

Pipli appliqué crafts, potentials and way forward

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Introduction:

Odisha has got a rich heritage of traditional artifacts being produced in the cottage-based sector, i.e., handicrafts. There are around 40 types of handicrafts such as brass and bell metal, cane and bamboo, art textiles, silver filigree, stone carving, appliqué, dhokra casting, terracotta, wood carving, woolen carpet, palm leaf etc. are being practiced in the state. The sector produces goods, which is channelised through 10-15 exporters. The handicrafts sector supports around 2 lakh families in the rural areas of the state. Major employment provider in the handicrafts sector is Cane and Bamboo (25%), followed by art textiles (9%), appliqué (7%), brass and bell metal (13%); stone carving (6%) and silver filigree (6%). These handicrafts employ around 70 percent of the artisans whereas the production is concerned these contribute around 85 percent of total value of handicrafts.

The applique work craft has craved a special place of its own among the handicrafts of Odisha. The distinctive style of Appliqué embroidery is a specialty of the ' Darji ' (Tailor) community of Pipli, Puri district, Odisha. Originally used in festivals, now find a way into our home too. The craft involves embroidering and stitching of small pieces of colored cloth with motifs of flowers, animals, village scene and traditional designs on to a larger base

cloth. The cloth used for patch as well as base is cotton with different color combinations. The usual appliqué patchwork items are Garden Umbrellas, Wallets, Wall Hangings, Lampshades, Pouches & Bags etc. Appliqué & Patchwork has been diversified into many utilitarian items like bed sheets, cushion covers, file folders etc. The women artisans dominate applique manufacturing. In addition to manufacturing, the appliqué trade has employed a large number of rural women artisans of Orissa.

About appliqué craft:

Appliqué', which is a French term, is a technique by which the decorative effect is obtained by superposing patches of coloured fabrics on a base fabric, the edges of the patches being sewn in some form of stitchery. It is distinct from what is known as patch work in which small pieces of cut fabrics are usually joined side by side to make a large piece of fabric or for repairing a damaged fabric. Though the form is not unknown in other parts of India, it is Odisha and especially in Pipli that the craft has a living and active tradition continuing over centuries. While the largest number of appliqué craftsmen is concentrated in Pipli, there are quite a few in Puri and very small numbers in Khallikote, Parlakhemundi and Boudh areas also.

As with many other handicrafts of Orissa, the roots of the appliqué art/craft form is intertwined with the rituals and traditions of Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of the Puri temple. The appliqué items are mainly used during processions of the deities in their various ritual outings. Items like *Chandua Chhati*, and *Tarasa* are used for the purpose. 'Chanduas' are canopies, "Chhati", a sort of big umbrella with a long wooden handle while the "Tarasa" is a heart-shaped wooden piece covered by appliqué cloth and supported by a long wooden pole used for the religious purpose. However, the appliqué work in its colourful best



is most prominent in the cloth cover of the three chariots of the presiding deities in which they travel every year during the Ratha Yatra or Car Festival. As per tradition, the colour scheme of the three covers is predetermined. The chariot of Balabhadra known as Taladhawaja has a cloth covering of bright green and red, while that of Subhadra known as Padmadhwaja or Darpadalana has a cover of bright red and black. The chariot of Lord Jagannath called Nadighosha has a cover of bright red and yellow. The basic design of all three is similar being a combination of narrow and wide stripes while on the four sides above the openings, there are appliqué mythical motifs like Rahu (a Star), Chandra (moon) as well as motifs from nature like flowers etc. It is these colourful appliqué covers which identify the chariots of the three



deities from far away by the millions of pilgrims thronging the Badadanda (or the extra wide main road of Puri) in which the lords make their annual sojourn in the car festival. Seats and pillows in appliqué are also made for ceremonial use by the deities during the annual ritual of bathing festival (Snana Jatra) and is locally known as 'Chakada Kama' with motifs of 27 stars and geometrical

forms in appliqué work with motifs of fish, frog etc. Black cloth is used in the

ritual dress of the deities of Puri temple, locally known as the 'Gaja Uddharana Vesha', incarnation of Rescuer of Elephant. Appliqué cover is also made for caparisoning the dummy horses in the 'Horse Dance' or Ghoda Nacha during Chaitra (spring) Festival in Puri and other places.

