



PRESERVING TELANGANA'S ARTISTIC HERITAGE: THE LEGACY OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

Bunga Dashamma

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Department of History

Osmania University, Hyderabad

dashammabunga99120@gmail.com

Abstract

South West Telangana boasts a rich cultural history, reflected in its diverse traditional folk arts and crafts. This article explores the significance of these art forms, including Bidriware, an exquisite craft featuring silver and gold inlays on blackened metal; Pemberti metal crafts, known for their intricate temple adornments and global appeal; and Dhokra casting, an ancient technique admired for its rustic charm. Additionally, Banjara embroidery and Kummari pottery demonstrate the deep connection between artistic expression and daily life in Telangana.

While these crafts symbolize cultural heritage and exceptional craftsmanship, they face growing challenges due to industrialization, rising material costs, and dwindling markets. Once-thriving artisan communities, such as those in Pemberti, now struggle to sustain their traditions, necessitating urgent efforts for revival and preservation. This article examines the historical roots, technical intricacies, and cultural significance of these crafts while advocating for initiatives to safeguard them. By preserving these art forms, Telangana can uphold its cultural identity and provide economic opportunities for its artisans.

Keywords: *South West Telangana, Folk Arts, Craftsmanship, Bidriware, Pemberti Metal Crafts, Dhokra Casting, Kummari Pottery, Medara Basketry, Cultural Heritage, Traditional Art, Artisan Legacy, Handicrafts, Mughal Motifs, Temple Adornments, Economic Empowerment, Sustainability, Rural Artisans, Craft Revitalization, Global Appreciation of Indian Art.*

Introduction

Telangana, a southern Indian state, is renowned for its rich artistic and cultural heritage. The districts of South West Telangana, including Adilabad, Bhadradri Kothagudem, Medak, and Hyderabad, are home to a variety of traditional crafts that embody the region's history, beliefs, and lifestyles. These crafts, passed down through generations, not only serve as cultural symbols but also provide livelihoods to local artisans.

Among the most iconic crafts is **Bidriware**, a centuries-old art that blends Persian and Indian influences. Originally developed in Bidar, Karnataka, Bidriware flourished in Hyderabad, where skilled artisans mastered the art of casting, engraving, inlaying, and oxidizing metal to create intricate designs. The striking contrast between blackened metal and silver or gold inlays, often inspired by Mughal motifs, defines this exquisite craft.

Another significant craft is **Pemberti metalwork**, which dates back to the Kakatiya dynasty and later flourished under the patronage of the Nizams. Artisans in the village of Pemberti

specialize in crafting brass, copper, and bronze temple adornments, idols, and ceremonial objects. Their work, known for its elaborate detailing and spiritual symbolism, is highly sought after in both Indian and international markets.

Dhokra casting, practiced by tribal communities such as the Gonds and Marias, further enriches Telangana's artistic landscape. This lost-wax technique involves molding intricate designs in clay and wax, producing rustic yet elegant metal figurines, bells, and ceremonial objects.

Additionally, **Kummari pottery** and **Medara basketry** highlight the symbiotic relationship between artistry and rural life. The Kummaris, or potters, create earthenware that serves domestic and ritualistic purposes, while the Medaras, or basket makers, craft bamboo baskets that are both functional and decorative.

However, these art forms face numerous challenges. The rising cost of raw materials, competition from mass-produced goods, and a lack of institutional support have led to a decline in artisan communities. Once-thriving villages like Pemberti are witnessing dwindling numbers of artisans, forcing many to abandon their craft for alternative livelihoods. To ensure the survival of these art forms, sustainable interventions are necessary.

This article delves into the legacy of South West Telangana's crafts, examining the techniques, cultural significance, and challenges faced by artisans. It also proposes strategies for revitalization, emphasizing the need for government initiatives, modern marketing strategies, and craft innovation. Preserving these traditions will not only sustain Telangana's cultural identity but also bolster tourism and create economic opportunities for artisans.

Bidriware: The Art of Silver Inlay

Introduction:

Bidriware is a sophisticated craft involving the inlay of silver or gold on blackened metal. Originating in Bidar, Karnataka, the art spread to Hyderabad, where it became a prominent feature of the region's handicraft tradition. Introduced by Persian artisans, Bidriware has retained its traditional aesthetic while incorporating Mughal-inspired designs.

Techniques and Materials:

The process of making Bidriware involves four main steps: casting, engraving, inlaying, and oxidizing. Designs, often featuring floral and geometric patterns, are engraved and filled with silver or gold. The distinct black finish is achieved by oxidizing the metal using a special soil mixture from Bidri Fort.

Cultural Significance:

Bidriware items, such as vases, jewelry, and decorative objects, embody the grandeur of the Mughal era and continue to be cherished for their intricate beauty.

Economic Impact:

Despite its artistic value, Bidriware faces declining demand due to the influx of cheaper machine-made imitations. Efforts to market it globally and integrate contemporary designs can help sustain this historic craft.

Pemberti Metal Crafts: The Legacy of Temple Artistry

Cultural Significance:

Originating in the village of Pemberti, Telangana, this craft involves the creation of brass and copper artifacts, temple adornments, and ceremonial items. Historically supported by the Kakatiya rulers and later by the Nizams, Pemberti artisans have played a vital role in preserving Telangana's religious and artistic traditions.

Techniques and Expertise:

Pemberti artisans are known for their detailed work on temple doors, idols, and flagpoles, with some pieces featured in renowned temples such as Rajarajeswara Swamy Temple in Vemulawada and Yadadri Temple in Telangana.

Challenges and Preservation Efforts:

Despite its historical importance, the craft is declining due to rising material costs, competition from industrial production, and a shrinking artisan workforce. However, recent government policies are attempting to revive interest through funding schemes, artisan cooperatives, and craft tourism initiatives that promote Pemberti metalwork as a cultural attraction.

Conclusion

Telangana's traditional crafts form an invaluable part of its cultural identity. The meticulous craftsmanship of Bidriware, Pemberti metalwork, Dhokra casting, Kummari pottery, and Medara basketry showcases the state's artistic diversity. However, these art forms face threats from industrialization, high material costs, and waning interest among younger generations.

To safeguard these traditions, concerted efforts must be made through government policies, training programs, and global market integration. By fostering innovation and preserving these crafts, Telangana can ensure the sustainability of its rich artisanal heritage while providing economic stability to its artisans. The legacy of South West Telangana's folk arts is



not merely a relic of the past but a living testament to human creativity and cultural resilience.

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