

Culture And Visual Art Tradition Of Balasore District Of Odisha – With Special Reference To Traditional Lacquer Artist Kesu Das

***Dr. Akshay Kumar Panigrahi, Ph.D, D.Litt**

Lecturer in Odia, Baba Panchalingeswar Degree College Sanataragadia, Balasore, Odisha.
*Corresponding Author: *Dr. Akshay Kumar Panigrahi, Ph.D, D.Litt*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Balasore district was part of the ancient Kalinga which later became a territory of Toshala or Utkal, till the death of Mukunda Dev. It was annexed by Moghuls in 1568 and remained as a part of their suzerainty up to the middle of eighteenth century, to be precised up to 1750-51. Then the Marahattas occupied this part of Orissa and it became a part of the dominion of the Marahatta Rajas of Nagpur. The East India Company ceded this part through a treaty called treaty of Deogaon in 1803 and it became a part of Bengal Presidency up to 1912. But the first English Settlement came into existence in Balasore region in 1634 while Sahajahan was the emperor at Delhi. The first of English factories was established in this region in 1640. During this period Dutch and Danish settlements were also founded in this region. Balasore as a separate district was created in October, 1828 while it was in the Bengal Presidency. With the creation of Bihar province, Orissa was diverted along with Balasore district from Bengal to Bihar. But with the creation of Orissa as a separate State on 1st April, 1936 Balasore became an integral part of Orissa State. The national movement of independence surged ahead with the visit of Mahatma Gandhi in 1921. Similarly Praja Andolan was initiated against the ruler of Nilagiri State. The state of Nilagiri merged with state of Orissa in January, 1948 and became a part of Balasore district. In 3rd April, 1993 Bhadrak Sub-division became a separate district and from this day Balasore remains a district of Orissa with two Sub-divisions namely Balasore and Nilagiri having 7 Tahasils namely Balasore, Soro, Simulia, Nilagiri, Jaleswar, Basta & Baliapal and 12 Blocks namely Bhograi, Jaleswar, Baliapal, Basta, Balasore, Remuna, Nilagiri, Oupada, Khaira, Soro & Bahanaga. The name of the district is being derived from the name of the town, which is old and important. The name Balasore is recognised from the Persian word BALA-E-SHORE which means "TOWN IN THE SEA". The historical legend ascribes that the district has been named as per the LORD BANESHWAR (LORD SHIVA) of the town., which subsequently changed to Balasore during MUGHUL Rules.

The district Balasore accounts for people of different religions viz Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian etc. with many a caste, creed and community. The copper coin Collected from Bhograi and the collection of statue of Lord Budha from places like Avana, Kupari, Basta & Ajodhya magnify the existence of Budhism in Balasore and it is expected to be popular during "Bhoumakar". The statue of Lord Jaina at Jaleswar, Balasore & Avana hints about Jainism at Balasore and expected to be popular in 10th – 11th century. Balasore is highly famous as for "Saibapitha". Many a temples of (LORD SHIVA) are seen in various places of Balasore. The temples of Lord Shiva are highly popular at Chandaneshwar Baneshwar Jhadeshwar Panchalingeshwar Bhusandeshwar, Maninageshwar. District Balasore has got fame as "Saktapitha" as found from "Bhudhar Chandi" of Sajanagarh, "Danda Kali" of Khantapara and "Chandi Mandir" of Kharjureshwar. The Sun temple of Ajodhya, Seragarh, Nilagiri & Bardhanpur Gifts picture about "Sun Devotee". Vaishnav Dharma was popular from Gupta dynasty.

Vishnu temples at different places of Balasore and Khirochora temple (built during 2nd Narasingha Dev) highlights the facts. The two Jagannath temples at the heart of Balasore & Jagannath temple at Nilagiri, Mangalpur, Gud, Jaleswar, Kamarda, Deuligan & Baliapal magnify the culture of Balasore. Many a Masjids, Churches, Gurudwar (at Remuna) etc. identify about different religion and place of workshop at Balasore. Traditionally, Balasore is considered to have a rich heritage of both art and culture. A look into the history of this district, and one can view a culture that is strong rooted and art that depicts a lot about this district. The coastal town is known for the splendid number of temples that is surrounded by, and the richness observed in its culture and tradition. Diversity of belief and religion holds the culture of Balasore strongly.

