

PROJECT HUNAR

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EMPOWERING WOMEN APPLIQUÉ & EMBROIDERY ARTISTS OF DHANAU, BARMER CASE STUDIES



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Cultivating Hope in the Arid Landscape: The Journey of Savita Devi

“Project Hunar was not just a training initiative; it was a movement that sewed courage into the fabric of tradition, stitching together hope and opportunity in the arid landscape of Rajasthan.” – Savita Devi

In the arid landscape of Barmer, Savita Devi’s journey with fabric and thread began in the early days of her childhood. Born into the legacy of applique work, she inherited the art from the deft fingers of her mother and grandmother. With measured strokes of scissors and rhythmic needlework, she stitched tradition into sarees and bedsheets, much like the generations before her. Yet, despite the mastery of her craft, innovation eluded her—a constraint not of talent, but of opportunity.



Village: Dhanau

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Then arrived Project Hunar, a herald of transformation, casting ripples of change in the still waters of convention. Under its purview, Savita was introduced to an intricate training regimen that refined her applique work, introducing her to contemporary design principles and advanced stitching techniques. The training transcended mere skill enhancement; it was a revelation of possibilities. Through tailored workshops, she grasped the nuances of measurement and garment construction, an expertise once foreign to her traditional practice. No longer confined to sarees and bedsheets, her applique artistry found new canvases—shirts, jackets, and modern ensembles that bridged heritage with modernity.

Her journey did not remain solitary; it became a beacon for others. Stepping into the role of a master trainer, she became the medium through which knowledge flowed, mentoring other women in her locality. In a landscape where women’s aspirations are often tethered by societal norms, she cultivated a quiet rebellion—one thread at a time. Through skill-sharing and collective empowerment, the women of Dhanau, guided by Savita, found themselves stitching dreams into reality.

The impact of Project Hunar was not confined to technical expertise alone; it orchestrated a paradigm shift in market accessibility. Previously dependent on middlemen, who dictated terms and diminished their earnings, Savita and her peers were introduced to direct market linkages. This transition was pivotal—by interacting with customers, gathering feedback, and adapting to market preferences, they refined their products to align with contemporary demand. No longer were they faceless artisans in a supply chain; they became entrepreneurs of their craft.

The crescendo of this journey reached a defining moment when Savita, alongside her fellow artists, stepped into the Barmer Town Hall, their meticulously crafted pieces displayed before the district administration. It was more than a mere exhibition; it was an assertion of identity, a proclamation that women, bound by convention for centuries, had arrived as creators, decision-makers, and stakeholders of their own destiny.

Savita’s journey did not halt at the borders of Barmer. In the heart of Kolkata, at Sur Jahan, a world peace music festival held between January 31st and February 2nd, 2025, she stood amidst a global audience, her creations telling the story of a desert’s resilience. Here, her applique work, now a blend of tradition and innovation, found admirers and patrons from distant lands. This exposure was more than a commercial success—it was a cultural dialogue, an acknowledgment that rural artistry, when given the right avenues, can transcend geographical boundaries. Today, as the women of Barmer thread their needles and weave their dreams, Savita Devi stands as a testament to transformation.

Threading New Horizons: Indira Devi's Journey

"Applique was always my craft, but Project Hunar made it my voice. It taught me that a simple stitch can weave not just fabric, but also confidence, opportunity, and a future beyond tradition." – Indira Devi

For the past 25 years, applique has been more than a craft for Indira Devi—it has been her passion, her livelihood, and her silent expression of creativity. The rhythmic motion of her needle, inherited from her mother, once breathed life into sarees, stoles, and bed sheets, following the traditional patterns passed down through generations. While her artistry was impeccable, her creations remained confined within the conventional realms of applique work, awaiting the spark of innovation.



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That transformation arrived through Project Hunar, a catalyst that broadened her artistic vision and expanded her market reach. Under its guidance, Indira embarked on a journey of skill enhancement and product diversification and also served as a master trainer. No longer limited to fabric-based attire and linens, she began crafting an array of contemporary products—intricately designed accessories and other home décor items like table runners, cushion covers, curtains, etc. This shift was not just an expansion of her creative repertoire; it was a redefinition of her craft, aligning applique with the evolving demands of modern markets.

The true breakthrough, however, lay in market access. Where once her work found its way to buyers through intermediaries, Project Hunar introduced her to direct market linkages. This empowerment culminated in a landmark event from January 9-13, 2025, when Indira attended the ABID Expo in Kolkata, a prestigious gathering in the interior design sector. Here, she engaged with architects and interior designers, presenting her applique work not just as fabric embellishment but as a sophisticated element of interior aesthetics. Through these interactions, she gained invaluable insights into design sensibilities, material fusion, and the creative positioning of applique within contemporary spaces.

