



Evolution of Sambalpuri Handloom in Odisha: Retrospects and Prospects

*Khirod Chandra Maharana*¹, *Prof. (Dr.) Shyama Charan Acharya*²

¹PhD Scholar, Gangadhar Meher University

²Professor (Retd.), Gangadhar Meher University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.2023.4231>

Abstract:

Sambalpuri Handloom has seen numerous ups and downs with cultural forces as it has travelled through Odisha's and India's socio-political history. We have seen how the product has evolved in response to these social shifts and patronage over history. Thanks to this ingenious invention, art and talent have lasted the ages. The Sambalpuri handloom is so exquisite and distinctive that, it has overcome the test of time and is in high demand all over the world. If we look forward, then there will be a need for brand promotion, strategic marketing network to ensure its global availability, contemporary design and look improvisation. However, the products of sambalpuri handloom are yet to be in the position they deserve due to lack of adequate promotional initiatives. When it comes to business, many of the weavers are unaware of what is required to be competitive in the national or global market. Poor infrastructure and, insufficient marketing put them in competition with more businesses (Sahu & Mishra, 2018). The present study is an attempt to examine the constraints and opportunities of Sambalpuri handloom since its origin and also offer suggestions to overcome the impediments in its journey to the global market.

Keywords:Sambalpuri Handloom, Genesis, Globalization

1. Introduction

Sambalpuri handloom is a traditional weaving style that originates from the Indian state of Odisha. It is known for its unique designs and patterns that are created using a special type of handloom called the Sambalpuri Ikat. The fabrics produced by this technique are characterized by their vibrant colours, intricate designs, and geometric patterns. The technique of Sambalpuri handloom is passed down from generation to generation and is an important part of the cultural heritage of Odisha. Due to its distinctive pattern and design, which cannot be found in any other State or country in the world, the "Sambalpuri Handloom Sarees" has exhibited remarkable growth despite enormous difficulties and hurdles, resilience, and competition from power looms and mill sectors (Mishra & Das, 2020). However, it is facing some challenges in the present context. One of the main challenges is the competition from mass-produced, machine-made textiles. The handloom industry is often seen as less efficient and less profitable compared to mass production, which has led to a decline in the number of handloom weavers. The handloom sector has been steadily diminishing over the years, and handloom weavers are experiencing considerable difficulties due to a high cost of yarns, high cost of production, an unorganised market, loss of jobs and income etc. (Panda & Bhuwania, 2022). The handloom industry has steadily declined over the past ten years due to the increased competition posed by the contemporary textile industry (Mohapatra, 2014). Additionally, the lack of government support and the absence of a strong marketing strategy for handloom products have also contributed to the decline of the industry. Despite these challenges, there are efforts to revive and promote the sambalpuri handloom in the present context. There are government initiatives and non-government organizations that are working to support handloom weavers and promote handloom products. Sambalpuri handloom continues to be an important part of the cultural heritage of Odisha and is still widely used today. Handloom plays a significant role in the Indian economy owing to their rural employment potential by contributing to 23 % of cloth production in the country (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2019).

2. Review of Literature

Mohanty (2018) discussed the role of Sambalpuri Handloom in the socio-economic development of the region. Mishra and Sahoo (2015) analysed the economic impact of the Sambalpuri handloom industry on the livelihoods of the weavers and their families whereas Mohapatra (2016) examines the various techniques and designs used in the production of Sambalpuri fabrics, and how they reflect the cultural and natural influences of the region. Bhubaneswari & Kannan (2018) found that the handloom industry is making a positive contribution to job development and overall economic growth. Panda & Parida (2019) led to the conclusion that there is an urgent need to maintain the settlement of weavers that have been developed and are sustainable in response to the weavers' living and cultural patterns and occupational needs. Mishra & Mohapatra (2020) expressed the socioeconomic

well-being of the traditional weaver communities is seriously threatened by the handloom industry's deteriorating position as a result of increased global textile industry competition. Meher & Bhattacharya (2016) found that the weavers of the new generation do not have the desire to continue it as a career. Sarkar & Mukhopadhyaya (2019) had the same view that new generations are unwilling to accept weaving as their main occupation because of the uncertainty of the industry and strategies to make this ever-challenging industry globally competitive. They also explored that traditional handloom industries cannot cope with the new trend, so the results of globalization in the Indian context are mostly negative. Tanushree (2015) the policymakers should recognize the value of the handloom sector and allocate funds needed for handloom weavers to be uplifted. Tarai (2020) revealed that most weavers are willing to be an entrepreneur if they will be provided with government support and other growth factors.

