



Traditional Knowledge and the Everyday lives of artisans in Sonajhuri Haat

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the everyday life of artisans in the informal market of Sonajhuri Haat, Santiniketan. It examines how traditional knowledge is reproduced and negotiated through the everyday lives of artisans at Sonajhuri Haat, drawing upon Henri Lefebvre's concept of everyday life. Research design adopted was qualitative in nature. Sample size was 12 respondents which consisted of artisans and entrepreneurs through in-depth interviews and participant observation. This paper explores how traditional knowledge and sustainability are inscribed in the quotidian livelihood practices. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and map the functioning of artisanal practices. The findings reveal that traditional craft practices are embedded within daily routines, intergenerational learning, community interactions, and informal market spaces. Artisans continuously negotiate between preserving inherited knowledge and adapting to modern consumer demands, rising raw material costs, and livelihood insecurities. The study argues that sustainability is not merely an environmental practice but a lived social process reproduced through the daily activities of collecting materials, crafting products, negotiating with customers, and transmitting skills across generations. By focusing on everyday experiences, the paper contributes a sociological understanding of how traditional knowledge survives and adapts.



Sonajhuri Haat in Santiniketan is widely recognised for its weekly tribal marketplace, which is renowned for traditional handicrafts, tribal dances, folk music and artisanal products. However, beyond its recognition as a tourist destination, the Haat represents an important social world of the everyday life of the people in it. The Haat functions not merely as a marketplace, but as a social space where artisans conduct informal economic relations, cultural performance, and intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge. Traditional knowledge is often transmitted through observation, participation, and embodied practices rather than formal institutional education. Such knowledge systems not only preserve cultural heritage but also maintain ecology and local economic systems. The artisans' work remains embedded within networks of family, community, ecology, and culture.

Existing literature on traditional knowledge and artisanal practices suggests that indigenous knowledge systems contribute significantly to sustainable development by providing environmentally conscious production methods, local resource management, and community resilience. (Bardhan & Bhattacharya, 2022; Singh et al., 2010) Research on traditional crafts further highlights the role of intergenerational transmission in sustaining craft practices. (Tynsong et al., 2020).

The study attempts to situate Sonajhuri artisans within the Sociology of everyday life, emphasising how traditional knowledge operates through everyday social relations, cultural practices, and livelihood. The study primarily draws upon Henri Lefebvre's concept of Everyday life to understand how artisans' craft practices are embedded in their social relations and informal economic structures.

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To examine how traditional knowledge is embedded within the everyday lives of Sonajhuri artisans.
- To explore artisans' livelihood and challenges.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of artisans at Sonajhuri Haat, Santiniketan. The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who possessed substantial experience and involvement in traditional craft practices. The fieldwork was conducted in the month of March and involved semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and field notes. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, probing questions were used to gather deeper insights, and the sample size was limited to 12 participants upon reaching the data saturation point.



Transcripts were manually coded using a predefined codebook, and codes were clustered into themes following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach (2006).

Results

The findings from observations and interview data explored how artisans acquire, practice, and adapt traditional craft production, which is deeply embedded within the everyday routines of family and community life. Craft production often takes place within household spaces where domestic responsibilities and economic activities go hand in hand with the enhancement of livelihood resilience among artisans in Sonajhuri Haat. This Traditional Knowledge encompasses not only the practical skills of craft-making but also an understanding of local ecosystems, material properties, and sustainable practices, evolving through intergenerational transmission (Gómez-Baggethun et al., 2013). Using a thematic analysis approach, five key themes emerged: (1) Traditional Knowledge and everyday life of artisans, (2) Intergenerational Transmission and Learning, (3) Traditional knowledge and sustainability (4) Resistance to industrial capitalism, and (5) Informal economy and Livelihood Challenges.

Traditional Knowledge and Everyday Life of Artisans

The findings indicate that traditional craft in Sonajhuri is an integral part of the everyday practices of family and community life. The production of craft work often occurs in the home, where domestic and economic activities overlap.

For many artisans, the haat is a social space as well as a livelihood space. The weekly market requires the collection of materials, production of goods, execution of household chores, and fulfilment of family responsibilities. One respondent said: "In the morning, we do the household chores and then sit together to make jewellery and craft items for the haat."