The artistic skill of the Oriya artists is quite unsurpassable in the world. The murals, cloth and palm leaf paintings of Orissa are as old as its magnificent architecture and sculpture. The Chitrakars or artists were

patronised by feudal landlords and kings, leaving them free to scale new heights in creativity in all fields of visual arts.

The three main categories of Oriya painting, the Bhitichitra or the murals, the Patachitra or the cloth painting and the Pothichitra or the palm leaf engraving have remained more or less the same in style, down the ages.

Rich Tradition of Lacquer Art of Balasore

Lac holds a pretty special place in the history and culture of India, especially Balasore. One would find a special mention of this form of art in famous work like The Mahabharatas well as poems of Kalidas. Alta, the famous form of cosmetic, has been created using lac. It was ritually applied in the lips and feet of women since ancient times. Lac is used to fill the gap in gold ornaments especially the Lac bangles. For the Balasore women, lac holds a special place in their ornaments that have a special place in their weddings and decoration. Lac is the creator of art speciality in Balasore. Lacquer Art, as it is known, lights up this beautiful town Balasore with rich and amazing culture of art. It is very important to understand that lac art produces amazing products that are beautiful and resistant. One can create bangles and ornaments using Lac art.

Balasore owns Jaukandhei as an important part of its art society. The dolls that are decorated and presented to the audience using Lac art basically known as jaukandhei. Lac Dolls are an important part of folk art of Odisha, especially Balasore

LAC:THE-NATURAL-RESIN-AND-DYE

The term lacquer originates from the Portuguese word Lac, a type of resin excreted from certain insects. [1] In modern usage, Lac-based varnishes are referred to as shellac, while lacquer refers to other polymers dissolved in volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as nitrocellulose, and later acrylic compounds dissolved in lacquer thinner, a mixture of several solvents typically containing butyl acetate and xylene or toluene. About 50% of the world Lac Production comes from Indian states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and a part of Andhra Pradesh. Orissa Produces 25% out of India's total Lac output. Rest 50% is produced by China, Indonesia, Thailand etc. Orissa has a major wild source of Lac host plants i.e. *Kusumi (Schleichler Oleos)*, *Palas (Butia Monosperma)*, *Ber (Zizyphus Mauritian)* and many other minor host plants. The Advanced decorative techniques of using additional materials such as gold and silver powders and flakes ("makie") were refined to very high standards in Japan also after having been introduced in China. In the lacquering of the Chinese musical instrument, the *guqin*, the lacquer is mixed with deer horn powder (or ceramic powder) to give it more strength so that it can stand up to fingering. True lacquer-work is Chinese or Japanese in origin. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, varnish resin derived from a tree indigenous to China, species *Toxicodendron vernicifluum (formerly Rhus vernicifluum)*, is commonly known as the *varnish tree*. The manufacturing process was introduced in Japan and remained secret for centuries. These lacquers produce very hard, durable finishes that are both beautiful and very resistant to damage by water, acid, alkali or abrasion.

JAUKANDHEI RELATED TO ANCIENT TRADITIONS AND CULTURE OF ORISSA

The lacquer art of Orissa has a correlation with the streams of ancient Indian art and culture though a clear-cut study could not be done as yet about its genesis. The use of Lac bangle and Lac dolls in marriage and other celebrations goes back to ancient days. The Laccoated bamboo boxes and Lac bangles are more popular in southern Orissa. Many researchers say; "**Jaukandhei**' is the reformed art and craft of **Dhangra-Dhnagri-male- female** clay dolls worshiped by primitive tribes of Mayurbhanj in Orissa. Due to its creative and delighting Touch, the inhabitants of Balasore Who are physically and culturally so close to *Mayurbhanj* have incorporated it into their art and culture. By way of believing in the piousness of Lac in Hinduism, this couple-Lac dolls have been accepted by the mass. The folk artists of *Balasore* have reformed this *Dhangra-dhangri* clay dolls by innovating the firing and designing with colored Lac in hot-process technology. Later on the '**Shankhari**' and '**Jaura**' communities of Balasore had introduced in their craft Lac bangles or fired clay dolls designed with coloured Lac which is known as '**Baleswari Jaukandhei**.' This craft could easily grow up in Balasore because of the easy availability of Lac host plants in the dense forest of Mayurbhanj and Balasore. The clay on River Budha Balang basin is suitable for terracotta works. Therefore, the Shankhari community of Balasore continued this trade in maintaining their livelihood. Later on, the ancient port town of Balasore could transport the Lacbased crafts which led to the flourishing of the trade. Others say; "it is contemporary to the mailing of *Lord Jagannath*, because its forms and designs have many similarities with *Lord Jagannath*-the prime God of Orissa. '*Jagannath*' means the lord of universe who was culturally and ritually integrated from the faith of *Anarya – a tribe i.e. Sabara* into Hinduism in Orissa. The Surveyor General of India has also placed this craft in the Surveyor Map published for the Department of Tourism, Government of Orissa in 1986.

