

Traditional Hand-woven Khandua of Nuapatna and Maniabandha -A Navigation into its Ancestry and Analyzing the Present

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Abstract

Indian traditional hand woven has a glorious past which had produced some of the exquisitely crafted fabrics mostly in the form of sarees. These sarees have been fascinating with a variety of eye catching colors and traditional motifs with some imaginative designs. They have always appealed the wealthy and royalty who used to patronize the crafts.

One such craft is the hand woven “Khandua” saree painstakingly woven by the hand loom weavers of Nuapatna and Maniabandha in Cuttack district of Odisha. These Khandua sarees are woven with mulberry silk yarn and sometimes in combination with cotton or tassar yarn. The fabric is also woven with calligraphy designs taken from the famous epic of “Gita Govinda” written by famous poet Jaydev. These “Khanduas” with calligraphy designs are reverentially offered to Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and sister Subhadra at Puri Jagannath temple as a ritual by the devotees. “Khandua” is very unique not only in construction but also for its colors, motifs and layouts woven with local soul and universal appeal.

Nuapatna and Maniabandha, the two villages and their adjoining areas have a long historical background of weaving typical ikat, tie-dyed cotton and silk fabrics spanning over a few centuries. Both the villages are situated in Athagarh sub division of Cuttack district in the state of Odisha. The fabrics mainly sarees, have been not only functional but also are ritualistic and artistically woven by the handloom weavers with a visual display of excellence in craftsmanship and skill brought down from generations as like any other Indian hand woven textiles.

The present article is the outcome of an empirical survey made by the researchers with 200 weavers of Nuapatna and 100 weavers of Maniabandha. In course of the survey, the past is mined out and a reflection is made on the economic and social condition of the weavers. The study reaches at the conclusion that neither there is much diversification in the craft process or product, nor there is a qualitative leap in the plights of the weavers. This creates a major challenge to the sustainability of the craft and the livelihood options of the weavers in the long run and the export potential of the state.

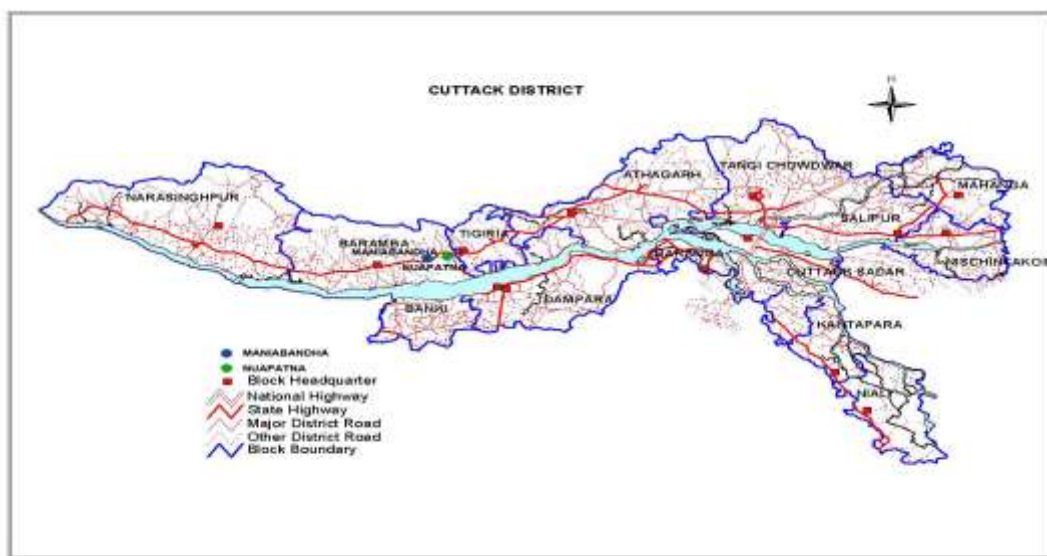
Key words: Handloom, hand woven fabric, ritualistic saree, tie-dye, Khandua, Pheta, Motifs, Design, Cotton Yarn, Mulberry, Dobby, Jacquard, Handloom Cluster, Warp, Weft.

