

A Management Approach to Sambalpuri Sari with a Sign of Cultural Facets

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Introduction

Woven textiles are one of the oldest techniques developed by people the world over. Earlier, the woven cloth protected the body from the heat and cold, and later developed into a form of dress, which expressed the cultural values of the people and their identity. The art of weaving and dyeing of fabrics was practiced in India from very ancient times. It was such an important part of the life of the ancient times that many of its techniques gave the name to philosophical and religious thought.

The global textile scenario is changing and gradually the production base is shifting to developing nations due to more than one reason. Trade blocs and non-tariff barriers will be among the challenges that will emerge in the changed market scenario. The industry will have to integrate itself and go in for vertical specialization to take on the challenges. Importance of handloom lies in its ability in generating non-agricultural employment in rural areas. Phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement (MFA) and functioning of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are likely to pose new challenges for the handloom industry. Removal of controls required under MFA and WTO will increase competition between developing economies while permitting the developed economies to retain protection over their textile sector. Non-tariff measures like ban

on child labour and use of certain dyes and chemicals etc will be posing serious obstacles to export, while opening the doors to import of textiles. In the today's world, changes relating to globalisation have become inevitable and irreversible. Handloom industry is required to be strengthened adequately for meeting these emerging challenges by exploiting its inherent strength.

Handlooms in India

Evidences of weaving practiced in India are found in epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata that speak in length about the craft. The Indian 'sari' has been in existence for more than 5000 years which is mentioned in the Vedas. Some versions of the history of Indian clothing trace the sari back to the Indus valley civilization, which flourished in 2800-1800 BC. It is the basic wear of rural people of India.

India has a rich cultural heritage of handloom industry and world famous workmanship of hand-woven textiles. Fascinating motifs and super design of the fabric assigned special importance to the sector. India has the largest handlooms industry in the world. The handloom sector, with a long tradition of excellence in craftsmanship, not only plays an important role in preserving the country's heritage and culture, it

also makes a major contribution to the economy. India's strength derives from its traditional production which commands premium value in the global market. The diversified fibre base and skilled manpower are the strength. Handloom products from India enjoy international reputation and have a good demand in the global market, contributing a significant portion of the nation's GDP. Sheer love of handloom products, its cultural richness and heritage, and exquisite designs and patterns have brought this industry into global spotlight. Handloom centres also serve as tourist spots attracting a large amount of foreigners. Thus tourism industry is also indirectly benefited.

Historically famous few of the hand woven textiles of India are Baluchar sari of Varanasi, Bandanis of Kutch, Brocades of Banaras, Chanderi saris of Madhya Pradesh, Georgettes of Mysore (Karnataka), Ikat saris of Odisha, Jamdhani saris of Bengal, Karalkuddi saris of Kerala, Kora cotton saris of Coimbatore, Paithani shalu of Maharashtra, Patolas and Tancois of Gujarat, Rathwa loincloth of Chhota Udaipur and Temple silks of South from Kancheepuram, Arni, Dharmavaram etc. India owes lots of cultural identity to its rich handloom heritage. But with liberalization of Indian economy, the modern textile industry has posed serious threat to the traditional handloom industry. Still, there are many advocates of handloom for reasons including ideology, philosophy, sheer love for handloom products and economic arguments. However, irrespective of the policies, projects and aspirations arising out of various quarters, the handloom sector is undergoing changes that are impacting the livelihoods of handloom weavers. The weakening position of handloom sector in the wake of global competition of textile industry has posed a serious threat to the socio-economic life of the traditional weaver communities. With

growing competition posed by the modern textile industry, the handloom industries has steadily deteriorated over the last decade, rendering thousands of weavers to unemployed and under employed resulting in large scale closure of several societies and production units.

