

# Rich Odisha Handloom in Kala Bhoomi Odisha Craft Museum

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## Abstract

India's ancient tradition of '*chaushat kala*' (sixty-four forms of art) and many of these art forms are still being practiced in Odisha. For example; painting on mediums like paper, *patta* or cloth, clay, etc. or stone carving; or metal craft; or clay work; or vibrant handlooms, and so on. Looking at these art forms, several questions occur to mind like who were the creators? How they created? What kind of raw material they had used in the past? How they are still doing it? What kind of technique is used for production? What are the tools? And is there anyone place where all these questions can be answered? Yes, the 'Kala Bhoomi Odisha Craft Museum', at Bhubaneswar, Odisha is the place, where one can see the diverse handicraft and handloom tradition of the Odisha. Inaugurated in 2018, this new Craft Museum has beautifully arranged eight galleries, which are dedicated to a vast range of handicraft and handloom artworks. Here only diverse handlooms have been discussed with little more information. The focus is on raw materials, dyes, tools, looms, and *sari* from different centers; Kotpad, Sambhalpuri, Sonepur, GI tags, etc.

## Introduction

To see the rich, diverse craft tradition of the region under one roof with a holistic approach, a must visit place is the 'Kala Bhoomi Odisha Craft Museum', at Bhubaneswar, Odisha. For ages, the traditional Odishan artisans have been expressing, exploring, and creating the artwork with all kind of mediums from hard (stone, metal, etc.) to soft material (*shola pith*, palm leaves, natural material, etc.) as well as elegantly woven handloom with so many colours, and motifs make the wonderful happening place at the '*Kala Bhumi*'. As its name communicates '*Kala*' refers to 'art' and '*Bhoomi*' is 'land' means 'land of art' in a true sense. This has been rightly mentioned by the Honourable Chief Minister of Odisha " The soul of India shines through the skillful hands of Odisha" at the time of the inauguration of the museum in 2018. With this visionary ethos, the museum works for the betterment of traditional crafts as well as the crafts person. To preserve the traditional handicrafts, handloom and thoughtfully involved in the propagation work are two distinctive features. This can be seen in the two blocks of the museum; the display area and live section, which are beautifully surrounded by lush green gardens. The well designed website and virtual presence, which become more relevant in the present scenario, provides a lot of information. <sup>1</sup>

The display area of the museum is divided into eight galleries dedicated to its various craftwork. In these galleries, one can see the intricate and minute detail work on stone and wood carvings, artistic *dhokra* and bell metal crafts, imaginative indigenous carvings done on seashells, animal horns, *shola pith* crafts, world-famous silver filigree work, energetic terracotta, traditional *pattachitra*, and tribal crafts, ancient palm leaf work, an important pre-weaving, cocoons and the vast variety of handloom *saris* and other material. Courtyards dedicated to tribal living and temple architecture are part of the museum complex. For conducting various activities (workshop, school programme, etc.) a dedicated space is an important part of the museum complex. The space is generally used for craft demonstration, cultural events, exhibitions, programmes etc.



The rich textile of Odisha is divided into two; pre-weaving and woven. The rich textile of Odisha is divided into two; pre-weaving and woven. Silk cocoons, looms, tools are well explained in the pre-weaving technique section. (Figure 1) The commercially viable varieties of natural silk mulberry, tassar, and eri<sup>2</sup> are extensively used by the weavers of Odisha for creating colourful saris, stoles, dress materials for daily uses, and the occasional wear attires. The whole process starts with the tedious job of rearing silkworms in different stages, which has also been explained here. The cocoons and the installation of looms explain the lengthy process of weaving, which yarn preparation personals, dyers, and weavers, use to do. To understand the process of production is equally relevant before one sees the final products of weaver's love, commitment, and dedication.

