

## **Dokra Handi Craft: A Tool for Economic Empowerment of Informal Sector Workers of Odisha**

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### **Abstract:**

*Handicrafts can be defined as products which are produced either completely by hand or with the help of tools. Handicraft in Odisha can be defined as products which are produced either completely by hand or with the help of tools. In Odisha, handicrafts have great potential for employment generation and income generation as they hold the key for sustaining not only the millions of artisans already existing, spread over the length, and breadth of the state but also for the increasingly large number of new entrants in the crafts activity. The handicraft raw materials used by the artisans are easily available. The products of handicraft are mostly artistic, imaginative, culturally attached, ornamental, traditional, religiously attached and socially symbolic, for which handicraft has become important to everybody's life. The crafts and the artisans of the sector are a significant part of the economy and are making state's footprints in the global market. Moreover, the great design and carvings of temples testify to the fact that art and craftsmanship are not new to Odisha but the skill which Odisha got from its inherent culture and rituals. The handicrafts industry of Odisha comes under the unorganized sector of the village economy. The main purpose of the study is to identify the occupational challenges faced by the male and female workers working in the dokra handicraft industry of Dhenkanal district of Odisha. All total 60 male and female dokra handicraft workers have been selected through purposive sampling method*

**Key Words:** *Artisans, Craftsmanship, Employment, Handicraft, Unorganised*

### **Introduction**

Odisha, the land of enchanting beauty is well known for its exquisite handicrafts. It has a rich tradition of handicrafts, unique in its characteristics that have evolved along with its art and sculpture, temple architecture, folk art, dance, and music. The craftsmanship is unique for its technical perfection and artistic excellence. Having an ancient tradition of making splendid pieces of art by hand Odia artists have long been presenting their awe-inspiring masterpieces to the world. Age has not withered the beauty and dynamic diversity of Odisha's traditional arts and

crafts. Even today, despite the industrial revolution and the availability of cheap machine-made products, the handicraft industry has not only survived but also flourished amidst stiff competition.

Almost every district of the State makes a rich contribution to the numerous ranges of hand-crafted articles available. Each article is a class by itself and is also perceived as a painstaking self-expression of the artisan and the local culture. As an industry it is highly labour-intensive and decentralized, being spread all over the state in rural and urban areas and has contributed significantly to employment and to the GDP of the State. Also, many artisans are engaged in certain crafts work on a part-time basis. However, despite the large production base the domestic as well as export market remains under-tapped. A huge potential exists in the state for economic development in rural areas through employment and income generation by promoting handicrafts. Based on an assessment of the socioeconomic status, employment and market position, the handicrafts of Odisha, which are 50 in number, may be broadly categorised under the following heads:

- (a) Popular crafts such as stone carving, woodcarving, silver filigree work, appliqué work, pattachitra, palm-leaf engraving, golden grass craft, wooden painted toys, sea-shell work, terracotta and clay toys, costume jewellery, Dhokra casting, paper-Mache, cane and bamboo work and the like. These are called popular crafts because of their good market potential, and they provide employment to many artisans in the state.
- (b) Rare and languishing crafts are on a declining trend and some of them are on the verge of extinction. It is estimated that Odisha houses about 1.30 lakh artisans. The total amount of production generated by the handicraft sector is about Rs.150.00 crore. Handicraft goods are also exported to foreign countries. The export-oriented crafts of the state mostly consist of dhokra casting including brass metal wares, stone carving, appliqué and patch work, silver filigree, natural fibre craft etc. To promote the handicraft products and livelihood of the artisans, the Government is taking major initiatives like the establishment of two State level Apex Bodies for promotion of handicrafts that are Odisha State Co-operative Handicrafts Corporation Ltd and State Institute for Development of Arts and Crafts. Apart from providing training and skill development, product development programmes, GI Registration etc., the Corporation has shouldered the responsibility of marketing the products through Utkalika. Utkalika has now entered the Web-based Marketing System, tied up with eBay, India Mart and Snap deal for retail purchases by domestic and overseas buyers along with its traditional outlets both inside and outside the State. The State Institute for Development of Arts and Craft (SIDAC) is managing the training courses, Design Cell, Museum and International Marketing Cell. Besides, they are implementing the schemes of both the State Govt. and Development