Position of Odisha in Handloom

Odisha is a beautiful state enriched with huge agricultural landscape and enormous forest products. Across the unending green fields and forests, the harmonic and rhythmic picking sound of a fly shuttle in most of the rural huts indicates the importance of the handloom industry and its role in the economy of Odisha. The picking sound is waved from more than 1,20,000 nos. of handlooms and this sound provides livelihood to more than 5 lakhs of weavers directly and more than this indirectly in cultivation of cotton, ginning of cotton and marketing of handloom products. The sari is a traditional female garment in the Indian Subcontinent consisting of a strip of unstitched cloth ranging from four to nine metres in length that is draped over the body in various styles. "Khandua" of Cuttack, "Habaspur" and "Bomkai" of Kalahandi, "Kotpad" of Koraput, "Parda" of Khurda, "Kusumi" of Nayagarh, "Saktapar" and "Bichitrapar" of Bargarh and Sambalpur etc. are the unique traditional products reflecting the essence of traditional way of life with expression of their unparalleled depth, range, strength and craftsmanship. In contrast to the mosaic like appearance of "Patola" of Gujarat, "Checkboard" and "Chowk" design of Puchampali, Andhra Pradesh and "Bandhni" of Rajasthan, the appearance of design and forms of Odisha have a soft curvilinear effect. Odisha's handloom base is made of two distinct types of products, the low quality plain fabrics that are used for towels, dhotis and plain saris and the other of high quality, design intensive tie and dye 'Ikat'

and 'Bomkai' fabrics. While the first category of low quality – low skill handloom production has been facing the stiff competition from power looms at the price front, the other category of high skill-high quality fabrics, which have brought fame for the state, have not been able to reach out to the desired markets in a sustained manner.

Sambalpuri Sari as a Presentation of Odisha Culture

Odisha has a history of exporting handloom to south-East Asia countries like Thailand, Java and Borneo. Sambalpuri saris are a symbol of tradition, culture and intricate technique. They have long been an important part of the ethnic Indian female attire and have been unadulterated in the present western culture inspired apparel world. Sambalpuri Sari is a traditional hand woven Ikat sari where in the warp and the weft is tie-dyed before weaving. Today the Baandha fabric is popularly known by its geographical and cultural name Sambalpuri owing to the pioneering efforts of Sri Radhashyam Meher, who brought about a radical improvement in the skills of the craftsmen and the quality of the products. Tie-dye weaving in western Odisha came in to existence during mid of 14th century and borrowed from Raipur, Chhatisgarh. King Ramai Dev of Patnagarh had invited 100 weavers' families who were skilled in tie and dye art. These weavers belonging to Bhulia community and their title is "Meher". Sambalpuri saris are a symbol of tradition, culture and intricate technique. They have long been an important part of the ethnic Indian female attire and have been unadulterated in the present western culture inspired apparel world.

Sambalpuri saris are known for their incorporation of traditional motifs like shankha (shell), chakra (wheel), phula (flower), all of which have deep symbolism, but the highpoint of these saris is the traditional craftsmanship of the

'Bandhakala', the Tie-dye art reflected in their intricate weaves, also known as Sambalpuri "Ikat". Traditionally, craftsmen created Baandhas with images of flora or fauna or with geometrical patterns. More recently, new types of Baandha depicting portrait, landscape and flowerpots are being designed. The designs in the sari are derived from our culture, tradition and mythology like Ramayan, Mahabharat, Jaganath culture and folk tales of Odisha. Different kinds of arts are:-

Panchabati:- Resembles to panchabati Forest, in which lord Rama had a "Vanavasha. Konarka Chaka:- Resembles to the "Art and Creativity of Konarka Chariot Wheel". Asaman Tara:- Resembles to the "Shining Stars of sky. Nandighosha:- Resembles to the "Chariot of Lord Jagannath of Ratha Yatra". Sankha:- Resembles to the "Mythological Use of Sankha". Bichitrapuri:- Resembles to the "Variation of Ikat on Borders; the designs are repeated three or more times". Passapalli:- Resembles to the "Folk Tradition". Taa-poi: - Resemble to the "Story of Taa- Poi and Boita Bandana, Festival of Odishan folk culture".

Before 1950's the products mix of Sonepur clusters were cotton saris and Dhotis. During this period only natural dyes were used this was due to unavailability of synthetic dyes. In 1950's, late Padamshree Krutartha Acharya established a handloom unit in Sonepur by installing 200 handlooms. In 1954, Dr. Acharya converted his firm into cooperative society named Sambalpuri Bastrayala Handloom Cooperative Society Ltd, Bargarh, which is at present stand as a leading PWCS of not only the State but also of the country. Synthetic dyes were introduced by Padamshree Krutartha Acharya during 1960s, some loom upgradations has been done. To provide protection to the weavers practicing this art, the handloom saris manufactured in Sambalpur Odisha were included in the India's

Geographical (GI) registry. Bomkai design was borrowed from village name “Bomkai” in Ganjam District of Odisha to Sonapur. The Bomkai Design were developed in late 1980s and introduced in the Sonapur in early 1990s. And also value addition with zari work was also carried out during the same period.

