

Tarakasi The Revival of Art, Craftsmanship, Culture, and Sustenance of Silver Filigree in Cuttack

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Abstract— This study revitalizes the silver filigree “Tarakasi” arising from Cuttack Odisha, concerning its significance to artistic history and creativity. Tarakasi is an intricate design indigenous art where fine silver wire is woven into beautiful forms, which has been practiced for centuries and represents the culture, history, and heritage of the region.

Tarakasi is rich in culture and ethnicity, yet there is considerable difficulty in it due to a lack of interest from the new generation, who trained under the vanishing master artisans, and with the decline of those master artisans, the threat of losing a unique craft comes into view. The purpose of this research writing is to present the ethnography of Tarakasi in Cuttack, comprehending the history and development of the craft and the socio-economic conditions of the artisan. This study describes careful approaches employed, life stories of the artisans, and the regional and artistic craft of Tarakasi. The observation and interview method has been adopted for data collection from the field. This study seeks to gather how contemporary society functions, the appeal and nature of Tarakasi, and demonstrate the need for maintaining their beauty and their role. In conclusion, the objective is to seek beauty in Tarakasi and endorse it to be recognized as part of the uniqueness of Odisha.

Index Terms—artisan, art revitalization, craftsmanship, silver filigree, Tarakas,, traditional craft

I. INTRODUCTION

The ancient city of Cuttack is well known for its beautiful handicrafts. It is a craft that speaks to the soul. Odisha, the state known as ‘Utkal,’ meant a place of art of the highest degree. It has a tradition of handicrafts, which are exclusive in their uniqueness. The craftsmanship is incomparable for its technical perfection and artistic superiority. It has the earliest tradition of making marvelous art by hand. (Kanungo, 2021) As mentioned in the article about Odisha’s

handicraft overview, artists have long been displaying their inspiring works of art to the world.

The objective of this paper is to explore and celebrate the delicate craft of Tarakasi, also known as silver filigree, understanding the process of form creation and material exploration. Silver filigree craftsmanship traces its origins to ancient civilizations, particularly flourishing in Odisha more than 500 years ago. Referred to locally as Tarakasi work, this art form rose to prominence during the Mughal era, becoming emblematic of artistic excellence. (RUNGTA“S, 2025). This craft is the key element of Cuttack’s cultural identity. Tarakasi, the elaborate silver filigree craftsmanship originating from Cuttack, Odisha, exemplifies India’s profound metallurgical and artistic heritage. This age-old art form entails the careful twisting and soldering of delicate silver wires to produce stunning jewelry, idols, and ornamental pieces.

Literature surrounding Tarakasi delves into its historical development, unique artistic characteristics, and cultural importance, while also addressing the challenges it faces and the initiatives aimed at its revival. The word “filigree” originates from the Latin terms “filum,” meaning thread, and “granum,” meaning small bead. Initially spelled as “filigreen,” it has since transformed into its present-day spelling. (britannica.com/art/filigree)

Despite its rich heritage, the craft faces difficulties due to the gradual disappearance of skilled artisans and the challenges posed by new generations. By examining the techniques, evolution, and personal stories of the artisans behind this art form, the paper highlights both the beauty and sustainment of Tarakasi. The art has been transmitted through successive generations,

which explains why silver continues to shine in the narrow backstreet of Cuttack. (Rudy Singh, 2019) Preserving this craft is essential as a representation of cultural heritage, and it is vital to investigate initiatives focused on its revitalization as well as the opportunities for future generations to protect its legacy.

II. METHOD

This article is a result of the weeklong visit to Cuttack. In this descriptive research documentation, both interview and observation techniques have been employed. Data has been collected from a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary data was obtained through interviews of artisans conducted in an informal manner. Observations were conducted to gain insights into the process of artifact creation.