Commissioner (Handicrafts), New Delhi. The schemes/ programmes are like the development of craft clusters, the revival of Languishing Crafts, the Organisation of Exposure Visits and the Organisation of Seminars/ workshops. With the implementation of modern technological intervention, the products are entering to the global market. By engaging reputed national and state-level designers, Design Development Training Programmes are organized in different clusters. Financial assistance up to Rs.12.00 lakhs is provided as a back-ended subsidy for availing bank loans for projects up to Rs.50.00 lakhs for the modernization of handicraft enterprises. Besides, financial assistance for the construction of Work-shed-cum-Housing for Handicraft Artisans, for setting up of own production unit, the Government is providing financial assistance up to Rs.10,000/- as margin money for availing bank finance up to Rs.50,000/-. Solar Lanterns to Artisan Households are being distributed to augment productivity. Handicrafts are a labour-intensive sub-sector of MSME which is of high potential employees for poorer sections of society. It is economically important because of low capital investment, and high-value addition. Promoting handicrafts is not only an attempt to led the rate of migration to urban areas but also the preservation and protection of old-age traditions and trade. It is only the mindset of the people which needs to be changed to accept and appreciate the craft, craftsmanship and the craft people of our State.

A very beautiful piece of land on the eastern coast of the country India is famous for its numerous handicrafts. There are a lot of handicrafts that have been running as the life force of Odisha and for which Odisha is famous. Some of the premier handicrafts of Odisha are PattaChitra, Sand Art, Metal Work, Silver Filigree, Stone Carving, Dhokra casting and making Puppets and Masks etc.

Dhokra is a metal-casted art that uses the ancient lost-wax casting technique. This art is said to be the first of its kind to use a non-ferrous metal like copper and its alloys-brass or bronze which do not contain iron. Going back to the age of metallurgy, the extracting of metal from minerals, about 4,000 years ago, it uses the process of annealing, where metal is heated to very high temperatures and allowed to cool slowly, while it takes the shape of an artefact.

Odisha is best known for its Dhokra metal casting which is an important traditional craft. This Dhokra casting is essentially folk art that is restricted in a few places. People of Sithulias/Ghantaras (an aboriginal caste) practice this craft. Other tribes like Ghaniaram, Thatarian and Gharien also practice Dhokra metal cast at Dhenkanal. The metal used for this casting is brass followed by the lost wax method. Dhokra metal casting is also found in other states. Especially when it comes to Odisha, Dhokra metal casting is largely set in the southwest of Odisha, namely Kuliana in the Mayubhanj district,

Kaimatin in the Keonjhar district, Haradagaria in the Puri district and Sadeibarni in the Dhenkanal district.

The metallurgical skills with wax technique to create such beautiful Dhokra metal casting technique have also been used by Mohenjodaro craftsman to cast bronze figurine of a "Dancing girl" of 4500 years ago. Using the same technique, the tribal families located at Dhenkanal cast the figures of gods and goddesses, lamps, boxes, ornaments and other ritual objects that are used for household needs. These products are sold mainly in local weekly markets. The craft of Dhokra metal casting remains a strong link to socio-cultural connections in Odisha. The rural brides of this region also receive a dowry of such metal casted wares.

The Dhokra people are settled over a vast tract in the mineral-rich central Indian tribal belt covering the modern regions of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and parts of Andhra Pradesh. They are also settled in the adjoining alluvial districts of Bankura, Bardhaman, Purulia and Midnapur in the western most part of Bengal.

The lost-wax technique, called *cire perdue* in French, is a metallurgical art that at once is one of the oldest and the most advanced one. Apart from India, it was used in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China and Greece the technique flourished in the hands of the Aztecs in Mexico during the 14th-16th centuries AD and in the Benin kingdom in south-central Nigeria during the 14th-19th centuries AD. It has been a favourite of many modern-day sculptors and for the last 100 years employed in dentistry and industrial manufacture. Modern technology is the art of making things on the basis of explicitly stated principles of science. The procedure of traditional *Cire Perdue* includes moulding a rough clay core sculpture of the required craft. After the core, a layer of molten wax is sculptured over clay and finishing touches are given to it so that the wax layer exactly replicates the required final metal sculpture.

