



The Silent Artists: Challenges for Adivasi Women in Sustaining Art and Craft Traditions in the Chota Nagpur Plateau

Sunil Mahato

Ph.D. Scholar in Political Science, Atal Bihari Vajpayee University, sunilmahato2k23@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Tribal art and craft are also age-old traditions in India. The traditional arts and crafts of the Chota Nagpur Plateau remain underdeveloped and continue to struggle for survival. In this context, Adivasi women play a vital role in preserving and sustaining these practices. Adivasi women sustain their cultural heritage through their expertise in Paitkar painting, Dokra metalwork, terracotta, bamboo crafts, bead jewelry, textiles, and more. Very few scholarly works have addressed this area of study. This research has been conducted through mixed methods; primary data has been collected through interviews, surveys, and observation, and secondary data has been collected from various kinds of books, journals, articles, etc. Due to the growing effects of urbanization and technological innovation, the art and craft tradition of the Chota Nagpur plateau is currently battling to survive. It demonstrates great ability and conveys the socio-economic position, faith, and rituals in the everyday lives of tribal groups. This paper highlights how Adivasi women in the Chota Nagpur Plateau sustain their cultural heritage through traditional arts and crafts and also contribute significantly to their community's socio-economic empowerment by transforming these arts and crafts into sources of livelihood and identity preservation.



Introduction: The Chota Nagpur Plateau is a physically and culturally significant region with rich ecological and socio-economic significance. It is located in eastern India and includes the states of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and West Bengal. Its geological richness and biodiversity make it a unique region in India. The way of life of the tribal tribes who live on this plateau is deeply entwined with the cycles of nature, demonstrating their close relationships to the natural world. Tribal art reflects this bond, blending life and creativity in a way that sets it apart from other artistic expressions. Our efforts are focused on preserving and promoting these extraordinary skills to ensure their continuity and recognition. The indigenous women of the Chota Nagpur Plateau hold a crucial role in safeguarding and advancing traditional art and craft practices. Women from Adivasi and tribal communities are crucial in expressing and forming this knowledge. However, this particular lived experience, especially concerning women, has not received the recognition it deserves within the context of mainstream society. By giving craftspeople the tools they need to grow their businesses, economic empowerment programs like microfinance programs and women-led cooperatives can help remove these obstacles. Furthermore, improving the marketability and environmental sustainability of traditional crafts requires integrating sustainable methods and encouraging skill development through community-based workshops. Public-private partnerships and government initiatives, such as special programs for tribal artisans, can help further promote and preserve Chotanagpur's creative legacy while guaranteeing the socioeconomic advancement of female artisans. The significance of these measures in empowering women artisans and guaranteeing the survival of Chotanagpur's indigenous arts for upcoming generations is examined in this study.

Objectives of the Study: This research aims to critically investigate the role of Adivasi women in the Chota Nagpur Plateau in preserving, sustaining, and transmitting traditional art and craft forms, while also looking at the political, economic, and sociocultural obstacles that prevent them from continuing. Furthermore, the study explores the strategies, indigenous knowledge systems, and cultural mechanisms employed by Adivasi women to safeguard and perpetuate their artistic heritage. Finally, it evaluates the implications of market integration, commercialization, and cultural commodification on the authenticity, sustainability, and long-term integrity of their crafts.

Methodology of the Study: This study focuses on the Chota Nagpur Plateau. The region is marked by semi-arid conditions, rugged landscapes, and hilly areas with dense forests. Most tribal villages are located in these hilly and forested zones. The area is home to some of the most economically disadvantaged rural and tribal populations. The study investigates socio-cultural, economic, and



environmental aspects of major tribal communities. These include the Santhals, Bhumijis, Kherias, Lodhas, Mundas, Oraons, Paharias, Birhores, and others. A combination of fieldwork and qualitative analysis has been applied.

For primary data, the interview method was used. Data was collected directly through personal investigation and indirectly through oral investigation. A series of pre-planned questions were framed as a schedule. Standardized questioning techniques were followed to conduct the interviews in an organized manner.

For secondary data, a multidisciplinary approach was used. Academic literature, including peer-reviewed papers, books, and articles, was reviewed to understand Adivasi culture, traditional art forms, and the role of women in maintaining these crafts. Government reports, such as those by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Census data, provided important statistical information on tribal livelihoods and cultural practices. Media sources, including news articles, documentaries, and online platforms, were consulted for current perspectives. These sources also highlighted the challenges faced by Adivasi women artisans. Finally, historical writings and archival materials, including colonial records, were studied to trace the development of tribal culture and livelihoods over time.

Traditional Art and Craft Forms in Chota Nagpur Plateau: The rich cultural heritage of its tribal populations is reflected in the Chota Nagpur Plateau's many art and craft traditions, which are well-known. The murals of Sohrai and Khovar, which were painted by tribal women using natural pigments to portray themes of nature, fertility, and mythology, are notable examples of visual arts. The Isko rock shelter sculptures and other prehistoric rock art demonstrate the area's long history of artistic expression. Crafts like ceramics, wood carving, bamboo and cane weaving, and Dhokra metals demonstrate the community's ability to make both ornamental and useful objects. Their talent is further showcased with handwoven linens with earthy tones and jewelry crafted from silver, beads, and natural materials.

