

Curator's Eye: An Anthropological Analysis of Old Vanishing Art and Craft of Ganjam District of Odisha

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Abstract

While looking at an antique artifact and oblivious question arises out of curiosity which sometime remains unanswered. Question possibly may be- how this thing came in to existence? How this thing was made and who made it? All this and many more questions are expected to be answer accurately during the anthropological studies and analysis. There are many traditional art and crafts of tribal and folk people of Odisha, which are now on the verge of extinction. This paper is an attempt to describe and illustrate the contents of rich Art and Craft special reference to Ganjam district of Odisha which are dying in nature now a days. The invisible role of curators who plays a vital role in expanding and preserving their literatures those remain concealed in the Art and Craft traditions. The paper deals with Anthropological documentation among the Dera, Metal craft and Chitrakar communities of Odisha especially on the collection of Dying arts and crafts.

Keywords: Art; Craft; Anthropological; Communities; Odisha

Introduction

Odisha has one of the richest traditions of handloom and handicrafts in the country, which goes back to the time of ancient. The ancient rock-cut caves and beautiful stone carvings drawn in the temples of medieval Odisha provide a flash of the rich tradition of crafts, art and sculpture in the ancient past. In a poor and industrially backward state like Odisha, these traditional industries like handloom and other popular handicrafts such as stone carving, wood carving, silver filigree, appliqué, patta painting, coir, dhokra-casting, bell metal works, etc hold considerable promise for economic empowerment and provide gainful employment to the technically little qualified, less educated and poor in the rural nonfarm sector [1].

Odisha, the land of enchanting beauty is well known for its exquisite handicrafts. The State was known as Utkal', which meant place of art of highest degree. It has a rich tradition of handicrafts, unique in its characteristics that have evolved along with its art and sculpture, temple architecture, folk art, dance and music. The craftsmanship is unique for its technical perfection and artistic excellence. Having an ancient tradition of making splendid pieces of art by hands Odiya artists have long been presenting their awe-inspiring masterpieces to the world. Age has not withered the beauty and dynamic diversity of Odisha's traditional arts and crafts. Even today, despite the industrial revolution and availability of cheap machine-made products, the handicraft industry has not only survived but also flourished amidst stiff competition.

Orissa is famous for her handicrafts which exhibit the skill and creativity of her artisans. Handicrafts are the visible symbol of cultural behavior. The craft culture of India shows the firm base in the country's age old artistic traditions. This is very true of Orissa as well as of Ganjam District.

An Anthropological study and field work for the documentation and collection of ethnographic objects of Silk, cotton weavers communities and the old vanishing Art and Craft of Ganjam district was carried out at Ganjam district of Odisha. During the fieldwork the weaver communities like Dera/Devang of Berhampur, Rangani, Tanti communities of Bomkai, Hinjilicut, Pitala, the brass metal artisan of Kansari community, the old cow-dung doll makers and stone carver community of Mathura were selected for the purposive fulfillment of the present discourse. The methodology included documentation, dissemination through photographic documentation and interview methods (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Tanta (feet loom) of Hinjilicut village Ganjam.

Description of the Field Areas

Ganjam is named after the old tow nship and the European fort of Ganjam situated on the northern bank of the river Rushikulya, which was the headquarters of the district, Berhampur. It were the Britishers, who ultimately defeated the French (who ruled over Ganjam previously) in the Deccan and took control of Ganjam in 1759. In the initial period of British rule, the district became part of the Madras Presidency which initiated the Patto (silk) saree weaving at Berhampur. Later the district was separated from the Madras Presidency and formed a part of the newly created Odisha Province. According to the encyclopaedia of Art and Craft Ganjam district earned the first position for its rich cultural heritage. The stone sculptures and Cow-dung craft of Mathura village of

Ganjam are of high artistic and aesthetic values. Masks of different shapes, made out of trivial items like waste paper, tamarind seeds, and cow dung provide livelihood support to some the local people. Brass and bell-metal flexible fish craft of Belaguntha gives another identity to Ganjam district in the field of Art and Craft [2].

Berhampur is famous for exclusive silk sarees not only in Orissa, but also in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. It is said that many Telugu aristocrats prefer to procure silk sarees for marriage purposes from Berhampur in spite of their own area. According to the old weavers and some other communities of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, they believe that the Patta (silk) fabrics are lord's fabric. This is used at the time of certain occasions where the human is treated as lord, like thread ceremony in Brahmin community and marriage ceremony in all Hindu communities [3]. In these ceremonies the Patta (silk fabrics) are considered as customary. Due to this tradition, the Patta is popular among local communities at the time of traditional ceremonies like marriage.