One look at the artefacts would get you nostalgic about the primitive era when hunting was the main occupation of mankind. The common themes of Dhokra art revolve around Hindu gods and goddesses, and figurines of men, women, and children. The other common theme is different animals, ranging from horses to elephants and tortoises to owls. All these creatures have some other meaning or significance in Hindu mythology. For example, the owl denotes prosperity and death, while the elephant denotes wisdom. The horse represents movement, and the tortoise is usually representative of the feminine gender.

One would find all of these creatures deeply ingrained in the Hindu religion, with each having iconic roles to play in the evolution of the religion. For example, the tortoise is considered an incarnation of lord Vishnu and denotes that it carries the seas and the lands on its back.

### **Review of Literature:**

Chattopadhyaya, (1963) in her book "The Glory of Indian Handicrafts" has vividly described the handicrafts of different states of India. National Institute for Social Development and Applied Research, Bhubaneswar has done research work on technology, and firm size and since the Indus Valley period until this modern age, a group of nomads have studied this craft successfully. Guha, ET. al. (2020) in their research work "Empowering the Dhokra Artisans through the Accessibility of financial resources for the Survival of their indigenous technology- a West Bengal, India" pointed out that the dhokra workers are entrapped by the vicious debt loop to meet their financial requirements at a very high-interest rate. Poor work environment, engagement of child labour and lack of marketing facilities make a big question on the survival of these artisans.

Kashyap et al (2006) in his study found that craftsmen lack of understanding the demand for local products, marketing channels, price fluctuation and value-addition possibilities which can help them to develop a comprehensive intervention plan based on the market plan.

Mitra's (2008) "The Antiquities of Orissa" has been the earliest reference to the craft. Among: her aspect of Orissa's antiquities he has briefly dealt with the patta painting. He has said that the painters are a hereditary sub-caste of Chitrakaras and that most of the pictures painted on cloth are produced in Puri itself. Patel & Shah (2017) stated that artisans mostly work in traditional unorganized sectors in which they are vulnerable to exploitation and low wages. Artisans suffer a lot due to being unorganized, lack of education, low capital, poor exposure, absence of market intelligence and a poor institutional framework.

Postal& Cooper, (1999) studied that since the Indus Valley period until this modern age, a group of nomads have studied this craft successfully. The methods of thought, attitude, shape and appeal have been changed, but the style is similar. The product of this exchange was mainly idolized, but slowly, the artisans began to enter the market with new designs, due to changing times and access to current fashion. The production of decorative goods also has expanded the demand for specialized urban consumers and exports. Greedy trader's and intermediates of handicrafts took advantage of the lack of sufficient quality control for the commodity by the State and the charitable association. Smith et al (2004) point out in their study emphasized the fact that rural enterprise needs to be encouraged to preserve the countryside-not just economically but socially and culturally. The logic to introduce policy measures that encourage enterprise growth to constitute some reversal of the economic decline in rural areas is clear. Business enterprises have been targeted as a vehicle to bring about rural regeneration. The research found that most "non- farm but on-farm enterprises are started and run by women, but little formal support exists to encourage and sustain their growth. Upadhyaya in the book "Economics of



handicraft industry” feels that without design development, technological advancement and quality improvement, we cannot think of healthy growth of such an industry. It has been agreed in responsible quarters that even in the field of handicrafts a certain amount of mechanization ought to be introduced in order to obtain the two-fold objective of better finish and rationalization.

### Objective of the Study:

1. To analyze the economic conditions of Dhokra casting artisans and the related problems faced by them in the same work.

