

MEENJHAR - A FLOWER OF HOPE IN THE DESERT STATE OF INDIA

AUTHORS

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DESCRIPTION

Craft can serve a purpose much larger than just satisfying a consumer. It can connect people and even provide an outlet for the artist to escape or improve their harsh realities. Meenjhar as a project was developed under the same consciousness as having a project of my own gave me a sense of agency that a lot of women feel missing. It was started in 2019, when I and my mother-in-law put up some handmade crochet rakhis (ornamented wristbands) for sale. 'Meenjhar' - a desert flower that grows on the tree Khejri - is often seen as a symbol of hope and respite from the harsh heat. This story resonated with both of us and I decided that this is what our initiative should be called.

Rakshabandhan is a popular festival in India wherein people tie rakhis as a symbol of protection and care. It is an annual celebration which brings the entire family together over food, sweets, and love. The Meenjhar rakhi project was carried out in 2021, when the world was still under lockdown. The objective of the project was to provide a therapeutic escape to women and the elderly by learning or enhancing their crochet skills. This was a deciding factor as a lot of women around us were struggling during covid. Some had lost their jobs while some were stuck with their abusive husbands at home all day. This inability to escape took a toll on many of these people's mental health. Thus, through this project, we aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Give a therapeutic escape to struggling women and the elderly.
2. Boost confidence and develop the feeling of independence in both skill and financial aspects.
3. Training and skill development of these participants.
4. Keep the beautiful art of hand crochet and other hand skills alive.
5. Make sustainable products which would follow the 3Rs - reduce, reuse, recycle.

Trainings were given to artisans based on their existing skills and interest areas which were:

- i.) Making the main component.
- ii.) Making the bands for tying them, and
- iii.) Assembling these parts along with the required ornamentation.

The packaging was done on 'Gaukriti' paper which was made of cow dung and seeds such that sowing it in soil gave birth to a new plant. By the end of the project, it became a collective effort from the family wherein everyone helped in assembling, shipping, and promoting the Rakhis.

About 50 women were involved in this project. It became a space for women to hone their skills, feel confident, and have a sense of financial autonomy. Designed to emphasise on the healing properties of crochet making, it helped women of all ages in managing their concentration skills and enhancing their endurance levels. This urges us into reflecting that the purpose of this industry cannot just be to fulfil consumer needs, but also to create a positive, symbiotic society that takes responsibility for the impact of its actions on our collective future.