Berhampur: A Silk City

Being a famous city for silk variety and quality, historically Berhampur was also a famous commercial hub for the British as well as the Kings. The craft of silk weaving was introduced at Berhampur town in 14th century A.D by the Mohuri kings [4]. The Mahuri kings were the great worshiper of Goddess Mahuri Kalua. During their patronage it is said that about 600 to 700 years back the King brought the Deras from Rajamundry which was earlier coming under Madras Presidency to serve Goddess Kalua and Budhi Thakurani the istadevi (clan deity) of Berhampur as her Bunakar sebayat (weaver to serve). The designs and patterns which are specific to these Patto sarees (Silk saree) were exclusively designed by the community to please the Goddess Kalua and Budhi Thakurani. But gradually they changed it as their pursuit of economy. The particular colour (Jaou, rani, silk colour) and patterns like Phada kumbha and Nadiya Phoola were the traditional design which are specific to the Patto Saree are now converted to different modern designs with tie and die according to the demand of local market [5]. Most of the designs of the Patto sarees were borrowed from natural flower, nose ring and other ornaments worn by the Dera women. During patronage of King the threads were brought by the king from Bangalore and Mysore. It is believed that previously the Patto saree were supplied to Puri for Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra for their regular adornments. But after the king now these charges are handed over to the weavers of Sonapur and Athagarh

district. Presently, the only Joda items are woven by the silk weavers for the Sebayats (temple servants) of Puri Jagannath Temple. There were 800 Maggum or Tanta (feet loom) working during the time of King which are now reduced to 100 in nos. The Dera community also served at the temple of Budhi Thakurani for regular worshipping. The weaving skill, technique and utilization of time of a weaver per Patto Saree and Joda (male garment) is very less in comparison to their wages which gradually forced them to leave this traditional handloom work. Now in collaboration with Govt. of Textile Department three co-operative societies are working for silk weavers (Soundarapandian, 2002). Whereas there are other co-operative societies working for cotton weavers like Rngani and Tanti communities in Pitala, Hinjilicut, Bomkai, Asika etc. The cotton weavers of Bomkai, Hinjili, pitala and Asika are famous for their traditional cotton handloom sarees like Ashmani tara, Taramala, Butta mala sarees etc [6] (Figures 2-8).



Figure 2: The design of Berhampuri patto saree.



Figure 3: The Dera women weaving patto saree in Maggum.



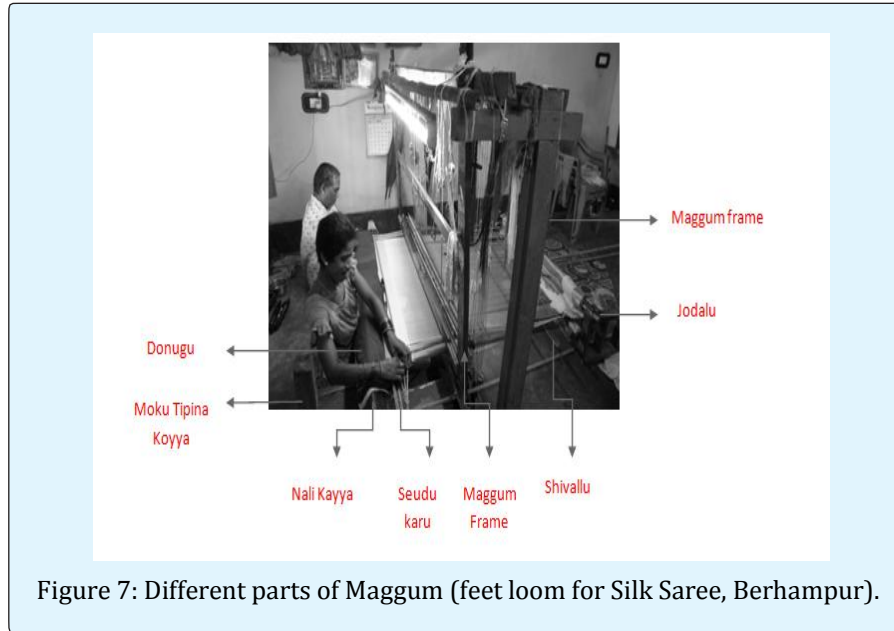
Figure 4: The Dera weavers weaving Joda in Maggum.