### Research Methodology:

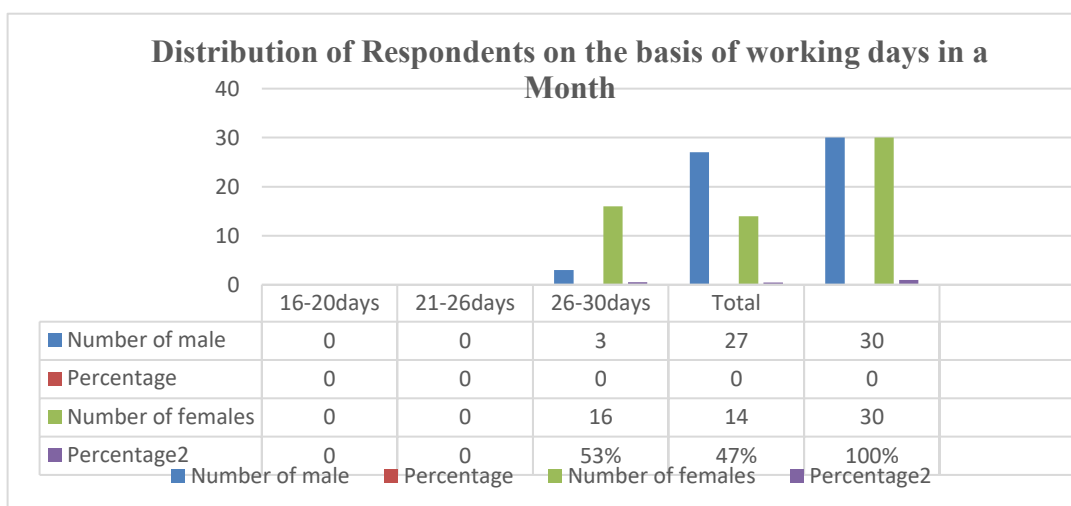
The present study has been carried out in Sadeibareni village of Dhenkanal district. All total 60 male and female artisans involved in dokra handicraft activities have been selected through purposive sampling. The age of respondents ranges from 15 to 60 years. The data for the study has been collected both from the primary and secondary sources. The information has been collected from the respondents through interview method.

Over a period, artisans have tried to teach other forms from their daily lives to create dhokra art. They have included holy lamps, caskets, utensils, and bowls in the gamut of Dhokra art.

### Result & Discussion:

**Graph- 1.a**

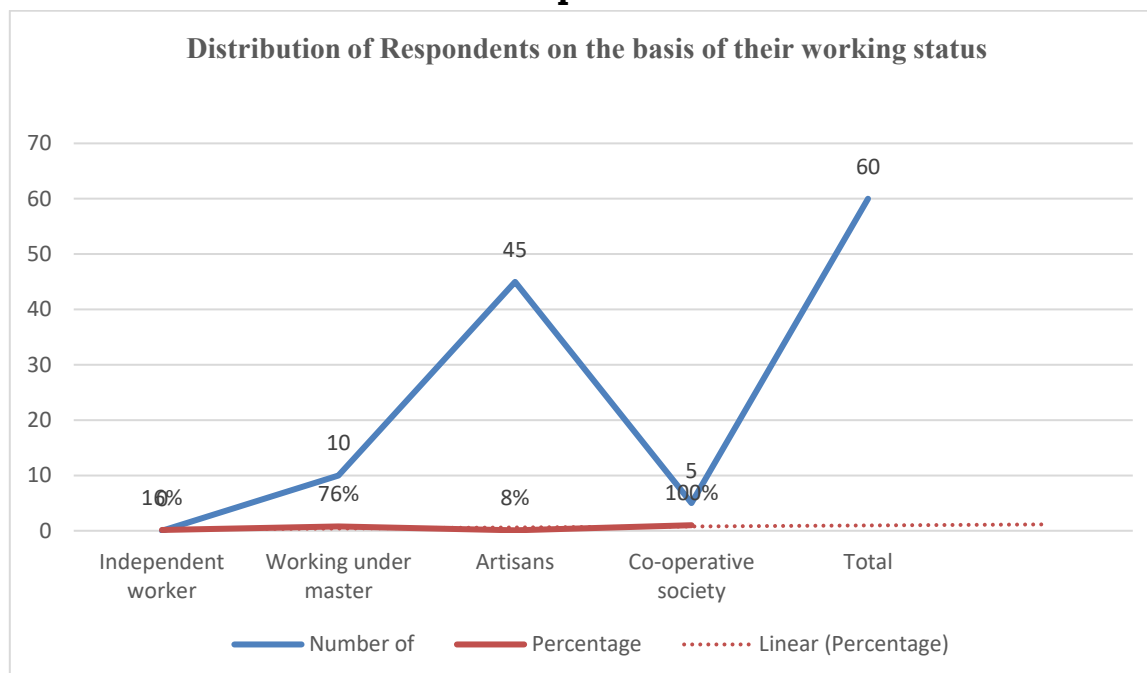
Source: primary survey



The above graph 1.a shows that about 90% of male respondents are working for 26-30 days, 10 % of respondents are working for 21-26 days where as 47% of female respondents are working for 26-30 days and 53% of them are working for 21-26 days. As the women are engaged in caring nature of work so they can't able to spare more time for productive work. So the participation of male artisans for 30 days work is more than the female

artisans. Their household responsibilities compel them to spare less time in artistic work compared to male workers.