1. Unique Craft Clusters with Unparalleled Craft Culture: Nuapatna and Maniabandha villages are unique in the entire hand woven craft culture of Odisha. Visit to Nuapatna village, the 3 km stretch road leading to Maniabandha from Nuapatna being interspersed with numerous weavers' cottages accompanied with the rhythmic beating sound of working handlooms, stretched warp yarn in the streets, colorful dyeing of yarn and open sun drying of multicolor dyed yarn, with typical country side unpretentious surroundings, offer an exhilarating experience devoid of urban clumsiness but with full of natural beauty.

Almost everything in the hamlet and household of both the villages has a story to tell. It is mesmerizing to listen the simple explanation given by the family of the artisans, more excitedly by the ladies of the family, showcasing the artistically skilled and innovatively executed hand woven products so painstakingly preserved in their small house for the last seven generations [1]. They don't show these products to anybody but only to the connoisseurs, patient listeners and lovers of traditional crafts. No wonder, the visiting tourists even from very advanced countries like Japan, Italy found to be awestruck and sighted to be hobnobbing in the most beautiful sojourns across the valley of Nuapatna and Maniabandha area.

The village Nuapatna is located at a distance of about seventy kilometers from the city of Cuttack and about hundred kilometers from Odisha's capital city of Bhubaneswar. It is well connected with good weather motor-able road with both the cities. The village of Maniabandha is about three kilometers away from Nuapatna and is also well connected with good road. Nuapatna lies between $85^{\circ} 15'$ to $85^{\circ} 54'$ east longitude and $20^{\circ} 20'$ to $20^{\circ} 30'$ north latitude. The area of production consists of four blocks of the districts namely Baramba, Tigiria, Banki and Athagarh. However, the main area of production is Nuapatna, a Panchayat having about 5000 weavers with more than 3000 looms.

Fig. A. Location map of Nuapatna and Maniabandha Village (Cuttack District)



Source: Gopabandhu Academy of Administration, Bhubaneswar

2. General statistics of Nuapatna and Maniabandha [3]: - (Census 2011)

Nuapatna and Maniabandha occupy a distinct place in the handloom map of the state. With a population of 7000, Nuapatna has 5000 registered weavers with 2183 looms, 22 cooperatives for the weavers, 20 self help groups, 29 master weavers, 364 tie and dye helpers, 2 technical assistants and 11 sizers. 5 national awardees have brought laurels to the weaving cluster of the locality. In contrast, Maniabandha with a population of 3500 has a total number of 384 looms. Virtually the two villages are synonymous with the production of Khandua and therefore, it is very often said that Maniabandha is Nuapatna and Nuapatna is Maniabandha.

3. Khandua Saree: Tracing the Ancestry

Khandua saree is hand woven by the traditional weavers of Maniabandha and Nuapatna area. It is prepared with mostly weft Ikat (tie & dye Bandha) designs by using cotton, pure mulberry silk and tassar yarn. Weaving of Khandua is a glorious chapter in the history of handloom weaving not only in Odisha but also the entire country dating back to centuries. Indeed, the saree may be considered as a crowning glory not because of its sheer elegance but because of its sophistication, grace and aesthetic appeal with functionality. In short, it used to be a symbol of romantic beauty with an oriental Odishi touch as nowhere in the country such sarees are produced except in Odisha's Maniabandha and Nuapatna areas. The motifs are taken from flora and fauna, animal imprints, bright colors like red, yellow, blue, green, maroon with bleached white are some of the attractions of the Khandua saree. [3], [4], [9]

Khandua fabric had its origin in the temple culture of Odisha. It is antique to the state. Historical references are found on the origin and use of Khandua fabrics for offering and dressing of the deities of Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath. This tradition is still followed as on date and Khandua fabric with the text from the famous epic "Gita Govinda" composed by immortal 12th century poet great Kavi Jaydev are reverentially offered to the deities at the renowned Sri Jagannath Temple at Puri. [1], [7], [2]

Madala Panji, the religious sacred document maintained by Lord Jagannath temple which also records the rituals conducted by the temple and states that king Ram Chandra Dev of Puri directed the weavers of Nuapatna to weave special cloth for Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath for clothing the deities on different festive occasions. And therefore practice of using hand woven fabrics for the lords is in vogue since 1710 AD. [1], [3], [12]