Figure 5: Tanta (feet loom) of Hinjilicut village Ganjam.



Figure 6: Tanta (feet loom) of pitala village, Ganjam.



Flexible brass fish of Belaguntha of Ganjam

Flexible brass fish produced in Bellaguntha in the Ganjam District has attracted customers all over the world. The scales of the fish are cut from the sheet metal and stitched at the rib with the copper metal wire which allows flexibility to the form. The head and the tail are separately fabricated and are later joined to produce the complete shape. Thanks for the craftsmanship world famous art, design, and the architect in manufacturing moveable metal fish out of brass. Belaguntha, historically world famous from the time of British rule for unique flexible brass fish craft is now on the verge of extinction. From the historical evidence and according to the

statement of Shri Pradeep Maharana, now the senior artist of the Kansari community, late Bhikari Maharana was the first metal artist who started this craft and used to demonstrate his craftsmanship at Bhanja king's court. During the period of king, Bhikari Maharana got the Royal status from the king as Bindhani Ratna and copper certificate as a skilled artisan of their kingdom. Later when the British tried to learn this skill from his grandson Shri Gangadhar Maharana by force, consequently under pressure he decided to suicide. But with the death of Gangadhar Maharana the swimming technique of the fish was lost. And later his wife fortunately who learned the only making of flexible fish taught their son to keep this craft alive. After king's patronage since from the time of British, the Kansari family is supplying fish to the Victoria Technical Institute, Madras for their livelihood.



Making process

The fish is basically divided into 4 parts like head, middle stomach, lower stomach and tail. The making of the fish starts with the collection of brass sheets and making of head portion. According to the size of head, the size of the body is decided. The body of the fish is divided into many pieces in order to provide flexibility to the fish. After making different parts, the parts are jointly stitched with each other in such a way that the fish can move easily. The tools like Sabala, Compass, Sheni, Guatia, Kadu chuta, Pagar, Janta, Pati janta etc are used for making different parts of the fish. After making of fish a sand named as Rashna Bali, a local sand which was earlier used

for polishing, is now replaced by modern polishing machines. The fish vary in designs according to the locally available variety of fishes like Rohi, Prawn, Magura, Gadisha, Kou etc. The making of the fish started during the British colonial with Rs. 2.00 per inch which was now reached to Rs.150 to 300 per inch.

This 300 year old craft started by Shri Bhikari Maharana even occupied a special place in the international market because of British Govt. but now in grass-root level it is on the verge of extinction. There are only three descendents of this community who are trying hard to keep this Craft alive (Figures 10,11).

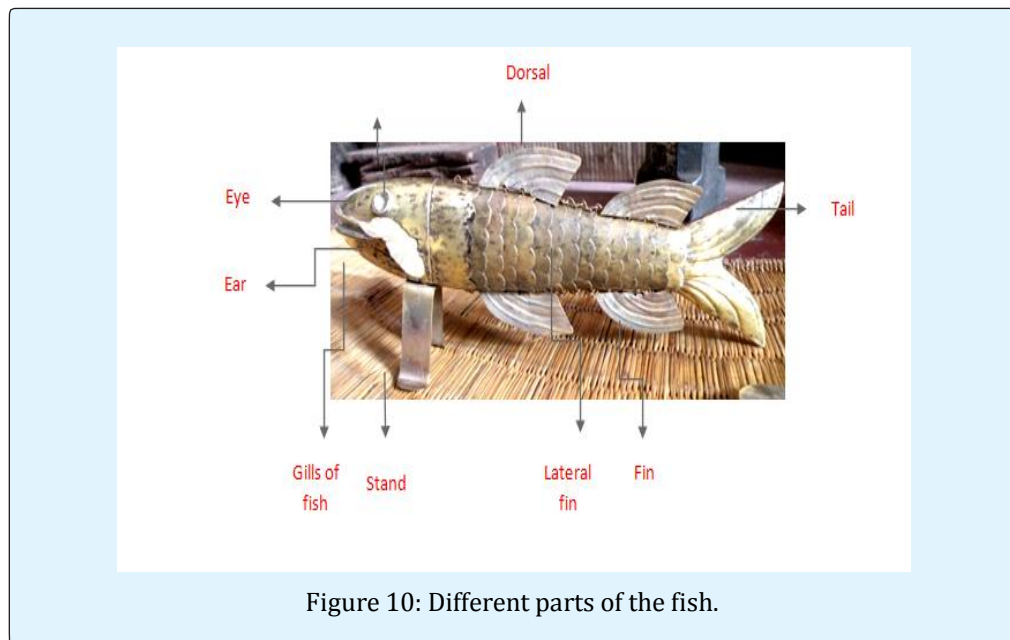


Figure 10: Different parts of the fish.

