

Emerging Trends on Indigenous Knowledge of a Weaving Community in Sonepur District, Odisha

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DOI: [10.36348/sjhss.2021.v06i11.002](https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2021.v06i11.002)

| Received: 13.10.2021 | Accepted: 19.11.2021 | Published: 24.11.2021

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Abstract

Handloom fabric forms part of our rich cultural heritage. Odisha is a beautiful state enriched with traditional garments that we drape over the body in various styles. The unique traditional products reflect the essence of traditional way of life. Odisha's handloom includes towels, dhotis, Saris, dress materials and many others. The blending of knowledge takes place through innovations over a period of time as this informal knowledge system evolves, adapts and transforms dynamically with time with materials, process and skill. The study is conducted in Bhulia-dominated villages of Sonepur district of Western Odisha. Basically the study revolves around the various reasons which have impact on the traditional knowledge and skill of the weaving community. The handloom weavers use their indigenous knowledge in the entire weaving process which they have learnt from their parents. We have seen many changes in the weaving and allied handloom works today with the invention of various developed instruments and techniques. The entire tasks they do today are the accumulation of their experiences they have gained inside and outside of the community. Many handloom processes like dyeing, tying, winding, warping and street sizing process are doing with some modification. It helps the weavers to progress the handloom weaving and to increase their household economy.

Keywords: Weaving, Indigenous knowledge, Handloom Industry, Tying and Dying.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional hand weaving has been a part of India's cultural heritage. This sector occupies a position next to agriculture as it provides livelihood opportunities to millions of people. Right from the Stone Age, cloth in various forms has continued to be a basic need of the mankind for protecting his body from the heat and cold of nature. Richness of our handloom products dates back to the epic times. Handloom fabric forms part of our rich cultural heritage. The antiquity of weaving in India is more than 3000 years old. Indigenous knowledge is the knowledge that transmits through the verbal way of learning from one generation to the next. These traditional knowledge including the way of cultivation and agriculture, ancestral worship and belief, observing festival and taboos, way of expression and language, dress and food, healing and healthcare system, and the low of existence in the community.

Odisha is a beautiful state enriched with traditional garments that we drape over the body in various styles. The unique traditional products reflect

the essence of traditional way of life. Odisha's handloom include towels, dhotis, Saris, dress materials and many others. The weaving community is famous worldwide for the traditional tie-dye weaving is shining in the part of western Odisha known as the 'Bhulia' is a respective community has a long glorious past. This community knowledge, techniques and processes have been reflecting the beautiful creation of the fabrics today. The richness of the culture and the craft which has spread in the world within a short span of time is possible by the development of the specific tie and dye works of the community in the recent past. The blending of knowledge takes place through innovations over a period of time as this informal knowledge system evolves, adapts and transforms dynamically with time with materials, process and skill. Thus the inclusive economic development of a particular sector of populous depends not only on the traditional knowledge but also the degree of adoptability and practices of the contemporary innovations (Posey *et al.*, 1995).

Review of Literature

Dantwala (1990) the study shows the organisations of industrial weaver's co-operation

society. Government implemented a scheme for the welfare of the society of the loom less weaver's large number of weavers without the loom are struggling hard under the control of master weavers on which they depend as there source of livelihood.

Shah (1995) studies how the handloom weavers are mostly weaker and marginal section brought into cooperative folds. As handloom is an achievement for the development of country besides it ensures on adequate and timely support of yarn and other raw materials which helped in marketing of finished textiles.

Doraiswamy (1996) in his study says that the handloom industry occupies the highest demand with better growth continuing process also it is difficult to find out the skilled labours to work on this sector the continuing demand cannot be matched by power looms in designs and texture.

Kutty (2000) in his study reveals about that there was no proper markets for woven products made by weavers but they walked doorsteps for earning their livelihood without taking food they sell their products at a very low price since weavers are destined to born, live, die due to poverty they face through a very exploited situation.

Area of Study

The study is conducted in Bhulia-dominated villages of Sonepur district of Western Odisha. The Bhulia community is spread in seven districts in the western part of Odisha namely: Bargarh, Bolangir, Boudh, Sonepur, Sambalpur, Sundargarh and Jharsuguda. The selection of the villages is made keeping in view the dependence of sample community on home-based textile. A total number of six villages in and around Sonepur with higher dependence of this home-based textile industry is selected as the sample villages. The sample respondents are the men, women and children participating in one or the other process of the home-based industry.