In the 1980s, the Sambalpuri sari became an international brand, thanks to substantial non-governmental support and the setting up of weaver’s cooperatives. Former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi became a sort of brand ambassador of the Sambalpuri sari, it was her favourite attire. Newsreaders on India’s national television channel, Doordarshan, turned this sari into an unofficial uniform. Her Excellency, the President of India, Smt. Pratiba Devisingh Patil took her oath of office and secrecy on 25th August 2007 clad in a simple, yet elegant spotted mulberry silk sari. The sari in question was a traditional one, with tie-and-dye design, woven by a weaver of Bhulia community of village Hardokhol, near Sonapur. The Sonepuri Sari called Radhakunja was a great attraction in the wedding of Abhishek Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai. The Sonepuri Saris were designed by master craftsman Chaturbhuj Meher of Sonapur and supplied to the Bachchans family. Sonapur district being the cradle ground of tie-and-dye textile nourishes many great craftsmen of excellence and fame. The boom ensured employment and dignity to lakhs of weavers in Odisha. Many of them have been honoured and awarded prizes, both at national and international level. The greatest maestros of the community Sri Chaturbhuj Meher and Kunja Bihari Meher of Sonapur were conferred with “Padma Shree” for his adroit workmanship and innovative skill in tie-and-dye textile designing. Late Krutartha Acharya of Bargarh too was conferred with “Padma Shree” for his unique and monumental contribution in the

field of tie-and dye textile designing. The cooperative societies would provide raw material like thread and colour to the weavers. Later, they marketed the finished product. Demand for Sambalpuri saris all over India and overseas ensured a high turnover for the cooperatives. Sambalpuri Bastralaya of Bargarh alone used to do business worth Rs.15 crore a year.

Problems of Weavers and Cooperatives

Handloom is one of the oldest cottage industries in India. But with liberalization of Indian economy, the modern textile industry has posed serious threat to the traditional handloom industry. The weakening position of handloom sector in the wake of global competition of textile industry has posed a serious threat to the socio-economic life of the traditional weaver communities. With growing competition posed by the modern textile industry, the handloom industries has steadily deteriorated over the last decade, rendering thousands of weavers to unemployed and under employed resulting in large scale closure of several societies and production units. After enjoying several years of prosperity and success, the weavers of Odisha famous Sambalpuri sari have fallen on hard times. The Bhulias of western Odisha are the acclaimed weavers of celebrated tie-and-dye textile fabrics, popularly known as Sambalpuri cloth. For centuries they have practiced and perfected the local tie- and- dye techniques of designing and weaving and zealously guarded the secret from being passed onto others. Sonapur district being the cradle ground of tie-and-dye textile nourishes many great craftsmen of excellence and fame. Under the stress of persistent problems of unemployment, low wages and distress sale of handloom cloth, the craftsmen of Sonapur district have bundled up their looms and are vending vegetables, pulses and grams in the daily market. Some of them have migrated to

Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat to work as daily labourers. The once prosperous, flourishing, vibrant and lively handloom sector of Odisha is now in a state of ruin and shamble. Some of the village weavers, however, are still playing their traditional looms as a testimony to a glorious tradition of great craftsmanship.

Due to the unprecedented economic hardship the handloom sector endures in Odisha and the Bhulia community in particular calls for urgent attention of the policy makers. If we have to conserve this great culture, the socio-economic conditions of the weavers have to be uplifted. There are also severe supply constraints. The weaver's cooperative society, the handloom development corporation, the apex marketing society etc, connected with the sale of handloom cloth and ensuring regular employment to weavers have all become sick and many have closed their shutters under the pressure of financial restructuring. Sonepur, the hub of Sambalpuri textile materials in western Odisha, is home to at least 50,000 weavers. But, absence of an organised market has pushed them into a state of misery. The weavers' co-operative society, which used to look after the community, is now non-existent in Sonepur. Reduction in number of Weaver's Cooperative Societies was due to reduction in government subsidies, declining support from apex WCS, closer of Handloom Development Corporation and mismanagement at the primary WCS level.

