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### **Traditional Knowledge of Folk-Craft in Socio-Cultural and Economic Development of West Bengal**

**Dr. Sujay Kumar Mandal**

*Professor & Head, Department of Folklore, University of Kalyani*

**Saikat Majumdar**

*Ph.D. Scholar, National Institute of Technology, Raipur*

**Kaynat Khan**

*Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Folklore, University of Kalyani*

#### **Abstract**

*Traditional craft forms in India rely heavily on traditional knowledge. It has a long history in West Bengal, and it has been used in a range of traditional crafts in rural areas. Artisan communities have exploited this information to demonstrate their superior skill throughout history. When we look at the concept of globalization, we can see how, as a result of the rapid speed of industrialization and urbanization, traditional folk craft expertise is gradually vanishing. Traditional folk crafts and craftsmen have been disproportionately impacted by modernization. For the sake of survival, they are forced to compete with modern businesses. To meet the needs of modern society, they have made a noteworthy change in their manufacturing and design lines. Younger generations are unconcerned about their traditional profession or area of competence. As a result, traditional folk trade expertise's cultural transmission would decline with time. The present article looks into the traditional knowledge of the various folk craft of West Bengal as well as the changing landscape of traditional knowledge. Aside from that, the study concentrated on the socio-cultural state and economic condition of West Bengal's artisan groups to boost commerce and export. The objective of this study is to identify strategies that would enable craftsmen to obtain financial assistance from a range of government and non-governmental organizations based on their traditional knowledge of folk crafts.*

***Keywords: Traditional knowledge, folk, crafts, culture, economy***

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**Introduction:** There is a vast range of cultural variation in the Indian subcontinent, both in terms of physical cultural components and intangible cultural components (folk melodies, dance, folk rites, and so on). After independence in India, this folk craft or handcrafted craft has become the second biggest industry in terms of job creation after agriculture. This folk craft items are made in a very traditional manner using a variety of simple and natural raw materials. This handcraft and arts have been renowned and popular in India for a long time,

and the technology that was formerly used in this craft is now being used in numerous ethnic productions and even engineering activities. As a result, for the up-gradation of modern folk craft or handmade craft, revolutionary mobility and dynamicity are required. A hard-core financial commitment, in addition to technical help, becomes a crucial agenda item for its continued proliferation. This handicraft industry has been disregarded because of many flaws in India's growth strategy and planning throughout the decades. Ample financing, technical aid, awareness within the artisan community, and current marketing practices all help to keep this skill alive and growing. A society's handicrafts are the best representation of its cultural ethos, creative thinking, ritual thoughts, and decorative attitude. This craft industry has to be transformed with the support of traditionalism in the current period of globalization; for example, contemporary development could incorporate ancient skills, traditional technology, and mechanisms by a new generation of craftsmen, and older raw resources and skills by contemporaneous artisans. As a result, a well-balanced growth is required, with both handcrafted and machine-made items taking precedence. An artisan working in the handicraft industry must be well-versed in the traditional knowledge and abilities of craft production and design. In cottage production mode, they are worked individually or in collaboration with a small group of artisan members. Family members or, in certain situations, paid labor (in very limited cases) are often used in the Terracotta craft production industry to create craft products that are not well-skilled by current technological help. Modern western technology has been blamed in certain circumstances for destroying age-old basic traditional ways.

The folk craft industry contributed significantly to the economy of the country by creating jobs, ensuring financial stability, and providing training and skill development. In India, it is an unorganized economic sector that operates as a cottage industry. The majority of the craft sector survives because of its illustrious historical heritage and renown, the availability of trained and semi-skilled labor, a broad market, increased demand, cheap prices, and environmental friendliness. Traditional crafts such as brass metalwork, Terracotta ornaments, stone and bamboo craft, ornamental articles, and jute goods are still popular in India. Despite the lack of massive governmental backing, devotion, and major financial investments, the handicraft industry continues to flourish. Some handicrafts, like jewelry and Baluchari saris, have grown into full-fledged big industries.

Overall we can see that the socio-economic condition of most of the artisans is not very good and the recent world pandemic has resulted in the worsening of their condition, they did not receive any help from the government and are struggling to survive during this tough time. Some of the major problems identified during this research project are; economic problems, lack of proper marketing system for their produced goods and artifacts, the increasing price of raw materials, lack of proper communication and transportation system, lack of proper training for the artisans, the daily wages of the artisans are also very low, government's negligence towards them, etc.

