



SUSTAINABILITY OF AN INDIGENOUS CRAFT: SILVER FILIGREE ARTWORK OF CUTTACK IN INDIA

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Abstract:

Silver filigree craftsmanship is part of an intangible cultural heritage that has continued to thrive through centuries in Cuttack known as the "Silver city of India". Locally termed "Chanditarakasi", this jewellery is crafted by stretching silver into thin wires, which are interconnected together based on intricate designs and shaped into various pieces of delicate ornaments. It is distinguished from other jewellery works by its three-dimensional nature, fine foils, snowy glaze and textures and excellent finish. The present paper highlights this craft's sustainability issue despite the problems faced by the artisans and their dwindling numbers. It also provides guidelines for intervention by the Government and NGOs for its continuance as a cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS: Cultural industry, Silver filigree, Tarakasi, Indigenous craft, Sustainability.

Introduction

It is the human characteristic to create, innovate, improvise and construct. Craft constitutes one of the primary sub-sectors within creative and cultural industries as defined by UNESCO as "industries which produce tangible or intangible artistic and creative outputs, and which have a potential for wealth creations and income generation through the fostering of cultural assets and the production of knowledge-based goods and services" (2009). It is a way of making the material culture based in a specific place and part of a specific local ecology. Its practices use natural materials and renewable resources in conjunction with human labour, which becomes meaningful renewable energy. The artisans and the user foster deep perception and awareness of nature and the environment through natural materials. Hence, crafts are essentially in line with sustainability principles due to their focus on local knowledge. Furthermore, the objects are valued due to their longevity, high quality and timelessness (Woolley 2011). Adamson (2010) defines it as "the application of skills and material-based knowledge to relatively small-scale production" as integration of theoretical knowledge, craft practices, skill, tacit knowledge and experience (Shiner, 2012;

Sennett,2008;McCullough,1997; Dormer, 1997; Metcalf, 1997).The concept of craft has been analyzed from different perspectives such as aesthetics ,function, expression, quality, technology, domesticity, amateurism, museology, skill and several more(Greenhalgh, 2000;Niedderer, 2006;Adamson, 2007;Risatti, 2007).To be sustainable, it must be assumed that craft must be equal in status to the categories of art and design. But it should also be distinct from both, and to do so, it must maintain its integrity in the face of technological development. Its affinity to human values and its ability to experiment help to distinguish itself and maintain its intrinsic value. The integrity of craft concerns the five parameters: materials, process, function, aesthetic, and concept and the skill developed in craft is honed through the experimentation of these parameters (Adamson,2007). New technologies offer new technical possibilities and require a rethinking of the integrity of craft with the new process (Niedderer, Harrison and John, 2006).

Sustainability is known as the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), which includes the three interdependent factors of environment, society and economics associated with human activities. (Elkington 1997). It requires a better connection between nature, culture, values, power relationship sand technology. It needs action from various groups: global policy makers, national and local governments, NGOs, corporations, local enterprises, communities and individuals. The process by which we move towards sustainability is sustainable development. It refers to a way of living responsibly regarding environmental issues, social justice and economic equality. However, there has been an attempt to add more components strongly related to sustainability. For instance, culture has been considered the fourth pillar by a committee of United Cities and Local Government (UCLG,2010).

Another quintuple framework considers culture and politics as proposed by the Canadian International Development Agency in1997 as cited by Gibson (2001). Still, in reality, one pillar often needs to make compromises, raising competition between the different components. For example, as cited by Zhang and Walker (2019), is the deeply entrenched debate between the economic pillar and the ecological pillar which is represented as the fierce debate between the “strong” and the "weak" sustainability in academia (Nugraha,2012;Kuhlman and Farrington, 2010;Dresner, 2008;Gibson,2001). In the ongoing debate, neutrality with an emphasis on balance to achieve sustainability is required. Thus, emphasis should be on the power of small, local communities as resilient social structures and productive systems that rely on technology and global network (Manzini, 2010).The three main directions for sustainable development are

- 1) Replication-continuity in producing original things.
- 2) Adaptation-changes to different and added value purposes.
- 3) Innovation-tradition serves as an asset or inspiration for innovation

