

## Handicrafts : The Visible Cultural Symbol of Ganjam District

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Orissa is famous for her handicrafts which exhibit the skill and creativity of her artisans. Handicrafts are the visible symbol of cultural behaviour. Craft involves a technology as well as art. Any articulated product in the sphere of creativity could be termed as an artistic handicraft. The person who imagines and creates these hand made goods of different origins forms is called as craftsman who is otherwise known as Silpi, Kalakar, Bindhani, Moharana, Karigar etc. 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.

The glorious archaeological monuments with their beautiful architecture and exquisite sculptures are a living testimony to the rich artistic traditions of the Ganjam District. The artistic traditions are also reflected in paintings, textiles, metal images, jewellery and other items of finery and aesthetic sensibilities.

The handicrafts of the region is known and admired world over for their primitive quality dexterity, precision, novelty in designing and concepts. The handicraft of the area is sustained in villages and they are of human need based. The produces are a basket, a bell metal bown, horn stics, a saree, claytoy, painted wood art or a wooden chest, etc.

There are almost more than one hundred crafts available in the district but about a dozen cater to the world importance. These are mostly paintings and painted items, applique, dhokra figurines, bell metal and brasswares, brass fish, carved items in stone, wood, horn; terracottas, toys, lacquer items, basket, filigree and other hand woven crafts. Along with these handicrafts other items of coir, jute, grass, carpets, cane and wooden furnitures are also receiving the growing importance in the area. It is a matter of great regret that a number of crafts are languishing due to want of patronage, shortage and availability of raw-materials, market and of Government support.

Handicraft Cooperative Societies were functioning in the State with 0.15 lakh members. Handicraft goods worth Rs.657.08 lakh were produced in the state during the year 2007-08, while the goods worth of Rs.723.84 lakh were sold. The State has 9011 cottage industry units functioning with an investment of Rs.38.30 crore, generating employment to 15,368 persons.

### **Patta Paintings**

Painted on primed and processed cloth, patta paintings traditionally depicted a large pantheon of Gods and Goddesses. As a religious art form, it evolved in various temples of Ganjam and other districts also. The Patta paintings which are used in the temples are archaic with iconic

features. Traditionally the Chitrakars, Moharanas and Mohapatra Painters used to paint Pattas in their village workshops. The specific handicrafts are available in Chikiti, Digapahandi, Dharakote and Parlakhemundi area. The painters of the art are now producing the traditional art of Radha Krishna, Ramayan, Bhagavata Gita's themes alongwith other varieties of unconventional modern arts. *Ganjapa* or the Painted circular playing cards are one of the socially used traditional forms of these painting craft materials. It looks very creative and colourful. Ganjapas available in the district are mostly of three types. A large variety of these cards carry paintings of Dasavatar, mythological subjects related to Ramayan and other variety is of Mughal Ganjapa with king and ministers, some other type is Ashtamalla Ganjapa i.e. the painted figures of eight wrestlers. Out of these Ramayan Ganjapa seems to be very popular.

Now-a-days, a lot of innovations are made in the Patta paintings. The traditional canvas, Pati, is replaced with tassar silk cloth and paper. The traditional pigments, hingula (vermillion), harital (yellow), Ramaraja (Ultramarine blue), Dipakala (the lamp black) and Sankhadhala (white colour prepared from the conch shells) have been replaced with chemically prepared colours.

Like Ganjapa, the palm leaf painting is another form of traditional cousin craft of Patta painting. It may be a simple engraving or illustration in pureline the palm leaf and the other form is engraving the art with colour filling. There are also innovations made by the painters to depict a story to bring a visual form, they use more than one folio of the palm leaf. These are vertically stitched together with the help of threads to create a needed rectangular or square format. These could be folded, opened or be hung on the wall. The craftsmen also use palm leaf in writing scripts, Slokas alongwith their pictorial illustrations.

### Wall Painting :-

The walls were embellished with conventional religious themes based on Krishnaleela and Ramayan. The largest concentration was given in the Maths especially of Ganjam and Puri. The Biranchi Narayan Math in Buguda, Jagannath Temple at Dharakote, Bad Radhakanta Math in Parlakhemundi, Ushakothi Gharas seen in different villages of Ganjam and in different temples and Maths of Ganjam district mostly bear the wall paintings which are worthy for preservation. Jhoties and Chitas find a special place in the houses of Ganjam mostly at Laxmi Puja and other festivals.

