



REVIEW ARTICLE

FLORAL CRAFTS FOR IMPROVED LIVELIHOOD AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Crafting in floriculture has been gaining impetus with the rapidly growing flora industry in India. Value addition in form of floral craft increases the economic value and consumer appeal of floricultural commodities and serving as a linkage between growers and consumers, it directly emphasizes the utility of flowers and a necessity for marketing of flowers. Thus, forms of crafting in floriculture like art of cut floral arrangements, bouquet making, loose flower arrangements, hair adornments, dry flower articles, potpourris, etc. are gaining momentum and popularising in our country. There is a vast opportunity in value added floriculture trade through crafting at entrepreneurial level for rural and urban people specially women besides growing and selling flowers. Crafting in floriculture is one such strategy that is also a logical extension of many farm businesses and can exploit underutilized farm resources for increased returns. Women at small scale can set up small enterprises where floral crafting in the form of bouquets, garlands, veni, flower arrangements in containers, dry flower making, etc. that has high potential for earning and improving livelihood.

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INTRODUCTION

India's rural women are involved in various types of work and contribute considerably to the economy. However, much of their work is not systematically accounted in the official statistics (Agoramoorthy and Hsu, 2012). Although the Government of India had declared 2001 as the 'Year of Women Empowerment' by passing a policy, much of the rural women's work has not been accounted in official statistics and data collection agencies admit serious under-estimation (Leach and Sitaram, 2002). Rural women across India are involved in agricultural activities from sowing to harvesting which is highly labour intensive. Hence, future agro-technology needs to emphasize on developing 'women-friendly' approach in reference to their skills, artistic approach as well as there is need of substantial support from the government and corporate sectors. Crafting in floriculture is low input and high output based work which entails lots of creative and artistic skills as well as long hours of perseverance and thorough involvement. It is here, women can play a greater role, besides these crafts are small scale based industries which can be managed by women from their homes along with their family responsibility. Rural women can very well take up projects involving flower drying and dry flower articles.

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Further, crafting in flowers involving skills of bouquet making and hair adornments with loose flowers has a good potential for earning livelihood for urban women. A large number of farm women in some villages of Gurgaon and Faridabad districts of Haryana, after being trained at IARI for drying flowers and making valued-added products have taken up the production of flower-based fancy and functional products for their livelihood. Similarly, some self groups of women in rural areas near Trichi and Salem in Tamil Nadu as well in west Bengal have come up with same concept who have strong tie ups with private sector. The small-scale floricultural craft in rural areas has the potential to undoubtedly energize and empower tribal, rural as well as urban women to enhance their livelihoods and economy and therefore it has the potential to contribute significantly to India's sustainable development in future.

Floral Craft based on cut flowers

The popularity and commercialization of floral craft i.e. based on flower arrangement art is rapidly increasing in our country as depicted from the magnificent floral decorations costing from Rs 10,000 to 20 lakhs in wedding and religious ceremonies. There is around 20 to 200% monetary value addition through flower arrangements in different forms. The growing popularity of special day celebrations like Valentines' day, women's day and mother's day has also contributed to the growth of this art cum industry. This sector is rapidly expanding with the growing rate of flower consumption. Floral

bouquet factories flourishing in Thailand, China, UK, etc., are offering sale of bouquets on many websites. Websites like www.theflowerfactory.com, www.flowerfactory.co.nz, www.flowerfactory.ca, www.theflowerfactoryusa.com etc offers floral decor for all occasions ranging from weddings, reception, spring, anniversary celebrations, etc., at your door step to make your celebration a memorable one. The bouquets and floral arrangements cost from US\$ 8 to US \$300 by these floral factories. The concept of floral designing has great application in modern bouquets and decorations on stage, walls, ceilings, curtains for various ceremonies including wedding. Although, this floral live art has become an integral part of ceremonies, it is yet to enter our homes and offices on regular basis. This global aesthetic live art needs to be explored at industrial level in India. Flower Arrangements are an important part of the ambience on any occasion like weddings, birthdays, parties, or any other events in life as well as beautify homes and offices alike. There are basically three style of arranging flowers *viz.*, western style (Oriental), Ikebana (Eastern style) and Contemporary free style which are generally composed of cut flowers, foliage, twigs, stems with some accessories (Hiller 1974 and Packer 1998).