It is observed that the traditional knowledge of folk crafts is disintegrating with the process of modernization and mega urbanization in the context of globalization. Traditional

folk crafts and craftsmen are seriously affected by modernization. The traditional craftsmen are forced to compete with the modern industries for their survival. They are also changing their production according to the needs of society. The younger generation is not concerned about their traditional occupation as well as traditional knowledge. Consequently, the cultural transmission of the traditional knowledge of folk crafts will become endangered. The craftsmen are getting marginalized in our society. This has become a big challenge for our folk tradition.

The magnificent folk crafts of West Bengal, a place of captivating beauty, are well-known worldwide. The State was known as "Bengal" or "Bangla". It has a long history of folk arts and crafts, each having its own distinct features that have grown in tandem with its art and sculpture, temple building, folk art, dance, and music. Because of its technical precision and creative quality, the craftsmanship is one-of-a-kind. Bengali artists have long been exhibiting their awe-inspiring creations to the world, thanks to an old history of creating magnificent works of art by hand. The beauty and dynamic variety of Bengal's ancient arts and crafts have not faded with time. Despite the industrial revolution and the availability of low-cost machine-made goods, folk craft has not only survived but flourished in the face of fierce competition.

The research extensively covers the traditional knowledge of various folk craft forms of West Bengal and deals with the changing scenario of traditional knowledge. Apart from this the study also dealt with the socio-economic condition and cultural aspects of selected artisan communities of West Bengal.

**Objectives:** The following are the objectives of the present study:

1) to show the importance of handicrafts as a cultural production that can be promoted as a tourist attraction 2) to represent folkcrafts are part of the cultural heritage that can become an alternative source of employment in rural communities and 3) to show the process of elaboration and commercialization of said crafts.

**Methodology:** This article studies the general history and evolution of handicrafts and a brief review of existing documentation on traditional knowledge of folk crafts and artisan communities. A survey on craftsmen's use of the traditional knowledge for their craftsmanship is made. Along with a study of artisan groups' socioeconomic situations and cultural characteristics, as well as observations of the cultural transfer of traditional folk craft expertise.

Traditional knowledge is a rapidly expanding topic of study on both a national and worldwide scale. Traditional knowledge, also known as indigenous knowledge, has been recognized by worldwide and national areas of study and development since the 1970s. It is now at the center of the discussions on intellectual property rights and has assumed immense significance. In India, some diverse and fragmentary works have been done on traditional knowledge of folk crafts. For example, S Simon John has published a research paper in the Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge on "Traditional Knowledge of Folk Crafts in Tamil Nadu". He has analyzed three folk craft forms of Tamil Nadu i.e. pottery

(Kullalar community), basketry (MalaiKuravar community), and grass mat weaving (Muslim Labbai community). His research work was focused on traditional knowledge of these folk crafts. In his paper, he gave brief but insightful details of the caste background of each community and their craft forms. The raw materials used in the craft along with the technique and procedure of each craft form. John further writes about the social and cultural significance of the crafts and the religious belief system and observations associated with the craft form and the finished goods. He also highlighted the impact of modernization and urbanization on the traditional folk craft forms. Due to the changing pattern of market demand the traditional craft men are facing challenges while trying to match up with the demands. They are changing their production line as per the latest market demand which in turn is affecting the traditional authenticity of the craft form.

In the field of traditional knowledge of folk crafts in West Bengal, any remarkable and in-depth research work has not yet been published. Therefore it is a new approach in the field of social science research work. This research work analyzed the traditional knowledge of folk crafts in West Bengal and also gave information about the problems of traditional knowledge holders and the solution process to these problems.

Some scholars have done research in this field partly. For example, David Smith and Rajesh Kochhar have jointly published the paper entitled "The Dhokra Artisans of Bankura and Dariapur, West Bengal: A Case Study and Knowledge Archive of Technological Change in Progress". In this research paper, they analyzed the cire perdue technique of the Dokra craft of West Bengal. They have also analyzed the ethnography of Dokracommunity. Another published research paper is "Indian Craft-technology: Static or Changing – a Case Study of Kansari's Craft in Bengal, 16th to 18th Centuries". S. Sarkar published this paper on the Kansaricraft community. He has analyzed the production technology of the brass and bell-metal craft of Bengal.

