

Chapter 10


Empowering Women Through the Lost Art of Thangka Painting and Cultural Tourism in Sikkim, India

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the intersection of cultural tourism and traditional arts in empowering women through Thangka painting in Sikkim, India. It delves into how Thangka painting, a vital aspect of Tibetan Buddhist art, not only contributes to cultural preservation but also provides significant entrepreneurial opportunities for women in rural areas. By examining the socio-economic impacts, challenges, and opportunities faced by women Thangka painters, the chapter aims to highlight the role of traditional arts in promoting sustainable development and gender empowerment in rural communities.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of women's empowerment is one of the most widely accepted topics and it is vitally important for women to come out of the old traditional form of restrictions to do certain activities which can be the source of income for any woman. Gender equality brings economic development and also added benefits to society, there's a need for the acceptance of women into the workforce without being gender biased and gender equality is a continuous effort to bring a better society Duflo, (2012). However, many countries have allowed uplifting women to be a multidimensional process and support like self-help groups to enhance their skills and bring their entrepreneurship development to enhance income and bring awareness Akter, (2018). Women's empowerment has become a crucial issue affecting their status.

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It involves gaining control over material and intellectual resources, allowing women to make decisions within families and communities. Bano et al. (2014) further stated that the small-scale industry is vital for women's employment and empowers them to provide a platform to generate income a small-scale industry, can accommodate both skills and unskilled women and provide them with guidance and training they have been able to contribute towards their family status. A small-scale industry that provides a platform for women for small scale industry, like the Thangka painting Dorji (2003) illustrates Thangka meaning is a seal, which talks about the life of Buddha and the teachings of Buddha and it's a symbol of spirituality. Thangka has been used for meditation purposes for the transformation of the practitioner and to develop inner strength. Thangka paintings are a very important part of Buddhism and its practice as it is considered an integral part of Buddhism. Leoshko (1998) further added the history of thangka paintings, emphasizing their primary purpose for meditation. Recognized as a Buddhist art form, thangka paintings have been integral to the Buddhist community, passed down through generations to preserve their authenticity. Traditionally, these paintings were created for religious purposes, depicting various deities. Over time, thangka styles have evolved, with Dhar (2011) identifying different varieties influenced by the skill development of artists. This evolution reflects changes in painting styles and the deities represented. The growth of thangka painting has occurred in distinct phases, with each phase showing unique characteristics. Dellois (2003) further noted that mandalas are a specific type of thangka, constructed according to principles of center, symmetry, and cardinal points, as taught by masters in the tradition. However, it was restricted to women making this art or learning this art form because Thangka painting, a traditional Tibetan Buddhist art form, represents a significant aspect of cultural preservation. Traditionally passed down through generations, this art form has been a source of cultural identity and spiritual significance for the local communities. In recent years, Thangka painting has also become a vital component of cultural tourism in Sikkim, attracting tourists and generating economic opportunities for the local population. Kreijger, (1999). Anywhere that we find that embodiment of the soul in communication with other souls we find art. As such, we may also think of both cultural and religious expression as a form of art Tarlow, (2011) Thangka is a beautiful wall hanging that is further decorated with gold, silk, and wood Thangka paintings are usually very stimulating, and usually used for depicting the life of Buddha. The most common shape in which a Thangka painting is done is the upright rectangular form. Buddhist people have always considered Thangka a treasure of tremendous value. The origin and basic development of the original Thangka in the form of paintings is still in dilemma the paintings belong to which region and the influences on the paintings from whereas many different artists have a different view on the origin part of these paintings. Thangka painting is considered as the traditional art by the painters and the locals who are based on the culture art of the locals. The development of the concept called cultural tourism and the demand for it have influenced many tourists' interests. (Bhutia & Sharma, 2018) Moreover, the perception of tourists has changed and the thangka painters with the highly skilled have understood the importance of their art and how it attracts tourists, and they appreciate the artwork of different thangka paintings. Art and craft, which are deeply rooted in traditional thought, reflect unique creativity shaped by religious, social, and economic influences.

In the Sub-Himalayan region, the relative seclusion of valleys surrounded by towering mountains has allowed a rich diversity of cultures to thrive. Each culture boasts its distinctive arts, architecture, and ways of life. One striking feature of this region's traditional arts is their realism, which reveals the fine artistic sensibilities of the people. These artworks not only express community attitudes but also tell a story about their journey from the past to the present. Traditional art has played a vital role in the societal changes that accompanied economic restructuring in the Sub-Himalayan area. Institutions like

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