Handicrafts & Handlooms of Orissa

A rich legacy of ancient culture
Stone Carving- A Grandeur of Rich Heritage
Foreword …..

The handloom and handicraft tradition of Odisha is well known- information exists of thriving trade in both handloom and handicrafts through the sea route in the days of yore. In fact, the tradition is not isolated or limited –fine workmanship and skill are evident in everyday, routine things- the brass cooking pots, the baskets used for storage or distilling, the “jhoti” or floor decorations made in every household on festive occasions, the colourful shawls woven by the tribals, the simple, beautifully woven floor mats used in all homes, the sand sculptures on Puri beach, to name just a few. In this land endowed with skill in every hand, the handicraft artisans and weavers stand apart. They have, over a long period going back many decades, honed to perfection the skills of their forefathers. The level of detail, the sheer beauty of designs, the labour of love that each piece passing through their hands bears, are all testimony to their untiring and often unsung effort in preserving the heritage of this great land.

This book is an effort to document for the first time in a comprehensive manner, some aspects of the handicrafts and handlooms of Odisha. The range to pick from is vast- a veritable sea of treasures, as it were. We have tried to represent each craft in a succinct manner in this book, so that the reader can quickly get a feel of the richness of the tradition, as well as the designer inputs being given to make it more contemporary. This representation is the tip of the iceberg- behind each craft are other linked crafts; scores of weaver and artisan families eking out a living by creating things of beauty for all of us; and government field staff and NGOs- many of whom have played a stellar role in developing the capacity of the craftspeople.

This book is being brought out on the occasion of the first international buyer sellers meet for handicrafts and handlooms being organized in Bhubaneswar from 24th-26th February, 2010. This will provide an opportunity to our crafts persons to showcase their products to Indian and foreign buyers and also give the buyers a one stop platform to source the products directly. I would like to acknowledge with thanks the effort put in by all members of the team handlooms and handicrafts in putting this compilation together at a short notice.

This book is dedicated to all the crafts persons- the artisans and weavers, of Odisha.

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The Legacy

Situated on the east coast of India, the State “Orissa”, with its beautiful coastline, hilly terrain, traditional cuisine and folklore of primitive tribes has a rich tradition of culture, costume and crafts. The timeless temples, majestic monuments with its skilled craftsmanship as well as exquisite woven costumes are a manifestation of the superb skill of the artisans and weavers of Orissa. A visitor’s knowledge about India is incomplete without a glimpse of Orissa.

Through centuries Orissa has retained its cultural identity within the mainstream of pan Indian culture. A land of rich and diverse artistic achievements, Orissa’s art and culture are the product of a long historical process where the spiritual, philosophical and the human dimensions have merged to yield the finest effect of a cultured and civilized life.

Steeped in living traditions and rich heritage Orissa’s hand crafted and hand woven products are distinct in its style. There are few mediums and techniques that the Oriya artisan has explored. An endless palette of natural fibers, stones, wood and metals are worked upon using natural and mineral dyes and colours. The unique techniques, skills and tools have continued to thrive through generations. Starting from traditional to contemporary, the Orissan art and craft has travelled a long way with changes, modification and additions with tremendous creativity, mesmerizing simplicity and beauty.
Crafts in Orissa are not merely a source of livelihood - they are a way of life. The products reflect traditional values and can be appreciated with a deeper understanding of the artisan’s life and culture.

Almost each region of the State makes a rich contribution to the myriad ranges of handcrafted articles. Appliqué works of Pipli, Butupali, Pattachitra and palm leaf etching work of Raghurajpur, Bhubaneswar, Stone carvings of Puri, Konark, Bhubaneswar, Naranagarh, Keonjhar, Balasore & Mayurbhanj, Wood carving of Kalahandi, Nabrangpur, Jagatsinghpur, Bhadrak, Puri & Bhubaneswar, Silver filigree of Cuttack, Golden grass craft of Jajpur & Kendrapara, Brass fish of Ganjam, Brass Icons of Nayagarh, Dhokra casting of Dhenkanal, Mayurbhanj, Nayagarh, Rayagada, Nabrangpur & Subarnapur, Tribal jewelry of Dhenkanal, Nabrangpur and Rayagada, Lacquer-ware of Nabrangpur, Rayagada & Balasore are the most popular. Each article produced is a class by itself and is also perceived as a painstaking self expression of the artisan and the locale culture.