This shows how economic activities are woven into the fabric of everyday domestic life and are not a separate professional sphere.

Learning and Intergenerational Transmission

One theme that emerged was the passing down of craft knowledge from one generation to the next. Traditional knowledge in Sonajhuri Haat is passed down mostly through observation and participation among the artisans in families and communities. Many artisans described informal ways of learning craft skills from parents, grandparents, and relatives.



The artisans are taught by the elders and also actively teach the next generation to ensure continuity. “I have taught my children how to weave bead necklaces; if they don’t get a job, then they will continue with this craft” (Respondent 3). This is a cultural conservation and a livelihood security strategy.

Traditional Knowledge & Sustainability

The routine use of natural materials reflects how sustainability is embedded within the everyday practices and lived experiences of artisans. Craftsmen were very conscious of using resources sparingly and not wasting them. One respondent, for example, stressed that “Even a tiny piece of wood is not wasted; a small piece can make a keychain” (Respondent 1). The use of natural and locally available materials was also significant. The crafts of artisans used seeds like lotus seeds, bullet wood, and hog plum to reflect the knowledge of ecology and cultural continuity. “I collect natural seeds like lotus seeds to make bead necklaces,” said one participant (Respondent 4). Sustainability is therefore reproduced through their practices.

Industrial capitalism resistance

The artisans are not only preserving the traditional knowledge but also adapting their practices in response to changing market demands, rising raw material costs, and commercialisation of crafts. “Raw materials are expensive, but customers still bargain a lot,” said one respondent. Increased competition in industrial markets and rising material costs are making traditional craft practices harder to maintain.

This involves the use of new materials and changing designs to appeal to modern consumers. As one of the respondents mentioned, “My mother used to make necklaces from locally available Sikki grass, but I have added German silver, stones, and cloth to my collection now according to the preference of the customers” (Respondent 6). Artisans adapt designs for consumer demand while attempting to preserve cultural authenticity.

The incorporation of modern materials such as German silver and decorative stones reflects how traditional crafts are produced within contemporary market systems. Through the lens of Lefebvre’s concept of everyday life, these practices can be understood as ongoing negotiations between cultural preservation and modern economic realities. The continued use of locally available materials is not only a matter of convenience but a conscious decision that respects local biodiversity and resource availability (Athayde et al., 2017).



Challenges and Opportunities

The artisan's work and decision-making process are largely influenced by economic constraints. Increasing prices of raw materials were identified as a major challenge, with one of the respondents saying, "Cost of raw material is expensive now" (Respondent 2). Rising raw material costs and reduced access to natural resources further demonstrate how broader economic changes influence the everyday lives and livelihood strategies of artisans.

Health problems and changing capacities are also affecting livelihood strategies. For example, one artisan spoke about a shift from direct production to managing other artisans: "Earlier I used to do Kantha, but with spondylitis, I left it, and now I have artisans at my house who sell by themselves" (Respondent 5). These findings show how artisans cope with financial stress and personal circumstances in everyday life to maintain their livelihoods.

Conclusion

Everyday craft practices of artisans at Sonajhuri Haat represent more than economic activities. They constitute everyday life through which cultural identity and traditional knowledge are continuously reproduced. It functions as a lived social space where artisans perform cultural activities, sustain social relations, and negotiate economic survival through everyday interactions. The practice of weaving, collecting natural materials, and teaching younger generations become form of everyday cultural production that sustains both livelihoods and cultural activities. The findings reveal that indigenous craft practices are deeply rooted in traditional knowledge systems, sustained through intergenerational learning, and continuously adapted to meet contemporary demands. However, artisans face increasing economic and resource-related challenges, which influence both production processes and livelihood outcomes. The incorporation of contemporary elements alongside traditional techniques is a strategic response to market demands, enabling the persistence of indigenous craft forms as evolving. The study demonstrates that traditional knowledge survives not simply through formal preservation efforts but through the everyday lives and practices of artisans. Sustainability emerges as a lived social process shaped by labour, memory, family relations, market negotiations, and community interactions.



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