportunities and reaching the maximum benefits from tourism and business opportunities. So, addressing those needs requires investments in the training programmes that aim to foster digital competencies, ethical marketing and sustainable production practices.

But, at the same time, spreading awareness and building ethical market relations to ensure fair remuneration and to eliminate exploitation in the supply chain is important. This includes defining transparency in pricing and promoting direct-to-consumer channels, in addition to introducing longer-term consumer sustainability over short-term profit Dhar et al., 2024; Tang & Xu, 2023).

8.6 Aligning Policy with Sustainability and Cultural Preservation Goals

Finally, policy frameworks should be in line with the overall sustainability and culture preservation agendas. It emphasises supporting continuity policies over a commoditised perspective of

intangible cultural heritage, which links the methods of preserving and presenting different knowledge systems to communities, backed by continuity policies.

The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage focuses attention on the role of communities in sustaining and transmitting knowledge systems, which underlines the need to implement policies that enhance continuity, rather than the commodification of intangible cultural heritage (Kurin, 2004). In a similar way, incorporating Kantha in the sustainability agendas helps strengthen its applicability to the objectives of responsible consumption, gender equity, and community resilience.

Such a coordinated policy approach, i.e., by connecting cultural, environmental, and economic goals, can be used to provide a more holistic basis to support Kantha as a socio-ecological practice. In such an approach it has been recognised that, in addition to technological or regulatory interventions, sustainability is achieved through preservation and reinforcement of the available knowledge systems.

9.0 Conclusion

This paper has examined Kantha embroidery beyond its conventional classification as a rural craft and has situated it within the framework of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge. It situates Kantha within the framework of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge. The findings show that Kantha represents a material reuse, intergenerational transmission, and ecological logic of everyday living, which is inherent to the lived experiences of women artisans in West Bengal. These practices are modes of sustainability which come out of localised situations and not externally designed interventions.

At the same time, the incorporation of Kantha into the tourism and market chains poses a set of tensions. This engagement can result in increased visibility and the generation of revenue, as well as the reduction of the practice into a product which, in many cases, will not be connected to cultural and ecological connotations. The standardization pressures and the expedited production situation further fuel the challenges of continuing traditional knowledge and the temporal tide of the craft-making.

As a response to such dynamics, the study recommended a shift towards perceiving Kantha as a socio-ecological system, as opposed to an independent economic activity. The introduction of a Rights of Craft approach, combined with already existing discourses of the Rights of Nature, provides a conceptual frame by which the issue of valuing cultural practices as objects that need protection may be understood.

The review also highlights the significance of participatory governance as a tool to implement sustainable tourism routes. It is important to make sure that artisans are not only actively involved in the decision-making processes but also make sure that these processes align with local cultural practices and lived realities. These strategies complement wider efforts to reinvest rural knowledge in policy frameworks and move beyond extractive approaches to rural development.

In general, the research indicates that there is a necessity to reevaluate the presence of the craft traditions in the sustainability and tourism discourses. By identifying Kantha as a dynamic practice, instead of a traditional heritage product, possibilities arise towards more inclusive and eco-minded developmental approaches. In this respect, Kantha remains relevant because it offers alternative approaches to sustainability that build on care, continuity, and collective knowledge.

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