Festivals, harvests, and mythology are celebrated through performing arts such as Paika, Jhumar, and Chhau dances, as well as music performed on ancient instruments like the mandar and dhol. In addition to being a source of income, the arts and crafts have strong ties to the natural world and tribal beliefs. The preservation of this rich cultural heritage depends on efforts to modernize and preserve traditional customs, such as modifying Dhokra and Sohrai for modern markets.

The Chota Nagpur Plateau's art and craft traditions are greatly preserved by women, especially via the production of Sohrai and Khovar mural painting**, which use natural pigments to illustrate themes of



fertility, nature, and traditional ceremonies. Additionally, they play a key role in creating textiles, pottery, jewelry, and bamboo items, which combine practicality with cultural expression. Women actively engage in traditional dances and songs outside of the visual arts, highlighting their significance in the cultural and spiritual life of the community. To ensure the preservation of this cultural heritage, efforts must be made to empower them through recognition, training, and better market access because, in spite of their contributions, their labor is frequently underappreciated.

Challenges for Adivasi Women in Sustaining Art and Craft Traditions: Due to their limited access to markets and difficulty to obtain appropriate pricing for their goods, Adivasi women have considerable financial obstacles in maintaining their art and craft traditions. Their crafts are frequently underappreciated in mainstream markets despite their talent and inventiveness, which results in low revenue and unstable finances. Many women are forced to rely on hard labor in construction, agriculture, or household duties due to a lack of proper compensation, which further reduces the amount of time and money they can devote to their customs. Additionally, their difficulties are made worse by a lack of adequate infrastructure and support networks, like cooperatives or financial aid programs, which exposes them to exploitation and aids in the slow extinction of these traditional customs.

Because of patriarchal norms and the demands of urbanization, Adivasi women encounter major cultural and social obstacles when trying to maintain their traditional art and craft techniques. Gender hierarchies restrict women's autonomy in decision-making, especially in the artistic and economic spheres, in many tribal groups. Male members frequently possess property and land rights, which limits women's financial autonomy and their capacity to invest in or market their crafts. Additionally, as younger generations increasingly embrace modern lifestyles and detach from ancestral knowledge systems, urbanization and modernization have caused the steady decline of traditional traditions. Women's position as cultural stewards is diminished as a result of the transfer from rural to urban environments, which impairs the transmission of artistic abilities across generations. These difficulties show that in order to maintain indigenous art forms and give Adivasi women economic and social empowerment, institutional assistance, legislative changes, and long-term projects are required.

The depletion of natural resources and the negative effects of climate change, Adivasi women artists face severe environmental problems in maintaining their traditional crafts. The overuse of basic resources like bamboo, natural dyes, and particular kinds of wood has resulted in resource scarcity, endangering the continuation of traditional handicraft and having an effect on these communities' financial stability. Furthermore, by changing ecosystems and impacting the growth cycles and availability of raw materials



required for indigenous art forms, climate change has made these problems worse. The supply of these resources has been further disturbed by unpredictable weather patterns, deforestation, and soil degradation, making it more and more difficult for artists to continue practicing their skill. The future of these ancient crafts and the livelihoods of Adivasi women artisans depend heavily on the urgent need for conservation laws, climate adaptation plans, and sustainable harvesting practices.

In order to combat their historical marginalization and emphasize their critical role in maintaining cultural legacy, awareness programs that promote Adivasi women's contributions to traditional arts, crafts, and culture are essential. Adivasi art traditions must be acknowledged as an important component of India's national identity. His painting highlights these art forms' cultural significance, which is sometimes overlooked in popular culture. Awareness campaigns can assist in integrating these art forms into national cultural narratives, guaranteeing their preservation and raising respect for the role of women in their creation by positioning Adivasi women as the guardians of these traditions. This strategy can aid in overcoming Adivasi women's historical marginalization and bringing their cultural contributions to the attention of a wider audience.

Several important challenges have been identified in order to solve the institutional and policy gaps impeding the survival of traditional arts and crafts practiced by Adivasi women. Adivasi women play a vital role in conserving cultural heritage through their crafts, but there are still many obstacles to overcome, including a lack of inclusive policies and inadequate government assistance. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) frequently spearhead campaigns to promote tribal artisan goods instead of the government. For instance, the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) has set up handicraft training facilities in a number of states, such as Odisha and Jharkhand, where Adivasi women are taught to make environmentally friendly crafts including bamboo crafts, terracotta ceramics, and Dokra sculptures. Although these programs offer vital skills and financial opportunities, they also draw attention to the lack of official backing for an all-encompassing and long-term strategy for Adivasi craft development

Additionally, groups like the People's Action for Joint Forest Management and Rural Development (PAJHRA) have established training facilities with the goal of enhancing Adivasi communities' capabilities by providing instruction in contemporary farming methods and cultural arts. A significant obstacle, though, is the absence of institutional frameworks and government-led policies that could scale these initiatives and provide these crafts access to a wider market. Experts have pointed out that the government must enact laws that not only acknowledge and protect traditional crafts but also offer



training programs that update methods and increase access to markets. Adivasi women still struggle to get fair prices and market opportunities for their crafts in the absence of these structural reforms.