**Graph- 1.b**



**Source: primarysurvey**

The above graph 1.b shows that in the working status-wise classification of respondents, 8% of weavers work in a cooperative society, 16% of artisans work under the independent weaver and 76% of weavers work under the control of master artisans.

### **Reason for working under Master Artisans**

While the study found that around 76 % of respondents were seen working under master artisans providing raw materials like brass, mahama, coal etc the reason behind the control of master artisans. Lack of financial sources & lack of marketing facilities is the main problem of artisans.

### **Distribution of Respondents on the basis of participation in various type of activities related to Dhokra Work**

**Table- 1.1**

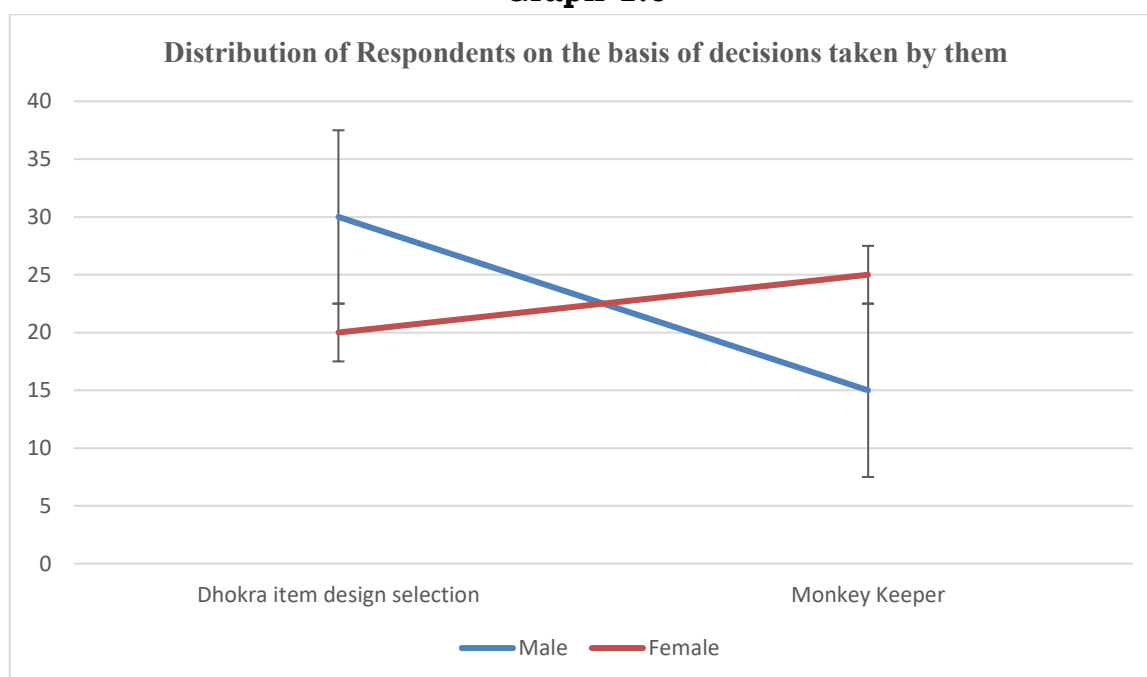
SL. No	Step of processing	Number of male respondents	Percentage	Number of female respondents	Percentage
1	Collection of different type of clay	--	--	30	100%
2	Core Making	4	13%	30	100%

3	Modelling	24	40%	15	50%
4	Moulding	12	20%	30	100%
5	De-waxing	10	3%	25	83%
6	Casting	25	83%	5	16%
7	Finishing	30	100%	0	0%

Source: primary survey

The above table 1.1 shows the participation of male & female respondents in dhokra casting. Mainly women are playing a vital role in dhokra casting. Women are taking an active part in the production process because the creation of dhokra craft is complex and time taking. So different steps are commonly divided among the family members, taking up most of the laborious work like gathering scrap metal, working in the furnaces to melt it and giving shape to it with the Mold and women are engaging themselves in preliminary preparations and creative activities, women are commonly seen laying ribbons of wax around the Mold for giving intricate designs to the final products.