These crafts are practiced by around 1.20 lakh artisans. The craftsmanship one of the best in the country is established by the fact that 129 artisans have got National Award, 4 of them have been awarded Shilp Guru and 3 Padma Awards.
Stone Sculpture ~ *memories engraved*

Stones that sing…. dance… and inspire, almost as if the stones have life. This is the tremendous creativity of Orissan craftsmanship which has sustained for generations through carving on the temples and monuments throughout Orissa. The stone carving of Orissa reflects the grandeur of a rich heritage. It has evolved over centuries via craftsmen who are descendants of the great builders of the famous temples of Lingaraja, Jagannath and Konark where mute stones have been transformed to living expressions of multi facets of human life. The tradition continues today in the nimble fingers of the stone carvers who replicate the beauty of the sculpture.

From Soap-Stone, ‘Kochila’ (a hard stone), sand stone and granite, stone carvers intricately engrave smaller replicas of temples, statues of gods & goddesses, Konark wheel, war horse and boats all carved with finesse to recall a glorious past. Apart from preserving the history of the land, the stone artifacts also provide artistic delight & utility.

Today, the stone carvers with the same dexterity cater to the needs of modern living. Diversified and modern items like table wares, office & toilet accessories with a traditional touch have added glamour and export potential to these products. These stone images give a touch of distinction to modern décor that few can hope to surpass.

Stone craft is mainly practiced in the districts of Keonjhar, Puri, Khurda, Jajpur, Balasore and Mayurbhanj.
Home decors in Granite
Creative statue
Wood carving & painting ~ melody in Wood

A special charm of Orissan Wood carvings is the blending of folk and classical forms. Each motif retains its vibrancy and aesthetic appeal in a characteristic breezy melody. The wood carvers make a variety of decorative and utilitarian objects – toys depicting birds and animals, real and mythical; boxes and bowls; images of gods and goddesses; secular figures, and innumerable other pieces are fashioned from wood and finished with smooth polish, gloss and shine.

Wood carving and painting of Orissa have both utilitarian and aesthetic aspects. The wood carvers of Puri have been building for centuries, the famous chariots used in Lord Jagannath’s annual Car Festival.

Made of light wood and painted over with arresting colours, the wooden masks of Orissa draw on the themes from Ramayana and Mahabharat and were earlier used by roving actors to stage players.

Each of them carries the imprint of their areas. For instance, the traditional wooden toy makers of Puri and Bargarh possess a distinctly unique style. The craftsmen from Nayagarh, Dhenkanal and Kalahandi make flower vases, jugs, bowls, vermilion boxes etc.

Made with a creamy white wood available locally, the gloss and shine of these articles make them singularly attractive. Their typical blending of utility and ornate style severally enhances the value of these wooden articles.

Whatever may be the occasion, intimate or formal, jovial or serious, these wooden articles make for a cherished gift that will last many years, a reminder of a thoughtful present.
Traditional decoratives
Painted wooden home decors
Appliqué ~ *colour at its native best*

Applique has a long history in Orissa. It basically implies carrying over of impression from one textile matter to another. The art form typically depended on four basic colours—red, white, black & yellow to produce a striking effect. In recent years, other colours have also been added, enlivening the craft even more. Temples and other religious institutions extensively patronized this art. In fact the basic inspiration for the art forms was mainly religious in nature.

The brilliant appliqué or patchwork of Pipili is famous for its bold character and vitality representing a modern look with a pristine brilliance and artistry. Pipili artisans deftly stitch traditional motifs of elephants, peacocks and flowers on umbrellas, canopies and fans on a cloth background, to form harmonious and colourful patterns with embroidery work.

The umbrellas and canopies for Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and other deities carry some of the finest examples of appliqué work from Orissa. But with progressive modernization, tastes have also become secular in content. Applique work today, reflects these modern trends and is a flourishing industry. The work has been fashioned to produce furnishings, home decors, bags, lamp shades to cater the needs of the buyers. Many subtle colours in various ranges add market value to these products.
Lamp shade
Garden accessories & home decors
Home furnishing
Patch works - wall hangings
Sliver filigree ~ the shine life craves for

Locally known as ‘tarakasi’, the silver filigree of Cuttack is noted for its delicateness and intricate workmanship. The art is ancient, dating back to the dawn of early history. Made of silver drawn into threads as fine as spider’s web, the filigree jewelry and decorative art work of Orissa is internationally known for its superb finish, fine foils and texture, snow glaze, delicate artistry and elegant craftsmanship. Ornamental trees, brooches and pendants or the highly proportional peacock-motif-ships that reflects Orissa’s seafaring ways, have a long history.

The variety of products from the silver-smiths is amazing. These range from jewelry to utility items. Starting with filigree necklaces to bangles, bracelets, perfume containers, armlets, earrings, hairpins to bowls, trays, containers and ash-trays, they are simply a class apart. Not only do these make ideal presents for loved ones but are in demand among the modern discerning clientele. Exploiting the metallic nature of silver the craftsmen have taken maximum advantage and moulded mughal and other designs to attract the buyer’s eyes.

