

The Historical Variations of Mootabi Handicrafts in the City of Meybod

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Introduction

Recognition of indigenous knowledge and technologies, some of which have been represented in form of handicrafts, is a requirement for sustainable development in developing countries. Fortunately, Iran has a brilliant position in the world in terms of indigenous knowledge and traditional technologies regarding handicrafts, although it is lacking in quality research and studies on such folk knowledge and technologies. Among such folk knowledge that has not gained that necessary attention, one can refer to Mootabi. The indigenous art and craft of Mootabi can be located in the city of Bafruiyeh in Meybod, Yazd. As a bedrock of this indigenous art, Meybod was named the National Mootabi city of Iran by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts in July, 2025. The history of this art and craft in Bafruiyeh, which is one of its main centers in the country, can be considered to be more than two centuries old. Mootabi refers to the spinning of goat hair to produce direct products such as Ghatmeh, rope, barbs, and indirect products such as black-cloth, sackcloth, cow hide, donkey hide, and camel hide. The most important advantages of goat hair are: its greenness, it's compatible with the environment; the automatic function of goat hair in winter and summer to protect against heat, cold, and rain, keep dangerous biting insects and reptiles away from it, and resist fire.

Research Method

The main issue of this research is to show the historical developments of Mootabi art-industry in Bafruiyeh, Meybod. This research, which was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, aims at better understanding of Mootabi and its historical developments as well as giving identity to the practitioners of this art-industry and paving the way for its revival in more up-to-date forms. The data of this research were collected through field and library studies and through means of observation, interview, photography, and recording. The statistical population of this research in its field section consists of the Mootabs of Bafruiyeh, local experts and historians, as well as the urban managers of Bafruiyeh. The necessary statistical samples were selected using a non-probability snowball method until the last sample or until theoretical saturation. For this purpose, the informants of the city of Bafruiyeh were first met. After interviews and discussions about the generalities of Mootabi handicrafts, the scholars and practicing activists of this field were asked about, and in this way more people were identified. After that, specialized interview sessions were held with them. In these interviews, researchers asked their own questions and recorded the given answers in form of audio. The next stage was observation, carried out in forms of pure and participatory observation. To observe, researchers went to the available few historic workshops in Bafruiyeh neighborhood. To gain a better and deeper understanding of the ins and outs of Mootabi, one of the researchers spent some time learning Mootabi from a Mootabi master to be able to perform it practically.

Research Findings

The findings of this study show that since about 1957, with the arrival of electricity, machinery, and automobiles in Bafruiyeh, all aspects of Mootabi have gradually changed, including the ways of obtaining goat hair, its transportation, its production process, its manufactured products, its consuming markets, its employment rates, its place in economy, the social base of the employed ones, and the reputation of the city of Bafruiyeh. After the arrival of machinery (both freight-carrying machines and machines involved in the production process), the profitability and the number of employees in this craft went beyond the usual state and grew rapidly. However, this trend changed since the late 1970s. After 1950s, the profitability of this art and industry was more in the trade sector than in production, so that not only the final products but also the hair that had been cut and combed were sold as intermediate goods to tribes. While before that, the profitability was more in the production sector. The centers for the procurement of raw materials and consumer markets were so expanded and diversified that buyers from Sistan and Baluchistan came to Bafruiyeh and sometimes stayed for several days until the goods they needed were produced. Mootabi products were even exported abroad. This trend began to decline from the late 1970s until it almost disappeared in 2000s. The introduction of machinery into this art and industry reduced the employment of women, because women were mostly engaged in cleaning and combing hair. However, removing lint from hair is still considered a female task to some extent. The introduction of machinery improved production, profitability, employment rates, and the social and economic base of the Mootabi; however, since the late 1970s, this trend has been reversed so much so that many Mootabs have even changed their surnames from 'Mootabi Bafruiyeh.'

Conclusion

The important point is that, despite access to electricity, Bafruiyeh's Mootab still performs fortunately the main part, which is braiding hair together, completely manually and traditionally. This has led to the recognition of Mootabi art and craft as a handicraft to the extent that in January 2014, Mootab was included in the list of intangible heritage of Iran. The most important issue, capable of stabilizing and Thriving this art and craft, is that the attitude of producers to consider the concept of "contemporariness" without compromising the authenticity and craftsmanship of Mootabi. By observing this condition, *modernity* can be welcomed in all stages of raw material procurement, processing, production, and market consumption. Of course, it is first necessary for the Mootabs to be recognized in terms of identity to regain self-confidence. This is the condition that the researchers hope to be realized through such studies.

Keywords: art industry, Bafruiyeh of Meybod, variations, Mootabi.