Western style of flower arrangement

The emphasis is on the use of 'many flowers as a mass' in the oriental/western style of flower arrangement. This style follows geometrical forms and consists of more number of flowers and depicts a complete and full effect (Mc Daniel 1996). Balance and Depth and rhythm are very important to be maintained. It displays mass effect hence repetition and continuity are very important to exhibit appealing and aesthetic look. The broad types of designs in western style of flower arrangement include various traditional designs, corsage and buttonnaires and wreaths. The traditional flower arranging styles combine lines and masses and create many variations of the line, line mass and mass arrangements (Packer 1998). A good knowledge of the traditional styles provide a base for the basic learning of flower arranging skill. These classic designs are based on geometric shapes including ovals, crescents, spirals, triangles, the Hogarth curve, zigzags or other geometric forms, having one center of interest near the central axis where all lines converge, with no evident crossed lines. Traditional designs were initially arranged in different types of containers like bowl, vase, pedestal or novelty shaped flower pots using different shapes of pinholder for holding flowers. Later, floral foams were being used to make lovely designs in western style of flower arrangement. In business terms this has taken the form of various type of floral bouquets like round or triangular baskets, spheres, cascades, hand bouquets, *etc.* where in women are playing a significant role either as an entrepreneur, teacher or florist.

Corsages and buttonnaires

These are small floral decoration designed to be worn and are very popular in western countries although gaining popularity in our country as well. Corsage is a small floral arrangement designed beautifully to be attached to the dress or worn on wrist. Corsages are also sold extensively during the Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day holidays in western countries. One of the more important uses for corsages in Europe is for weddings. The construction of florists' corsage resembles the arrangement

of flowers in containers. The bow and trim become an integral part of the design and satin leaves may provide the foliage. The corsage must be constructed securely enough to retain its original design with minimum use of wires and floral tape to avoid large masses of stems at the base. Flowers should be positioned for best effect and firmness in construction. Flower colours should be coordinated with the dress, the complexion and hair colour of the wearer, and the lighting available (for day or evening occasions). These are not so popular in our country but some designer forms of corsage and buttonnaire are now in increasing demand for wedding occasion in some parts of western and Northern India. Women entrepreneurs and women artisans have come up in this venture. Some women entrepreneurs have stepped in the floral business of specially designed roses with printed messages, names or paintings which sell at much higher (around 10 times) prices.

Floral Wreaths

A floral arrangement in the form of a circular garland, usually woven of flowers and foliage, that traditionally indicates honor or celebration. Wreaths are especially very popular on funerals as a symbol of honoring the deceased. Besides, they are also very much used on occasions like special celebrations and to welcome the guests as welcome wreaths when dinners are hosted. Wreaths are constructed on the wire frames by tying the greenery with continuous strands of wire or floral form rings or paddle. These are exclusively ordered in defence forces, government bodies and sophisticated societies for particular occasions. Women artisans are being involved in designing the wreaths which are sold at good prices.

Easter style flower arrangement (Ikebana)

Ikebana symbolizes Living flower. It is a Japanese word, meaning: Ike (To set in/To live/) + bana (flower). Ikebana is an expression of liveliness and has spiritual significance, depicting life and freshness (Komoda and Pointer 1984). Japanese ikebana is a creative art, which brings indoors the charm and beauty of landscapes, the seashore or lakeside. It recreates nature on a reduced scale through the arrangement of all types of plant material gathered from nature - from gardens, rivers, valleys. These arts have great application in décor at five star hotels as well as in high profile wedding ceremonies. The basic principles of ikebana are ii) Asymmetry: There is never symmetry in the ikebana types yet the arrangement looks balanced, iii) Few flowers: Few flowers are used to form basic lines of ikebana and it gives filling effect. The arrangement depicts space and creativity, iv) Proximity to Nature: Ikebana signifies life, it appears associated with nature as it inspired by nature v) Continuity: Ikebana always give a growing and live look. It should not appear inert but should appear persisting and maintaining continuity. Ikebana consists of three basic lines *viz.*, i) *Shin*- It forms the most important basic line of the ikebana. It symbolizes Heaven and expresses truth. Hence, this should be strongest, firm and tallest among all. Size of shin equals to (Length +width of the container) x 1.5-3 times. ii) *Soe*: *Soe* is the second important line of ikebana. It symbolizes man and expresses body, the human being. The shape of ikebana container varies from shallow, tall, broad, rectangular, round, oval, informal to curved types and double or partitioned types and are available in varied forms of porcelain, lacquer ware lined with copper and glass. Besides, baskets of metal and

