

## **BASTAR HANDICRAFTS: THE VISIBLE CULTURAL SYMBOL OF BASTAR REGION OF CHHATTISGARH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

India is well known for ancient arts and handicrafts creating unique identity throughout the world. In the state of Chhattisgarh, the Bastar Art which is having a distinctive characteristics and excellence in making exotic handicrafts with a wide variety of designs and shapes is still unreachable and unknown to the customers at national and international level. Bastar region having very old and deep rooted handicraft traditions. Bell metal craft (Dhokara art/ Gadhwā art), Wrought Iron art, terracotta art, bamboo art, tribal jewellery art, Cotton Fabrics and wood curving are typical of Bastar. All these traditional handicrafts are described.

**KEYWORDS:** Handicrafts, Bastar, Traditions

### **INTRODUCTION**

Handicrafts form a valuable cultural trait of a society from the beginning of the civilization. The cultural pattern of a society is reflected through the quality craft and craftsmanship of the people. Bastar a tribal district of Chhattisgarh is the Land of Handicrafts & Natural Resources. This Divine Land is also enriched with Natural Beauty which makes it a paradise for tourists. The deep forest area between bushes and bamboos where one always feel the absence of sunlight, wide and thick forests, between high mountains cool flowing streams, sky-touching mountains, caves, high waterfalls, and in the valleys the spread of greenery and in between this, the huts made by bamboo sticks, the fearless life style of the tribal's and their culture, one's heart and mind would be filled with new wonders and pleasure. Bastar is famous for her handicrafts which exhibit the skill and creativity of her artisans. Handicrafts are the visible symbol of cultural behaviour. Craft involves a technology as well as art. Any articulated product in the sphere of creativity could be termed as an artistic handicraft. The person who imagines and creates these hand made goods of different origins forms is called as craftsman who is otherwise known as Silpi, Kalakar, Ghadwa, Karigar etc. The craft culture of India shows the firm base in the country's age old artistic traditions. This is very true of Chhattisgarh as well as of Bastar region.

The glorious archaeological monuments with their beautiful architecture and exquisite sculptures are a living testimony to the rich artistic traditions of the Bastar. The artistic traditions are also reflected in Bell metal craft, wooden art, iron art, bamboo, terracotta, jewellery and other items of finery and aesthetic sensibilities. Survival for the ethnic population is dependent on the unfathomed ways of nature. The art of iron making is has been known in India from early vedic period and Rig- Veda several reference of iron (ayas) has been made They seem to instinctively sense the very core of nature, converse with its majestic silence and learn from its ancient wisdom. The tribal society of Bastar is famous for their excellence in making exotic handicrafts with a variety of designs and shapes. Bastar, being a district full of forest,

containing finest quality of teak and other types of woods from which very attractive wooden carving crafts and various types of furniture are being made by the skilled and experienced hands of the tribal's.

## METHODOLOGY

Surveys were carried out since 2008 in all the blocks of Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, following standard method to get the information of the handicrafts product of Bastar. Personal interviews with the village head, group discussion and assistance of local informants were used.

## RESULT

After six month of investigation, it was found that bell metal craft (Dhokra art / Ghadwa art), wrought iron art, terracotta craft, wood carving, bamboo craft, tribal jewellery art and Cotton Fabrics are indigenous product of Bastar.

### Bell Metal Craft (Dhokra Art / Ghadwa Art)

The bell metal or Dhokra Craft is one of the earliest known methods of metal casting. Metal pieces akin to Dhokra objects and figurines have been discovered at Harrappa and Mohenjodaro, leading to the belief that this craft dates back to prehistoric times. Today this craft is practiced extensively in Bastar, in the areas of Raigarh, Sarguja and most importantly in Bastar. Dhokra essentially refers to the casting of bell metal or brass using the 'lost-wax' technique. In Bastar district of Chhattisgarh, it is the Ghadwa community that is associated with this craft. Interestingly, in local etymology, Ghadwa means 'to shape or create'. A variety of products are created by the Ghadwas for local use such as effigies of local deities, vessels, and jewellery.

### Bell Metal (The Process)

The traditional lost wax technique is simple and ideal for use in tribal settings. The craftsman begins by winding a slim thread of wax over the contours of a clay core. It is then thickly coated with fine clay obtained from termite bills, and baked on drying, leaving a narrow vent to melt away the wax. The vacuum created between the core and the clay layer is filled with molten metal, which is then allowed to cool down and solidify. The moment that follows is loaded with anticipation, for it is then that the outer clay mould is cracked open, revealing the beauty of the final sculpture. Simple as this whole process seems, it requires great precision and skill. The metal must be able to flow uniformly and freely through the narrow spaces, and replace the wax without forming any bubbles or gaps.

Cow dung, paddy husk and red soil are also used in the manufacture of Dhokra artefacts, of all the raw materials used by the Ghadwas, the most important is beeswax. Besides the essential contouring, wax wires and pieces are also used for decorations required for finishing the artefacts. It is used because of its extraordinarily high plastic content and pliability, generating a rudimentary but powerful stimulus for the intensive design and faculties of the artisans.

Examples of lost wax casting (also known as 'cire perdue') are found across the globe, but the coiled thread technique is unique to Bastar. A glance at the traditional baskets provides a clue to its origin. The basket makers would wind grass around a rope, which was then coiled into shape. The same technique was translated into metal only much later, with forest dwellers being dependent on natural product long before they began to use metal. Metal anklets with basket weave motifs, and beautiful containers reminiscent of wicker baskets also point towards such a transition.