Methods Used

The household data relating to demographic structure, land use pattern, agricultural practices, value addition, etc was collected through different structured and semi-structured interview schedules. Qualitative dimensions focusing more on the perception and attitude of children was collected through sets of questions, social histories and case studies. Individual and group interviews was conducted to understand community members' choices, needs, specific issues and institutional support systems in various weaving processes in order to facilitate their profession and maximization of profits. Focused group discussion (F.G.D) was also employed to collect data. Observation method was used like in noting the various weaving

processes and the involvement of women and children in those processes.

Objectives

Against this backdrop, the study aims to:

- Study the social conditions prevailing among the handloom weavers with an objective to find out there place in the society
- Evaluate the role of the children and women in handloom weaving towards contribution of the family economy.
- Outline the various reasons which has impact on the traditional knowledge and skill of the weaving community

MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Many artistic weavers have been leading the handloom business and trying to transform the traditional weaving in their strength in to the technology based weaving. This transformation of the local knowledge into the technology based handloom weaving opened a new opportunity for earning in both rural and urban weavers. These opportunities and production system developed in many parts of the western Odisha has created for selling their product direct and indirect basis in the local and international markets. An age old person who has observed the transmission of this splendid work gladly shared the existing system comparing with the past. During the time of the pre-independence era this work has spread in the locality which later grows quickly while new market and transportation facilities opened in the country and abroad. Such works introduced by their ancestors are being used today while some changes has brought the growth of production and designs through the use of new instruments. The Drum and the winding machines have been introduced in the handloom weaving to make it simple from the perplexed form of weaving.

Designing on the body, border and Pällu portion of the fabric become easy through entry of the new invented jacquard and doobby machines in the traditional handloom. The jacquard plays the role of designing on the Body portion, while the doobby plays to decorate on the border portion. Both are the part of the extra weft weaving. These are some special instruments utilise by the weavers of Sonepur district of western Odisha. Prior to the invention of these two machines, the traditional designs were familiar through the stick, which holds during the time of weaving by the other family members. Today the entire process is running with the guidance of some master weaver and Mohajans in the region, who have appointed some skilled weavers according to their strength. The skilled weavers are continuing the tie-dye weaving in their traditional pit looms, which was operating by the elders through some bamboo sticks in the recent past. We are looking a distinctive form of dying process in the handloom

weaving process. The handloom weavers are slowly increasing the use of the synthetic dyestuff which has demolished the natural dyes in handloom production, because it is easily access in the local market and it is inexpensive. As the day progress the handloom weavers are using the synthetic colours in various dying process. According to the necessity they applied various methods, instruments and materials in handloom weaving process. On the way the traditional knowledge of the community, their process of manufacturing and various traditional instruments largely affected and some have lost their values permanently.

Implementing various handloom instruments in the loom imported from various parts of the country and abroad has changed the process of traditional weaving system a lot. Government and the director of textiles role in this sector are memorable. On the regional level it organizes various training programs, and facilitates the required trainers from the outside state. It coordinates between these two; execute the requisite training on this mechanized loom. Manufacturing fine cotton fabrics in the handloom is possible through application of some instruments like Reed, treadle, shuttle, bobbin, winding machine, new electric winding machines, drum, jacquard, fuldoby etc. These instruments used in the weaving broadly divided into two categories: one is newly invented and other is modified instrument from the old. Doing weaving with allied work was a part of the traditional weaver, which went some modification in the recent years. The simple allied work of weaving became complicated and developed the specialized workers as per the demand. These specialized workers are attached with each other for making a beautiful creation in the handloom. Overall the handloom works attach the person from inside and outside community for its production and marketing. If we look the previous form of handloom weaving we can find that it was independent, and the weavers were expert with their all allied handloom works. As these opportunity entrepreneurs pursuing a profitable business venture based on traditional knowledge, have always trying to innovate and a consequent growth, thereof. These growths are likely to have a large indirect effect on economy by providing employment opportunities as well as improved goods and services (Lazonick, 2005).

Today's Handloom has developed with some new processes practised by the new specialised workers. Nowadays a weaver always depends on others to fulfil their need of weaving. The new form of weaving demolished the traditional and indigenous knowledge of the community in some context, where an independent weaver had a separate identity on the weaving in and around the locality. The advanced weaving form is producing varied creation according to the demand of the market and helping the handloom weavers for raising their household economy. On the

other hand it has lost one's sovereign and created them as the wage labourer working under the guidance of a master. Now-a-days there are a few independent handloom weavers in the region and a large portion became wage labour, being supervised by the masters/Mohajans. The Mohajani process is in progress because the weavers are attracted towards the finance provided by them without interest.