3. Origin of Sambalpuri Handloom

The history of Sambalpuri handloom can be traced back to ancient times, with evidence of the technique being used in the region for over a thousand years. It is believed that the technique of weaving Sambalpuri fabrics was developed by the local tribes, who have been practising it for centuries. The early history of the Sambalpuri handloom is closely tied to the history of the region itself. Since the fourth century BC, people in the state of Odisha have been practising the textile craft of handloom weaving. However, despite its long history and cultural significance, Sambalpuri handloom remained largely a local craft for much of its history with minimal exposure to the outside world. This began to change in the 20th century, as the craft began to gain recognition both within India and abroad. One of the key factors that helped to bring Sambalpuri handloom to the global stage was the rise of the Indian independence movement. As the movement gained momentum, many Indian artists and craftsmen began to draw inspiration from the country's rich cultural heritage, including its traditional textile arts. As Sambalpuri handloom gained visibility and recognition in India, it also began to attract attention from international buyers and designers.

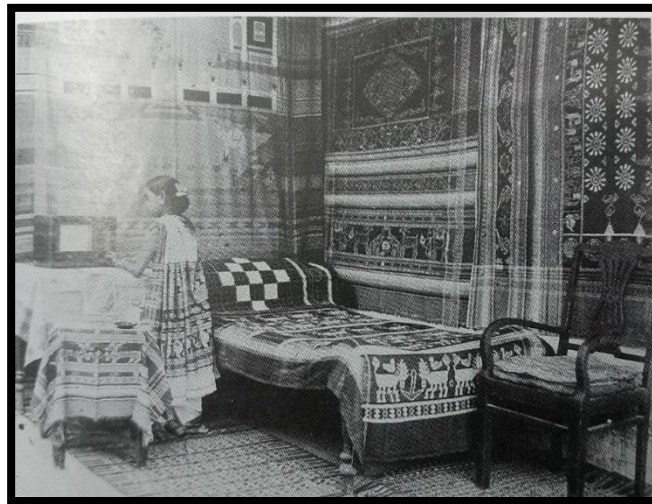


Figure 01: Variety of Bandha Fabrics by UtkalParda Agency

In the 1960s and 1970s, many Western fashion designers began to incorporate traditional Indian textiles and motifs into their collections, which helped to further popularize the craft. As a result, by the 1980s, Sambalpuri handloom was being exported to countries all over the world, with many international retailers and designers showcasing their products.

