



Research Paper

## Safeguarding of Traditional Craftsmanship of Sambhal Handicrafts with Special Reference to Bone and Horn Artifacts

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### ABSTRACT:

Craft practices are an integral part of any cultural setting; they provide an identity to the people belonging to a particular culture. India is known for its diverse cultural setting resulting in different forms of craftsmanship. The main objective of this paper is to document the traditional craftsmanship of bone and horn carving of Sarai Tarin (Sambhal) as it is the foremost step in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage according to UNESCO's convention 2003. It is also important for transmitting or communicating intangible cultural heritage from generation to generation, rather than on the production of its concrete manifestations. This craftsmanship is facing day to day challenges for its survival and number of artisans getting reduce gradually affecting this art and leading its existence in threat. This traditional craftsmanship which is a domain of intangible cultural heritage is in dire need of safeguarding which primarily require its proper documentation. Methodology adopted includes digital documentation of process at various production sites in Sarai Tarin (Sambhal), to find out the use of bone and horn in this craft industry, to document tools and techniques involved, interviewed artisans to know about the issues and challenges they are facing in practicing this craftsmanship.

**KEYWORDS:** Bone, Craftsmanship, Handicrafts, Heritage, Horn, Sambhal.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

India is known for its diverse cultural setting resulting in different forms of craftsmanship. Handicrafts of India represent our heritage, customs, practices, rituals and ceremonies. This paper is based on the **traditional craftsmanship** of Sambhal artisans of making bones and horns objects and safeguarding their knowledge and skills, for the communities and groups who practice their traditions and customs as it is foremost step in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) according to UNESCO's convention 2003. Many expression and manifestations of ICH are under threat, endangered by globalization and cultural homogenization, and also by a lack of support, appreciation and understanding. If ICH is not nurtured, it will be lost forever, or frozen as a practice belonging to the past. Maintaining cultural heritage is an essential element of any effort to realize the growth potential and promote sustainability and vitality of rural areas (Ribašauskienė, E., & Šumylė, D. 2016).

The goal of safeguarding, as with other forms of intangible cultural heritage, is to ensure that the knowledge and skills associated with traditional artisanry are passed on to future generations so that crafts can continue to be produced within their communities, providing livelihoods to their makers and reflecting creativity. Zhiang Wang (2017) stated that traditional art and crafts are the important form and part of our traditional culture, the artistic form of historic and cultural connotation, also an important direction to carry forward the traditional art culture. Many craft traditions have age-old systems of instruction and apprenticeship. One proven way of reinforcing and strengthening these systems is to offer financial incentives to learners and teachers to make knowledge transfer more attractive to both. India is one of the important suppliers of handicrafts to the world market. The Indian handicrafts industry is highly labour intensive cottage based industry and decentralized, being spread all over the country in rural and urban areas (Mohi-ud-din, T. 2014). "Handicraft is the second largest source of employment in the country, after agriculture. Yet India's hand industries are in a crisis of misunderstanding." *Crafts council of India-2011*

“According to the United Nations, over the past 30 years, the number of Indian artisans has decreased by 30%, indicating the need to re-invest in artisans to safeguard history, culture and an important source of livelihood.” (Kapur, H., & Mittar, S. 2014). They generate employment and foreign exchange earnings which are vital for economic growth and upliftment of the rural economy (Mohi-ud-din, T., et al. 2014).

Sambhal city is famous for its unique kind of horn and bone craft items which is manufactured in Sarai Tarin 4 km away from Sambhal city (but included in Sambhal) which are being exported to various countries. One of the distinguish feature of Sambhal handicrafts is that it uses bones and horns of dead animals which make it environmentfriendly. Today approximately one lac population of Sarai Tarin is connected to this industry. These handicrafts are being exported to various countries such as Africa, Hong Kong, China, Japan, America, England, Germany, Israel etc. These handicrafts are appreciated by various western countries but today this handicraft industry and artisans are facing lots of challenges because the exporters paid very small amount for these items to the artisans and they export at a very high cost. The artisans of Sambhal work very hard but cannot get benefit & only earn small amount, which cannot improve their condition and it remain same as usual. (Maeed, A. (2002). Handicraft is way of income of the crafts persons and is essential to overall prosperity. But an average artisan has inadequate access to information about markets, buyers, tastes and tools and technologies in manufacturing and also lack of knowledge about use of information technology. (Renu, & Anupama. 2018).

Objective of this paper is to study historical background of traditional craftsmanship of Sarai Tarin (Sambhal), to document and study in order to find out the use of bone & horn in art and craft industry, to spread awareness of this handicrafts which will lead to its growth and demand globally, to explore the tools and techniques used in the craftsmanship of Sambhal handicrafts.