wood are also used for ikebana. Traditionally bamboo has been also very well used as ikebana container. A single, hollow bamboo container is cut to have double and triple openings for the purpose of incorporating different floral designs to form one complete composition. *Rikka*, *Nagiere*, *Shoka*, *Moribana*, *Morimono* and *Jiyuka* are the important styles of ikebana. *Rikka* is the oldest style with strict principles while *Nagiere* and *Moribana* are simple forms of ikebana. Women ikebana experts are highly paid for designing ikebana in five star hotels as well as for wedding or special occasions and are also engaged in teaching the technique in ikebana schools.

Dry flower craft and potpourris

Dry flowers and plant materials have tremendous potential as substitute for fresh flowers and foliage for interior decoration as well as for a variety of other aesthetic and commercial uses. Although, India is rich in its biodiversity in native ornamentals, at present the industry is not properly established and depends on plant material available in forests and no systematic growing of specialized flowers for drying exists anywhere in the country (Bhutani, 1993). In India, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, and Kolkata have emerged as major hubs of dry flowers industries in recent times. For making dry flowers, flowers and plant parts can be collected from wild sources of some flower crops like Dahlias, marigold, jute flowers, wood roses, wild lilies, helichrysum, lotus pods, etc. Some flowers that are air-dried and used include Dahlias (*Dahlia hortensis*), poppy seed heads (*Papavere somniferum*), roses (*Rosa*), Delphinium, larkspur (*Consolida ambigua*), lavender (*Lavandula augustifolia*), golden rod (*Solidago canadensis*) African marigold (*Tagetes erecta*) strawflower (*Helichrysum bracteatum*), cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*), statice (*Limonium sinuatum*), globe amaranth (*Gomphrena globosa*), lotus pods etc. Even pod and fruits of many shrubs and trees are being exploited for drying. Inflorescence of many grasses like *Aira elegans*, *Alopecurus lanatus*, *Agrostis*, *Coix*, *Erianthus* etc can be exploited for drying purpose (Bhattacharjee and Dee 2005). The demand for dry flowers is increasing at an impressive rate of 8-10% and therefore there is a great scope for the Indian entrepreneurs. Dry flower articles like dry flower bouquets, cards, wall hangings, sceneries, frames, wreathes, pomander etc are also popularising in the market.

A significant component of dry flower export comprise of potpourris. The exclusive 'Potpourrie' made of dry flower with added fragrance to serve as an attractive room freshener is highly popular at global level. There are export oriented dry flower units that are specialized in processing of *potpourries*. It is a special mixture of dried sweet scented plant parts including flowers, leaves, seeds, stems and root with some fragrant aromatic oil added to it. The important dried ornamental plants used for making potpourris are roses, lilacs, lavender, pinks, hyacinths, lilies, violets, wall flowers, marigold and many others which are associated with essential oil viz., geranium, daisy bush, bergamot, sage, savoury, thyme, angelica and sweet cicely. In addition, foliage of ferns, pine- cones, lily pods and driftwood and other items from nature's treasure of exotic bloom are collected from forests and gardens (Singh 2003). The dried matters are sometimes artificially dyed with some bright dyes also. Mostly women are engaged in collecting such products and further in semi processing them for drying,

bleaching and making some crafts. Potpourri is normally designed in a transparent glass bowl or a ceramic jar or stored in a colourful satin or muslin sachet or in a thick transparent polypropylene film with its opening being tied with silk ribbon. In earlier days it was considered as women's art and the grandma's knowledge which has now become a successful business having high export potential.

