

# Folk Crafts of Birbhum District: A Study

Early folk man to fulfil his daily needs, to survive used different types of natural components around them. Their social, cultural, economic life was purely controlled by nature. With the unique skill, imagination, and experience they had made different objects according to the need of the society. This unique skill transforms from generation to generation. Folk art and craft always associated with the location aspects. As the different types of natural elements are main ingredients of folk art, they are always confined in a specific geo-environmental region. Birbhum is the abode of different types of folk arts and craft from early ages. Traditional folk art and craft practiced by the folk societies is very important in the field of folk culture of India.

**Keywords:** Folk, Nature, Folk Art, Culture, Geo- Environment.

## Introduction

The philosophy of folk society is reflected by the folk art of that society. Generally, in traditional agrarian folk societies, folk art play an important role in village economy. The artesian makes different types of products to meet the needs of the society. Folk art always associated with the flavour of the natural environment of that particular place. It proves that folk arts always associated with fulfilment of the daily needs of the folk people of that particular region. Any change in the geo-environmental component can hamper the sentiment of folk culture of that region. Originality is an important characteristic of folk art because the knowledge and experience of the folk artesian transfers from generation to generation. In Birbhum different types of folk art and crafts items are found in different parts of the district. Folk societies to meet their need used different natural ingredients in different ways. The folk artesian with their expert hand give life to different inanimate objects such as Brass and bell metal, Pottery, Shola Pith, Kantha Stitch, and Scroll Paintings etc. In Birbhum it is noticed that folk art is not only associated with daily needs of the folk people but it is also associated with different rituals, customs and folk festivals. But now days with the advent of capitalistic economy the folk cultural life of the district have faced many problems from different spheres of folk life. Change can be seen in social, economic and cultural life of the folk people of Birbhum district. Some folk art objects are near extinct or totally extinct. The folk artesian are facing different types of problem due to the effect of globalization.

## Objectives of the Study

The main objectives are as follows-

1. To identify various forms of folk crafts of the district
2. To assess the effect of Globalization on the folk craft sectors of the district.
3. To suggest some measures to overcome the problems of the folk craft sectors of Birbhum district.

## Methodology

Methodologies of the discipline Geography as well as folklore are adopted for the research work. Data have been collected from field survey and from printed sources such as Books, Journals, Reports etc. Random sampling techniques have been used. Different social, political, economic and cultural factors are taken into consideration to fulfil the research work.

## Geo-Environment of the Study area

Birbhum is a district of Burdwan division of West Bengal. The geographical coordinated are 23.8402° N, 87.6186° E. Total area is about 4545 Sq. Km. Geographically this district has unique characteristics. The western part of Birbhum is the fringe area of Chotanagpur plateau. Undulating terrain is not suitable for agriculture. Small hillocks are found in



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some places such as *Mamabhagne Pahar*. Some of the minerals are extracted here such as- iron ore, coal, china clay etc. The general slope of the district is from west to east. The eastern part of the district comprises fertile soil and forms the north- eastern boundary of the *Rarh* region. Climate of the district is of Tropical type. The western portion experiences more summer temperature than the eastern part. Summer temperature rises up to 48°C. In winter temperature drops around 10°C in some portion of the district. Ajay, Mayurakshi, Dwarks, Kopai, Kuain are the important rivers of the district. Most of the rivers are originated from the ChotaNagpur plateau region and are non perennial in nature. Total population according to Census 2011 is 3,502,404. Out of which 1,546,633 are male and 1,468,789 are female. Density of population is 771/ Km. and literacy rate is 70.9%. Birbhum has three subdivisions namely Sadar, Rampurhat and Bolpur. Suri is the district town. of Birbhum. Other important centers are Bolpur, Santiniketan, Rampurhat, Illambazar, Nanoor, Labhpur etc.

#### **Significance of Selecting the Study Area**

Birbhum is an important district of West Bengal in respect of folk cultural values. From ancient times different folk societies flourished in different parts of the district. The folk societies of western part of the district have been making different metal crafts from ancient times. On the other hand the eastern part is agriculturally developed. Accordingly different folk crafts related to agriculture are found in this region. The forested land of the district is the abode of different aboriginal people like the Santhal, Oran etc. Not only the cultural life but also the economic life of them is controlled by the forest in many respects. They have collected different forest products and made different folk crafts items with them. Folk crafts are associated with different folk rituals, customs and festivals of the folk societies of the district. Folk crafts are the integral part of folk life style of the district.

#### **Folk Crafts of Birbhum District**

Various forms of folk crafts are found throughout the district in relation to the geo-environmental conditions of the folk societies. Some of them are as follows-

##### **Brass and Bell Metal Craft**

This metal craft industry has an ancient reputation in the metal craft history of Bengal. The western portion of the district is famous for this craft. Different types of pots, utensils, vessels, tools and weapons are made by the local folk artists. The measuring bowls of Lokpur is world famous. But this unique craftsmanship is almost extinct now. The Tikarbata village of Bolpur subdivision is famous for making of brassware. Pots of different types, Khagri, Bogi etc are made from brass and bell metal.