Early Producers and productions:

The craft is traditionally practiced by a caste of professional tailors, known as 'Darjis'. As with other services of the Lord, darji seva or the supply of appliqué items is rendered by the caste members in return for which they receive certain portion of the daily offering, 'bhog' from the temple. All this is regulated by the record-of-rights of the Jagannath Temple. The darjis have their own headman or sardar who has a higher share in the 'bhog' of the Jagannath Temple. It is interesting to note that the craftsmen are socially well organised and there are close family relationships between the craftsmen of Puri and Pipli. Their organisation can be very well compared to the craftsmen's guilds of medieval Europe. They also have annual meetings of craftsmen to resolve social and related problems.

The traditional items made of appliqué patterns and associated with religious functions are canopies, locally called 'Chanduas', Chhati, a sort of big umbrella with a long wooden handle. Tarasa, a heart-shaped wooden piece covered by appliqué cloth and supported by a long wooden pole, both these items being carried before the deities in their ceremonial



processions. 'Jhalar' another popular item is a sort of frill which is used as a border to canopies and also independently used as decorative pieces. An interesting secular and popular item is 'Batua', a unique Orissan cloth pouch which has usually a semi-circular shape with the top being straight. There are various layers of cloth providing pockets for storing different items of use and

the mouth is closed by pulling strings attached to the sides. It is very popular among village folk for keeping the materials for 'pan', like betel leaf, areca nut, lime, etc., as well as for keeping money. Another traditional item is 'Sujnis' or embroidered quilts.

Geographical Region:

The main centre of production is Pipli a small town in Puri around 20 KM of the state capital. The important appliqué production clusters of Puri & districts of Khurda are given below:

Table-1

District	Location of the clusters
Puri	Pipli, Kanasa, Kadua, Kanas, Puri Town, Satyabadi, Delanga, Gop, Nimapara, Satsankha, Sakhigopala, Ranapur, Matipada, Kanatpur, Konaru, Astaranga, Brahmagiri, Satyasadi
Khurda	Bhakersahi, Mundahanapatna, Rajas, Banamalipur, Bhubaneswar Sadar, Bhubaneswar city, Bolianta, Koneru

Production process:

The basic material for appliqué is cloth. The process is fairly simple and has been succinctly summarized by Mr. B.C. Mohanty in his monograph on 'Appliqué craft of Odisha-study of contemporary Textile crafts of India' as under: 'Flat motifs are first cut from cloth and specially prepared motifs are made separately. If more than one of the same cut motifs is required, a stencil is used. These cut and specially prepared motifs are then superimposed on a base cloth in predetermined layout and sequence. The edges of the motifs are turned in and skillfully stitched onto the base cloth or stitched by embroidery or without turning as necessary. The specially prepared motifs may

be coloured or white. The base cloth is usually coloured. Some of the specially prepared motifs have exclusive embroidery work and some have glass bead work. In heavy canopies, the base cloth is additionally supported by a back cloth for strength.

Without elaborating the preparation method of appliqué, we briefly mention broad steps and processes applied for appliqué making. Broadly the appliqué making starts with procurement of raw material and encompasses three major processes i.e. (i) the motif making (ii) cutting and (iii) stitching. The cutting process is carried out through on-cutting method and off-cutting method. The stitching process varies from item to item and come under six broad categories, namely, (1) bakhia, (2) taropa, (3) ganthi, (4) chikana, (5) button-hole and (6) ruching. Sometimes embroidered patterns are also used and in a few items glass bead work is also ingrained. The layout of various motifs and patterns vary according to the shape of the piece.

The canopy has a large centre piece which may be a square. This centre piece is then bounded by several borders of different widths, one outside the other, till the edge is reached. In the umbrella and Chhati the inner field is arranged in circles, each circle having patches of one motif placed side by side. Patterns are laid in the same way as the shape of the Tarasa, with a large motif or two placed at the centre. The layout for covers for horses consists of a series of concentric strips in the portion which covers the neck, each strip having patches of one motif, while the portions which fall on either side of the body are plain, having border all round with or without a motif at the centre of the plain field.