### Stone Carving :-

Stone carving is an age old craft mainly of Ganjam. The descendants of the artisans who once scaled the dizzy heights of excellence in temple building have kept the sculptural tradition alive through their hereditary craft of stone carving.

This craftsmanship could be traced in the long and cherished temple building activities that continued over a period of more than two thousand years. The Orissan Sttapatis (Stone architects) and Silpis (artisans, masons and carvers) have shown remarkable depth and dexterity in handling hard granite stone and bringing them into a shape of fine sensible and artistic living like poems. The jewellery like intricate and exquisite carvings on the temples make the Ganjam or Orissan sculpture unique.

The muguni (granite stone), Kunda (sand stone), Khadi Pathar (soap stone), Baulamalia (a type of coloured soft stone) are the best varieties of stone available in Jagannath Prasad and other parts of Ganjam and Orissa which give a thrill to this handicraft. Due to the longevity of the stone carving, people usually purchase these sculptures for outdoor or display. The customers also need these stone arts to keep as city symbols and in public buildings, star hotels and to beautify the



corridors, corners of drawing rooms as a fashion need in interior decoration. Village Mathura of Ganjam has a number of world famous temples; and stone artisans. The Nayikas, dancing girls, musicians, horses, elephants, Gajasimhas, Vidala and other modern decoratives are in the demand and also in the sculptural habits of the craftsmen. The products also include the replicas of temples, the images of Gods and Goddesses, the Konark wheel and horse and decorative figurines like Alasa Kanya (the indolent damsel), Salabhanjaka (lady leaning against Sal branch), Sura Sundari (heavenly beauty), Lekhika (lady writing a letter) etc., which are popular items of household decoration.

### Wood Carving

From time immemorial the artistic expression of the craftsman has been possible through a vast media at his disposition : Stone, metal, bark, fibre and a plethora of such other natural endowments. Obviously, wood has been, for its abundant availability in forests, a powerful medium of satisfying the creative impulse of the craftsman.

The Sun temple at Buguda is one of the famous representations of this wood art. The art in carving is no way less than the sun temple of Konark which is of stone. Several traditional villages, temples, Mandaps carry these arts. The wooden beams, pillars, the ceilings are having very beautiful carves of plants, leaves, fruits, flowers, animals, birds, peacocks, swans (Hamsas) etc. The other wood arts like Padma Mandals, lotus, panasa (jack fruit), members hanging down with perching parrots, birds, bracket figures, Alasakanyas (indolent damsels), Viralas (mythical lions) and mithuna (erotic couples) are generally seen in temples. The Palinki (Palanquin), Vimana (portable Pavillions) doors, palank (cots), sinduka (chests) and furniture made of wood with intricate carvings and inlay work still exist in royal palaces and temples of Orissa. The chariots of Lord

Jagannath, Balbhadra, Subhadra and the godly images are the best known examples of this craft generally made by these rarely available craftsmen in different interior parts of the districts in the title of Maharanas, Badheis, Biswakarmas, etc.

### Toys

Toys as playthings have caught the human imagination since times of yore. Toys range from day figurines to painted wood, to lacquer, to papier mache and cowdung. Toys are mostly produced by women in their leisure hours generally after harvesting. These may be termed as women craft. The design, architect, painting, colour and the used material price the toy. The village Mathura, Dharakote, Digapahandi, Chikiti and some parts of Berhampur, Parlakhemundi produce a greater variety of cowdung toys which is very light, cheap, colourful and hygienic for child play. Lacquary toys are tiny, queer and colourful with contrasting colours. The traditional handicraft and market of toys are now pressurised by different plastic, rubber and ceramic toys produced by machines.

### Horn Works

Horn works is really a craft which is produced from the buffalo horns. The horns are collected, heated and shaped to required forms and sizes. Parlakhemundi is excelled in horn craft. The craftsmen are poor and still striving hard to keep the craft alive. Simple items of birds, fishes, cranes, prawns, lizards and other modern arts of attractive designs are made out of these horns by the craftsmen. The walking sticks, the tiger, the parrot mounted on them, buttons, writing pens and penstands, combs of different varieties are the accepted popularity for the craft.

### Brass and Bell Metal Works

Brass and Bell metal work is considered traditional and auspicious. In the temple rituals brass and bell utensils are a must. Even at houses, the brass and bell made kitchen utensils like



Pitehers, Lotas (water containers), pots, cooking and serving vessels, lamp stands, plates, etc. are required. These metal crafts are very well available in the areas of Dharakote, Jagmohan, Kantilo. Due to the advent of iron and steel, plastic utensils into the day to day uses, the brass and bell metal market is greatly affected and so the craftsmen are diverting their life style which gave a blow to this handicraft. Anyhow the temple rituals, worshipping utensils are now in the star hotels brass and bell metals are still keeping its existence.