**Graph-1.c**



Source: primary survey

The above graph 1.c shows that 100 percentage of male and 66 percentage of female take part in the in the dhokra design selection but in case of purchase and sale of the same item is done by male member of the family. Though the women within the family do not take part in the purchase and sale of the products but the reverse situation is found in case of keeping the money within the family. Around 83 percent of females and 50 percent of



male keep the money within the family. This reflects the sense of gender equality in the mindset of the respondents.

### **Distribution of Respondents on the basis of involvement of family Members in dhokra making**

**Table 1.2**

<b>Sl.no</b>	<b>Number of family members</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	0-1	--	--
2	2-3	14	23
3	4andmore	46	77
Total		60	100

Source: Primary survey

The above table 1.2 states that about 77% of families have more than 4 numbers of family members engaged in dhokra craft. Whereas 23% of families having 2-3 members are engaged in the same activity. This shows the dhokra work requires a greater number of persons to proper handicraft works.

### **Distribution of Respondents on the basis of training Programme received from the Government**

**Table 1.3**

<b>Sl No</b>	<b>Name of the Training Programme</b>	<b>Number of male respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>No female responders</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Gurushisya Parampara	10	33%	20	66%
2	MCM	21	70%	25	83%
3	Craftvillageprogramme	0	0%	0	0
4	Designdevelopment underhandicraft	20	66%	4	13%
5	AamAadmiYojana	0	0%	0	0%
6	HandicraftAward	6	6%	2	6%
Total		30	100	30	100

**Source:Primary survey**

The above table 1.3 depicts the training programme scheme provided by the government in the handicraft industry. It states that in their training

programme 70% of male Artisans take part in the MCM training and 66% take part in Design development under handicrafts, & 33% of female artisans take part in Guru Shishyaparampara training & only 6% of both male& female respondents got handicraft award & around 83% of female respondents joined in MCM training. About 66% of female artisans take part in Guru ShishyaParampara, 13%in design development under handicraft. And no one respondent in Sadeibereni village facilitated in craft village programme &AamAadmiyojana.