### **Specialized Bone and Horn Carving in Ancient Traditions**

The practice of rendering bone into a work of art dates back to the prehistoric past. Bone carving has been associated with many civilizations around the world that favored it as an art medium. Art works featuring animal bones were typically associated with ceremony, ritual, and religion. Ancient specializations in the bone carving craft are rather specific. Some believe that during the Middle Bronze Age bone carving was one of the first traditional occupations which have given rise to an independent industry– the production of ornaments. This specialization can be traced in archaeological materials of all later periods. In the Bronze Age, production zones for bone and skin processing were located within the living zones of a settlement unlike pottery production zones that were usually located beyond the village territory. The close relationship between bone and skin processing during the Late Bronze Age influenced their development. In the Northern Pontic Region, the decline in skin processing caused a considerable decrease in the diversity of bone tools (Gorbov, Ushachuk, 2000:99 – 100).

Cultures all over the world have some pretty ingenious ways of creatively re-using human bones. Frequently bones are carved and repurposed into jewelry, cups, musical instruments and weapons. Bone carving has been practice by a variety of world cultures, sometimes as a cheaper, and recently a legal, substitute for ivory carving. It was important in prehistoric art.

Bone was also used by artists and craftsmen to try out their designs, especially by metalworkers. Such pieces are known as "**trial-pieces**".

Horns have been used by people for many purposes throughout history. Some bovid horns are used as musical instruments, for example the shofar. Drinking horns were popular among many different ancient cultures. They were used by Scandinavians, Greeks, Romans, Thracians, Scythians and people in Africa. People have been drinking from horns for at least 2,600 years.

Powder horns were originally bovid horns fitted with lids and carrying straps, used to carry gunpowder. This craft has been prevalent in India from ancient times. The tribals are usually associated with this craft. The Himalayan tribals practice this craft for making rituals items. Before the invention of plastics, bones were a common material for tools and objects. Even now, bones may be mixed with their modern counterparts in products. Bones can be used as a weapon in the wilderness. Several cultures created shovels from mammal bones. Button-like objects made of bone or other materials have been found at archaeological sites. These objects may date back as far as 2000 BCE.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

Data was collected through multiple visit of various production sites in Sarai Tarin (Sambhal) followed by photographic documentation and interaction with artisans through some self-developed questionnaires. The questions were asked on history of crafts, techniques and process of bone and horn carvings, present status of this craftsmanship, factors affecting handicraft industry and issues faced by the artisans etc. Data was also collected through some government reports and records, journals and web.

### **Tools and Equipments**

Many types of tools are involved in bone and horn craft which includes shaper, grinder, moulder etc. Tools used in bone and carvings are as follows:

A diamond bit, a drill bit and sanding bits with sand paper are the main equipment required for bone carving, Cutter, Motor, different grades of files, buffing machines, engine etc. are also used.



**Fig.1. Cutter**



**Fig.2. Button Making Machine**



**Fig.3. Motor**



**Fig.4. Different types of Buffs and Polishing Pads**



**Fig.5. Working Area**

### **Techniques and Process of Craftsmanship**

Bone carving is the act of creating art forms by carving into animal bones which often includes the carving of antlers and horns. It can result in the ornamentation of a bone and creation of a figure. Both bones and horns are different both in terms of their physical or chemical characteristics. Therefore technique and process of making of bones and horns objects are different but sometimes the techniques may be the same.

#### **❖ Bone Carving Techniques**

Objects of **bones** are manufactured by following steps:-

- Bones, fevicol SH, wood and paint are common raw materials required for production.
- When the animal dies, its flesh rot after some time and then its skin along with its bones and skeletons is collected by garbage collectors. (See fig. 6).
- Bone craft is a time consuming process and perilous to health.
- The bones are first boiled with soda in water and then left in the sun for 1-1/2 hours to dry. This process helps to remove fat and other greasy elements from the surface of bones and to some extent also removes foul smell.
- Boiled bones are cut into desired sizes. (See fig. 7).



- The middle part of the bone is also cut into small long stripes according to the requirement.
- Then the bones are scrapped to make it equal size and to make both sides parallel with the help of a machine, sand paper is used in this machine (See fig. 8).
- There are various types of sand paper which comes in many numbers and selected according to the scrapping of the object, more the number increases more finishing is done.
- When the bones are furnished they are kept into the solution of hydrogen peroxide ( $H_2O_2$ ) to give white appearance. 5 liter Hydrogen peroxide is diluted in 50 liter water and kept bones in the sunlight for 15-20 days, if bones are boiled keep it only for 3-4 days. (See fig. 9).
- Then the bones are taken out from the hydrogen peroxide solution to make it dry. (See fig. 10).
- According to object bones are colored in various colors. For coloring powder colors are used. Approximately 1kg color is mixed into 30 liters water to color the bones.
- These bones are used to make various items such as boxes, tables, tray, purses etc.
- Bones are paste with the help of fevicol, araldite etc. and pressure is given on the object to fix bones tightly on their places. (See fig. 11).
- Final furnishing is given to the object by scrapping followed by polishing to give the object its final look then the objects are ready to export. (See fig. 12, 13).