Legend runs that Kavi Jaydev wanted the "Gita-Govinda" text to be put on the fabric so as to offer to the deities of the Puri temple for their clothing. The deities particularly, were clad with fabrics woven with "Gita Govinda" Slokas which were initially woven at the birth place of the great poet at village Kenduli. For some unknown reasons it was not possible to weave Khandua at Kenduli. Hence, King Ram Chandra Dev of Puri directed that Khandua be produced at Nuapatna. It was in 1710 A.D as stated earlier. [1], [7], [6] Since then, Nuapatna started weaving the "Gita Govinda" Khandua for regularly offering to the lords at Puri temple. Today, seven generations of families carry on the legacy of preparing and weaving this Gita Govinda Khandua and they are the families' of late

master craftsman National awardees Shri Sudam Guin and the master craftsman Madan Naha of Nuapatna. [1]

Fig .B. Gita Govinda on Khandua Fabric



4. Khandua: Religion to Royalty

Khandua is a 5.5 meter wonderful hand woven traditional saree. It got patronage from the local royalty in the state of Odisha .Because of its elegance, combination of traditional colors, flawless weaving with eye catching motifs, the “Khandua saree” attracted the royalty of nearby princely ruled areas like Gajapati, king of Puri, nobility of Badamba, Athagarh and adjoining areas in the state of Odisha. Earlier the colorful fabric used to drape the rich and the royalty particularly the royalty consisting of the Puri, Gajapati Rajas, and rajas of Dhenkanal, Nayagarh, and Athagarh. Nearby princely states also used to patronize the Khandua, extensively used by the members of the royalty. [9], [12]The soul of the Maniabandha and Nuapatna is hand weaving. It has remained unchanged more or less through all the historic and economic upheavals the region has seen. Alas, gradually it is struggling to shed its past and move towards being a group of modern villages, of course handloom weaving taken up as a profession.

5. “Khandua”: The Product and the Components

“Khandua is can be broadly divided into two categories. They are: Gita Govinda Khandua and Khandua sarees.

a. Gita Govinda Khandua (Ritualistic Khandua-also called “Pheta”)

It is mainly used as ritualistic fabric devotionally offered to Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and sister Subhadra of the famous Jagannath temple of Puri situated at about 55 kms from Bhubaneswar. This ritualistic fabric is woven with the verses slokas taken from the famous epic “Gita Govinda” composed by the legendry poet Jayadev, and artistically put on the fabric with the help of tie and dye technique (locally called “BANDHA”) which is unique in character and design as per the photograph given below (also called as Pheta) [1], [2], [3], [4], [7]

- b. Khandua saree:**-The saree is hand woven by the handloom weavers beautifully portrayed and amazingly composed since more than a century. However the finding of the origin of this saree is not clear. As on today the length of the saree is 5.5 mts (6 yards) without blouse piece width varying from 42 inches to 48 inches (1.1 to 1.2 mts). The beauty and elegance of the saree mainly comes from its composition done in ikat layout of motifs and color combination.



Fig.C. Khandua Saree

Fig.D. Contemporary khandua Saree

Ikat is yarn tied and dyed design, both either in warp or weft or both. The saree is woven with tie and dye design on both the sides, body in plain light colors and the pallav (anchal) woven with weft tie and dye ranging from 0.30 mts to 0.50 mts The body weft is tied and dyed in two colors, with the colors of the border on both the sides and single color in the body of the saree as per the design. In course of weaving and with the superimposition of warp and weft colors, a solid color in the body and border of the saree is achieved giving beauty and grandeur to the saree. Hence, Khandua is basically tie and dye fabric with traditional designs.

Motifs

The elegance of Khandua is attractively visible with its bold motifs designed and woven in ikat designs. The motifs are mainly drawn from the natural surroundings of the area consisting flora and fauna, animals, birds etc. [1], [8]. The most popular motifs are creepers, flowers, elephants as may be seen in photographs.