The export potential of this craft is truly enormous especially since the wares are hardy and long lasting and able to maintain their luster for long.
Jewelleris & decoratives
Metal Craft ~ the shining wares

Bell-metal wares occupy a pride of place in Orissa’s casting history. The utensils & other domestic utility products are being made by the artisans from time immemorial. The flexible brass fish of Ganjam, the cute brass icons of Nayagarh are unique creations of our artisans.

Presenting a syntax of beauty and utility, dhokra is an alloy of brass, nickel and zinc with an antique look. In dhokra casting, the products are cast in brass by lost-wax-process and display a wire work finish. The wax-work is done with great skill and precision from wires of bees-wax. These pieces with their antique look go well with all types of interior décor.

Orissa is also a land of indigenous tribes. Use of ethnic jewellery is a common phenomenon among them. Both men and women deck their body with a variety of ornaments made out of metal by lost wax process. A wide range of ornaments is prepared from dhokra beads mixed with glass beads and threads.

Tribal jewellery has become a fashion of the present day and is being appreciated by a wide range of customers of national and international market.
Home decors
Home decors
Folk painting & palm leaf engraving ~ cue to the past.

A painter is a man for posterity. The painters of Orissa did not confine their bourgeoning talents to common media of expression. They diversified into pattachitras (painting on cloth) and illustrations on palm leaf manuscripts. The result is a rich reservoir of art forms.

The folk paintings known as ‘Patachitras’ make lovely wall hangings which had once been a source of education for the rural folk. The ‘Patas’ usually have mythological themes—from Mahabharata, Ramayana and legends concerning Radha-Krishna and Lord Jagannath. The chitrakaras or the painters prepare the canvas by an indigenous method i.e. by coating the cloth with a mixture of chalk and tamarind seeds which produces a surface of leathery quality on which the artist paints with earth and stone colours giving meaningful expressions to their artistic skill and imagination.

The ancient craft of palm leaf illustrations, though limited to a few craftsmen, presents delicate and thoughtful mythological figures to depict stories from the scriptures. Romantic figures drawn on small leaves now serve as book marks and greeting cards and find ready market.

Now for a diversified products range, the painters have used the basic patches and colours in synchronization with the native character on modern utility and wooden items. Incidentally, these have created a sensation in the domestic market as well as in the eyes of foreign buyers to a great extent.
Decorative items
Bamboo Craft ~ majestic creations

Basket making from bamboo was an art of ancient days and this has been a traditional profession of rural artisans. The locally available bamboos are used for production purposes. The bamboos are split and polished into thin reeds by knife and then woven. Procurement and splitting are done by men while weaving is generally done by women folk. This craft is the livelihood for many Orissan craftsmen. Today a number of items are made from bamboo such as furniture, fruit basket, tray, light stand, candle stand, pen stand etc. having both utility and decorative value. Orissa has produced many outstanding items from this craft which can be used in any living room or as exterior fittings.
Utility items
Garden Accessories & Home decors
Golden Grass Craft

Typical of Orissa is a rich yellowish variety of grass reed – ‘Kaincha’ generally growing in swampy areas and appropriately called golden grass. Beautiful mats owe their origin to the rich golden luster of this variety of grass.

The villagers, mostly womenfolk, make a variety of decorative and utility articles of golden grass. The delicately textured table mats are woven with the skin of the reed and lend distinction to any dining table. They are easy to store and easy to clean.

The durability and flexibility of these grass products are some of their special features. To lend that exclusive ‘style’ to any modern décor, everywhere these finely woven pieces offer an irresistible attraction – a quaint charm. The product range includes dainty baskets, sets of boxes (one contained in another) table mats, coasters and hats etc. Each creation of golden grass is extremely attractive and buyers prefer such products. These are not machine-made and require expert craftsmanship on each item to give it a distinct identity.
Utility items

Golden Grass
Palm leaf basketry:

Palm leaf items which occupy a unique place among eco-friendly and biodegradable products. The tender palm leaves used in making these products are ivory in colour. After drying these leaves in sun, desired products are made by interweaving the leaves. Craftsmen used their artistic skills to make basketries, laundry bags and a wide range of utility items. Each piece becomes unique due to its hand weaving and its natural content.
Home accessories & decors

Palm leaf basketry
Palm leaf basketry

Home accessories
Terracotta ~ *earthen delights*

Pottery is one of the fewer crafts that have retained the ancient charm and skills. The craft remains untouched by the influence and advancements of the modern world. The potter through his patient creativity gives a numerous forms to the earth- right from household articles to decorative and religious items. Terracotta Craft of Orissa, though not very distinct from other parts of India, gets a separate style and shape in the hands of the Oriya artisans. Their skilled art of surface ornamentation, using varied techniques such as coiling, beading etc, gives their vessels, votive objects & figures such as horses a different dimension in beauty.