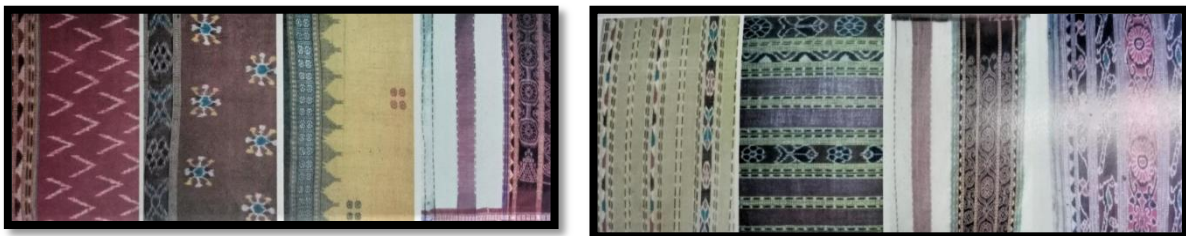


Figure 02: Pattern of 'Bandha Art more than 60 years old

In recent years, the Sambalpuri handloom has been actively promoted and supported by the state Government of Odisha and the Central Government of India. The Government has taken steps to revive and promote the craft by providing training to weavers, setting up retail outlets, and providing marketing support to weavers and cooperatives. As a result, the industry has seen a resurgence in demand and growth. Till the end of the eightieth century, the Indian handloom sector was the sole supplier of cloths; however such monopoly came to an end by the early ninetieth century due to the industrial revolution in Europe (Faruque & Islam, 2021). The unique motifs and designs of Sambalpuri fabrics are inspired by the natural surroundings, such as the flora and fauna of the region. The fabrics are made using traditional handlooms and the process of weaving is done by skilled artisans. The popularity of Sambalpuri fabrics has grown in recent years, and they are now considered to be a symbol of Odisha's rich cultural heritage.



Figure: 03: Ancient Texture of

Source: <https://www.sahapedia.org>

The above figure represents some incorporated into handloom fabrics. the deer's beautifully batting gentle walk (3), and the lion's view of goddess Lakshmi (5), and the



Sambalpuri Handloom

ancient textures which are The duck's rhythmic movement (1), innocent eyes (2), the elephant's (4). The lotus flower depicts the seat conch shell stands for prosperity (6).

4. Handloom under Cooperative Framework

The early 1950s witnessed a surge in the cooperative movement of the country under the state's patronage. Cooperative institutions were expected to bring about an economic upliftment of the weak and downtrodden through democratic management and cooperative principles. State patronage and supply of resources motivated the weavers and artisans to establish weaver cooperative societies. Central and State Governments are extending their hands of support to the people attached to this caste-based occupation by making many cooperative clusters in many local regions (Pradhan & Khandual, 2020). This led to the mushrooming of cooperative industries. The Indian government has promoted the use of cooperative models and policies and has made it easier for Apex societies at the state level and PCS at the village level to create and function. (Aggarwal, 2020). Radhashyam Meher converted his best showroom named 'Meher Art Emporium' into a cooperative institute named "Meher Art Fabrics Cooperative Society Ltd" in 1955. It was the most up-to-date showroom comparable to the best Sambalpuri Textile showroom that exists today in Odisha. It was during this period that many other cooperative institutions such as Sambalpuri Bastralaya Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society Ltd (1954), Sarkanda WC (1954), Attabira WC (1955), Kardolla (1955), Padampur (1955), Laumunda WC (1956), Rampela W (1956) and many others came into existence. The abundant Fund made available to them by the government through shares, grants and subsidies enabled them to engage the skilled craftsman within their area of operation. Meher Art Fabrics Cooperative Society Ltd (MAFCS) under the presidentship of Radhashyam remained the dominant institution in the production of 'Bandha Art Textiles' in the Cooperative Sector, while the others thrived on the infrastructure built by him.



Figure 04: Retail Outlet of Sambalpuri Bastralaya

Source: <https://www.justdial.com>

5. Sambalpuri Handloom at Present

Sambalpuri textiles have now become an intrinsic part of the nation's rich artistic and cultural heritage. They are not mere pieces of beauty, but a measure of the heights of imagination and skill obtained by the artisans. The renowned educationist Late Dr Mayadhar Mansingh sums up the artistic grandeur of Sambalpuri Textiles in the following words: *Those who are keen on knowing Odisha's artistic heritage at its best, my advice is to see two things. These are Konark on the East Coast and Sambalpuri Textile on the West of the State.* Despite the government's ongoing efforts to promote the sector through various development programmes, the success of these initiatives is seriously in doubt (Sarkar & Mukhopadhyay, 2019).

5.1 Handloom Sector in Indian Context

The handloom sector is vital to India's economy, serving as both a source of employment for rural people and a carrier of the country's rich cultural legacy to other countries. Every Indian state is well-known for a particular handloom, which is reflected in the vibrant way of life, culture, and geography (Mishra & Das, 2021). According to the handloom census 2019-20, the handloom sector employs approximately 35 lakh people directly. Handlooms in India exemplify the country's cultural diversity and highlight the craftsmanship of the world's weavers. Handloom weaving is the second-largest economic activity after agriculture, employing many weavers and allied people directly and indirectly. This sector accounts for roughly 15% of the country's fabric production and also contributes to the country's export revenues. India produces 95 per cent of the world's handwoven fabric. Handloom exports from India declined from 2,353.33 crores in 2015-16 to 2,245.33 crores in 2019-20, according to the Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC). Since independence, many government measures have attempted to revitalize the Indian handloom industry. However, the majority of these measures have had mixed results.