Samanta in his research article "Socio-Economic condition of the Dokra Artisans – A Case Study of Burdwan District, West Bengal" gives us extensive idea of the socio-economic condition of the Dokra artisans of Burdwan district. His research was based on a primary field study. He firstly briefly outlined the historical backdrop and description of the Dokra craftsmen in general. Then coming to his research area, he highlighted the socio-economic condition of the Dokra workers starting from their population size to their family size, their employment situation, educational level, financial status their living conditions, access to basic sanitization and amenities Samanta attempted to cover every topic related to their socio-economic status. He also discussed the marketing strategies of the Dokra craftsmen. He briefly touched on the various problems faced by the Dokra artisans. Lastly, he suggested some remedial measures which can solve some of the problems of the Dokracraftsmen. Something worth mentioning here is that even though Samanta covered every topic related to their socio-economic condition a further more detailed study will prove to be more fruitful on this topic. In contrast to Samanta's work, we can find that Chaterjee (2015) in his case study highlighted all the problems faced by the Dokra artist in a more detailed and in-depth manner. He argues that despite having a high demand for the

traditional Dokra artifacts in the national and international market, the artisans are facing a lot of problems faced by the Dokra artists and the Dokra industry. Though still very briefly written in comparison to other research in the same field we find an interesting discussion in Chaterjee's work. The issues and problems highlighted by him are real and provide an insightful picture of life in the Dokracraft.

**Challenges and measures for folk craft tradition:** Globalization, like other types of intangible cultural assets, poses significant challenges to the survival of traditional kinds of crafts. Mass manufacturing, whether in giant multinational corporations or tiny local craft industries, may frequently offer things required for everyday living at a cheaper time and financial cost than hand manufacturing. Many craftspeople are finding it difficult to adjust to competition from these companies and industries (Ted Barber and Marina Krivoshlykova, 2006). Environmental and climatic pressures also influence traditional crafts, and deforestation and land clearing diminish the abundance of the main natural resources. Even when handicraft becomes a cottage industry, larger-scale production can cause harm to the environment.

To overcome these problems, there is an urgent need for financial assistance from the government as well as non-government organizations. Capital or loan should be provided to them through the artisan credit cards and their interest should be low so that they can bear the interest without any difficulties. The price of raw materials should be regulated with the help of the government, as well a continuous supply of raw materials should be provided to them by the government. The discount should be given on the GST that is imposed on the raw materials and the finished products. Artisan allowance, old-age pensions, medical insurance, and life insurance should be given to them. Overall, to uplift the socio-economic conditions of the artisans the policy which should be adopted by the government are as follows; (1) development of folk craft entrepreneurship, (2) development of Self-Help Groups of the artisans. (3) Creation of folk craft cooperative societies for every craft form and assistance should be provided to the artisans through the Cooperative societies. (4) Recognition should be given to selected villages that are excelling in their craftwork as "Model Craft Villages" and tourism activities should also be encouraged there. (5) Development of folk craft clusters. (6) Development of Folk Craft Parks.

**Cluster development:** The formation of SELF-HELP Groups, cooperatives, the federation of artisans and SVP should be encouraged. Attention should be given to enterprise development. Capacity building of artisan organizations should be encouraged. raw material banks should be created for the artisans and credit support should be provided to them. Marketing support should be given to the artisans they should be provided with technology and design support.

**Preservation of Craft Heritage:** The preservation of the craft heritage is very important. The Guru shishya parampara training should be conducted. Attention should be given to the revival of the languishing crafts and documenting the crafts in such a manner that they remain archived forever for future references and studies. Training and awareness camps should be organized. The traditional or ethnic handicrafts should be displayed in

government buildings and parks as well as public spaces. Villages should be given recognition as heritage villages or heritage sites. State handicrafts day should be observed.

**The Welfare of the Artisans:** For the welfare of the artisan's government should provide insurance coverage, and life and health insurance should be provided to them free of cost. The old-age pension should be given to the artisans above 60 years of age, their children should be given scholarships, housing facilities should be provided to them, an artisan welfare fund should be created, electrification and sanitation of the artisan households should be provided to the artisans.