Institutional Mechanism for Sambalpuri Sari

There are mainly three numbers of Apex marketing organizations functioning under Government patronage. These agencies are formed by the producers cooperatives of the State. The products so produced are mainly marketed through different sales outlet existing both inside and outside the State (metros and cities).

Boyanika : Boyanika is synonymous with the rich weaving heritage of Odisha, the exotic state in Eastern India. Boyanika is working for the weavers in the state for more than five decades and Odisha's pioneer brand for hand-woven fabrics. Today it is a stamp of authenticity and high quality to the consumers in India. Boyanika also offers authentically designed famous Handwoven to the discerning international buyers. Boyanika is authorized to use "Handloom Mark" and "Silk Mark" as the Flagship Organization for promotion of Odisha Handwovens and the first Govt. owned organisation to receive the ISO 9001 - 2008 Certificate.

Sambalpuri Bastralaya : At the level of Primary Societies in the Western part of the State, marketing of the Products are taken care by Sambalpuri Bastralaya which is considered to be one of the largest Primary Societies in Asia. Mostly the products are marketed through buy back arrangement between the society and the producer. The marketing network is spread all over the country both in and outside of the State.

Utkalika: Odisha State Cooperative Handicrafts Corporation Limited (Utkalika) established under OCS Act, 1962, is the Apex body of Primary Handicraft Cooperative Societies in Odisha. The main objective of the Corporation is to organize and promote various handicraft industries on commercial basis within its area of operation along with procurement and marketing of handicraft products both inside and outside of the country.

Others : Presently, the cluster is marketing its products predominantly through the local weekly *haat* and through small traders/ local shops wherein nearly 80% of the production of the cluster is sold. However, slowly and slowly some master weavers and the awardees were able to develop contacts with the outside markets and thus started supplying in a small way to these

customers. In addition to this the producer cooperatives also market their own products through local /city base reputed private traders with mutually agreed terms and conditions.

CONCLUSION

The product has travelled along with socio-political history of Odisha and India and seen many ups and down with cultural forces. We have seen the product itself developing along with these social changes and the patronages received in the history. With this creative product variation the art and technique has survived through ages. Our handloom saris are so rich that there is great demand of the Odisha fabric throughout the world. The weavers who practiced the art for centuries are now leaving their job in search of other livelihood options. To keep the Sambalpuri sari art in tact which is an important part of our culture we have to find out the possible ways how the weavers will get fair wages. In the current scene of the aggressive marketing and high competition the business needs to adopt some modern practices to keep the art, technique and pride alive. The handloom textile sector has its own peculiar features and determinants of competitiveness. Once they are identified, we can attempt for its development along with global challenges. What our handloom industry needs now is better marketing strategies and design

innovations. We could experiment with our patterns and add more creativity to suit the international market.

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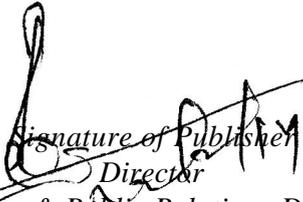
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**STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP AND OTHER PARTICULARS ABOUT
ODISHA REVIEW
FORM-IV
(See Rule -8)**

1. Place of publication : Bhubaneswar
2. Periodicity of its publication : Monthly
3. Printer's Name : Shri Abhaya for and on behalf
of Government of Odisha
- Nationality : Indian
- Address : Director, Printing, Stationery
and Publication, Odisha, Madhupatana,
Cuttack -753010.
4. Publisher's Name : Shri Pramod Kumar Das
Director
Information and Public Relations Department,
Bhubaneswar-1.
5. Editor's Name : Dr. Lenin Mohanty
- Nationality : Indian
- Address : Editor, *Odisha Review*
Information and Public Relations Department,
Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar.
- Name & Address of Individuals who
own newspaper and partners or,
shareholders holding more than one
per cent of the total capital. : Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar

I, Shri Pramod Kumar Das, Director, Information & Public Relations Department, Bhubaneswar, do hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.


Signature of Publisher
Director
Information & Public Relations Department
Bhubaneswar