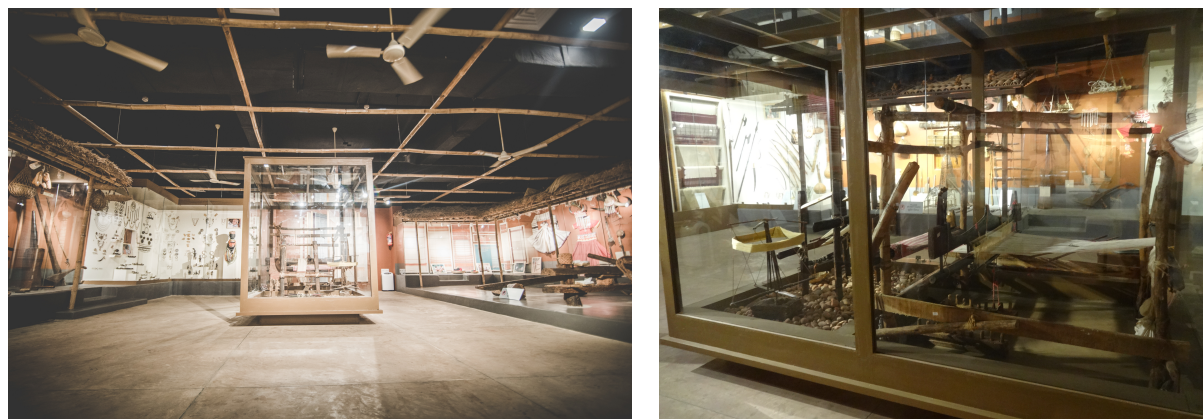


Figure 1: Loom, and other tools, unstitched and stitched garments displayed in showcases in the village setting. Photo courtesy: Kala Bhoomi and Craft Museum Bhubaneswar, Odisha

The textile gallery gives the bird view of a vast variety of handloom textiles produced, used, and cherished by most people. (Figure 2) The Odisha weavers have earned so many Geographical Indication (GI) tag for textiles shows the variations of their work. Most of these examples are displayed in the textile galleries. These were created for religious, occasional, wedding, and daily uses as well as commercially popular varieties. Displayed on rollers on full view, and the different level of platform area makes the grand view to the gallery. (Figure 3) The display of organic material straight is good for the objects, which is unfortunately found missing in many Indian museums.<sup>3</sup> To discuss all the variety of handloom is not possible within limited space, therefore only few textiles had been discussed in detail.



Figure 2: Natural dyed handloom and handwovensari's are on view in the textile gallery. Illustrating various motifs these textiles were produced in different centres of Odisha. . Photo courtesy: Kala Bhoomi and Craft Museum



Figure 3: Textiles are stretched in a frame, which have full support. Such display gives the good view of the object. Photo courtesy: Kala Bhoomi and Craft Museum Bhubaneswar, Odisha

The first one to earn the GI tag in the long list of Odisha handlooms<sup>4</sup> is the 'Kotpad handloom' where traditionally cotton *sari* and sometimes silk too besides the fabric are made. (Figure no-4) The cotton *sari* is one of the most admired one, which has a narrow madder dyed border with plain or *butidar* (tiny motif) field. The tribal weavers of the Mirgan community of Kotpad village lives in Koraput region of Odisha. These weavers use the natural dyes, which are obtained from the *Aulor Aal* (*Morindacitrifolia*) tree root, which grows in the region. The unique quality of dye is its skin-friendly and one of the most comfortable attire in all the weather, which had successfully created a special niche market for itself and always remain in great demand.<sup>5</sup> The weavers traditionally use two colours; maroon and black for making the *saris*, shoulder cloth, and turban.<sup>6</sup> The entire process of colour and dyeing threads takes around fifteen to thirty days. Inspired by the surrounding of flora and fauna, the most popular motifs woven are temple, fish, fan, this reflects the culture of the area. These motifs are developed by the extra weft, this gives the slightly raised effect to the *butis*, which adds charm to the *sari*. On the traditional lines, a beautiful *sari* was specially woven by Basudev weavers cooperative Society Ltd. Cuttack, Odisha in 1984 for The Visvakarma- Rasa (The Evoking of Variant Moods) exhibition.<sup>7</sup> This Visvakarma white *sari* shows tiny *butis* all over the field and madder dyed stripes on border *pallu*, the end panel of a *sari*, and the typical style of Kotpad *saris*.