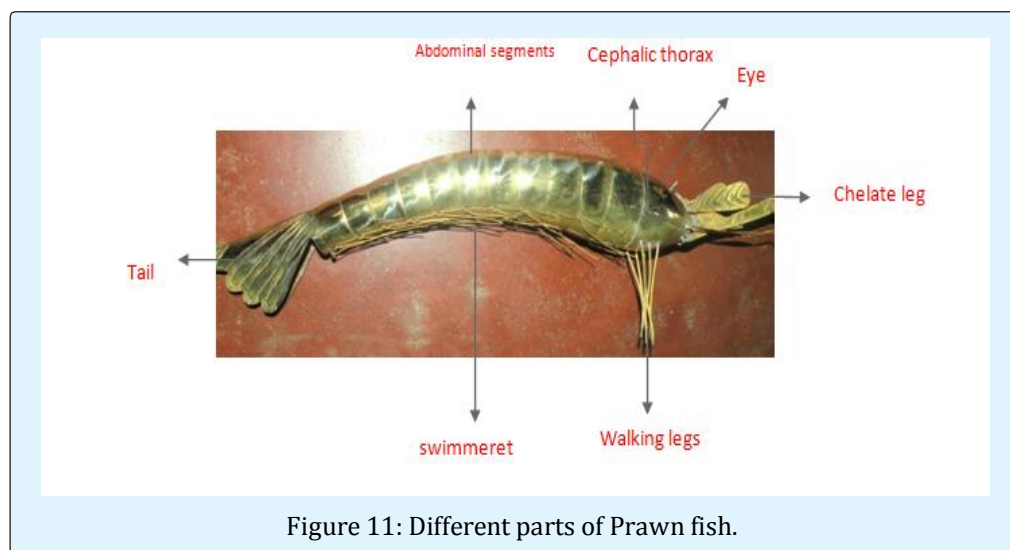


Figure 11: Different parts of Prawn fish.

The Cow-dung craft of Mathura and Chadheyapalli

Around 80 numbers of families in Mathura village and 40 numbers of families in Chadheyapalli village from Chitrakar community are living since from the rule of Bhanja King of Ganjam. The communities, since from the time of royal patronage, are preparing cow dung dolls for Kundhei Jatra, a local fair of dolls which continues from Bahuda Jatra(cart festival) to Asadh poornima.



Figure 12: A Chitrakar women of Mathura village.



Figure 13: A Ganjapa/Sara maker of Chadheyapall village.



Figure 14: A Chitrakar women with her cow dung Craft.

The community starts the making different images like Lord Jagannath and his companions, pigeon, parrot, crane, elephant, lion, tiger, snake, goat, sheep, the image of warriors, women with baby etc including Ganjapa and Sara (playing cards) before four months of this fair which they sell. The raw material is free, and the cost of production is almost negligible [7]. Mostly made by the women of the Chitrakar community, these brightly painted toys are rustic in design. Being holy as well as having eco-friendly properties these toys were very famous since centuries. Cow-dung, cotton cloth, Apuchi (tamarind seed), Chalk powder, Sankh (Seashell powder), Geru pathar (for brown colour) are used as raw material (Figures 12-14).

Conclusion

The handicrafts constitute a timeless facet of the rich cultural heritage of India. As an economic activity, the sector contributes immensely to the economic development of the country in general and artisans of the rural India in particular [8]. The sector contributes immensely to the economic development of the rural India due to close affiliation of the sector to the rural India as most of the products belong to rural area of the country. The element of art and craft present and its appreciation by the customers of both the foreign and domestic market make it the potential sector for both development of rural India and increasing the export of the country [9].

Further, the products constitute a precious part of the generational legacy and exemplifies the richness and diversity of the country and the artistry of the artisans of the country. The production of traditional products and its integration to the modern designs as a part of the demand pattern of domestic and international buyers also provides a very good platform to these traditional products for growth and sustainable development [10].

Keeping in mind the traditional values of the exclusive art of the sector of Odisha, it's a greater task at the hands of the anthropologists to study it deeply and find out the folklores hidden to upheld it. Revival of the traditional culture of each community lies at the hands of the researchers; as to the best of the knowledge this is the first kind of a report from Ganjam, Behampur, it will surely lead scopes to many researchers.

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