**Fig.6. Raw Bones Collection**



**Fig.7. Cutting of Bones**



**Fig.8. Scrapping of Bones**



**Fig.9. Bones soaked in the solution of**



**Fig.12. Scraping**



**Fig.13. Polishing  
Hydrogen Peroxide**



**Fig.10. Dry Bones**



**Fig.11. Craftspersons, Sticking Bones to the Base**

#### **❖Horn Carving Techniques**

Horn is, by its nature, a very good material for making things. Crafting these horns as an art requires good skill and very few people can do it. It is soft enough to be worked easily, while being hard and tough enough to be durable under most circumstances. It can be heated & then flattened cut and carved. When horn gets hotter, it gradually reaches a point where it becomes plastic enough to mold and shape.

1. Firstly, horn is selected according to the objects which we want to make.
2. To begin working with horn, they must first prepare it by removing the soft core. There are number of ways to do this-
  - The first method to immerse the horn in boiling water, and after, the outer portion has softened a little, removing the core. This method is quickest and most sterile.
  - The second method is to dry out the core in warm, even conditions for a few days, when the core dries and shrinks, will separate the two. This method is not particularly clean; however, if you have the time, it is quite easy. Any warm, dry spot will suffice such as near a furnace, the back shelf of a closet, on the top of roof, or whatever.
  - The third method is to soak the horn in water for a few months. This is probably the best method for mass preparation of a large number of horns, and was the method of choice used by some horners in history. It will, however, create a lingering odor, and a potentially unhygienic situation, (unless you choose to regularly change out the water, until all the blood has soaked away from the core).



- You can scoop out as much of the core as possible, to help the drying process, using a split piece of wood, bamboo or something similar item.
3. Clean away the membrane as quickly as possible, because it can soon begin to rot, and this can screw up the horn.
  4. Scrap and scrub out anything that remains inside the horn as far down as you can reach. Use Scouring pads, bottle brush, etc. It is also possible to do scour out the inside of the horn using varying sized gravel to slowly clean it out.
  5. Horn is most commonly heated for shaping by dry heat such as baking etc. The surface is then smoothed down with the help of any type of support.
  6. Polishing is the next step, which is done by rubbing the different sizes of sandpaper. The polishing is continued till the horn becomes smooth and shiny. (See. Fig.14.)
  7. These are thoroughly cleansed with water and dried in open air. (See. Fig.15.)