##### **Shola Pith Craft**

The scientific name of *Shola* is *Aeschyomera Aspera*. It is an aquatic plant. The tropical climate of the district is suitable for production of this plant. In the reservoirs they

have grown abundantly. The *Malakar* community of Birbhum with their unique skill and techniques made different items like- garland, home decoration items etc. the crown of the Hindu God and Goddess are made with *Shola*. Due its white colour it is termed as 'Herbal Ivory'.

##### **Scroll Paintings**

Scroll Paintings of Birbhum are known as *Pata Chitro*. It is a unique folk craft of the district. The *Patua* community creates this folk cultural item. The *Patua* community are nor Hindu or Muslim. But they follow both the rituals of the two religions. Previously natural colours and handmade papers are used for making *Patas*. But now day colours and papers are collected from the market. With dance and song the *Patas* are represented to the audience. There are different types of *Patas* found in the district, such as, Scroll paintings, Rectangular pot etc. Different mythological stories are narrated through the pictures of the *Patas*, but now day contemporary issues are taken into consideration.

##### **Alpana**

The word Alpana came from Sanskrit '*Alimpon*'. This folk art is associated with different folk rituals and festivals. With the help of rice powder, water, a piece of cotton and natural colours the folk women decorate the floor with designs. Different designs are associated with different types of rituals. Sometimes designs are done on clay pots, clay plates.

##### **Pottery**

The potters of Birbhum district make different pottery crafts for the folk societies. The potters are known as *Kumbhokar* in Birbhum. They made different household products such as water pots, utensils, home decorating items, idols of Hindu God, Goddess, jewellery etc.

##### **Kantha Stitch**

Old, worn out cloths are the main materials of this craft. Cloths are piled in layers and stitched to make *Kanths*. This is a recycling craft. The women of the folk societies are the inventor of this folk craft. Generally *Kanths* are used for protect from cloths. Folk women with needle and colourful yarn make beautiful designs on cloths. Now day this technique is used in making different Indian dresses. Designs like flowers, tress, sun, moon, temple, and mosque are stitched.

##### **Wood Craft**

The folk artists with the help of Chisel and hammer engrave different types of designs on wood. Wooden doors, windows, different idols, furniture even different types of ornaments are made by them. Some years back mud houses are common in the district. For making these type of houses different wooden items have been used by the folk people.

##### **Bamboo Craft**

Basket weaving and mat making are done by the folk people of Birbhum. Bamboo, grass, leaves etc forest products are used in this type of craft. The *Dom* community of the district is famous for making

bamboo craft products. Now day different home furniture, decorating items, small toys are made with the bamboo.

#### **Effect of Globalization on the Folk Craft Sectors**

The effect of globalization is seen in almost every sphere of life. The folk societies of Birbhum are not free from the advent of capitalistic economy from 1990's. As the market economy expands the folk craft sectors of Birbhum experiences two types of transformation- (i) The Structural change and (ii) Philosophical change.

#### **Structural Change**

This indicates the change in the outer structure of the folk crafts of the Birbhum district. The philosophy of the folk culture remains unchanged. The *Patuas* are now collecting their raw materials from the market. Previously they used different natural materials for making *Patas*. Artificial colours are used abundantly. Now day in wood craft sectors different sophisticated tools are used for wood carving. Potters are using mechanised wheels for their work.

#### **Philosophical Change**

This is the inner change of the structure of the folk crafts sectors of the district. With the expansion of market economy the views of the folk people have changed a lot. The philosophy of using some folk crafts items are now totally changed from its originality. Such as in recent past earthen utensils were common in folk societies of Birbhum. But now the use of this folk craft is limited to certain rituals and customs. The use of brass and bell metal utensils are almost extinct now. Due to the philosophical change of the folk craft sectors of Birbhum creates several problems to the folk artists of the district. Changes in morality, honesty, tolerance are the main controlling factors of Philosophical change.

Due to globalization the folk craft sectors of the district experienced several negative effects. But there are some positive impacts also. As capitalist economy supports open and free market economy the door of the world market has opened in front of the folk craft sectors of Birbhum. Some craft items of the district such as – *Kantha Stitch, Scroll Paintings, Shola Pith* are already world famous. This will encourage the village economy.

#### **Suggestions**

To overcome the problems of the folk crafts sectors of Birbhum, some measures should be taken. These are as follows-

1. Government and Non Government initiatives should be taken to encourage the folk artists.
2. Co-operative may be formed to sell and

promotes the folk crafts.

3. Arranging loan for the folk artists.
4. Providing raw materials to the folk artists at the right price.
5. Awareness about folk art is to be created among the future generations of the society.
6. Government marketing system has to be developed.
7. In order to preserve folk art properly, a museum should be built.
8. Arrangement of pension of the elderly folk artists.
9. Arrangement of free medical facilities for the folk artists.

#### **Conclusion**

The folk crafts of Birbhum have its own characteristics in the folk map of India. It should be preserved in its original form. The effect of Globalization is obvious. Some folk crafts are extinct and some of them are in the situation of near extinct. Initiatives should be taken urgently to preserve this unique heritage of the folk societies of Birbhum. The future generations of the folk artists are not agreed to come to their ancestral job. The condition should be changed; otherwise the folk art of Birbhum will one day be lost in the womb of time.

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