The motifs used are fairly varied yet fixed and consist of stylised representations of flora and fauna as well as a few mythical figures. Of the more common of these motifs are the elephants, parrots, peacocks, ducks, creepers, trees,

flowers like lotus, jasmine, half-moon, the Sun and Rahu (a mythical demon who devours the sun). Just as there are a few fixed motifs only a limited number of colors are used in the traditional appliqué craft. These are green, red, blue, yellow and black. The creative urge of the craftsmen however are released in the endlessly various combination of motifs as well in the mixing of these limited colors. While there has been very little change in the use of motifs, there has been a trend towards greater experimentation in colour combinations.

Superimposition of coloured cloths on grey marking cloth is quite common today as the use of cloth of all colors and hues. Similarly, with the changing times the craft has also adopted itself to the needs of modern consumers. Among the more popular appliqué items today are garden umbrellas, a variant of Chhati with wooden or aluminum stands, shoulder bags, ladies hand bags, wall hangings, lamp shades, bed covers, pillow covers, letter pouches, etc. Appliqué items are also being used in combination with other handicrafts to produce composite products. An interesting use is the superimposition of appliqué on grass mats and used as partitions. Though earlier the art form was restricted to darji caste, today it is practiced by non-caste members, notably by some young Muslim boys. Unlike many other handicrafts, appliqué items are attractive artifacts of daily use apart from being decorative. They are also comparatively cheaper

Artisans, production and seasonality:

The appliqué in Pipli has three categories of players, via, (a) Artisan Entrepreneur, (b) Trader entrepreneur and (c) Artisan worker. The definition of these players is as given under.

An artisan entrepreneur is one who is as artisan himself, makes the craft either himself or by using family labour and /or hired labour. He sells the goods fully or

partly himself. He may sell a part to intermediaries like trader entrepreneur. He invests capital for this purpose and, therefore, considered as entrepreneur.

A trader entrepreneur is one who may or may not be an artisan. He does not engage himself in making the craft. He collects products from others and sells those either through his own showroom or to others who have showrooms or other business houses. For this activity he invests capital and bears the risk associated with the business.

An artisan worker is one who sells his labour and skill to earn wages either on a daily/monthly or piece rate basis. He does not invest any capital but may use his own tools, which do not have much monetary value. He bears no risk. Though there are artisan entrepreneurs and trader entrepreneurs exist in the centre, they are unable to market the all products produced in the centre. The extent of middlemen grabbing the scene is approximately 52 percent. This shows the control of middlemen over the business in Pipli. The major constraint for the overall development of the stakeholders is finance since there is a limited access to the institutional sources. Around 70 percent of the artisan entrepreneurs and 40 percent of the trader entrepreneur of Pipli have reported about this.

At present about 15,000 appliqué artisans are earning their livelihood through appliqué craft. The total production of the centre is more than 70 million rupees. One of the important aspects of the product is that about 60 percent artisans are women. In other words, more than 9000 women are employed in appliqué craft in the state of Orissa

The artisans generally cater to the needs of three different classes of customers i.e. the urbanites, the national and international tourist; and the rural customers who come on pilgrimage to Puri. As the appliqué craft found to be more fanciful in nature and decorative, most of the tourists visiting the famous

destinations of the state use to purchase the craft. Besides, the craft is also marketed in almost all-important domestic markets and major tourist destinations of the country

However, a close look at the production and marketing activities of the centre indicates that the intensity of production is seasonal in character as the products have a very good demand among the tourists visiting the country. As such, the artisan uses to get work during that particular season only and in other days they either sit idle or shift to other part time avocations like agriculture giving rise to *seasonal unemployment*. Similarly, due to lack of demand, most of the woman artisans perform domestic chores along with artistic work associated with the appliqué craft. The reason behind it is low demand for the product due to lack of market linkage and poor market penetration. Since most of the units are own account enterprises, a single artisan's work is being done by two or three artisans (who are available in the family) giving rise to *disguised unemployment*. Hence in Pipli Appliqué craft industry has presence of both seasonal and disguised unemployment; and is all pervasive. The condition of artisans could change only if they could able to find continuous and sustained demand for their product.

Exports:

Even though we have a long-standing tradition of appliqué work in our country, it was not until late nineties, that we started getting bulk orders for appliqué work in export market for computerized machine embroidery. Since then there has been a steady flow of appliqué work and the demand has been growing. But it is still not everybody's cup of tea. Even now, many computerized embroidery units refuse to take appliqué embroidery jobs as they are uncomfortable with its application. It is true that it requires some experience on the machine operator's part and patience on the factory

owner's part to successfully adopt appliqués in their routine work as initially higher than acceptable rate of rejection is not uncommon. During the past few years, the product has been exported to different international markets like UK, France, Switzerland, Belgium, USA, Australia, Singapore, Canada and Japan. Most of the exports are indirect exports.

Registration under GI:

The unification of world economy under the framework of WTO has thrown open the protected market of the traditionally age-old creative economy of arts and artifacts out of gear on account of their susceptibility to protect their own market by world class advertisement and promotion. So much so, the economic backwardness of the producers does not allow them to fight against infringement of their art styles and designs in the age of globalization. The multilateral trading system under WTO has provided a protection to the intellectual property of the innovator through "Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights" (TRIPS). The TRIPS under its arena includes a number of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) to protect the designs, patterns, concepts, intellectual innovations and trade secrets etc. These IPRs confer legal recognition of ownership to the intellectual property innovated by the person or group of persons or a community of people in a geographical region and so on. One of the important aspects of agreement which have become significant under fair trade and protection of intellectual property of the innovator is Geographical Indication (GI). GI stipulates protection of intellectual property of the products, originating in a particular geographical region of a country having reputation and unique qualities associated with the product in that region. Once protected, GI contributes more effectively to the socio-economic development of many regions. It also creates and support jobs and encourages diversification and commercialization of the product in response to the demands of quality-conscious consumers. GIs also contribute

to the conservation of natural resources and the preservation of native traditions and cultural heritage often reaching back to distant ancestors.

The way forward:

In view of the growing threat to the age-old traditional knowledge of the country, the stakeholders of the product have facilitated IPR Protection of Pipli Appliqué Craft. The product has been taken up for registration with a view to protect and capitalise the brand value associated with it. The product has since been registered under Geographical Indication (GI) Act of India in 2008.

However, converting IPR Protection of the product to opportunities for stakeholders, there is a need to explore the brand value of the product through market linkage. The market linkage will help in realizing the premium price of this original product. Though the product has a domestic market in the country and exported to a few numbers of countries, the craftsmen have not been able convert their skill and hard work for a larger market. The artisans by and large, remain economically poor. A large artisanal group in the craft is women. Since most of the stakeholders are not aware of the different marketing tools available for marketing the product in both international and domestic market, it is also necessary to identify the suitable marketing tool for the stakeholders. Hence, there is a need to develop appropriate strategy for market linkage of the product.

Further the export trend of the product does not say much about the demand pattern of the product in international market as the export of the product is very low during the past years but the product is exported to host of countries like UK, France, Switzerland, Belgium, USA, Australia, Singapore, Canada and Japan. One of the main attributes for the low volume of export is lack of market linkage of the product. Since the product is associated with socio-cultural aspects of Indian society and decorative in character, it could have

very good potential market in the countries having large presence of Indian population and cultural association with India like Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Malaysia. It is expected that the market linkage will bring out increase in demand for the product and hence more work for producers and supporting artisans.

To create an enlarged demand oriented domestic as well as international market, a serious effort is required to be put on the aggressive publicity measure besides training the artisans in some key areas which needs immediate attention. (1) Training the artisans on the quality maintenance of the product particularly the colorfastness (2) training on the export procedure and packaging of the product to help producers or the cooperatives to start their own export (3) Making Available the quality raw material(fabrics) at the door step of the artisans at reasonable prices which has been a problem as observed from the field study (4) making available the information on the markets and price trends(both domestic and International), (5) Product diversification as per the market study and so on. Since the artisan groups are resource poor, a coordinated intervention by the policy making body and the stakeholders of the industry will bring about a great change in the lives of these skillful artisans; a majority of whom are women.

Note:

1. The statistical information provided in the article has been borrowed from the study conducted by the textiles committee "Evolution and Growth of Pipli Appliqué Crafts" and Reports of the All India Handicraft Census 1999.

2. Dr. P Nayak is also an Advisory Board member of ICOSA, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.