

Crafting a Livelihood: A Story of the Kotpad Dyers and Weavers

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Abstract : Craft -an integral part of the conduit to create something beautiful- is a visual representation of the human imagination given life through the hand. The Mirgan tribe in the Naxalite infested forests of Koraput, Odisha are not exempt from this craving for beauty. These skilled craftsmen dye and weave the simple yet sophisticated Kotpad textiles. The women undertake the time-consuming task of dyeing the cotton and silk yarns with the root of the aul tree. The men then weave these yarns into beautiful sarees and dupattas. The root of the aul tree lends the textile its maroon to brown color, which is offset against the unbleached cotton to create a minimalist and distinctive look. The motifs, incorporated through the extra weft technique, reflect the rich tribal heritage of the community. This is an eco-friendly, non-toxic textile. Kotpad fabrics were on the verge of extinction due to various factors like poor infrastructure, no innovation in traditional designs/products, customer ignorance leading to low demand. With livelihood opportunities through craft slowly dwindling, artisans were moving to alternative sources of income generation, like agriculture and daily wage labor. There was an urgent need for intervention to revive the craft, spread awareness about them in urban spaces, and strengthen the artisan's ability to innovate and create. Recent efforts by government bodies and local designers have given Kotpad handloom a contemporary look without diluting its essence. This research explores the possibilities to leverage Kotpad handloom to find a place in the dynamic culture of the world by its promotion among different target groups and incorporating self-sustaining practices for the artisans. This could further encourage a space for handmade and handcrafted art, rich with stories about India, with a contemporary visual sensibility. This will strengthen environmental and ethical sustainability.

Keywords : craft, contemporary, handloom, natural dye, tribal

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