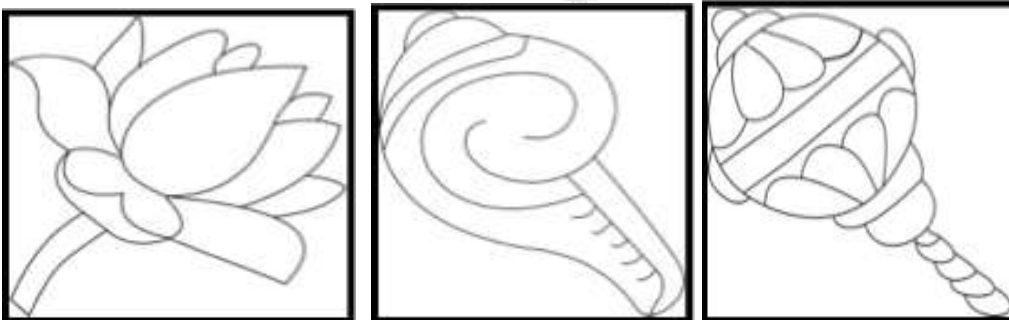


Fig. E. Khandua Motifs

6. Colors

The Khandua saree has a distinct characteristic which are different from other locally produced ikat sarees. The saree has a light color body and contrasting color border and pallav (anchal). Soft pastel shades like light yellow, Light pink, light green , light orange are used in body and dark shades in body and border mainly consist of red, maroon, dark green and blue.

7. Raw Material

The basic raw material required for the production of “Khandua” fabrics are cotton or pure silk yarn and the chemicals and dye stuffs required for dyeing the ikat designs. Pure silk yarn (mulberry silk) is purchased from Karnataka (Bengaluru) through agents or directly in lots (weight in kgs) which are mainly used for warp because of its better quality. The yarn is then degummed and processed for making the warp. However, weft yarn from Malda (Malda silk) from West Bengal is used. [1], [3], [10]

8. The process inflow

The purchased silk yarn from the market is first degummed (taking away the natural gum from the natural silk yarn) by boiling with water with a proportionate mixture of soap powder and small quantities of soda ash. After boiling, the yarn is washed and dried. It is now ready for the next process of bleaching and dyeing, if required otherwise it is wound on bobbins in the process of winding. Then warping is done as per the requirement of length, width, number of threads per inch etc and is wound on wooden rollers called warp beams. The warp yarns are then drawn through the healds and reed, the count of which is decided depending upon the density of the cloth. After drawing, the beam is now ready to put on the hand loom, adjusted the setting and then the weaving process starts. [5], [11], [12], [13]

9. General Observation:

In spite of its centuries old existence the craft has not attained new heights so as to derive adequate earning benefit for the weavers. The regular uninterrupted supply of raw material, marketing support and financial support, technical training, technology up gradation for high productivity, strengthening of cooperative societies are some of the important issues which need to be addressed with sufficient budget allocation for the development of handloom in general and improving the socio economic condition of the weavers in particular.

Socio Economic profile of the sample weavers

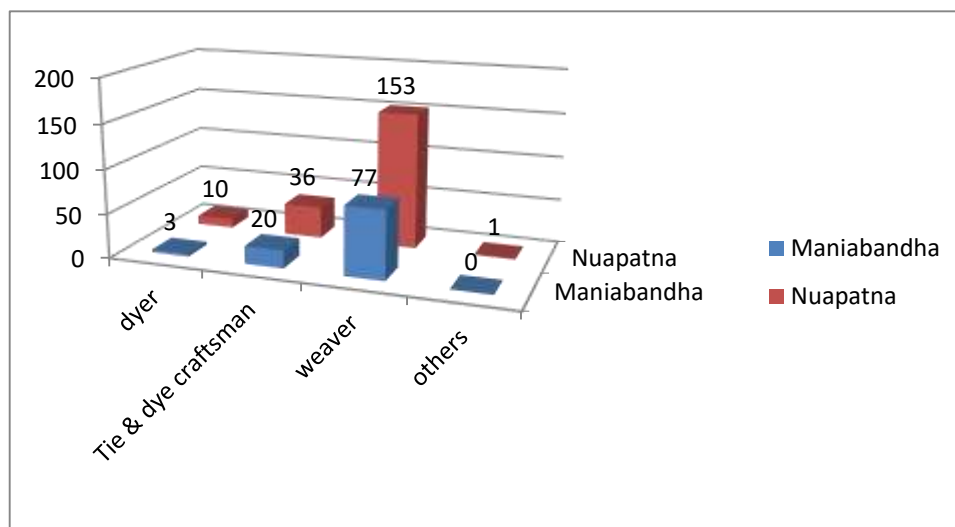
The Description of Khandua becomes half hazard without a reflection on the socio economic plights of the weavers. In this attempt, the socio economic condition of the handloom weavers of Nuapatna and Maniabandha has been analyzed through a sample survey with an exhaustive interview schedule. The sample size was 200 households at Nuapatna and 100 weavers' households at Maniabandha. Some of the findings of the survey are given below