Figure 4: Traditional Kotpadsari dyed with *aal* are decorated with small *butis*, striped *pallu* with narrow border on both sides. Photo courtesy: Kala Bhoomi and Craft Museum Bhubaneswar, Odisha



Figure 5: Tribal craft show unstitches and stitched garment, headgear with horn, musical instrument, and various implements of day to day use. Photo courtesy: Kala Bhoomi and Craft Museum Bhubaneswar, Odisha

The tribal textiles in the tribal crafts gallery represent both unstitched and stitched attire along with musical instruments and other utilitarian things, an essential element of tribal social and cultural life. (Figure 5) In the showcase, madder-dyed white *sari/dhoti* and shawl and red long skirt-*choli* embellished with cowrie or *kaudi* and applique work are on display. The headgear is decorated with cowries and the veil of cowries along with the horns makes the headgear an impressive look. The horned headgear reminds the 'Pashupati seal' of Harappan civilization.<sup>8</sup> The peacock feather bunch is on the top portion of the horned headgear, which might be worn by men during the dance performance. Different types of musical instruments make the showcase lively; all this shows the love for dance and music of the people.

The next important, attractive display is the *ikatsari* with calligraphy and motifs. Ikat handloom sarees of the region is locally known as 'Bandha of Odisha' or 'Odisha ikat', which got the GI tag in 2007. The resist dyeing technique of ikat is a process of tie-dyeing the warp and weft threads to create the design on the loom before weaving.<sup>9</sup>

So many varieties of ikat are produced in the Odisha region, which can be classified into four broad categories; Bomkai (also known as Sonepuri); Sambhalpuri (aka Bandha); Khandua; and Pasapalli. Woven in





Figure 6: Ikat sari of Odisha is embellished with calligraphy in Oriya and traditional motifs. Photo courtesy: Kala Bhoomi and Craft Museum Bhubaneswar, Odisha

the villages of Mankedia in Balasore or Mayurbhaj, Balangir, and Cuttack districts of Odisha. Mixing of calligraphy along with traditional motifs is one of the most complex weaves in which Odisha weavers had developed mastery. This art form, known so far, is not practiced in other traditional ikat centers of India.<sup>10</sup> Although calligraphy weaving was found in the Assam region, which is woven with a different technique and popularly known as 'Virndavanivastra', where old Assami letters were woven.<sup>11</sup> For introducing the Vrindavanivastra and making it popular was the efforts of Sankardev is numerous, later on, this was followed by the Bengal weavers also.<sup>12</sup>

The *bandha* sari also served an important religious function. The Gitagovinda is probably one of the oldest surviving types of religious ikats, which were specially made by the community of Nuapatna weavers in the Cuttack district. On a cultural level, the Gitagovinda cloth is circulated in the ritualistic domains within the Jagannath Temple of Puri. Sri SadashivRath Sharma, the renowned scholar of Oriya language and religious culture, found records in a daily diary (MadalaPanji) of King Ramchandradev II, who was the ruler in Puri (circa 1719 CE). It mentions that;

"Jaydev, the great poet of the 12th century used to offer the sacred 'Gita Gobinda' text to Lord Jagannath, Lord of the universe. To ensure proximity to his deity, he decided to procure fabrics with lyric woven into them, with which to adorn the image. So, impressed was King Ramchandradeva by this symbolic act that he immediately placed orders for these fabrics in Nuapatna."<sup>13</sup>

The Nuapatna is one of the oldest weaving centers, and weavers weave shlokas or verses from the Gita Gobinda texts into the fabric. The ikat textiles woven in silk are used for religious purposes in the temples of Jagannath Puri.

An ikat sari in the gallery is a beautiful example of traditional *bandha* sari is perhaps from Barpali of Bargarh district of Odisha. (Figure 6) On the black background, *chupar* style cross bands of Oriya letters depict four motifs in four divisions. This pattern is woven in repeat all over the field of the sari, while three temples are on *pallu*, and a mix of a circle and cross-band border motifs are on both sides, which have been beautifully woven in red and white colour threads.

These motifs (from top clockwise) are; perhaps, a pair of stylized peacocks, which symbolizes prosperity. Next, is the stylized tortoise, one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu, out of ten incarnations. The coiled serpent symbolizes the unending cycle of time. The last one is Naga Bandha. Maintaining the same colour palette, the end panel or *pallu* illustrates the three beautiful temple architecture perhaps symbolizes the chariots on the RathYatra festival, which adds charm to a sari (Figure 7). A special weft ikatsari illustrating three rows of pattern with calligraphy is woven all over the field, *rudraksha* motif on narrow *pallu* with yellow plain borders. The patterns are the series of *bandhas* (cryptic poems) that were commissioned for the Visvakarma- Master Weavers exhibition.<sup>14</sup>