Both craft and sustainable development are intricately connected with how human beings create and interpret life, with culture and social relations, the use of and relationship with natural materials, and with livelihood and broader economic opportunities. Craft is still seen as a part of everyday life and livelihood opportunities. The interaction with craft and sustainability focuses on sustainable utilization of natural materials and financial benefits as part of livelihoods, particularly for tourism markets (Cawe and Ntloko1997; Shackleton and Shackleton,2004; Venkatesan, 2006). Over the years since the definitions

given in 1987 by U.N.'s Brundtland report, sustainable development has led to broad academic debate and a variety of environmental initiatives around the world. Sustainability is long-term, strategic thinking that promotes effective stewardship of the world's resources, acknowledging not only absolute environmental constraints but also the importance of social and human aspects (Dresner, 2002). Sustainability is seen by Orr (2002) as "the arts of longevity", emphasizing the irrevocable inter connection of both the natural and human worlds and theory and practice. The environment is conceived as a context of the relationship that exists. It takes on meaning about the beings who inhabit it, with the awareness that these beings are human and non-human entities who, through their presence and activities, contribute to its shaping (Gibson, 1979; Batson, 1973; Ingold, 2000a). Ferraro et al., (2012) writes that craft has the potential to contribute to more sustainable futures and has a role to play in the transition to more sustainable societies. It contributes to sustainable development theory and, at a more local level, offers opportunities to reduce carbon foot prints enhance social equity and build resilient communities.

Silver filigree workers of Cuttack

The English word filigree is shortened from the earlier use of *filigree*, which derives from Latin "filum", meaning thread and "granum" grain, in the sense of small bead. Archaeological finds in ancient Mesopotamia indicate that filigree was incorporated into jewellery since 3,000BC. Specific to the city of Midyat in Mardin province in Upper Mesopotamia, a form of filigree using silver and gold wires, known as "telkari", was developed in the 15th century. The filigree craft was advanced to its highest perfection by the Greeks and Etruscans from the 6th to 3rd centuries B.C., both in design and form and at some point, in time, cross-cultural influence led to the craft reaching the shores of the Indian sub-continent (Castellani, 1861; Chisholm, 1911).

Like Meenakari and Kundan designs on jewellery, the elegance of the filigree design is rich in the web-like pattern of silver lace. This work is known as "tarakasi" because in the odia language, "tara" means wire. "Kasi" is to wind the wire tightly. Beaten silver is drawn into thin wires and foils, and then these are fashioned together to create show pieces or jewellery of infinite beauty. According to some sources, the art may have come to Odisha, a state in India, through its trade links with Indonesia because of similar artistry. The city of Cuttack is centred on a strip of land between the Kathajodi river and the Mahanadi river, bounded on the southeast by Old Jagannath Road. Currently, the city is a part of the Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC), consisting of 59 wards. The present paper highlights some of the important areas in the city comprising wards 10, 12, 13 and 14 of Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC), where the houses of these workers are located along with their workshops.

Table-1: Number of Tarakasi workers in Cuttack

SL. no	Specific areas in the city	Ward nos	No. of Workshops		Number of workers	
1	Mansingpatna	10	02	8%	37	35.9%
2	Mohamadiabazaar	14	04	16%	18	17.47%
4	Jagannathballav	14	03	12%	03	2.91%
5	Kazibazaar	14	02	8%	07	6.79%
8	KhatbinSahi	14	01	4%	04	3.88%
9	Dagarpada	12	03	12%	04	3.88%
10	ChandniChowk	12	0	0	07	6.79%
11	Alishabazaar	12	04	16%	09	8.73%
12	Binodbihari	13	04	16%	08	7.76%
13	Balubazaar	13	02	8%	06	5.82%
	Total	04	25	100%	103	100%

Source-Field work, January, 2019

The majority of the tarakasi workers belong to the “Vaisya Bania” caste who are classed as “Socially and Educationally Backward Class” (SEBC) (vide list No.18222 dated 29.07.1996, welfare, Govt. of Odisha). There are no female tarakasi workers, and all 103 numbers are male workers. All the surveyed workers are Hindus, with only 03 Muslim workers. They are endogamous and belong to Hindu descent groups or lineages locally known as “gotras” like Nagashya, Bharadwaja, Kashyapa etc. They are both patrilineal and patripostetal, with the father being the head of the household and descent being traced in the father line. They observe all the Odia traditional religious rituals and festivals. Very few second-generation learners are in their families, which explains the lack of skilled tarakasi workers.

The process of creating each piece takes the collaboration of many workers; each specialized in one step of the many that turn a lump of raw silver into a handcrafted work of art. First, the outer pattern of the ornaments is traced on paper. It helps the workers to assess the size and definitive form of the twisted, looped, cut, coiled and curled with hands to follow the design on the paper. Then, bit by bit, one piece at a time, thin silver wires are put together to create a design. Looping, nipping, weaving, plaiting, piling, filling and twisting are all used in creating the desired designs. All the separate pieces of silver are then carefully soldered together.

Sustainability of the Tarakasi craft

Sustainable materials, also known as "green materials", refer to materials that take account of the energy consumption and pollution emissions through the life-cycle. By replacing, adding or reducing the elements of the original products, designs can usually give the old jewellery a new content and appearance as a second life. Its most significant feature is the renewed jewellery inherited parts of the old jewellery's physical characteristics and emotional memory. Still, the function and concept are more in line with the needs of the current wearer. Through this improvement, jewellery obtains the value and significance of regeneration.

As tarakasi craft production is largely an unorganized sector, there is a paucity of professional infrastructure such as workshops, storage space, packing facilities, etc. The family's overall low educational level makes it difficult to manage inventory, access government schemes and market information, and begin with traders and middlemen. They also lack the financial capability to upgrade technology in production or undergo necessary training regularly, compromising the quality of their products and raising their production cost. They lack access to quality raw materials, which are increasingly becoming difficult to acquire. The cost of pure silver is rising faster than the wholesale price index. Tarakasi workers also suffer from a lack of working capital and access to credit and loan facilities. Hence, they cannot fulfill bulk orders and simultaneously support their family's living needs while the order is executed. They also do have difficulty accessing government schemes and managing necessary collateral funds. On the other hand, banks cite poor recovery rates and wrong utilization of funds by tarakasi workers. So, they have low bargaining power while marketing their products and are forced to sell at low prices to recover costs and support themselves. There is a fragmented value chain because of a lack of market linkages among tarakasi workers who have few opportunities to reach new consumers through relevant platforms like shopping malls and online marketing. These workers have no organized association, and a few are present to procure the "artisan card" given by the government. Because of all these problems, there is a lack of interest in second-generation learners who are disinterested in continuing their family tarakasi traditions. So there has been no passage of the oral tradition in the form of skills and knowledge of designs and motifs. As Mohanty(2013) sums up, the lack of adequate resources, working capital, raw materials, space for storage and display of finished products and market network make the artisans depend on middle men.

Sustainability refers to the ability to continuously maintain or support a process, there has been much diversification in the production of silver tarakasi products since earlier times. Silver tarakasi jewellery and show pieces are popular as gifts, souvenirs and hand décor. These products help sustain tarakasi designs like classical Odissi dance jewellery, accessories required during religious festivals, mementoes and souvenir items related to the tourism industry. The demand for such items ensures that the local workers get orders throughout the year and continue to improvise and learn new, improved technology so that they can cater to and fulfill the needs of the consumers.

Silver tarakasi jewellery is an integral part of the Odissi dance costume. Since this dance is traditionally a dance-drama genre of performance art, it is complemented by many intricate silver tarakasi jewellery pieces; On the forehead, the dancer wears a forehead ornament locally called "matha Patti" and "allaka" or headpiece on which the former hangs. The dancer usually wears two sets of necklaces as part of the attire - a long necklace or "padaka tilaka" with a pendant that hangs just above the waist belt and a short necklace or choker called "Chika" worn snugly around the neck. The arms are adorned with armlets called "tayita" or "bahichudi", with bangles or "katakana" being worn on the wrists. The dancer wears earrings or kapas, usually depicting peacock structures covering the entire earlobes with bell-shaped dangles or "jhumk" hung from them. Finger-rings or "anguthis" are also worn by the dancer. The waist band or "benga-patia" is worn around the waist and is functional in keeping the Odissi saree of the dancer in place. The belt has a tarakasi mound design in concentric circles that are held together using broad band, usually red, which is tied in a knot behind.