Loose flower craft

In Indian tradition fresh loose flowers are used for crafting in form of garlands, flower ornaments and hair decoration. Loose flower craft in form of garlands, String, *veni*, bridal crown, *Jadai* (Hair adornment), loose flower based corsage for hand wrist etc, have great demand especially during festivals and South Indian weddings. In South India, flower garlands have an important role in every festival, when the deities are decorated with garlands made from different fragrant flowers (often jasmine) and some specific leaves. The quality flowers with fragrance and aromatic leaves are used to make garlands to worship Hindu deities. Some of those fragrant flowers include jasmine, plumeria, lotus, lilies, nerium, chrysanthemum, roses, hibiscus, etc. Also in wedding the couple wears a wedding garland through the country as a rich tradition. Some loose flower based floral craft well known in our country specially in South India are *Thodutha maalai*-which means garland made using fibres (usually banana tree fibers (*vaazhai naar*)) -ranges in height from 1 1/2 feet to 12 feet and thickness from 5-6 cm to 3/4 feet in diameter, *Kortha maalai*-made using needle & thread, String-a flower string is a traditional Indian garland that can be used either as hair decoration or as offerings in pujas (prayer), Wedding Garlands, Bridal crown-crowns made jasmine flower buds are used in some marriages for adorning the couple, *Jadai*-it is unique decoration of women's hair with Jasmine and crossandra tied to base material like banana fibre, corsage for hand wrist-it is made up of jasmine buds and rose petals. In the western region of the country floral beautiful jewellery and hair decor made up of buds of spider lily, jasmine, tabernaemontana and petals of rose are specially designed for brides and are priced during wedding occasion. Only women are involved in making these designer floral jewellery and hair adornment business which gives around 250% to 1000% value addition in flowers.

Conclusion

Crafting in floriculture through dry flower making, floral decor, bouquet making, dry flower frames and articles, potpourris by using the ornamental plants is considered as an ideal venture in the recent past for livelihood and women empowerment. Women groups can work together with small-scale processing enterprises to create new markets for higher value floriculture products. Besides, utilization of the plant products from the forest places has created an employment opportunity and rural livelihood security to the people realized on this venture. It is possible to start a home scale establishment with a meagre amount of rupees fifteen thousand and woman may supplement her income by employing other members of the family. Often, small-scale processors look to their community for local ingredients, staff, and markets. An industry based on crafting should be started as 'Small' by first investing ingenuity, second labour, and third money. One may need an independent source of income to cover the costs for at least the first three to five

years. Crafting in floriculture can serve to showcase the uniqueness of flowers as communities. If properly explored, flower crafting can develop into a successful cottage industry by the prospective women entrepreneurs in our country wherein a great potential for improved livelihood is foreseen.

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It is important to empower women. Empowerment means becoming able to take responsibility. Women have the right to determine their own choices in life. The aim of the Swawlamban project is to improve the livelihood of rural women by proper utilisation of available resources, up-gradation of existing skills and marketing support to sell the products. The objective is to identify, motivate, plan and implement income generation activities to ensure sustainable livelihood opportunity of the members involved in income generation activities. Activities such as livestock rearing, rural art and craft, food processing, candle making, bread factory, vermi composting, soft toys manufacture, paper plate making etc. are supported. Marketing linkage is als Significant links between improving women's economic empowerment and overall economic growth are well-recognised in the international development practice and research communities. Economic empowerment means ensuring women have the opportunity to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth, as well as negotiate respectful treatment. has further estimated that low female participation in labour markets in Asia, for example, costs the region up to US\$47 billion each year.vi The World Bank has noted that while real gains have been made in recent decades in women's health and education, little has improved in women's economic empowerment, despite its significant potential development impact.vii This is. USAID invests in empowering women and girls in Ethiopia across all of our programs by promoting equal access to education, health, and economic opportunities. In doing so, we help create opportunities for more equitable participation in society for females across the country. We also address the root causes of gender-based violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation.