



# WOMEN POWER: PRESERVATION OF HERITAGE, PATH TO PROGRESS



Heritage and  
Weaving  
Preservation



Preservation of  
Traditional Crafts  
and Arts



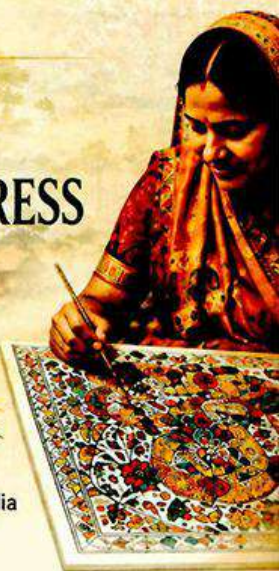
Preservation of  
Traditional Knowledge  
and Food Heritage



Financial Inclusion  
and Economic  
Empowerment

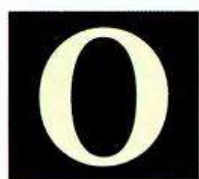


Developed India  
2047



India's cultural diversity finds its strongest expression in rural communities, where women play a central role in preserving traditional knowledge, languages, folk arts, crafts and culinary heritage that sustain the country's civilisational ethos. Through their roles in households, communities and women-led institutions, they ensure the continuity of cultural traditions while contributing to livelihoods, social cohesion and sustainable development. Strengthened by supportive policies and collective enterprises, rural women are transforming cultural assets into opportunities for inclusive growth. Recognising and empowering *Nari Shakti* is essential for safeguarding India's cultural heritage and advancing the vision of *Viksit Bharat@2047*.

## Dr. Madhubanti Dutta



Over the past decade, India has moved beyond viewing women merely as beneficiaries of development to recognising them as key drivers of socio-economic transformation.

Through a lifecycle approach, policies and programmes have expanded women's access to health, education, nutrition, livelihoods, financial inclusion and leadership opportunities. Improved access to sanitation, housing, clean cooking fuel and tap water has enhanced women's dignity and quality of life.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as powerful instruments of women-led development. As emphasised by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, India's development journey has progressed from "women development"

to "women-led development," recognising women as active participants and leaders in social and economic transformation. Today, there is growing recognition of the role of *Nari Shakti* in shaping India's future. Beyond their economic contributions, rural women are custodians of India's rich cultural heritage. Through the preservation of traditions, languages, crafts, folk practices and indigenous knowledge systems, they sustain the cultural diversity that forms the foundation of India's civilisational identity. Their contribution extends beyond cultural preservation to livelihood generation, community resilience and sustainable rural development. As India advances towards *Viksit Bharat@2047*, empowering women as guardians of cultural diversity remains essential for building an inclusive and culturally confident nation.

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## Rural Women as Custodians of Cultural Diversity

India's cultural diversity survives largely through community practices embedded in rural life, with women at the forefront of preserving traditions. Their role is particularly visible in cultural practices linked to agriculture and community life. In Assam, women preserve the essence of Bihu through songs, dance, weaving and ritual practices associated with the agrarian calendar. In Tamil Nadu, women uphold Pongal traditions through kolam art, traditional food preparation and ceremonies celebrating the relationship between farming communities and nature.

Rural women are also custodians of indigenous knowledge systems. Studies by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and tribal research institutions have documented women's traditional knowledge relating to seed preservation, medicinal plants, food processing and water conservation. In the Himalayan region, women maintain knowledge of medicinal herbs and climate-resilient farming practices, while tribal women in central India safeguard biodiversity through the sustainable use of forest resources.

These contributions extend beyond cultural preservation. Indigenous knowledge supports climate adaptation, food security and sustainable resource management. By sustaining traditions and local knowledge systems, rural women preserve cultural diversity while strengthening resilient rural communities.

### Preserving Folk Traditions and Local Languages

Rural women play a crucial role in preserving India's intangible cultural heritage through folk songs, storytelling traditions, local histories and regional languages. Through everyday cultural practices, they ensure the transmission of collective memories, social values and indigenous knowledge across generations. Lullabies, wedding songs, harvest songs, devotional hymns, folklore and community narratives continue to

be passed down within families and communities.