Picture -01

Different ornaments used by the Odishi Dancers



Another area where tarakasi products are profusely used is in “pujapandals” of various Gods and Goddesses. A pandal is a temporary structure set up to venerate various Gods and Goddesses in a common forum. Cuttack is also known for festivals like Basanti Durga puja, Dolayatra, Ganesh puja, Laxmi puja, Durga puja, Kalipuja, Kartikeswar puja, etc. During these festivals, palanquins, crowns, jewellery, tableaux and other accessories are made from silver using tarakasi design by the tarakasi workers. Durga puja is a ten-daylong festival in the month of Aswina(September-October)in temporary shrines called Puja pandals. Tarakasi workers of Cuttack excel in crafting large ornamental pieces that add to the grandeur of communal festivals. Making silver tableaux or Chandi medha for Durga idols during puja season is becoming popular. They craft different sections of the tableaux in their workshop and finally assemble these in the right places. The Goddess Durga is decked in the fine tarakasi silver jewellery aiming a spear at Mahisaasur in front of a 30 ft high silver tarakasi tableau in the backdrop.

Picture – 02 Silver tableaux or Chandi medha for Durga idol



Another source of work for silversmiths which helps them to sustain their earnings is the making of silver filigree mementoes and souvenirs. Silver tarakasi jewellery and showpieces are popular as gifts and home decor. The tarakasi workers have extended their imagination and creativity to create beautiful products around local themes like Konark wheel, idols of God Jagannath, the Holy Trinity, God Ganesha, maritime boats called Boitas ,ceremonial bands called Rakhis and universal themes like Taj-Mahal and Eiffel-Tower.

One of the most popular piece is from the Bhagavat Gita, the holy book of the Hindu, depicting the chariot of Arjuna driven by God Krishna.

Picture-03 Chariot of Arjuna driven by Krishna



Picture- 05 Traditional boat or Boita



Picture-06 Ceremonial band or Rakhi



Intricately designed vermilion and kajaal caskets, waist bands, and hair-bun clips we real ways apart of the trousseau of an Odia bride, but this tradition is dying out. But even now, odia marriages are incomplete with out tarakasi anklets and toe-rings, considered auspicious and assign of married status. Miniature models of Jagannath temple, Konark temple and Mukteswar arch are created and exhibited abroad as miniature visuals Odissan art and heritage. Tarakasi mementoes to the dignitaries and players of the Men's World Cup Hockey Tournament in December,2018,Sri Pankaj Kumar Sahu, a national awardee silver filigree worker with years of experience, even though physically disabled, along with five other workers, prepared 275 mementoes replicating the hockey stick, the ball and the glorious World Cup with more than20 kg of silver.



One of the significant issues that this sector faces is information dissemination, where modern customers need more information related to these products. Therefore, it needs a robust marketing system which can assess the demand and acceptability of these products to meet the need of the customers. However, the producers mainly produce based on local requirements and need more information regarding the demands of this craft product at the national and international levels. In the meantime, they have no solid financial supports that make them efficient in investing in marketing their products. In this context, the Governments at the state and national levels have started various marketing schemes to increase awareness among the people through exhibitions, handicraft emporia, publicity in electronic media etc. However, creating human resources from within who can learn the structure and logic of the broader global market and formulate new strategies for endogenous development as per the principles laid down by UNESCO (Quijano-Caballerou, 2011) can contribute to sustainability.

Conclusion

Globalization poses significant challenges to the survival of traditional crafts. Mass production can supply goods at a lower cost than hand production. Many tarakasi workers struggle to adapt to this competition. Environmental pressures impact traditional craftsmanship, with deforestation and land clearing reducing the availability of key natural resources. As social conditions and cultural taste change, festivals and celebrations that once required elaborate craft production becomes austere, resulting in fewer opportunities for tarakasi workers. Younger generation find apprenticeship lengthy and demanding and opt to work in factories or the service industry, where work is less exacting and often pays better. Besides, tarakasi production involves 'trade secrets' which cannot be shared with outsiders.

One proven way is to reinforce and strengthen the age-old system of instruction and apprenticeship by offering financial incentives for making transfer attractive. Local traditional markets for craft products can be strengthened, and new ones created to that hand-made object imbued with accumulated knowledge and cultural values offer a softer alternative to 'high tech' items of global consumer culture. Measures can be taken to guarantee the rights of traditional craft workers to gather raw materials while ensuring environmental protection. Legal measures like intellectual property protection and patents or copyright

registration can benefit traditional crafts. Sometimes legal measures intended for other purposes can encourage craft production, allowing craft skills and knowledge to thrive. Thus, sustainability lies in community-based thinking where culture represents problem and possibility, form and process (Dessein et al., 2015). Traditional local knowledge and skills with long historical roots are a valuable form of cultural heritage for contemporary culture. Guidelines for culturally sustainable development should support cultural renewal and reconstruction.

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