### **Wrought Iron Art**

The dark raw forms of the metal artifacts and figurines of Chhattisgarh, appear as a reflection of its own people. Both share a coarseness that is underlined by quiet elegance and dignity.

The inherent respect that the ethnic people have for the environment means that the raw material used for this craft is predominantly recycled scrap iron, with the rich ore mines of Cherangdungri occasionally acting as the supply source. The method of production is simple, yet effective. Metal is made pliable by beating it in furnaces, and then shaping it carefully into basic form using bummer and tongs. Mastery over the craft is evident in the fact that no joints of any kind appear in the products. On completion, a coating of varnish is applied, to enhance its cluster. Lamps; candle stands; effigies of musicians; toy animals like lions, monkeys, and deer; an assortment of figurines and deities; and ritualistic objects like jhaari and laman diya typify the product range. Kondagaon, Narayanpur, and Umargaon villages of Bastar are the centres of this crafts in Chhattisgarh.

### **Terracotta (The Process)**

The expertise and skills required for producing the terracotta artefacts have been banded down from one generation to another of the Kumhara community. The Kumharas source the raw material from the Indravati River. The upper river soils are used to create the forms by employing rudimentary tools like the potter's wheel and wooden spatula. Many hours in a gentle slow fire imparts vital strength and stability to the creations. They are finally coated with the deep river soils that lend a dark sienna tone to these elegant artefacts.

With the magic of their skilled bands and inherent creativity, the potters create exquisite matkas (pots), handiyas (bowls), and lamps. Ritualistic offerings in form of animal figures of elephants, horses, bulls, and clay masks constitute an integral part of terracotta craft. Examples of immense sophistication and ingenuity of indigenous technology are the water carrier or surahi, and the wick lamp. Contemporary forms like pen holders, lamps, and paperweights are also created, in keeping with modern day requirements.

### **Wood Carving**

This is one of the most famous, beautiful and unique art of wooden carving of Bastar tribals. These wooden crafts are made out of the finest teak wood and white wood. These wooden crafts includes models, Idols, wall panels, furniture items etc. Among the furniture items Deewan (Cot with box) is very famous and attractive since it involves the art of carving with different pictures of Bastar culture and other designs of interest. These handicrafts are generally exported to different places of the country, and it has demand even from foreign countries also. Bastar is a region with extensive land cover, with large forests of sheshum and Shivna thriving in the area. Initially, the tribals used the forests to source wood for basic needs like firewood and building shelters. Over a period of time they began to use wood for carving objects and other forms of carpentry, precipitating in the emergence of a community of people skilled in this craft, called the Badais. The badais then diversified into two groups- one making agricultural instruments and others making decorative and totemic pillars. Simple tools made of wood or bamboo is used by them. The kaas is employed to remove the bark of the trees and scrape the wood surface. When carving, scraping and shaping has to be done, the Poh chisel and the smaller sala poh are used.

One of the places where the badais skill can be seen is the ghotul. The youth dormitories of the Muria once stored dancing stilts, carved wooden head gear or kutual, and large drums used during the dances. Even today, the boys gift intricately carved wooden combs to the girls as a token of their affection. Reflecting the mood at the ghotul, are doors and pillars carved with elaborate images of amorous couples indulging in merry making. Motifs such as combs, sun and moon, floral and geometric designs also appear alongside.

### **Bamboo Craft**

Bamboo craft are deep rooted forest in traditional culture of all three ethnic group of Bastar. Various attractive eco-friendly products are made out of bamboo and cane, such as fruit and vegetable baskets, mugs, flower vases, tea trays, carry bags, containers, baskets, dustbins, mats, etc. The Bansods of Chhattisgarh make more than 200 different varieties of bamboo articles including a large assortment of baskets. The Kamar tribals of Raipur are adept at making baskets and other items like fish traps, mats and bird traps from bamboo.

### **Cotton Fabrics**

Cotton Fabrics are one of the famous and attractive handicrafts made by the tribals of Bastar. These are made of Kosa thread which is made from a kind of worm found in the forest, hand woven and hand printed by tribes who trace their lineage to the 14<sup>th</sup> century weaver-saint-poet Kabir. The hand printing is generally done with the natural vegetable dye extracted from ail, found in the forest of Bastar. These fabrics includes cotton saris - well-known as Bastar Kosa Sadi, dress materials and drapes.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

India a land of unity and diversity with many cultures and rituals is having a highly potential state like Chhattisgarh which is rich in tribal Handicraft. Bastar district of Chhattisgarh is one of the tourist destinations in India. The traditional handicrafts product of Bastar is very popular among the tourist. By promoting the handicraft of Bastar we are not only revealing the hidden talents of the artisans to the world but also strengthening the Indian culture by escalating it in the global scenario.

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## APPENDICES

**Anupam Kumar Tiwari: Bastar Handicrafts: The Visible Cultural Symbol of Bastar region of Chhattisgarh**



**Figure 1: A Ghadwa Artisan at Work**



**Figure 2: Wrought Iron Art**



**Figure 3: Terracotta Craft**



**Figure 4: Wood Carving**



**Figure 5: Bamboo Craft**



**Figure 6: Cotton Fabrics**