### Distribution of Respondents on the basis of outside Trading

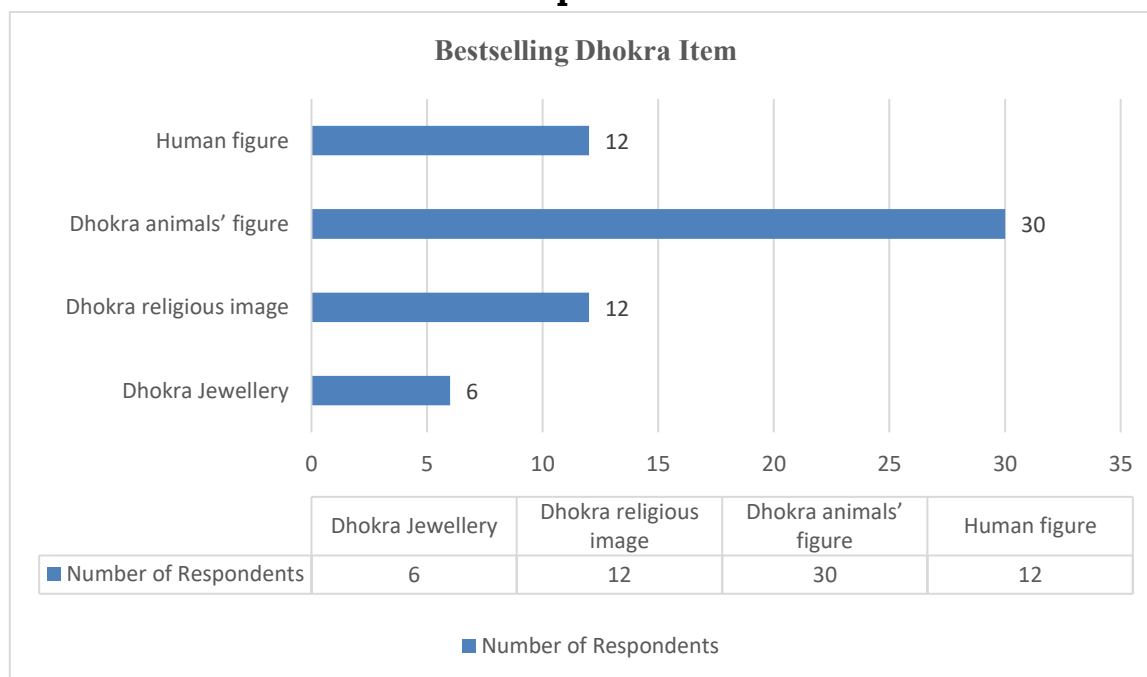
**Table 1.4**

Sl. No	Places	Male respondents	Percentage	Female respondents	Percentage
1	In Odisha	25	50%	20	40%
2	Outside Odisha	20	40%	10	20%

Source: Primarysurvey

The above table 1.4 shows that 50% of male respondents sell their Dhokra items in Odisha's many places in mela and jatra time. & 40% of male respondents go outside for trading purposes. Around 40% of female respondents sell their items in many places of Odisha like Bargarh, Rourkela, and Sambalpur & also sell their dhokra items in Adivasi mela, jagarajatra, Laxmi puja and etc. Only 20% of female respondents are going outside for trading purposes.

**Graph- 1.d**

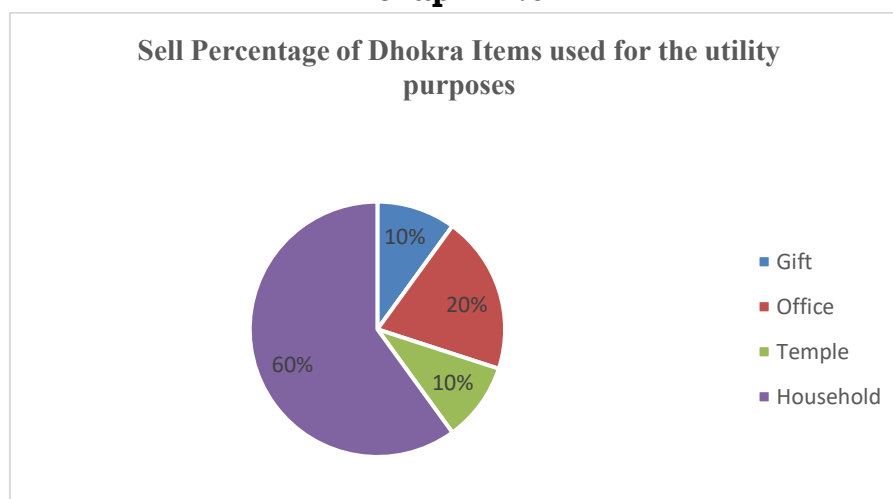


Source: Primarysurvey

The graph 1.d shows that about 50% of respondents are engaged in selling dhokra animal's figures and 20% of respondents are engaged in selling dhokra religious and human figures respectively. The above said dhokra items are considered as the bestselling dhokra items in the Sadeibarani village.

### **Sell Percentage of Dhokra Items used for the utility purposes**

**Graph- 1.e**



Source: Primarysurvey

The graph 1.e shows that about 60% of dhokra house hold items have been used for utility purposes. It is sold in good amounts because the household things use in daily basis at home or for decorating purposes. Women love to use these types of handicraft products at home like dhokra night lamps, peacock, elephant, turtle, horse etc. Whereas around 20% of dhokra items like pen stand and flower set etc are used for office utility purposes. The respondents have reported that the only 10% of temple utility items like Diya stand (jagara), God and Goddesses' idol, & also gift items are sold by respondents because it is very costly but these are occasionally sold in high quantity.