BALESWARI JAUKANDHEI'S USE IN FESTIVITIES AND FOLK CULTURE

By and by the couple male-female Lac dolls known as 'Jaukandhei' was popularised as the bride and bridegroom in the cultural tradition of the people of Balasore. Rich or poor, they celebrate their wedding on various festive occasions. Their Even the children of the locality play with Lacdolls couple celebrating their weddings in their childhood days. Mostly, the people celebrate this wedding wishing the wellbeing of the friends and neighbours especially with a view to bringing conjugal peace in the family. Some of the well up people had used *Sabari & Palinki* – the palanquin - arranging grand feast in such wedding ceremonies. This tradition was seen with the residents of *Sunhat, Patrapara, MansingBazar, Makalpur, Puruna Baleshwar, Ranasahi, Tapsi, Rasalpur* and many parts of Balasore. Consequent upon the changes in ethical values in the society, this traditional practice disappeared day by day and now the 'Jaukandhei' remains in the 'Jagatpedi' offered to the brides in bridal ceremony. The 'Jagatpedi' means *Jagat-universe and Pedi-box* i.e. universal-box a large box made of bamboo containing clothing, grocery, ornament, cosmetics and other consumables to meet the day-to-day need of the bride for a long period after marriage. Especially, the married women of Balasore offer traditionally designed Lac doll and Lac bangle to Land *Laxmi-Narayan* on the auspicious occasion of *Maha Sabitri Brata* wishing the long life of their husbands and peace and prosperity in their the conjugal relationship.

STRIVING ARTISANS OF LANGUISHING FOLK ART: BALESWARI JAUKANDHEI

After 1980s, due to the onset of modern technology and popularization of plastic dolls, ceramics etc, this trade started declining day by day. Besides the craft families of *Shankhari* community started shifting their occupation to other unorganized sectors because of acute poverty posing a threat to their trade. Moreover, the artisans were unable to cope with the modern science and technology in upgrading the quality of lacquerbased craft product as well as being unable to developing the designs according to the contemporary art and market trend.

Mrs. Basanti Sen wife of *Hari Sen* of *Olandaj Sahi, Barabati Balasore* had tried her hand in manufacturing and selling Baleswari Lacquer Craft till the nineties. Her business declined due to lack of diversified products and commercialization of craft in modern days. *Mrs. Sabitri Nandi* is the last in exponent the line and has to flag of such a languishing craft. Flying She is the daughter-in-law of *Mrs. Basanti Sen* and the daughter of *Late Gadadhar Sen*, elder brother of *Hari Sen* who belongs to the traditional craft family and was married to *Late Sankarshan Nandi* of *Barabati*. *Mrs. Nandi* learnt the Lacquer Craft traditionally, exhibited her artistic talent at national level, and won the national merit award in 2006. She has been participating in several exhibitions at state and national level. Baleswari Kala Kendra has adjudged her as the "Baleswari Kala Rani" in 2005. *Mr. Alekh Sahoo* a young terracotta-lacquer artist of *Nalamganj* learned lacquer craft from *Mrs. Sabitri Nandi*. *Mrs Kanak Lata Das* – a growing lacquer artisan learned lacquer crafts from *Mrs. Nandi* in a Skill Development Training and is promoting this art. Pioner *Silpi Kesudas* - an eminent artist of Orissa has started a revolution in Baleswarilacquerartsince2004.

