

Chapter 7

A Case Study on Pipli Craft of Orissa: Learning, Community Building Through Inclusiveness Leading to Development of Pipli Applique Craft

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ABSTRACT

India is known for its arts and crafts, handicrafts form the gateway to this ethnic nation. Primary research for this project started with a visit to Odisha to study the craft of Pipli appliqué. The state Odisha has a rich cultural heritage, which is a harmonious blending of art, religion, and philosophy interwoven around “Lord Purusottam Jagannath”—the internationally famous Vaishnavite God at holy city of Puri. Pipli applique textiles originated as temple offerings, chariot decoration, and ceremonial products. The technique itself was practiced by the selected few craftsmen of the village. Through this chapter, the author presents craft cluster study project through a learning together initiative project conducted by an on-site visit, stay at the cluster, at a small village Pipli located in the eastern state of India: Odisha. This chapter also gives an insight about the socio-economic factors that have affected the Pipli craft. An effort that has built a strong community relationship between the Hindus and Muslims of the village, all bound by the Pipli applique craft.

INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH

India has had a rich cultural heritage since the beginning of civilization. There are 29 states and each state has its unique craft practice. Craft has been a strong inspirations and source of employment for several decades.

Although the country was ruled for many centuries by Mughals (1500s to 1850s) and later by the British (1600s to 1947), the cultural roots of Indians remain strong to this day. The variety of traditions,

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rituals and festivals has been passed over generations and are still a part of daily Indian life. Supporting and surrounding these traditions are the objects, symbols, garments that are based on the innumerable arts and crafts propagating for centuries from one generation to another.

Through this chapter the author wants to present a case study of the learning process that has had a significant impact on the Social Design and has further helped in Community Building and Inclusiveness through the Pipli appliqué craft. This study is done as a part of academic activity and the study is carried out on the Pipli craft in state of Odisha in India.

Fashion Design discipline at MIT Institute of Design in India encourages learners to study and appreciate on the traditional crafts of the country. India is a country that is rich in its crafts and culture. Throughout the length and width of country several unique and extraordinary arts and crafts are practiced. There are several crafts are prospering and are recognized throughout the world but also there are a few that have not got the due recognition and are fading away. As an academic project and an attempt to bring designers closer to the rich heritage a course facilitates study and visit to a craft practicing community. Staying on location is planned in a manner that the students not just get hands on learning of the craft but also experience the socio-cultural background and the economic factors that affect the artisans and the traditional crafts. This also presents opportunity to learn, identify, appreciate and interact with artisans. The students are able to witness the journey of craft from material to product, this is especially beneficial when designers set out to bring out their true identity and begin to reference historical, cultural and contextual backgrounds which have influenced their formative years. The students get opportunity to reflect on the character and ethos of the culture by researching its heritage and finding newer meanings, interpretations and opportunities. Their contemporary designs then further show an evidence of the rich heritage in the most individual creations.

The objective of such an exposure is much needed for the students, this also creates a platform to develop communication channels and connect between the craftsman / artisan and the upcoming designers. The exposure is not just limited to the fashion related crafts – i.e. textile based, surface development or artefacts but also shows the social development and lifestyle of community. It also brings to light all the layers of that work together to create the mater piece. The students also get to learn that they are also a part of change that will be seen in the Fashion industry in coming days. The budding designers and their interactions with the artisan community are seen as one step towards bringing the craft to the consumer. Also, the understanding that the change they bring has a significant social impact and not just on the artisan but also the community around them.

With the multifaceted approach towards studying the crafts and art of the country it must be recognised that the factors influencing are multi-dimensional. There is a huge influence of religion, historical traditions and community building in the survival of the craft. Nevertheless, the growing disconnect with traditional patterns of livelihood, encroaching urbanization, easy connectivity, exposure to visual media and education is leading to a vital loss of knowledge and skill repositories that are unique preserves of a cultural biosphere. With easy accessibility to mass produced goods and exposure to mass media, the shift from self-reliant and sustainable economy is fast being corroded both in terms of quality as well as in the aesthetics of material culture. The shift in livelihood patterns and education has led to a distancing of the regional inhabitants from their own identity and heritage leading to a decline in craftsmanship, a blurring of regional identities and a lack of innovation. The Pipli village and its study are to identify the traditional approach behind the craft, modern interventions over a period of time.

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