Table .1 Category of Employment

| Village Name | Dyer | Tie & dye Craftsman | Weavers | Others | Grand Total |
|--------------------|-----------|---------------------|------------|----------|-------------|
| Maniabandha | 3 | 20 | 77 | 0 | 100 |
| Nuapatna | 10 | 36 | 153 | 1 | 200 |
| Grand Total | 13 | 56 | 230 | 1 | 300 |

Source: Primary survey data

Graph 1 Category of Employment



The above table gives us information about general type of employment in hand weaving industry. Normally in this area, most of the work is divided among artisans. To take an example a weaver only weaves on the loom, a tie and dye craftsman ties the design on several groups of threads as per the design outlines, a dyer dyes the tied yarn in different colors as per the colors combination of the pattern and in some cases “others” help in the process of making the fabric in addition to the help extended by other family members. Hence, the need for classification of labors in the handloom industry as per the present prevailing conditions as given below:

Table . 2 Employment Type by Gender

| | Village Name | Dyer | Tie & Craftsman | Weaver | Others | Grand Total |
|--------|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Male | Maniabandha | 3% | 20% | 77% | 0% | 100% |
| Female | Nuapatna | 7% | 16% | 78% | 0% | 100% |
| | Grand Total | 4% | 19% | 77% | 0% | 100% |

Source: Primary survey data

The traditional craft no doubt accommodates a good number of women. In the division of labour process women are found at different rungs of the functional hierarchy which is graphically depicted below. So, the craft is a boost to women’s employment as such contributes for their empowerment.

Graph 2 Employment Type by Gender

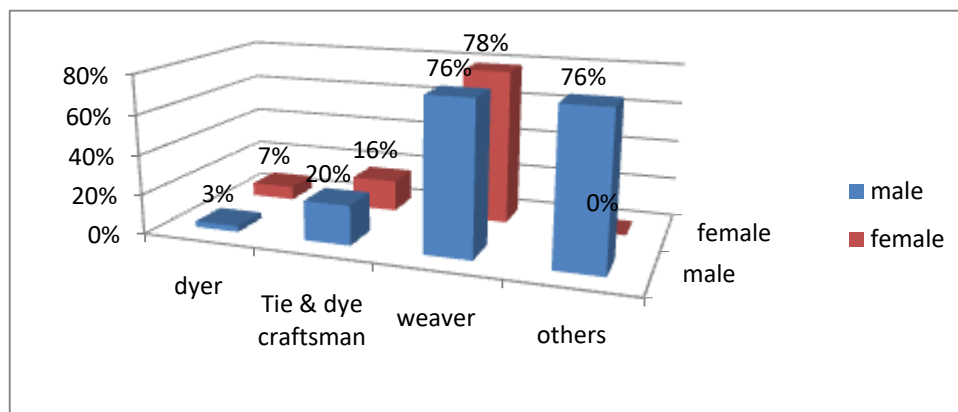


Table .3 Type of Family

| Village Name | Single | Nuclear | Joint | Extended | Grand Total |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Maniabandha | 4% | 64% | 32% | 0% | 100% |
| Nuapatna | 1% | 69% | 30% | 1% | 100% |
| Grand Total | 2% | 67% | 30% | 0% | 100% |

Source: Primary survey data

The survey brought it to the forefront that basically nuclear families is the dominant type of family among the weavers followed by joint families. In Maniabandha 64% of weavers have nuclear families while 32% have joint families while in Nuapatna 69% weavers have joint families while 30% have nuclear families.

Table .4 Religions of Respondents

| Village Name | Hindu | Muslim | Buddhism | Grand Total |
|--------------------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| Maniabandha | 26% | 0% | 74% | 100% |
| Nuapatna | 94% | 1% | 5% | 100% |
| Grand Total | 71% | 1% | 28% | 100% |

Source: Survey data

As per the survey, there are almost no Muslim weaver in Maniabandha and hardly 1% in Nuapatna, where as there is an appreciable blend of weavers belonging to Buddhism which comes to 74% in Maniabandha and 5% in Nuapatna. Hindu weavers come to around 26% in Maniabandha and 94% in Nuapatna. But is no appreciable difference in the weaving style of all the weavers irrespective of their community.