A RENAISSANCE OF LANGUISHING FOLK LACQUER ART AND CRAFT OF BALASORE BEGENING

Silpi Kesudas founded an art organization in the name of *Baleswari Kala Kendra (BKK)* in 2004 and started a mass movement in revitalizing this languishing art and craft, working as the Executive Director. He has united a few eminent personalities and organizations like *District Industries Centre (DIC)*, Balasore, *Directorate of Handicrafts & Cottage Industries (DHCI)*, Orissa, *Bhubaneswar*, *State Institute for Development of Art & Craft (SIDAC)*, Orissa, *Bhubaneswar* and *Rural Development Foundation (RDF)*, Balasore for catalyzing this movement.

STUDENTS'-ARTISTIC-MOVEMENT

About 2500 school students of Balasore district showed their interest in revitalizing this languishing lacquer art by participating in different art workshops, seminars and competitions organized by BKK involving the experts and philanthropic organizations like *Bharadwaj Social Organisation, Educare, Fakir Mohan Art & Craft School, Fakir Mohan Sahitya Parisad* etc.

CRAFT WOMENS'TECHNOLOGICAL-AND-ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVE

59 female and male artists started a development initiative in reviving this craft from 2005 to 2006 at Balasore forming 4 Self-Help-Groups (SHGs) at *Barabati, Nalamganj* and *Arad Bazar* at Balasore Town and *Kalipur* in *Sadar Block*. Technical trainings on lacquer design and Lac bangle were conducted for them for six months involving the experts like *Sk. Moniar Hossain, Mrs. Fatima Begum- Rajasthani* traditional master crafts person on Lac Bangle of *Cuttack*, *Mrs. Sabitri Nandi- traditional lacquer crafts person* and *Silpi Bhaskar Behera* – a traditional terracotta artist of *Panchalingeshwar*. They were provided with the managerial trainings on SHG, Book Keeping, Marketing and Entrepreneurships. After that, Baleswari Kala Kendra conducted skill development training on lacquer craft for 10 women at *Gudipada* of Balasore Town and for 10 women at *Tartari* of *Nilgiri CD Block* in Balasore district with the support of *Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA)*, *Nilgiri*. Now, total 79 women artisans and 8 men artisans in Balasore district are involved in this craft. In

addition to that, Baleswari Kala Kendra conducts “Skill Development Trainings” and “Design Development Trainings” on lacquer crafts for the interested artisans and art-lovers.

Brilliant Artist Kesudas - the only Indian painter to introduce new colour medium lacquer on canvas.

District Balasore in Odisha is blessed with a living legend of art and culture, who is none other than Sri Kesudas, a lean and thin man with long hair and mustache who is known and loved by families of rural and urban interior of Balasore. Following the path of noted writer of Balasore Fakir Mohan, he dedicated three decades of his life for the revival of dying traditional art Baleswari-Jaukandhei which brought him fame and recognition at state and national level. Despite poverty and numerous hurdles Kesudas proved himself as the leading Odia artist of the generation to refine his own visual and conceptual vocabulary that emerged through his focus on the points of intersection between architecture, sculpture, and spatial analysis to revive, redevelop, and reestablish the disappearing traditional art, artist and culture of his district. His amazing effort can be found in myriad of public and private art collections both in the India and abroad, and has been seen in numerous exhibitions. He currently works in the field of child art, cartoon, tribal art, sand art and Baleswari folk art.

Contribute to Indian visual art field:

Kesudas is the only Indian painter to introduce new colour medium lacquer on canvas. Local folk art is painted by him with this new colour medium which is not only outstanding effort but also created a revolution in Indian Visual Art. He has been awarded with senior fellowship on Visual Art from 2014 to 2016 by the Cultural Department of Government of India. He has to his credit a collection of 300 pages record on Indian Lacquer Art and Culture.

Contribute to Baleswari art and culture

He revived the disappearing traditional folk craft Baleswari-Jaukandhei and organized numerous workshops in which number of women got training for making Jaukandhei to sell in the market for their lively hood. His sensational attempt inspired writers, play actors, magazines and daily newspaper to popularize this folk craft and female folk of Balasore restarted to worship Jaukandhei during Savitribrata. He also popularized Jaukandhei Bahaghara in Balasore, Bhubaneswar which is observed now as a social cultural festival with much pomp and pleasure every year.