Table 01 Number of Weavers & Handlooms in the Indian Context

Handloom Census	Weavers & Allied workers (in lakhs)	No of handlooms (in lakhs)
First Census (1987-88)	67.4	37.8
Second Census (1995-96)	65.5	34.71
Third Census (2009-10)	43.31	23.71
Fourth Census (2019-20)	35.22	27.01

(Source: niti.gov.in)

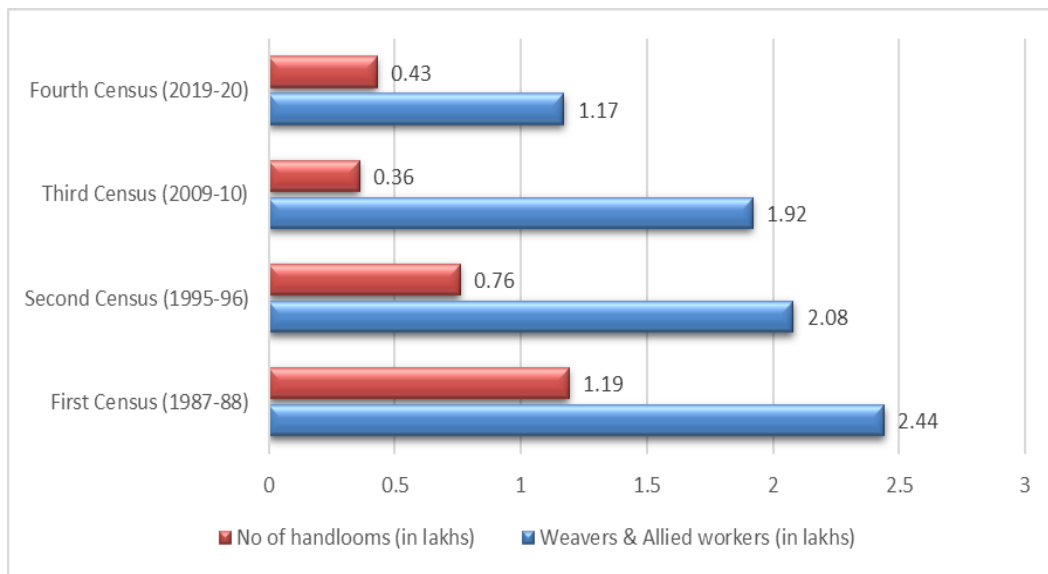


Figure 05: Number of Weavers and Handlooms in India

From the above table and figure, it is evident that there is a decrease in both the number of weavers and allied workers and also the number of handlooms since the last four handloom censuses in the Indian Context.

5.2 Handloom Sector in Odisha Context

The State of Odisha is known for its silk ikat weaves, which are produced on the loom using a complicated method (bandha) in which wrap and weft threads are first connected and then dyed to make the intended pattern. The saree is Odisha's most popular and well-known tie and dye textile. Khanduas, Saktapada, Tara Bali, and Bichitrapuri, to name a few, are traditional sarees composed of cotton and silk. They include bold and exotic designs. Rows of birds, animals, fish, seashells, rudraksha beads and temple spires are common design themes. Sambalpur, known for its Sambalpuri sarees, is one of the most well-known handloom centres in Odisha. This renowned weave is centred in the villages of Sambalpur, Bargarh and Sonapur.

Table 02 Number of Weavers & Handlooms in Odisha Context

Handloom Census	Weavers & Allied workers (in lakhs)	No of handlooms (in lakhs)
First Census (1987-88)	2.44	1.19
Second Census (1995-96)	2.08	0.76
Third Census (2009-10)	1.92	0.36
Fourth Census (2019-20)	1.17	0.43

(Source: niti.gov.in)



Figure 06: Number of Weavers and Handlooms in India

From the above Table, it is evident that there is a decrease in both the number of weavers and allied workers and also the number of handlooms since the last three handloom censuses in the Odisha context.