Graph 3 Religions of Respondents

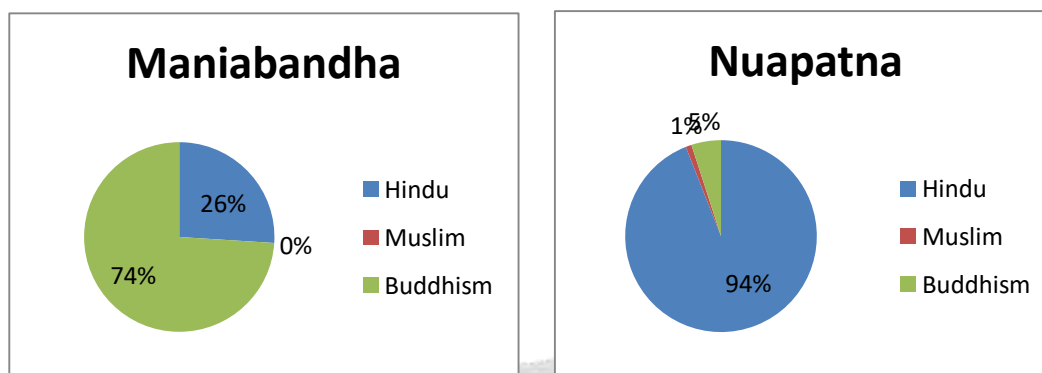


Table .5 Caste Distributions

| Village Name | SC | ST | OBC | Grand Total |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| Maniabandha | 4% | 0% | 96% | 100% |
| Nuapatna | 1% | 1% | 99% | 100% |
| Grand Total | 2% | 0% | 98% | 100% |

Source: Primary survey data

The survey indicates that most of the weavers in both the places belong to OBC (Other Backward Class) which is 96% in Maniabandha and 99% in Nuapatna. Weavers belonging to SC come to about 4% in Maniabandha 0% belonging to ST while in Nuapatna there are only 1% weavers belong to SC and 1% belong to ST.

Graph 4 Caste Distribution

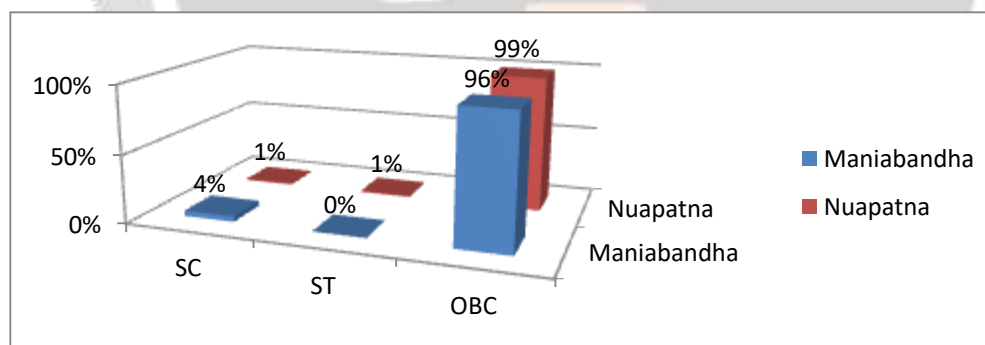


Table .6 Economic Status of the family BPL(Below Poverty Line)

| Village Name | YES | NO | Grand Total |
|--------------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Maniabandha | 30% | 70% | 100% |
| Nuapatna | 48% | 53% | 100% |
| Grand Total | 42% | 58% | 100% |

Source: Primary survey data

It is interesting to find out that inspite of developmental activities almost 30% weavers in Maniabandha and 48% weaver families in Nuapatna belong to B.P.L category. However, 70% families in Maniabandha and 53% in Nuapatna are above the B.P.L mark.