Learning to Weave

The handloom weaving is a traditional craft creates employment among the weaving and non-weaving communities' over generation. It has stood with many obstacles during the time of natural calamities, war and famine and cultural invasion. This industry is recognized with the people because of rich cultural values and identity through this handloom weaving. Creating innovative designs by the indigenous people couldn't be replaced by the other experts in the power looms production. This traditional invention doesn't require any electric motion in weaving, which only operates by applying physical energy to move the treadle, reed and shuttle in a same time. This operation has created many incredible designs in handloom and passed its knowledge from generation to generation for its sustenance as an economic base of life. However, the handloom weavers of these regions are experts in generating new designs from the existing one, which later is followed by the power loom experts and invent the same designs to cover up the demand in the markets at a cheaper price. In course of time, the specialized traditional designers have been creating new designs according to the demand of the market and observed its sustainability in the local markets. If the demand decreases, the traditional experts again create the new designs for market favour. Knowledge they gain from their parents applies in the process and hand over it to the next generation with its advanced form. As the time pass the new generation learned the techniques, process and designs of the existing one from their parents and try to continue it without any trouble.

Learning of weaving is a complicated task for a person who totally out of knowledge of weaving. Children and the older person living in a house is a best platform to learn the process very easily. Children watches various handloom works in their home can easily handle the weaving and allied handloom works under the guidance of the elders. It is a platform on which a member of the weaving community can learn without fear and pressure of the trainer. In course of the time, the form of handloom weaving has changed a lot in both the forms of technology and the traditional processes. A complete handloom weaver is he who learned the complete work of weaving, including the dyeing, tying, winding, sizing, and warping a series of operation in handloom weaving. This form of weaving has created diversified expert workers under the guidance of the masters who have been handling the

entire process of the handloom production and marketing in the region.

Today's Handloom does not give any opportunity to a person to learn all the allied works at a time. It takes much time to concentrate oneself in any of the allied work of weaving. Children in the community learn his parents' occupation without hesitation and trouble facilitates by the members of his house in their everyday life. Learning of weaving is a very simple process may be difficult for them whose family does not weave. Today a new learner gains the skill of weaving from his neighbours through continuous watching and involving in a specific activity for a considerable period of time. Weavers do not deny to teach their person of own community, but they do not share extra weaving techniques they have learned in their life on their own motivation and skill. They also learn the operation of the Jacquard and Dobby weaving from the persons who fixes the machine in their loom shed or the special trainers appointed by the government textile departments. People of the community participate in various training programmes organized in the district and outside of the state to skilled up the new weaver who requires introducing jacquard in his loom shed. The time and the date of the training announced in the departments and facilitate the weavers who are members of the cooperative societies for a long time. It means in the process of learning children do not get chance to learn everything in their houses, due to the development of diversified handloom process.

A weaver Manobendra Meher of Matikhai describes it as thus-

“When I started weaving before 40 years ago, I first started with the help of the 4 numbers and 8 number of sticks attached with the border of the warp yarns. I know to create various designs or the flowers created in this portion. By the help of the 3 sticks we have created chotia, kangna, types of small flowers and fish, supari, kelikadamba by the help of the 8 sticks in the loom”



(A Kunchi Maker is at work)



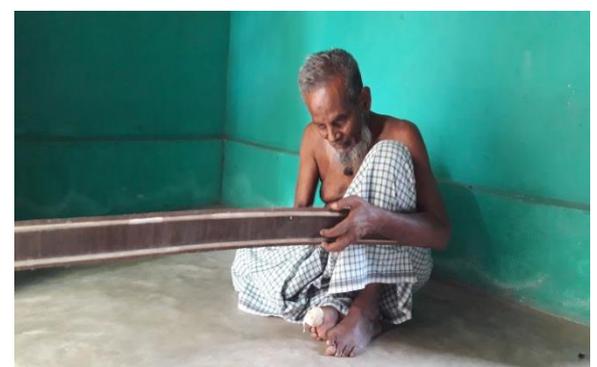
(A Jacquard weaving Machine set at the top of the loom)



(A Weaver is at work of dyeing yarns on Synthetic colour)