Contribute to Odishan Traditional Art Rituals

Recognition of Patidion Cult: Patidion Ankana Utsav

The great Jagannath Cult of Odisha observes with devotion the Snana Yatra of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra with 108 pitches of water. As tradition Lords got fever for which they are worshiped by Daitapatis and Raj Vaidya in Anasara Ghara secretly. At this time Patti Dians are worshiped in the Jagannath Temple at Puri. In the Jagannath temples of North Odisha this tradition of Patti Dian is introduced by Kesudas and he organizes a 6 days camp of Patti Dian Ankan Utsav in which he personally teaches Patti Dian painting skill to the participants.

Contribution to Odisha cartoon

Initially Kesudas is a cartoonist and his spectacular cartoon works have been regularly appeared in reputed new paper, periodicals and magazines. He inspired to organize the first State level Child Cartoon Art Competition from 1987 to 98 which generated enthusiasm among the participants towards cartoon painting. To popularize the cartoon Art he has also published a book named “Barnamala Saha Sahaj Cartoon Sikshya” which teaches cartoon drawing in simple way on Odia alphabet. This is his phenomenal work to attract the children towards cartoons.

Contribute to Odishan sand art field

Adding Cultural value in Sand Art: Balire Naibidya

Sand Art in Odisha is a remarkable art form. Balasore with sand beach at Chandipur is famous as Sand City. To popularize Sand Art at Balasore his sand art captions are published in Odia News papers and he personally teaches students the technic of Sand Art. His “Balire Naibidya” programme organized during Rath Yatra at Balasore is a magnificent work of Sand Art and number of visitors are attracted to this sand Art point.

Amelioration of traditional and regional floor painting: Jhoti

Every Odia housewife is an artist when she draws Jhoti (drawing made by rice powder water on floor of house) at the time of Manabasa to welcome Goddess Mahalakshmi. This artistic cult of Odia housewife is a long grown traditional art form which was gradually extincting. Kesudas added fresh attraction to this traditional art form by organizing Jhoti-Pratijogita at famous public places of Balasore in which number of Odia ladies take part with enthusiasm. Now this Jhoti Craft is well known nationally.

Mass awareness of Tribal Painting:

Tribal Wall painting made by Tribal women of Odisha to make their houses beautiful. This art has a specific art form which attracts worldwide visitors. Kesudas took interest to develop this art form and capital city Bhubaneswar, Tribal wall Painting is seen on road side boundaries. Sarva Sikshya Abhijan of Odisha Government accepted the advice of Kesudas to implement Tribal wall paintings on the walls of schools. Besides

during the General Election 2009 , Kesudas organized a Tribal Art exhibition among the tribal students with the theme of “Transparency in Voting” to aware the general citizen about free and fair election.

Contribution to society: Naba matruka Puja

As a tradition loving personality Kesudas started his outstanding effort to refrain the youth from uncultured activities during Durga Puja Festival and for the issue of women empowerment a new tradition of Naba Matruka Puja. Nine more than seventy years old dignified mothers are worshiped every day from Mahalaya to Nawbmi day of Puja Utsav in which hundreds of youth take part to pay homage to mother.

Conservation of Horseshoe Crab: *The Fossilac*

In the coastal districts of Odisha , specially in the district of Balasore Horseshoe crabs (crab with blue blood) are available who are at the verb of extinction. This valuable species of crab is a boon to the mankind and rare for the use of medical science. To save this species from extinction, which is also known as Living Fossil as it exists since 450 million years on planet Earth, the great environmentalist Kesudas started initiative to organize sand art, exhibitions and conference to generate awareness among the people to save this species.

Cultural Adviser at North Odisha Chambers of Commerce & Industries (NOCCI)

North Odisha Chamber of Commerce and Industries (NOCCI), Balasore being attracted by excellent spectacular work of the artist in the field of Art and Culture , honoured Kesudas as Cultural Advisor of NOCCI since 2013. Kesudas has been continuing a weekend cultural programme at Utkalaa Open Theatre in the premises of NOCCI Business Park to promote new visual & performing artists, same time reward respected artists. For literature, he started Monthly Facebook Kabita Asar on 4th Sunday in every month.

This brilliant artist Kesidas has brought a renaissance in the field of art and culture of Balasore. He is the exceptional artist to introduce contemporary art like Insulation Art, Performing Art, Public Art and 3 Dimensional (3D Art), Sand Art, The Waste-installation Tread Art in Balasore. The innovative thought of this genius artist is rarely observed in any art form.

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