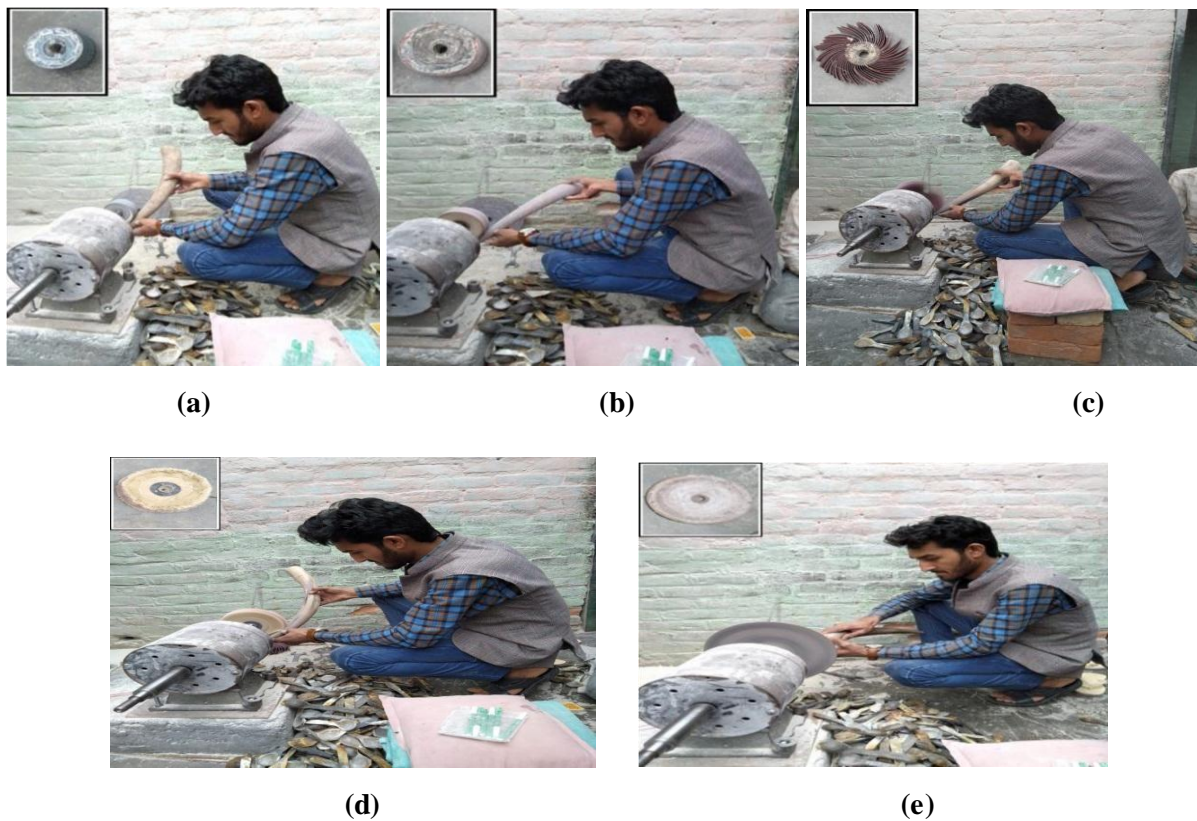


Fig.14 (a-e). Artisan working on Horn



Fig.15. Cleaning after Polishing



**Fig.16. Prepared Horn**



**(a)**



**(b)**



**(c)**



**(d)**



**(e)**



**(f)**

**Fig.17. (a - f) Other Handicrafts made up of Bone and Horn**

### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The versatility of the various materials used in Indian Handicrafts items are as follows:

<b>Major Crafts</b>	<b>% Units</b>	<b>% Artisans</b>
All Textiles	56.70	58.42
Cane and Bamboo	12.63	12.49
Wood	6.19	5.48
Metal	3.62	3.68
Stone	0.80	0.71
Straw, grass, fibre and leaf	7.40	6.40
Leather	2.79	2.85
Glass	0.83	1.03
Clay and ceramics	5.16	5.50
Ivory, bone, horn and shells	0.61	0.60
Miscellaneous	3.27	2.84
All mediums (all major crafts)	100.00	100.00
Total	(14.55.056)	(47.61.186)
Source: NCAER, 1995-96		



In above table it is shown that India has bone and horn handicrafts in only minor percent which is a matter of concern. This craftsmanship has been shrinking day by day to a small section due to different threats. During the survey I found that this industry is reducing with higher pace. Only aged people are involved in making horn combs, while young generation diverted to other occupations.

Handicraft industry's contribution cannot be neglected in giving employment to a large number of artisans from generation to generation. Handicrafts of Sambhal are known for its artistic history and unique eco-friendly crafts. Instead of having potentialities this industry is suffering from sharp decline in its exports business. This is mainly because of the rapid change in consumer preferences and tastes inadequate advertising and publicity, exploitation by middlemen, untapped zones, and increased prices of raw materials, electricity supply, and tough competitions in the world market from different countries. Due to the low wages, lack of credit facilities, uncertainty of work load throughout the year and inability to sustain a basic lifestyle, the artisans take up a variety of alternate occupations. Following are some other reasons for declining of Sambhal handicrafts;

- Low financial budget
- Inadequate advertising & promotion
- Poor or no market knowledge
- Poor delivery schedule
- Poor packaging
- Transportation
- Health hazards due to dust of bones
- Environmental issues.
- Lack of planned and developed infrastructure etc.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The value chain has been infringed and the traditional sense of Sambhal handicrafts has disappeared. This Sector is in dire need of development and promotion in order to revive the culture and art of the Indian heritage especially as the promotion of this handicraft which addresses several needs of the society; to preserve culture, act as a source of income, upgrade the social status of women and help to eliminate child labor by the participation of women in the different productive sectors.

Bone and horn artifacts of Sambhal have a very bright future if proper measures are taken well in time to develop this small industry based on a traditional craftsmanship. The main problem in the conservation of handicrafts is to involve the next generation in the preservation of craft. Due to various reasons which have been discussed earlier, the children of the craftsmen have to take up other lucrative professions, while giving up on the traditional occupation, thus leading to further deterioration of the craft. Preserving this heritage and passing it to next future generation will strengthen and keep it alive. There is an urgent need to resolve the problems of artisans, and safeguard this valuable heritage according to UNESCO's convention. This craft should be given a boost through extensive government support initiatives in terms of financing, technological help, elimination of middle men and training & development schemes for the artisans. Similarly, for better performance the need of the large workforce must be identified and all necessary steps should be taken for creating a self-sufficient workforce. This workforce will provide employment opportunities for large number of people, thus contributing to the overall cultural & economic growth of the country.

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