(Weavers folding the warp yarns after the end of the street sizing process)



(A Reed maker from the Muslim community engaged in his work)



(A girl child Learning the task of winding rolls)

At present, the form of creating designs on the borders is based on the use of the Tye-dye process with dobby weaving. The pressure of the driving of the sticks ended with the invention of the dobby machine in handloom and the weavers become free from the flowing of the sticks. In the recent past while the dobby was not invented the traditional weavers were weaving the course cotton yarns those were needed more care at the time of the warping, sizing and weaving. The silk yarns were also used in the border portion to create the beauty and also to increase the demand of the fabrics. Some weft yarns were tied and dyed in such a manner that fitted in the border portion and create the beauty of the traditional fabrics, but a small numbers of designs were ever invented. The figures created on the fine cotton were shining more compared to the course cotton yarns. Some fabrics well known on that time were Hanspatan, Satkamia Bandha, Gachha Chandana, Bichhitapuri etc. These fabrics were woven on 80, 60 and 40 numbers of yarns obtained in the market. The 60 number of the yarns used for the warp side while the 80 number of yarn for the weft portion.

Some extraordinary designs were also created interlacing with two opposite yarns having tie dye works were very difficult for setting during the time of weaving. In that process, the warp and weft yarns joint together in such a manner through flowing of the reed heddles and shuttle at a time that creates the designated figures on the body portion appropriately. The flowing motion of the traditional handloom was only known by the weaver, who drives regularly and who have a long time experience in weaving.

A weaver Meghu Meher from Sialjjhuli describe it as thus:

“I started weaving since last 40 years before my marriage, and I was making flowers on the border of the fabric by the help of the sticks. I heard from the relatives about the dobby machine and I booked it for me. Later I thought it can be created self and can be marketed. I suddenly started making of the machine with my idea looking the previous machine brought

from the Nagpur of Maharashtra. Later on I started selling those in the villages going by my bicycle. It took over one year to get recognition but gradually this wooden machine made me famous in the region. After recognition, weavers are coming regularly to my house. After that I left my handloom weaving and concentrated myself with the dobby machine selling in the locality. Now I am selling all those machines from my home. At present we are selling this dobby in Rajkhoriar, Bargarh, Bolangir, Sonapur, Boudh, Puruna Cuttack, Phulbani and Berhanmpur regions”.

Impact of Modernization Lessens the Role of Child

Children of a weaving community begin their life hearing the sound flowing from the loom every day very early morning to the late night. The sound of the shuttle and treadle strikes on the ear in every time when it runs. In the beginning of the childhood, children collects bobbins/pirns spreads in the loom shed while her mother asks to collect. In the childhood days, children always live with their mother and help to collect the blank rolls as required lay on the floor. As the age goes on, the growing children take part in other various handloom works guided by their parents in the house. In the previous times when two pieces of the fabrics were prepared at a time in street sizing and warping process, females support to their husbands in the entire processing of warp yarns. At the same time their children support their parents on holding of the Kunchi which used in the sizing process. Basically, the male child stands in the place till it ends with holding the brush and the rice water used there.

The learning process gradually developed with its complicated form of weaving, which progress with the maturity of his mind. The school going children are very much helpful on the handloom and allied works. They were at the stage of the learning. In the previous times, while the new form of the weaving was not introduced, the process of the designing on the surface of the fabrics was decorated by the help of the jalla which was required to lift as per the figures designed on the surface. That lifting yarns were done by the middle age children while females engaged in the household works. The weaving work starts from morning and during the day time, when housewife went for cooking in the kitchen. Fathers require someone to lift the warp yarns sticks. The training of this work gradually starts with observing continuously on the lifting process, which later helps him to do all that work alone. Male children of the house help their father in tying and dyeing process they gradually learn from their fathers and grandfathers in the family while the female children helps their mother in various household task and sometimes sit for winding the rolls in the veranda. Generally females take the responsibility of winding weft yarns while a male child sit to do this work in the house. Entry of the drum and jacquard machine in the

handloom weaving made their children free from the burden and engaged them in the study.

Manavendra Meher a weaver of Matikhai states:

“I was 20-year-old when I started my work as a weaver in my father loom shed. From the beginning I have been weaving the tie dye based fabrics on the throw shuttle loom. During the learning periods i have helped my parents in the street sizing and warping processes. I was weaving on 20 and 40 no. of yarns which were difficult to weave by the help of the traditional bamboo made reed. I have used some sticks for designing flowers on the body portion. The Jacquard which has come just 5 years befor lost the value of traditional work among the weavers of our community today”.