Women-led cultural transmission is visible across the country. In Rajasthan, women preserve Maand and Panihari folk songs that reflect local histories and the desert way of life. In Chhattisgarh, women performers help sustain the Pandavani storytelling tradition, while Bengal's Baul tradition continues to transmit spiritual teachings through song. These traditions preserve cultural heritage while strengthening community bonds and intergenerational learning.

Women are equally important in safeguarding India's linguistic diversity. With many dialects facing the risk of decline, women serve as primary transmitters of local languages within households and communities. By preserving songs, stories and languages, they ensure that cultural identities and traditional knowledge systems remain vibrant in a rapidly changing society.

### Traditional Crafts, Handloom Heritage and Culinary Traditions

Women artisans have played a decisive role in sustaining traditional crafts such as Madhubani painting in Bihar, Phulkari embroidery in Punjab, Toda embroidery in Tamil Nadu, bamboo crafts in the North-East and Kutch embroidery in Gujarat. Women constitute a significant share of India's handloom workforce, preserving weaving traditions passed down through generations. These crafts embody local histories, artistic expressions and cultural symbols unique to specific communities.

Rural women also preserve traditional food cultures that reflect local ecological knowledge and agricultural diversity. Indigenous recipes, millet-based diets, fermentation techniques and seasonal food practices have long been maintained within households by women. The renewed focus on millets following the International Year of Millets has highlighted the importance of traditional food knowledge in promoting nutrition security, climate resilience and sustainable agriculture.

## HOW SFURTI SUPPORTS ARTISANS AND COMMUNITIES



### SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Training and upgradation of skills, especially for women artisans.



### DESIGN & PRODUCT INNOVATION

Support for product development and quality improvement.



### MARKET ACCESS & E-COMMERCE

Exposure, exhibitions and online selling support.



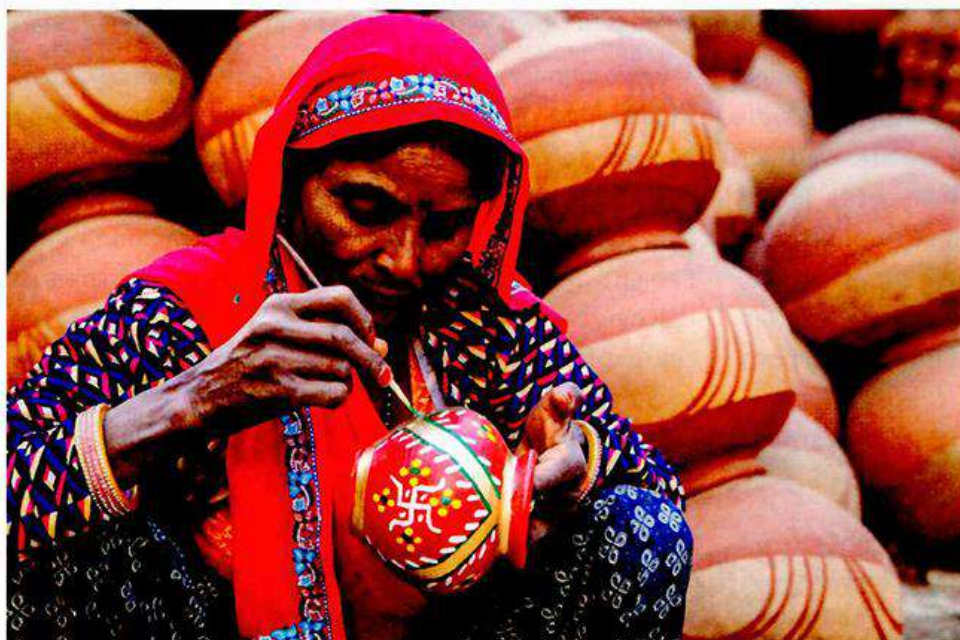
### COMMON FACILITY CENTRES

Shared services, tools, machinery and infrastructure.



### SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Better incomes and employment generation within the community.



### Women-Led Institutions as Agents of Cultural Preservation

Collective action through Self-Help Groups, artisan collectives and cooperatives has emerged as an important mechanism for preserving cultural heritage while generating livelihoods. Across rural India, women-led institutions are safeguarding traditional crafts, handloom practices and indigenous products by linking cultural knowledge with economic opportunities. More than ten crore women are associated with SHGs under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).