6.Sambalpuri Handloom and E-Commerce

Sambalpuri handloom products can be found on various e-commerce platforms. These platforms provide a platform for artisans and weavers to sell their products online, which can reach a larger audience. E-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra have a dedicated section for handicrafts and handloom products, which includes Sambalpuri fabrics. Additionally, several online marketplaces specialize in selling traditional and handcrafted products, such as Handloom Hub, Craftsvilla, and Utsav Fashion. These platforms not only provide a convenient way for customers to purchase Sambalpuri handloom products but also help preserve and promote traditional craftsmanship.

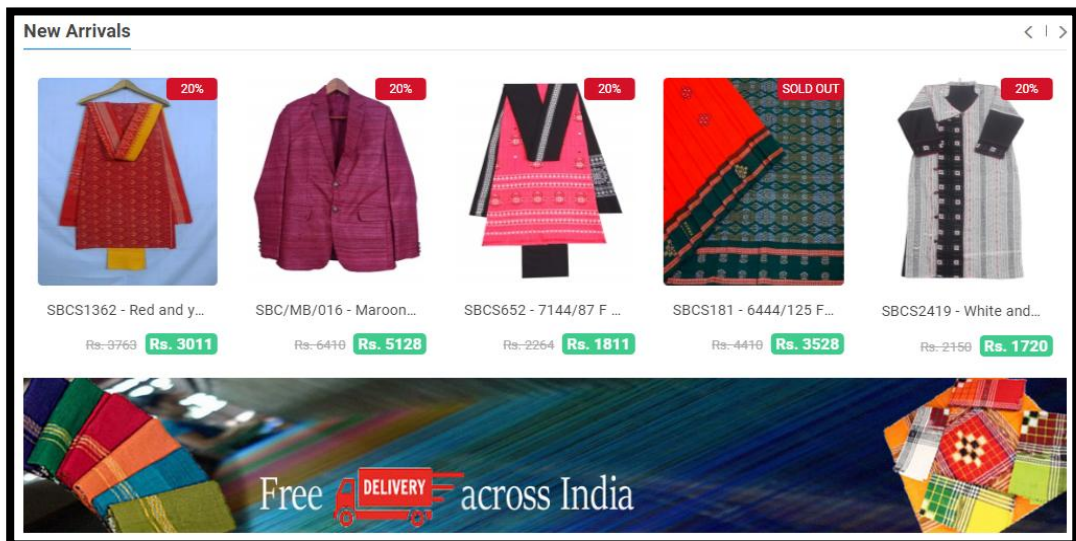


Figure 07: E-Commerce Store of Sambalpuri Bastralaya

Source: www.sambalpuribastralaya.com

7. Conclusion

Critical patronage is necessary for the survival of this special skill. It is the source from which the artist derives satisfaction, inspiration and admiration. 'Bandha' textiles are pieces of art and appreciation is necessary for their improvement, growth and development. Appreciating Sambalpuri textiles needs considerable awareness regarding the inputs, nature of the yarn, multiplicity of colours, the intricacy of the design, imagination and creativity and overall appeal to the consumer. This awareness can give true recognition and value to the craftsman and products. The caste-based vocation has changed as a result of the changing environment brought on by globalization and the changing economy (Meher, 2022). Today, Sambalpuri handloom is a significant part of Odisha's economy and an important cultural export. It is also a source of pride for the people of Odisha and a symbol of the state's rich cultural heritage. Sambalpuri handloom craftsmen should reinvent their native knowledge and abilities to increase the production and marketability of their products (Ghosh & Jena, 2018). The evolution of Sambalpuri handloom from a local craft to a global phenomenon is a story of resilience, hard work, and cultural pride. The craft has stood the test of time and continued to evolve and adapt to changing market trends. Today, it is a symbol of Odisha's rich cultural heritage and an important part of the state's economy. It is a beautiful example of how tradition and modernity can coexist and create something unique and inspiring.

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