The low heat produced in traditional kilns results in a porous and brittle product. Although this porosity is ideal for cooking and storing food, the vessel becomes contaminated through constant use. The terracotta vessels are, therefore, broken & replaced at regular intervals. Utilitarian pottery comes in bewildering profusion. A variety of earthen objects are made lamp, toys flower vases, pots, musical instruments.
Home decors
The Hand wovens

Drawing heavily from the motifs replete in tribal culture and their association with nature, the hand-wovens of Orissa have entered the living rooms of people from all over the world. People with tourists and locals for an ethnic look and natural feel, textiles and handlooms of Orissa are a must to see, touch, try on and buy. Hand wovens of Orissa are mainly available in natural fibers like cotton and silk through the colours, patterns and methods of weaving differ for the two textured materials.
Ikat tie & dye ~ a bonding of colours

The unique hand weaving process of Ikat (Tie and dye) is confined to a few areas in India. It has perhaps reached its pinnacle in the form of Sambalpuri handloom fabrics.

“Ikat” means to tie/bind the thread and dye it so that the tied portion is not dyed. This basic idea is carried out on the warp/weft threads as per a predetermined pattern which comes out prominently after weaving.

When either longitudinal thread (warp) or horizontal thread (weft) is tied and dyed the fabric is called single ikat. When both the warp and weft are tied and dyed the fabric is called double ikat fabric. The skill of Orissan weavers is so high that the motifs achieved can be circular or curved, calligraphic or portraits of humans or statues of Gods and is the highest achievement of an artist found nowhere else but on the Sambalpuri fabrics. The weavers are also adding beautiful motifs by using extra warp and weft threads to give it a unique rich texture.
Home furnishing
Home furnishing
Ikat (Tie-Dye)

Dress material
Co-ordinated set
Stoles
One important segment of the natural dyed fabrics produced in the state is generally known as Kotpad saree and scarves, linked to its place of production i.e. Kotpad in Koraput district which is 560 kms from the state capital. This is a traditional tribal pattern woven with coarse cotton in natural dyes. The vegetable / natural dye used in this fabric is an extract of root bark of Aul tree. The fabrics are mainly developed with the tribal motifs (using extra weft) of hut, snake, water pot, temple, axe and hand fan etc. Now a days the motifs are developed on products like cushion covers, table mats, scarves and stoles for wider market reach.

Natural colours like lacquer (red color), jack wood (yellow color), marigold and indigo are also used in Nuapatana (Cuttack district) for production of bridal sarees with calligraphic effects, stoles etc.
Home furnishing
Extra thread ornamented hand-woven ~ Festooned drapes

The plain woven fabric is decorated with insertion of extra warp or weft thread in the direction of ground warp (longitudinal) or weft (horizontal) evolving a predetermined motif with desired color & weave. Bomkai, Berhampuri, Katki, Siminoi, Habspuri & Dhalapatahar Parada are the major extra thread ornamented hand-wovens having their unique strength & characteristics.
Bomkai

A traditional design originally woven with coarser cotton yarn in Bomkai, a village of Ganjam district is at present mainly woven on finer cotton and silk yarn in the districts of Subarnapur and Boudh. Main products are sari and dress material. The beauty of the products lies in the extra weft designs decorating the anchal/ pallu having motifs of flowers, miniature tree forms, birds and animals combined with extra warp designs at border. Now a days all the extra thread designs are mixed with a tie-dye touch evolving a special look. Sometimes gold coated threads are used for bridal saris.
Tassar (Raw Silk) Fabrics ~ Natural and pure

Orissa is one of the major tassar producing states in the country and has got a rich tradition of weaving tassar fabrics of lovely texture and luster. Ranging from sarees, scarves, and dress materials to latest home furnishings, tassar fabrics have now become a status symbol. Gopalpur in Jajpur district, Makidia in Balasore district, Fakirpur in Keonjhar district and Dihirakul in Mayurbhanj district are the main weaving areas of tassar in the North East part of the state. Generally the products are made by using cotton or silk as warp and ghicha and noil (different types of raw silk yarn) as weft. The final product is a fabric in different shades of gold and brown and different textures not able to many uses.
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Data & information available at Directorate of Textiles & Handlooms, Orissa
Directorate of Handicrafts & Cottage Industries, Orissa
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