Although every sari on display is so beautiful and exquisite that can be discussed in length, maybe some another time. One common feature one can notice here is that each of the creation of Odisha weavers is woven on the traditional lines of dyeing, use of colours, and from the long directory of motifs, which reflects the religious and cultural ethos of the region.<sup>15</sup>

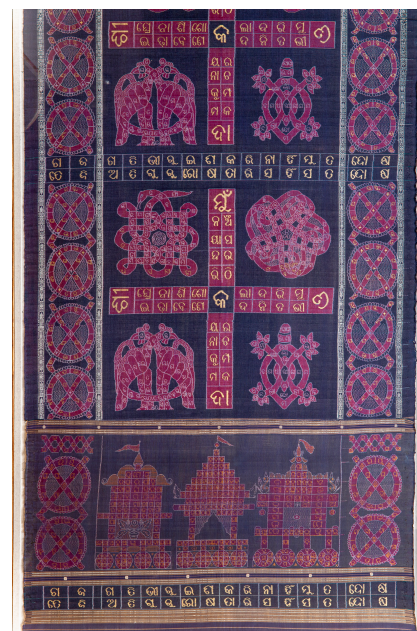


Figure 7: Detail of ikat sari. Photo courtesy: Kala Bhoomi and Craft Museum Bhubaneswar, Odisha

In the end, the State authorities of Odisha should be complimented for taking the lead in setting the dedicated museum for handloom and handicrafts. The textile lovers do hope to see more such ventures by the other states, as each state has the capacity of doing it. Such ventures will be good for the artisans as well as traditional art forms of India in a big way, lots of commercial scopes, especially in the present scenario.

## References

1. <https://www.odishacraftsmuseum.com/>
2. Out of four varieties all three are used except Muga, which is more used by the Assam weavers
3. Exhibiting textiles for the longer period, is always a matter of concern for the curators and conservators dealing the textiles collections in the museum. This need to be addressed properly by the Indian museum.
4. There are number of Odisha handwoven and handloom textiles, which got the GI, these are; Kotpad handloom fabrics (2005); Odisha ikat or Bandha of Odisha (2007); Pipli applique work (2008) ;Khandua sari and fabrics (2009); Gopalpurtussar fabrics; DhalapatharParda and Fabrics; Bomkai sari and Fabrics (2009); Habaspuri sari and Fabrics; BerhmapurPata or Phodakumbha sari and Joda (2012). <http://www.ipindia.nic.in/registered-gls.htm>.
5. This I have experience too, while wearing my cotton kotpad sari in the all type of climatic conditions of Delhi. My sari is also maddar dyed plain sari with black striped *pallu*.
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7. Chishti. R.K.,& Jain R., *Tradition and Beyond Handcrafted Indian Textiles* (general editor) Martand Singh, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2000, p-136.
8. Bhattacharya. S.K. Indus Civilization, in *Masterpieces from National Museum collection*, (ed) S.P. Gupta, National Museum publication, 1985, p-15, pl-16.
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10. Patan, Rajkota, in Gujarat; Pochhampalli and Chirala in Andhra Pradesh, although the later one is not producing anymore; Patapakal in Telangana in South India ikat weaving is practised.

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<https://grandmaslegacy.wordpress.com/2017/12/02/bomkai-sambhalpuri-pasapalli-odisha/>
14. This exhibition was held at the Royal College of Art, London, as part of the Festival of India in UK in 1981. Chisti R.K. Ibid, p-53.
15. Meher, S., The Sambalpuri Ikat of Odisha: History, Symbolism and Contemporary Trends, in Sahapedia, <https://www.sahapedia.org/the-sambalpuri-ikat-of-odisha-history-symbolism-and-contemporary-trends>

### About the Author

Anamika Pathak, Former Curator, National Museum, had curated several permanent & temporary exhibitions. Extensively travelled to several countries, closely associated with many academic and cultural institutes to deliver lectures on various aspects of Indian Traditional Textiles, Decorative Arts, Museology and Preventive Conservation, presented research papers in seminars, published fivebooks, booklets, exhibition catalogue, portfolio & children'sbook, more than fifty published articles on art, textiles & decorative arts in journals like *Marg*, *Arts of Asia*, *National Museum bulletin*.