**Development of database:** The proper census of the artisans should be conducted to maintain their database. Each artisan should be provided with a photo identity card, an online database should be formed where their data should be properly entered and reported.

**Institutional support:** A proper artisan monitoring system should be created and the artisan grievance redressal forum and helpline should be created for the welfare of the artisans.

**Infrastructure:** Development of SIDAC should be done as the "center of excellence", infrastructures for craft schools should be developed, and common facilities in clusters should be created. Government should also put their ideas into creating handicraft parks. A proper marketing infrastructure is also very beneficial for the artisans.

**Raw Materials:** Government should arrange forest and mineral-based raw materials for the artisans, and it should also be built raw material banks so that the artisans can easily access them and get raw materials at any time whenever they need them.

**Marketing:** For the marketing of the produced goods and artifacts government should organize exhibitions and buyer-seller meets which will help in the proper marketing of the goods, marketing of the same artifacts can also be done through government organizations. Several sales 'out-lets' should be open by the cooperatives and self-Help Groups, urban haats or craft bazaars can also be open for marketing purposes. Government should take initiative to set up government showrooms where folk artifacts can be showcased for marketing purposes.

**Export Promotion:** Government should promote the exportation of folk crafts and artifacts, the artifacts have a global demand and a huge international market, but they are not promoted in the right way thus it lags. International marketing cells should be set up to look into the export of the artifacts, it can also look after the quality testing and standardization of the goods to make them fit enough to be sold in the international market.

Folk craft has its symbolic meanings, and it is unquestionably a source of immense pride among West Bengal's craft industry. It has its own cultural, spiritual, artistic, historical, and legacy qualities, all of which must be preserved and maintained in an orderly manner. In terms of export and marketing values, the expansion and development of this craft industry must be maintained. The demand for handicrafts and ethnic crafts has recently increased, presenting marketing and economic opportunities. For continued development and acceleration, it must be linked to other small and cottage industries. It is necessary to

engage local artisans in craft art throughout the year to ensure their job and earning potential. For its further improvement and development, this knowledge of craft art must be integrated into the organized sector. For its smooth growth, it requires enough information, financial help, technical advancement, a skill-building program, and effective marketing strategies.

**Conclusion:** The folk craft industry has a long and illustrious history. Indian craftsmen were famous throughout history for their workmanship and unique aesthetic expression. The Patola cloth art of Surat in Gujrat was transferred to the Middle East (Baghdad) during the 15th and 16th centuries due to its popularity. The demand for handicrafts from feudal lords and Nawabs increased throughout the Mughal Empire (Kings). For business reasons, the British East India Company also exported a large number of crafts to foreign nations. The flourishing of this handicraft and folk art in India lasted till the British monarchy was established. The authority of the Nawabs was diminished by the British government, resulting in a significant drop in demand for handicrafts. (Reddy et al., 2018,) Folk crafts are objects created solely by the artisan's hand or with the use of a few simple tools. It places a greater emphasis on physical labor rather than relying on equipment. The artisan's skill and expertise are demonstrated through their craftwork, which demonstrates their mental strength, creativity, and willingness to preserve traditional cultures, among other things. The artisan uses their hand skills to complete the formation of the final product from raw materials without the use of machinery. This art form was created in the past and has been passed down from generation to generation. These items have cultural, social, religious, aesthetic, traditional, and symbolic values that are important for cultural preservation. Each handcraft has its color, tint, form, texture, and geometry, depending on the geographical place. Various schools of thought support the importance of this handmade item's cultural heritage and conservation value. "India needs to concentrate on the blooming of arts, science, and literature," remarked Prof. C.K. Prahalad, Paul & Ruth McCracken of the *University of Michigan's Ross School of Business*. The objective is for India to become the world's model for dealing with diversity. It has the potential to serve as a model for universality and inclusivity in practice. Subsidies have nothing to do with inclusive development. It's all about building long-term possibilities." (Singh and Fatima, 2015). As a result, the government should concentrate on the unorganized economic sector in addition to the organized sector, as it includes a variety of cottage industries, including the handicraft sector, where craft workers are always battling for a dignified platform that meets their needs. As a result, the folk craft industry makes a substantial contribution to the economic, socio-cultural, and regional growth of the country. Thus, the craft industry can enhance the local and national economies by generating foreign currency and creating jobs.

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