III. ORIGIN OF THE CRAFT

Filigree has spread to numerous regions worldwide due to cross-cultural exchanges, ultimately flourishing in India. Historians debate the exact origins of this craft in Odisha, with some theories suggesting that it was shaped by Persian, Indonesian, and Greek influences, possibly brought to the region through maritime trade routes. Its prominence significantly increased during the Mughal era. (Archive, 2010) (Gatha.com)

Cuttack is counted to be a center of Tarakasi art due to the patronage of royalty and the hardworking community of artisans (Mohanty, 2008). The use of pure silver and traditional tools (Pattanaik, 2015) is the feature of this craft. The inspirations are taken from the intricate designs of Odisha's temple architecture, mythology, and natural elements (Sahoo, 2013). Traditional motifs like conch shells, lotus flowers, and Hindu goddesses are also featured. To handcraft silver wire and weave in a delicate lace-like pattern requires extraordinary skill and accuracy. The term "Tarakasi" comes from the Odia language, where "Tara" means "thin wire" and "Kasi" means "to wind the wire tightly." This technique produces an elegant, web-like pattern fashioned from silver. Comparative analyses show that while filigree work exists in other regions of India, Cuttack's Tarakasi is distinguished by its superior craftsmanship and religious significance (Das, 2017). There is no doubt about the rich history

of Tarakasi, but it is facing challenges due to lack of support, high silver prices, and machine-made alternatives. Few recent studies mentioned the ongoing efforts to revitalize this craft through government initiatives like GI Tag (GYAN, 2024), artisans' mutual support, and some innovative and modern approaches (Behera, 2020).

IV. COMMUNITY OF ARTISAN

The intricate filigree art of Cuttack craft is made by skilled artisans known as "Rupa Banias" or "Roupyakaras." These craftspeople are traditionally from the goldsmith community, with many running family businesses and others working for themselves or as casual laborers. (Mahapatra, 2001) (Sen, 2015) However, it is now being performed by the fishing community for livable earnings. Currently, only a few families in Cuttack are keeping the craft alive. (Pande 2024) Silver filigree craft supports both the local economy and the city's cultural legacy.

V. RESULT ANALYSIS

Unique insights were provided by visiting the homes and workshops of Rupa Banias, the master artisans who have passed down this complex art form through centuries.

It was exciting to watch their expert hands transform raw silver into exquisite jewelry and complex objects. The artists shared their experiences of belief, determination, and the difficulties they endured while practicing their profession. They described their family's past, which included making ornaments for kings and goddesses, and openly discussed the challenges they confront in today's culture. Each craftsman's statement reflected their dedication and creativity.



Figure 1: An on-site image of an Artisan processing the design of silver filigree

A. Artisan Interview Analysis:

Cuttack has been divided into 59 wards. Jagannath Ballav, Mansigpatana, Kazi Bazaar, Mohamadia Bazaar, Khatbin Sahi, Chandni Chowk, and Alisha Bazaar are dedicated to a large number of silver filigree craftsmen. These are important areas for Tarakasi artists who practiced traditional crafts and passed down their expertise through generations. Buxi Bazar, Tulasipur, and Nayabazar are now major centers for filigree craft manufacturing.

B. Challenges for Artisans

A. Table of listed observations

Sr. No.	Name of Artisan	Feature	Challenges
1.	Raghunath Das	A skilled artisan known for his fine filigree skills.	No separate space for workshop; the entire family is engaged with the craft
2.	Rabi Sahoo	A professional craftsman who is well-known for using traditional techniques.	Irregular orders, irregular supply of raw material and irregular payments
3.	Ghanashyam Maharana	Master artist who created Chaandi Medha, used during Durga Puja.	Poor financial condition, poor market to handicraft
4.	Jadunath Swain	Devoted to the revival and progress of Tarakasi patterns.	Working more than 8-10 hours a day in heat, high production cost with less

			profit
5.	Prakash Chandra Sahu	A renowned artisan who has made major contributions to the craft.	Limited market, limited credit facility
6.	Biswanath Dey	Contributed to the creation of silver jewelry for worshipping Goddess Durga.	Lack of exposure and poor work environment

Because of insufficient support and a falling interest among younger generations in engaging with these traditional crafts, the number of artisans has markedly declined over the years. As per the gathered information during the year 1995-96, around 3,000 filigree artisans were working for filigree, but by 2019-20 (Bhubaneshwar, 2024), this number had fallen to 612 only. During the interaction with artisans, they mentioned that now around 200 to 250 artisans just remain active in the craft. This group is remarkably the last generation of master artisans. Artisan Biswanath Dey emphasized the challenges that artists confront and how urgently their crafts need to be better promoted in both domestic and foreign markets. Other craftspeople expressed similar worries, pointing out that the unorganized sector produces the majority of Tarakasi crafts.