These institutions provide artisans with access to training, credit and market opportunities, ensuring that traditional practices remain economically viable. By combining cultural preservation with economic empowerment, women-led organisations strengthen local identities, promote inclusive growth and ensure the continuity of India's diverse cultural heritage.

### Government Initiatives Supporting Women in Cultural Preservation

Recognising the link between cultural heritage and rural livelihoods, the Government of India has introduced several initiatives that support women artisans, weavers and traditional knowledge holders. These programmes seek to preserve cultural diversity while enhancing economic opportunities for rural women.

DAY-NRLM has mobilised millions of women into SHGs engaged in handicrafts, handloom production and traditional food processing. The Scheme of Fund

for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI) supports artisan clusters through infrastructure development, skill upgradation and market access. Similarly, the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative promotes region-specific crafts and products, helping traditional artisans gain wider recognition.

Tribal women artisans have benefited from the efforts of the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED), which promotes indigenous products through

market linkages and platforms such as Tribes India. The National Handloom Development Programme supports design innovation, skill enhancement and marketing of handloom products, while Geographical Indication (GI) tagging protects the uniqueness of traditional crafts and cultural products associated with specific regions.

By linking cultural preservation with entrepreneurship, skill development and market access, these initiatives are enabling rural women to transform traditional knowledge into sustainable livelihoods.

### Regional Best Practices and Success Stories

Several success stories demonstrate how rural women have combined cultural preservation with economic empowerment.

The women artists of Bihar have played a pivotal role in popularising Madhubani painting beyond local communities. What began as ritual wall art has evolved into a globally recognised cultural product, providing livelihoods to thousands of women while preserving the artistic heritage of the Mithila region.

In Gujarat, women artisans have revitalised traditional Kutch embroidery through cooperatives and SHGs. Their efforts have safeguarded intricate craft traditions while expanding access to national and international markets.

The North-East provides another inspiring example, where women-led weaving enterprises continue to preserve indigenous textile traditions. Traditional shawls and handwoven fabrics carry cultural symbols and histories unique to tribal communities.

Kerala's Kudumbashree network has successfully promoted traditional foods and indigenous products through women-led enterprises, demonstrating how cultural heritage can be linked with livelihood generation.

### Empowering Rural Women for Sustainable Development

Empowering rural women is central to India's vision of inclusive and sustainable development. Beyond enhancing economic opportunities, it strengthens social inclusion, preserves cultural diversity and builds resilient rural communities. Through SHGs, cooperatives and women-led enterprises, traditional crafts, handlooms and cultural products are increasingly becoming sources of income and entrepreneurship.

Economic empowerment enhances women's participation in household and community decision-making. Greater financial independence enables women to influence governance processes, advocate for community needs and contribute to social transformation. Their traditional knowledge of natural resource management, food systems and biodiversity conservation also support climate resilience and sustainable development.

### Nari Shakti: Preserving Heritage, Building Viksit Bharat

Despite their significant contributions, rural women face several challenges. Rapid urbanisation, migration and changing lifestyles have weakened the transmission of traditional knowledge across generations. Commercialisation has affected many traditional practices, while women artisans often face competition from machine-made products, limited market access, inadequate digital literacy and insufficient recognition of their cultural labour.

Addressing these challenges requires recognising culture as a resource for sustainable development. Strengthening women-led cultural enterprises through access to credit, skill development, digital literacy, branding and market linkages can transform traditional knowledge into sustainable livelihood opportunities. Educational institutions, local governments and community organisations must also promote cultural awareness among younger generations.

The expansion of GI protection, cultural tourism, digital marketplaces and community-based heritage initiatives can further enhance the visibility and economic value of traditional cultural practices.

### Conclusion

Rural women are the custodians of India's living cultural heritage, preserving traditions, languages, crafts, cuisines and indigenous knowledge systems that enrich the country's cultural diversity. Their contribution extends beyond cultural continuity to livelihood generation, social inclusion, environmental sustainability and community resilience.

Recognising and empowering these women is vital not only for safeguarding India's cultural plurality but also for building an inclusive, culturally confident and sustainable *Viksit Bharat*. As India progresses towards *Viksit Bharat@2047*, empowering rural women as custodians of cultural heritage and agents of development will be essential for preserving the nation's cultural richness and ensuring that the spirit of *Nari Shakti* continues to guide India's progress. □