This exposure was more than an exhibition; it was an education. She learned that applique, when envisioned beyond its traditional utility, could transform spaces—adorning walls, accentuating furniture, and breathing handcrafted charm into interiors. This revelation not only reshaped her approach to applique but also instilled a newfound confidence in her craft.

Indira's journey did not stop at personal growth; she became a torchbearer of change. As a master trainer, she passed on her refined knowledge to women in self-help groups (SHGs), ensuring that the wave of transformation reached every corner of her community. The stitches of empowerment extended to her own household, where she is now mentoring her daughter, Manju, in the art of applique. Under Indira's guidance, Manju is blossoming into an enterprising artist, weaving her own aspirations into the legacy of craft.

Indira Devi's story is not just about applique; it is about reinvention. Project Hunar was not merely a training initiative—it was an awakening, stitching tradition with innovation and crafting new futures out of old threads. In her hands, applique is no longer just a skill; it is a tool of transformation, reshaping her fate and that of the women around her, one stitch at a time.

Weaving Identity: Sugni Devi's Journey

"For years, I stitched without a name, without pride. Project Hunar showed me that my hands do more than sew—they create, they inspire, they build a future. Now, I teach my daughters that our craft is our strength." – Sugni Devi

Life had always been harsh for Sugni. For two decades, she meticulously stitched pieces of fabric together, mastering the art of applique, a craft inherited from her mother. Yet, despite her dedication, her work felt devoid of meaning—her hands created, but her heart never felt the power of her skill. Catering solely to middlemen, she was reduced to mechanical production, where neither pride nor recognition accompanied her labour. Her artistry remained unseen, her efforts undervalued.



Village: Dhanau

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Project Hunar arrived as a turning point, unravelling possibilities she had never imagined. Through specialized training, she was introduced to new product development and design innovation, breaking free from the monotonous replication of conventional patterns. The program also equipped her with tailoring expertise, enabling her to construct garments with precision. With these newfound skills, she expanded her repertoire to include ladies' apparel such as kurtas and kaftans, integrating applique into contemporary fashion.

Beyond technical training, Project Hunar cultivated something deeper—a sense of self-worth and belief in her craft. She no longer saw herself as merely a worker but as an artist, an entrepreneur, and a bearer of heritage. With every stitch, she began reclaiming ownership over her work, weaving her identity into her creations.

Her transformation did not stop at personal growth. Recognizing the generational value of her craft, Sugni took on the role of a mentor within her own household. She now teaches applique to her three daughters, instilling in them the belief that their skills hold power, potential, and dignity. Her vision extends beyond the present—she aspires to establish a family enterprise, where applique is not just a means of survival but a legacy of empowerment.

Sugni's story is one of rediscovery. Project Hunar did not just train her—it made her believe that she, too, can. No longer a nameless artisan in the supply chain, she now stands as a creator, a teacher, and a woman who stitches dreams into reality.

From Passion to Profession: Parvati Devi's Journey

"I once stitched in silence, unsure if my craft had a place beyond my home. Project Hunar gave me the confidence to speak, to sell, and to share my art with the world—both in person and online. Now, my stitches know no boundaries." – Parvati Devi

Parvati Devi's hands first traced the delicate stitches of applique when she was just ten years old, guided by the patient hands of her grandmother. Back then, the craft was a passion, a pastime woven into the fabric of her childhood. But passion alone did not translate into prosperity as the artists seldom had direct connections with the market.



Village: Dhanau

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That changed with Project Hunar—an initiative that not only honed her technical skills but also gave her a vision for an empowered future. Through structured training, she expanded her product repertoire, exploring new designs and diversifying her creations beyond the traditional offerings. She also served as a master trainer. Yet, one of the most significant transformations was beyond fabric and thread—it was in the realm of communication.

Previously hesitant to express her artistic journey, Parvati found her voice through communication training. She learned to articulate her inspiration, describe the intricacies of her work, and confidently present her craft to an audience. This newfound confidence took center stage when she participated in Lokotsav, Goa (January 17-26, 2025), a vibrant festival celebrating folk artistry. Here, she not only showcased her applique creations but also engaged in direct interactions with customers, including international visitors. Their enthusiastic feedback and appreciation reshaped her perspective—her craft was not just art, but a marketable, desirable product. The overwhelming demand for applique at the event resulted in impressive sales and valuable connections, opening avenues for future opportunities.