- Master Practices Are Being Lost: As younger generations show little interest in the profession, the number of artisans has drastically declined.
- Lack of Facilities: The potential for expansion in this craft is limited by the lack of workshops, storage facilities, and established trade associations.
- Monetary Challenges: Lack of financial resources and increasing silver prices make it difficult to produce in large quantities.
- Limited Market: Depending on middlemen, craftsmen have to cut down the prices at which

they sell their products, which limits their negotiating power.

- Technological and Training Deficits: The quality of products and their market reach are adversely affected by the absence of access to modern technology and business training.
- Decline of Traditions: Design knowledge and critical skills are at risk of being lost due to the lack of participation from future artisans.

B. Studying & analysing Filigree

It is indeed a privilege to witness an artisan engaged in the silver crafting of an artifact known as "Chaandi Medha," which serves as a backdrop during the Durga Puja festival. This creation is exceptionally beautiful, showcasing precision, patience, and skill. From the selection of raw materials to the final finishing

touches, artisans were required to follow established standards with meticulous precision at each stage. Alloy containing 90% or more pure silver, typically procured from Kolkata or Mumbai by various traders, is used. At first, raw silver, which is in the form of beads, slabs, bars, or bricks, is dissolved in a small clay pot placed within a bucket of hot coal. The creation of filigree jewelry involves many stages and requires a range of tools. The temperature is controlled using a hand-operated bellow. After approximately ten minutes, the molten silver is poured into a small rod-shaped mold and cooled by immersion in water. The resulting cooled silver rod is then transformed into a thin wire through a machine, a process that was historically performed manually with the help of two individuals operating a crank



Figure 2: Artisan demonstrating the process of 'Chaandi Medha' backdrop for Durga Puja

The flat wire is gently heated with a small kerosene flame to make it softer. The artisan then skillfully strings, twists, and shapes the wires by hand into a preset design. The piece is then immersed in a slurry of borax powder and water, with the powder being applied before it is exposed to a small flame, thereby ensuring that the delicate details of the design are retained. Following the soldering process, the heated component is molded into a specific design using techniques such as granulation, snow-glazing, and casting to enrich the overall beauty and aesthetic of the design. Subsequently, the crafted piece is polished with platinum to attain a durable shine. This detailed procedure requires significant physical exertion, but the result is the stunning filigree Tarakasi art.

VI. CONCLUSION

The rich cultural heritage of Odisha is exemplified by the delicate art of silver filigree. Engaging with artisans reveals that this traditional craft, along with its associated skills, is facing numerous challenges, such as economic hardships, a decline in the artisan, and limited market opportunity, and a major concern for its survival is the diminishing interest among the new generation. In order to make the Tarakasi's continued existence and revel, it is essential to provide an organized market network, workshop facilities, and wide publicity, which facilitate artisans to adapt while maintaining. the craft's legacy. Important actions should also be performed to use e-marketing and strong branding to promote the craft in both national and global markets.

It is therefore essential for the government, cultural organizations, and designers to associate together to conserve this tradition of craft. 'Tarakasi' can continue to serve as an inspiration of hope for artistic excellence for generations to come with the integration of innovation with tradition and eventually regain its importance in totality.

VII. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Furthermore, this research can be developed by conducting a comparative study of various filigree traditions both within India and internationally, highlighting the distinctiveness of Cuttack's Tarakasi. This can help to increase the potential to investigate e-commerce opportunities, export capabilities, and strategic branding for achieving global recognition. Use of digital documentation, including films, virtual archives, and immersive media, can attract outreach and aid in the preservation of this craft. In continuation of the aforesaid, conducting policy and economic research that examines the effects of Geographical Indication (GI) tagging, subsidies, and initiatives supporting artisans could give significant insights. Fostering education and skill transfer through structured training programs to the fullest can motivate younger generations to continue this traditional art.

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