



Changing Patterns in the Applique Craft of Pipili

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The applique craft of Pipili is an attractive product in the world handicraft market. Pipili, the small town situated on the golden triangle, Bhubaneswar-Puri-Konark, attracts the tourists, who stop for a while at Pipili. Very often guides are heard persuading tourists : "Here is something for you to carry as a token of remembrance for your visit to Orissa." Applique works of Pipili, filigree works of Cuttack, horn works of Cuttack and Parlakhemundi and *patta* paintings of Raghurajpur are offered as objects of gift by the people of Orissa.

Jagannath Pattanaik, a leading historian of Orissa, dates the origin of the applique works to 850 years back. The process of making the products remained unchanged for the past few centuries but during the last two to three decades, the applique products and their style have undergone a tremendous change. Darjis who make this craft for generations, now attribute two reasons for such change in the applique works. The first reason is the changing taste of the customers and the second is the commercialization of the products. Most of the Darjis are of the opinion that it is the customers who are primarily

responsible for bringing about change to the traditional applique works. They are of the opinion that when the very survival of the applique work owes it to the tourists, it is rather the choice of the tourists that has imposed a change on the products and its making style. Customers want the products to be cheaper and attractive. Artisans go for more profit, at times ignoring the quality.



Among the traditional applique work, Chandua, Chhati, Trasa, Alata, Adhoni, Mandant and Bana, used at the time of Dola Jatra for deities are quite well known. The use of all these products are associated with the religious ceremonies. But there are some other products which are prepared for the domestic and individual use. Two such

products are Batua and Pasa-Pali. Since betel is commonly chewed in Orissa, a special type of bag called Batua is prepared to carry betel leaf and the accessories. It is very much popular among the tourists from Eastern parts of the country. Pasa Pali or the dice-mat is another popular ancient products sold among the natives.

All these products are fast disappearing from the applique market. Instead, wall hangs,



garden umbrellas, lamp sheds, cushion covers and letter bags are now prepared as they are very much in demand by the tourists. Several tourists have special choice for monochrome art, for which monochrome garden umbrellas are prepared. Attractive motifs like Surya Mukhi Parrot, Dancing Peacock, Elephant are gradually getting withdrawn and more of monochrome and patch work is now in use.

It may appear reasonable that it is either the changing choice of the customers or the commercial attitude of the artisans or may be, the combination of both, that has brought about a radical change in the traditional work. But perhaps there is another factor, which is more responsible for bringing about a change in the traditional and classical applique works. Applique works, which was a secondary source of income for Darjis for centuries, has become their principal source of income today. Earlier, applique work gave them subsidiary income by prouiding them part-time engagement. All the principal applique products were used for religious purposes and during festivals. Rest of the year Darjis were earning their livelihood by way of mending umbrellas and mattresses moving in and around the township. Now as there is a growing demand by the tourists for more of the utilitarian products. Darjis are engaged full-time with their entire family and it became their principal source of income. The cost of labour and the return for investment have diverted their attention from the classical work to commercial work.

Earlier, locally prepared colour used to be added to the white cloth and applique products were prepared. But these days applique products are prepared out of coloured cloth. As a result, cheaper cloth is used and at times due to the non-availability of suitable matching colored cloth in the local market, traditional works are suspended and alternative new products are prepared.

Competition amongst the artisans, use of low quality inputs and use of readymade and machine made items have often brought down the standard of the work. It is now slowly drifting from cottage industry to small scale industry. Something exceptional in the market that may be liked by the tourists initiated change in the applique works. It is now seen that every day some new product is exhibited on the forewall of the showroom to attract tourists. Since most products are common in the market, some artisans take pain to create new products with a sole aim of monopolising the item for getting more profit by fixing the price at his own accord. But after some days the same product is copied by others and it becomes available in all the shops. With this process, new products appear in the market, which disappear after a brief spell.



Although, the applique craft of Pipili is undergoing a change, octogenarian artisans still prefer to produce antique and classical work. With the demand for more of utilitarian products, changes may come but principal applique products like Chandua, Chati and Trasa will continue to live as it is associated with religion and culture. Pipili has earned a name because of the famous applique works.

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