The Traditional Street Sizing

Street sizing in handloom weaving is a vast process practised by the weaver and his family members jointly in a place they have fixed for this specific task, in front of their house, or on the ground. A place for this task is specially fixed by every weaving household separately. Some families come together and selected a place to do this task jointly. Two wooden pillars are already set on that place. The head of the house leads the task. He holds the yarn and the attached instrument with him and moves to the place fixed for this task. Household wives generally co-operate her husband in the entire task from the beginning up to the end. She set the warp yarns with her husband. It takes a few hours to set all the warp yarns in a systematic way. They attach all the detached yarns together and the head of the house flow the Kunchi on the warp yarns putting on some amount of Thir. After allowing the flow the kunchi on the warp yarns, it makes the yarn separate. It also helps to identify the detached yarn easily. It is very difficult for others who does not have an experience on the complete task. It takes minimum 2-3 hours to complete the street sizing process.

A weaver is responsible for the complete task. Though he does not move his mind from the task and keenly observe all the process when it is in progress. In the past a weaver was doing every required task before to reach the stage of street sizing process. When the task is in progress he put 6-8 numbers of sticks in the warp yarns. He set the sticks in the stretched warp yarns one by one maintaining in a specific distances. It is generally done to make the warp yarns straight, well visible and detach. In the beginning he has already done the fanijura task, where he previously set the yarns in a sequence. The total length of the warp yarn is 24 feet consisting of a total number of 2800 of warp yarns. The fabrics are divided in to a series of yarns like silk yarn, tie-dye yarn, plain yarn and Border yarns. After flowing the Kunchi on the warp yarns, they keenly observe it all again, so that every single detached yarn can be found easily and attached. After doing a series of task a weaver beat all the warp yarns from one end to the

other end so that a loose yarn is easily detach and identified. In the entire street sizing process a weaver tries to make the warp yarns strong putting on water rice and through flowing of kunchi. After completing of various tasks they call some persons from the community to hold the stretched yarn at the time of folding. At least 6 persons are required to do it without difficulties. Two persons stand one end two in the middle and another two person start folding. At the time of folding they do not make the yarns loose. Every two feet of folding they set the stretched yarn again and move. It takes half an hour of task to complete the entire winding process.

Subjugated by the grandeur and potentials of contemporary science and technology, indigenous knowledge systems and its efficacy for inclusive development in the developing world have been disregarded and marginalized, until recently (Gorjestani, 2004). While philanthropists, social scientists and development agencies are only beginning to acknowledge their significance in comprehensive inclusive growth, their enduring role as the backbone of sustainable livelihood in the developing countries like India cannot be questioned. The developing world, in this regard, cannot be isolated. Even in western industrialized nations, indigenous knowledge accrued across generations continues to play an ultimate role in feasible and industrious uses of localized resources, knowledge and skill whether they be handicrafts or handlooms or food production or so on so forth (Twarog & Kapoor, 2004).

Concluding Remarks

The indigenous knowledge has travelled along with socio-political history of India and seen many ups and down with cultural forces. It also developed along with these changes and the patronages received in the history. With this creative variation, the art has survived through ages. The innovation in the design, products, raw materials and machinery, and marketing and logistics lead to improved business acumen in the handloom sector of Odisha too. The handloom weavers use their indigenous knowledge in the entire weaving process which they have learnt from their parents. We have seen many changes in the weaving and allied handloom works today with the invention of various developed instruments and techniques. The Weavers do not deny using of various developed instrument in the progress of handloom weaving. As the handloom developed it has created many allied activities along with various weaving techniques. Due to the high illiteracy and non-existence of formal technical knowledge, the introduction of sophisticated innovation and changes in traditional knowledge and process is a catastrophe. The entire tasks they do today are the accumulation of their experiences they have gained inside and outside of the community. Many handloom processes like dyeing, tying, winding, warping and

street sizing process are doing with some modification. It helps the weavers to progress the handloom weaving and to increase their household economy. To conclude, innovation in indigenous knowledge plays an important part in artisans' financial landscape but it does not offer a ready means to escape from the poverty. As such, it plays a limited but important role in helping them to cope with their myriad and daunting economic challenges, through a viable entrepreneurial success and growth.

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