Beyond traditional markets, Project Hunar introduced Parvati to the digital sphere—a world where geography no longer limits potential. Digital marketing training equipped her with the tools to navigate online platforms, allowing her to promote and sell her products in a space that transcends physical boundaries. Today, she is actively exploring e-commerce and social media marketing, gradually establishing an online presence for her work. She believes that with these digital avenues, the reach of her craft is limitless, and distance is no longer a barrier.

Parvati's journey embodies the fusion of tradition with modernity. Project Hunar did not just refine her stitches—it amplified her voice, expanded her reach, and turned her childhood passion into a sustainable livelihood. Now, she stands not only as an artist but as a confident entrepreneur, embracing both the physical and digital marketplaces with equal grace.

Breaking Barriers: Jatna Devi's Journey

"All my life, I was told what I couldn't do. Project Hunar showed me what I could. Now, I don't just stitch fabric—I stitch confidence, independence, and change." – Jatna Devi

For Jatna Devi, applique was more than just a craft—it was an inseparable part of her existence. Since childhood, she had stitched patterns with precision, her hands moving instinctively over fabric, breathing life into traditional designs. Yet, while her work was admired, her potential was always questioned. Throughout her life, society dictated what she could not do—her role was confined to the kitchen and household chores.



Village: Dhanau
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But Project Hunar changed that narrative. It gave Jatna the opportunity to explore what she could do, pushing her beyond societal constraints and proving that she, too, could be an agent of change. The skill enhancement training introduced her to new applique designs and diversified product development, moving beyond traditional items to create contemporary, market-ready offerings. Learning the use of the sewing machine was a pivotal moment—what once seemed an unattainable skill became easy, allowing her to construct varied styles of garments with applique embellishments.

However, more than technical skills, Project Hunar instilled confidence—a belief that her talent deserved recognition beyond the confines of her home. The program became a testament to women's empowerment, showing her and countless others that they were not just creators but protagonists in their own process of development.

One of the greatest injustices Jatna had witnessed was that while women crafted applique pieces with precision and dedication, it was the men who travelled far and wide to sell them. Women remained invisible, their contributions unacknowledged. Hunar challenged this norm, equipping women with the skills and self-assurance to break free from societal restrictions and present their craft to the world on their own terms.

Today, Jatna stands as a symbol of defiance and determination. She no longer waits for others to validate her work—she takes charge, showcasing her creations, and engaging with customers. Her journey is proof that confidence is the strongest stitch of all—one that binds tradition with empowerment, ensuring that no woman's talent remains hidden behind closed doors. With every garment she crafts, Jatna sews a new story—one of courage, change, and limitless possibilities.

Stitching Success: Teeja Devi's Journey

"I always knew how to stitch, but Project Hunar taught me how to sell. Now, I don't just create—I connect, I market, and I grow. My craft is no longer just tradition; it is my enterprise." – Teeja Devi

For as long as she could remember, Teeja Devi had been threading the fine stitches of applique, a craft she inherited from the women before her. The rhythmic motion of her needle was innate to her, but for years, her work remained within the traditional confines of sarees, bedsheets, and household linens. While applique was her identity, it was Project Hunar that transformed it into a livelihood with limitless potential.



Village: Dhanau
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The initiative introduced Teeja to advanced applique techniques, encouraging her to expand beyond conventional designs. Through tailoring training, she mastered garment construction, integrating applique into wearable fashion. She explored diverse applications of her craft, embellishing a variety of products, from accessories to home décor, thus diversifying her creative portfolio.

Beyond skill enhancement, Teeja took on the mantle of a master trainer, sharing her expertise with other women in her locality. She helped them refine their craft and embrace applique not just as an art, but as a sustainable livelihood option. However, her most significant transformation came through business and communication training, where she learned the art of marketing—an essential skill that elevated her from a creative producer to an entrepreneur.

She learned to price her products competitively, present her work effectively, and build direct market connections. With a newfound understanding of branding and consumer preferences, she expressed a keen interest in further marketing training, recognizing its potential to scale her creative enterprise to new heights.

This confidence materialized at the VHAH Festival, Shekhawati (February 13-17, 2025), where she showcased her applique creations to a broad audience. The festival saw an overwhelming demand for applique products, leading to impressive sales and new business connections. But the highlight of her journey was an encounter with Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Honourable Minister of Culture and Tourism, Government of India, who personally appreciated her work—an acknowledgment of immense pride and motivation.

Through Project Hunar, Teeja Devi discovered the power of marketing in transforming craft into commerce. No longer just an artist, she is now a businesswoman, a mentor, and a symbol of empowerment. Her journey is proof that when tradition meets training, it paves the way for a future stitched with success.