Role of Women on Cultural Preservation: In order to suit modern demands, Adivasi women have been instrumental in maintaining and modifying ancient art and craft methods. Their contributions are diverse and include innovation in traditional methods, economic empowerment, and cultural heritage preservation. Adivasi women have shown tenacity and inventiveness in bringing their traditional crafts into the contemporary marketplace. They have made sure that their crafts are still relevant and appealing in the modern economy by adjusting designs, adding modern aesthetics, and using new materials. This flexibility offers their communities economic options in addition to protecting cultural treasures.

Traditional crafts have given Adivasi women opportunities to become financially independent. They have increased their negotiating power, gained access to new markets, and negotiated better pricing for their goods by forming cooperatives and taking part in self-help groups. Adivasi women have demonstrated incredible tenacity in the face of obstacles such as restricted market access, competition from mass-produced commodities, and socioeconomic limitations. To ensure that their rich cultural history is passed down to future generations, they keep innovating within their established ways.

In Adivasi groups, elder women such as mothers and grandparents are essential in transferring traditional information to the next generation. This transmission is not limited to just craft techniques but extends to folklore, songs, agricultural practices, and medicinal knowledge. Adivasi women transmit myths, stories, and historical accounts orally, which helps young people develop a strong sense of self. Anthropologists like Virginius Xaxa and N.K. Bose have found that these oral traditions are a living repository of Adivasi history and values. Young girls are taught the importance of customs related to many life events, including harvest festivals, marriage, and birth. The organized transmission of these customs among Adivasi households has been documented by ethnographic research. Traditional skills are maintained through hands-on instruction in handloom weaving, needlework, and natural dyeing techniques. The economic and cultural significance of these crafts in maintaining indigenous livelihoods is highlighted in reports from organizations such as the Tribal Research Institute. In order to maintain the continuity of traditions, elders actively instruct younger members of the community about the methods and cultural value of various art forms. The preservation of Adivasi culture depends on this methodical educational approach.



Throughout history, women have played a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of cultural legacy, especially when it comes to craft activities. These kinds of activities are frequently essential for preserving social cohesiveness and bolstering group cultural identities. Crafting, whether it be through embroidery, weaving, or pottery, is a group activity that promotes cultural continuity and a sense of belonging rather than just being an individual activity. Cohesion of the Community Craft projects contribute significantly to the development of stronger social ties. Research indicates that group crafting sessions frequently serve as forums for women to exchange information, transmit customs, and foster camaraderie. These activities focus on the process itself, where social connection is crucial, rather than merely the final products. Women participate in shared histories when they come together to craft, reaffirming their social positions and preserving continuity for next generations.

Environmental Management A strong cultural bond with the environment is also demonstrated by the use of sustainable materials in craft projects. Local, sustainable resources and methods are the foundation of many traditional crafts. Using eco-friendly materials like natural fibers, dyes, and clay, women are frequently the main keepers of such knowledge, especially in Indigenous communities. Women help to preserve the environment and the culture associated with these traditions by emphasizing ecological responsibility in their craft pursuits.

Generational transmission, women pass down both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, from the designs and techniques to the values found in the crafts themselves. As stewards of these practices, women not only preserve cultural narratives but also contribute to their evolution, bringing traditional crafts into the modern era while maintaining their historical significance. Women involvement in crafts is essential to the preservation of cultural identity.

Recommendation/Suggestion: Furthermore, draws attention to the often-overlooked work of Adivasi women, which includes both their crucial role in maintaining their communities' economies and their contributions to artistic forms. Adivasi women are still marginalized since they are not visible in historical documents or in modern work patterns. Promoting laws that provide equitable compensation and market access for their crafts, an awareness campaign can highlight the need of acknowledging their work as a vital component of the economy and culture. Such campaigns can address the economic issues faced by Adivasi women and ensure that their contributions are acknowledged in both domestic and international markets by highlighting the important role they play in maintaining their communities.



Since women are frequently the main maintainers of traditional customs, an analysis of the detrimental effects of development-induced relocation on Adivasi women shows that they are disproportionately affected by the loss of land and resources. Their vulnerability is increased when gender-specific demands are not taken into consideration by development policies. A successful awareness campaign should draw attention to the cultural and socioeconomic difficulties Adivasi women experience as a result of displacement and promote laws that uphold their rights and enable them to carry on with their customs. In order to ensure that Adivasi women's contributions to culture and society are not forgotten in the face of contemporary development, such campaigns can make use of digital platforms, workshops, and collaborations with cultural groups to increase awareness and foster support for their rights.

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