### **Distribution of Respondents on the basis of uniqueness of the designs of the Dokhra items**

**Total 1.5**

Sl. No	Types	Number of respondents engaged in developing unique Dhokra Designs	Percentage
1	Development of a new unique design which differs from Competitors.	35	58%

2	Developed unique Cultural aspects in the design of the products.	15	26%
3	Designing more unique products.	10	16%
	Total	60	100%

Source: Primary survey

The above table shows the development of unique design of items in the village of Sadeibareni. Around 58% of respondents said that they develop new unique designs, & 26% of respondents said they developed unique cultural aspects in the design of the products. & only 16% of respondents said that in comparison to a competitor, they produce more unique products.

The design has not changed much in the case of the dhokra products, since most of the design inspiration comes from nature and daily activities. However, design has become a bit contemporary as noticed in a few products where like: the dhokra door handle and night lamp lord Ganesh was seen reading a book on riding a scooter. This change has come with very few like 2/3 of artisans.

### **Challenges faced by artisans of the Dhokra Industry at work place**

**Increases in the price of raw materials** have affected the artisans in numerous ways. Some of them have shifted to other ways of earning their living, while few are still struggling to manage the low sale and high value of raw materials. This has also affected the enthusiasm of the artisans, resulting in little or no innovation in the products.

**Lack of knowledge** about the new designs that are being experimented with, and lack of encouragement to work with innovative ideas is causing a major setback among the artisans.

**Unavailability of Bank Account** Most of the artisans do not have a bank account and depend on the local money lenders to take loans, who charge them at a higher rate of interest. They are unaware of the various minimum wage facilities available from the Government.

**Market Competition** okra Crafts, which are produced with traditional skill are under threat of steep decline because of competition from the cheaper machine-made local substitutes and imports, which give greater uniformity and finish.

**Protection of own cultural identity** is a major issue faced by the artisans. Numerous businessmen who are not producers of Dokra have set up

factories that produce similar metal products and get traded within and outside India.

- 1) Following the old technique and not adapting to modern technology, is causing a delay in the production process.
- 2) Lack of proper lighting has affected the work of the artisans. Since they are not able to work much in the evening, as they are mainly dependent on natural lighting.

### **Marketing Challenges**

Globalisation has improved the market conditions for Dhokra crafts. But this has not really helped the artisans because most of the profits are made by the middlemen who help them connect to the rest of the world. Lack of awareness and education is the major reason for the loss experienced by the Dokra artisans. Most of the time they are unaware of the demand for their craft.

The main problems faced by the artisans when it comes to marketing are:

Due to a **shortage of financial resources**, advertising publicity cannot be undertaken by them. The absence of a marketing network has been a discouraging factor in this region.

The practice of artisans **depending on the middlemen** for the procurement of raw materials and selling of finished products has been a major disadvantage, as this has reduced the profits earned by the artisans.

**Huge disparity in the pricing of the products** has also reduced the demand for the products. For example, the same products in one place are found for R\$200 however in another part of this area it is priced differently. This has also affected consumer behaviour.

**Lack of proper transportation facilities** has also restricted the artisans from travelling to nearby places to explore more and find another channel to sell their products.

### **Conclusion:**

The Dhokra artisans of Sadeibareni village face problems mainly with their identity as they left their native place 9 years ago for an argument among their fellow villagers which happened due to interference of a third party i.e., an NGO who use to buy and sell the products from the artisans. That NGO created disturbance among the people of the village by buying the products from half of the villagers and neglecting the other half people, which affected both their social and economic status. So, the people who were neglected evacuated to a forest area and started living there with their families and working from the same place. This change created a huge disturbance in their daily life as the children couldn't go to school in fear of wild animals and monkeys which affected their education.

After facing problems like this the new generation of children is not willing to pursue the same dhokra crafting as a profession as it has a few drawbacks if the end product won't

perfect then they have to face a loss, and it takes a longer period of time to prepare a perfect dhokra craft, so a maximum of people with age group 30 – 50 male are working on the same craft and younger girls of age below 30 are working as a support to male workers as they are to be married soon.

As the people there has no good source for learning better technique and contacts to sell their products so their only hope is the master artisans who help them learn and sell their products in the market. The maximum earning of the artist ranges from 10,000 to 15,000. The government schemes don't reach the m on time for which they are unaware of various government policies too.

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