Table .7 Income from “Khandua Saree Weaving” per month

| Sl.no | Income from Khandua Weaving | Up to Rs.3500 per month | Income per day |
|-------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Maniabandha | 99% | 3500/30= Rs.117 |
| 2 | Nuapatna | 90.5% | 3500/30= Rs.117 |
| 3 | Average | 93.3% | 3500/30= Rs.117 |

Source: Primary survey data

Table .8 Receipt of Old Age Pension or Any Other Aid under Government Schemes

| Village Name | YES | NO | N/A | Grand Total |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| Maniabandha | 22.00% | 78.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Nuapatna | 17.50% | 82.00% | 0.50% | 100.00% |
| Grand Total | 19.00% | 80.67% | 0.33% | 100.00% |

Source: Primary Survey data

Receipt of old age pension is admitted by 22% weavers and denied by 78% weavers in Maniabandha where as in Nuapatna this benefit is received by only 17.5% and not received by 82% weavers. This makes their conditions precarious during their old age.

Table.9 Receipt of any Aid by any Member of the Family under NREGA or any other Employment Generation Scheme

| Village Name | YES | NO | Grand Total |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Maniabandha | 9.00% | 91.00% | 100.00% |
| Nuapatna | 20.50% | 79.50% | 100.00% |
| Grand Total | 16.67% | 83.33% | 100.00% |

Source: Primary survey data

Surveyed families responded with 20.5% benefit from this scheme from Nuapatna where as Maniabandha responded with only 9% benefit from this category. This on an average come to 16.67% families benefited and 83.33 not benefited. So, livelihood problems continue to exist for them.

Table .10 Receipt of Prime Minister’s Accidental Insurance Scheme

| Village Name | YES | NO | Grand Total |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Maniabandha | 50.00% | 50.00% | 100.00% |
| Nuapatna | 63.50% | 36.50% | 100.00% |
| Grand Total | 59.00% | 41.00% | 100.00% |

Source: Primary survey data

This benefit is seen to have been availed by 50% surveyed families from Maniabandha and 63.5 % families from Nuapatna averaging to 59% availed on the whole and 50% from Maniabandha and 36.5% from Nuapatna averaging to 41% did not avail the benefit.

Table .11 Use of Toilet Facility

| Village Name | Own toilet | Public facility | Open defecation | (blank) | Grand Total |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------|-------------|
|--------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------|-------------|

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Maniabandha | 35% | 8% | 57% | 0% | 100% |
| Nuapatna | 47% | 4% | 49% | 0% | 100% |
| Grand Total | 43% | 5% | 52% | 0% | 100% |

Source: Primary survey data

It is in this backdrop, this analysis gains importance. As per the survey it is found out to be very alarming that, still 57% household in Maniabandha and 49% in Nuapatna defecate outside in open spaces where as only 43% have their own toilets. Since Maniabandha and Nuapatna villages have become tourist attractive sites (visitors from Europe and Japan are very frequent), it is important that early steps should be taken by the concerned authorities to improve the present condition and aim for 100% open defecation free as part of “Swatch Bharat” programme.

10. Conclusion:

- Nuapatna and Maniabandha areas have a rich tradition of hand weaving the artistic Khandua Saree and the Khandua fabric with calligraphy designs in silk and cotton.
- The Khandua silk fabrics are specially woven for offering to the deities of Lord Balabhadra, Jagannath and sister Subhadra in the famous Puri Jagannath temple in Odisha as ritualistic fabrics.
- These ritualistic fabrics are designed with calligraphy with the Sanskrit verses taken from the famous Gita Govinda epic written by 12th century poet Jaydev.
- In spite of the centuries old craft, the economic conditions of the weavers have not improved.
- As per the survey, the average daily income of the weavers have not exceeded beyond Rs.140 per day and the average monthly income not exceeding Rs.3500 per month.
- The governmental assistance appears to be insufficient as per the survey data reveals.

Thus, the study reaches at the conclusion that neither there is much diversification in the craft process or product, nor there is a qualitative leap in the plights of the weavers. This creates a major challenge to the sustainability of the craft and the livelihood options of the weavers in the long run and the export potential of the state. More financial assistance, regular supply of quality raw material, adequate marketing support, technological and design intervention with plans for product development are some of the areas along with strengthening of the cooperative sector which need urgent attention for sustaining the craft and to preserve the culture and tradition of the hand weaving craft of the area.

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