### **Brass Fish**

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.

### **Dhokra**

Dhokra or the metal craft produced in the last wax process retains the archaic and primitive quality. These are widely admired and collected for their ethnic beauty and artistic ingenuity, produced by nomadic tribes called Situlias and Thataras. These are sold in weekly village hats. The deer, horse, elephant, figurines are cast in bronze with decorative texturing. The man (measuring bowls), lamps, lamp stands with peacock etc., the figures of Gods and Goddesses with a decorated arch are quite common goods of this craft. Some of the tribal folks like Kandhas of Ganjam and Phulbani are using this craft. Now-a-days, the Dhokra craft has become popular and number of workshops have sprang up in urban areas, with hired artisans to cater to the demand.

### **Pottery and Terracotta**

Pots, the common cooking utensils in rural homes, water jars, grain containers, lamps, lampstands etc. are a few objects, which are in great demand in the villages. The votive horses, elephants, deepalees (lamps) which are used for offerings to the village Goddess (Grama Devatis) are now in demand in the sophisticated drawing rooms of the urban elite. The pottery workers of Chikrada, Chhelia, Chikiti and Digapahandi, Dharakote areas are manufacturing these varieties. But due to the advent of steel and plastic utensils, the craft has been affected a lot. Only due to the cheap price and due to the availability of soft and coloured clay in the area, the pottery craft is still surviving in the rural Orissa. The Puja festivals give a great push to the iconic art images of Gods and Goddess like Durga, Ganesh, Laxmi, Kali etc. Potters of Orissa still make earthen pots to be used in various religious and social functions. They are made in various shapes and sizes and are adorned with fish and flower motifs and geometrical designs.

### **Golden Grass and Cane Works**

Baskets, handfans, caps and table mats are woven from golden grass by the female folk. Floor mats are also woven out of golden grass which is a local product. Today the demand for these goods has increased and this testifies to their beauty, utility and lasting quality. Cane is used for weaving baskets, chairs and several items of furniture.

### **Sarees and Other Fabrics**

Perhaps the most popular items in Orissan handicrafts is the handloom sari. The saris come in a variety of designs and colours to suit every taste and pocket. Generally, in Ganjam, the village Bomakai, Mantridi, Pittala, Aska, the weavers called Tantie and Deras are weaving a very beautiful and amazing textiles of export quality. Berhampur is also famous for silken textiles called



Patta generally woven by pattaras, weavers, Deras and Devangulus. Berhampur patta sarees are worn by orthodox and modern women alike. The handloom textile products produced in the district are popular in the country and abroad from time immemorial.

In Ganjam District Manual, it is mentioned that the craftsmen were known as the manufacturers. The village weavers, village potters, blacksmiths, carpenters are the unique craftsmen of the district, they device the present ornamental, descent, beautiful, heart-amazing different handicrafts of the present day.

### **Tribal Art and Crafts**

Tribal art enters into many different aspects of life. The Kandhas (Ghumusar) show a great skill in carving doors with traditional figurines and tobacco pipes with many geometric designs. The Saura icons drawn on walls have received international acclaim. The dome-shaped traditional architecture of the tribal (Godaba) houses has a great appeal to the eyes of visitors in tribal-dominated Ganjam.

### **Other Handicrafts**

Bamboo basket making, grass art, Beta Craft (stick), paper images and basket making are also the original craft of the district mostly living in the areas of Nuapada, Parlakhemundi, Berhampur and some of the tribal regions. Cuttack though gets name for filigree works like Pipili for applique craft, Ganjam craftsmen are very much skilled to start both of these crafts also. Sankha bangle out of lac making is a specific handicraft heritage of the district, the craftsmen are Sankharies. Marriage Mukutas or kiritas are prepared by mostly the Malies of the district in a very descent and in artistic way. Likewise not less than a thousand art craft is available in the area but the matter is, it is not marketable as before. The craftsmen of the district are now frustrated with their craft and so the new borns make a

different way of living without taking the interest in parental craft profession. The Government and Non-Government agencies should come forward to help these crafts at least for living.

Apart from these the district has many other items of handicrafts such as papier mache, sola pith work, lacquer work, zari work, glass beads, cloth garlands, camphor garlands, jute, carpets, rushmats and above all the sea shell zinc sand works of the coastal Ganjam (Gopalpur) strike the art and craft lovers very much.

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