



Shrimati Boori
*Master in hand-beading, working with Sahaj,
Dahod, Gujarat*

The Dahod district of Gujarat, India, is comprised of tribal people who have long depended on agriculture to make a living. This means that their work is very seasonal, leaving long gaps between the times they can toil the land. Many men in the village leave their families and migrate to cities to look for seasonal work there, leaving the women behind to fend for themselves.

It was in this environment that a group of people in a non-government organization decided to branch off and help the women develop their arts and crafts in the hopes to achieve sustainable employment. Their mission is: "Socio-Economic empowerment of the woman through art and craft based activities to secure her position in society where she can think independently, becomes a role model for future generations, and above all does not have to prove herself because of her gender." In order to achieve this goal, this organization trains and empowers tribal women groups with vocational education, helping them create functional products and make a living. The group has grown to include more than 2,700 tribal artisans (working part-time or full-time on the crafts) from 52 different villages of the area.

Boori, joined this artisan cooperative 9 years ago as a widow, a great disadvantage for a woman in her region. Before joining the cooperative, she and her community were facing horrible hardships. Thanks to Fair Trade, Boori was able to break the cycle of poverty and exploitation, giving her the opportunity to re-marry. This is almost unheard of in her tribal society, but is a testament of how Fair Trade is directly challenging social structures and reshaping them so they can benefit everyone. Women in this cooperative went from making an average of Rs. 500-1000 per month to making Rs. 3000-4000 per month. Apart from the increased income opportunities within the village, women have also gained social status within their family, community and various government and banking institutions. Thanks to the success of the program, men started joining and now make up 10% of the group.

We believe that this is a great example of creating opportunities for marginalized producers because Boori faced many challenges before joining this group. She is a woman in a society where men are usually in control. She was also a widow, meaning she was left alone to fend for herself. Her village depended on agriculture (a job reserved for men, usually), but the work was seasonal and affected by climate change. All the odds were against her.

However, thanks to the economic empowerment that was offered to her by Sahaj, Boori became a productive member of society. **After learning her craft, Boori became productive within the cooperative and started getting paid. This new empowerment enabled other men and women in her village to see her real worth. They were able to see beyond the fact that she is "just a woman", and started valuing her better. This also enabled her to become a decision maker in her society, and is now respected and known in her community. Finally, she was able to remarry, which is almost unheard of in this part of the world.**

--Courtesy: SETU-the bridge to artisans

