



Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs
of West Bengal



SITALPATI

The Cool Weaves



“*The notion of education through handicrafts rises from the contemplation of truth and love permeating life’s activities.*”

Mahatma Gandhi

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West Bengal is a treasure trove of natural and cultural heritage. The intangible cultural heritage of Bengal is an exemplary instance of the aesthetic lineage of Bengal. Utilitarian lifestyle items like basketry made with date palm leaves and Sabai grass, hand spun and hand woven jute rugs (Dhokra), mats made with cane slips (Sitalpati) or Madurkathi (Madur), pottery, Kantha-spreads, decorative and ritualistic items made out of Shola and others, reflect a curious fusion of indigenous craftsmanship and utility. Bengal’s art and craft reflect cultural history, ethnic roots, and lifestyle in-tune with nature. Variety of masks, Dokra and metal work, range of indigenous weaves and embroideries, dolls, masks and figurines curved out of wood are examples of Bengal’s artistry. Culture of Bengal is enriched by the mellifluous tunes of the Baul, Bhawaiya, Bhatiyali singers, rapturous dances of Chau, Raibenshe and Jhumur, storytelling traditions like puppetry and Patachitra, and folk theatres like Gambhira, Banbibir Pala among other folk forms.

The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub (RCCH) Project is an initiative of the Department of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) and UNESCO aiming to rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal and strengthen rural creative enterprise. The journey started in 2013 and the RCCH project currently covers 50,000 handicraft and folk artists across the state. It has strengthened the ecosystem supporting the transmission of traditional skills in art and craft, fostered direct market linkage, engaged youth in pursuing their traditions, and promoted cultural tourism to the villages of the artists. The project is indeed a testimonial to the contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to sustainable development, social inclusion and also to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





Sitalpati

Sitalpati are cooling mats that are commonly found in most of the Bengali households. This traditional art of making beautiful mats involves weaving together the strips of a plant known as 'Murta.' The comfort and aesthetic appeal are obtained by the weaver's skills, weaving pattern and innovative use of colour and design. Weaving Sitalpati is a family based endeavor, where men are engaged in growing and extracting the plant Murta while women are mostly engaged in weaving.



Varieties of Sitalpati

There are various kinds of Sitalpatis like, Kamalkosh, Mihi Sital, Bhushnai Pati, Mota Sital, Dalar Pati, etc. Common Sitalpati weaves are mostly diagonal, with two or three slips overlapping each other respectively (called two or three Gachha). The simple straight woven patterns are locally called Chiknai. The Kamalkosh and Bhushnai are the finest, with smooth textures and intricate weaves. Kamalkosh is developed with complex imagery designs using the diagonal weave, and Bhushnai is developed with extremely fine slips, delicate designs and intricate patterns.



History of Sitalpati

Sitalpati refers to cool mats. The word derives its meaning from two Bengali words, 'Sital' meaning cold and 'Pati' meaning mat. The history of Sitalpati takes us across the borders of India to Bangladesh. The plant Murta grows in the water bodies of Sylhet, Sunamganj, Barishal, Tangail, Comilla, Noakhali and Chittagong. This mat is used by people all over Bangladesh as a sitting mat, bedspread or prayer mat. After the partition, the tradition of weaving Sitalpati came to India with some refugees, who knew nothing but weaving these cool mats and selling them.

Cooch Behar, a town in West Bengal, which was once ruled by the Koch dynasty, is the home to Sitalpati weaving. More than 14,000 families of Ghughumari in Cooch Behar are involved in this craft form. These mats have traditional and contemporary patterns and motifs woven, which are created by the weavers to make them intricate and unique art pieces.

The Weaves

1. Regular pati
2. Kamalkosh
3. Coloured pati
4. Pati with woven motifs
5. Cutting of inserted slips
6. Muribandha
7. Introducing new structured weaves



The Motifs

1. The butterfly motif
2. The traditional wedding motif
3. The lotus motif
4. The deer motif
5. The elephant motif
6. The peacock motif






Process

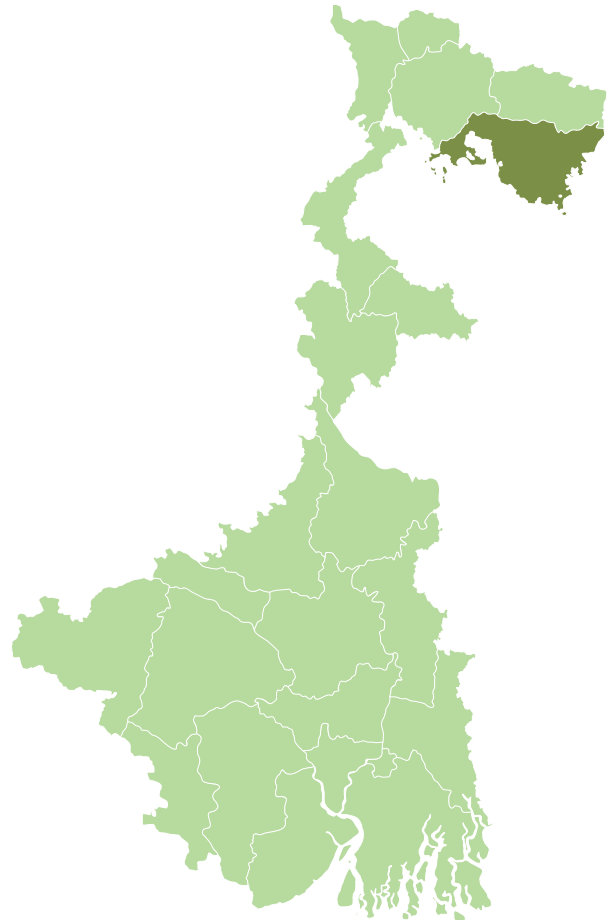
The different stages involved in Sitalpati weaving includes preparing the cane strips, coloring, dyeing and weaving. The stem and the branches of the plants are used to make the cane strips. First of all, the canes to be used for obtaining strips are washed in water. After washing, these canes are kept in the sun for drying. These are then divided into equal halves lengthwise. These divided halves are again sub-divided into four splits of equal length and breadth. The cane sticks can be sliced with varying fineness into slips of varying width & thickness. Following the slicing the cane slips are processed in different ways to bring different colours and enhance the quality. The Pati's quality is defined by the different layers of the cane, fineness of the cane slips and the process of making.

 Block- Coochbehar-1& II

 Block- Tufanganj

 Block- Mathabhanga

 Block- Dinhata



Craft Hubs

RCCH project covers Coochbehar I, Coochbehar II, Tufanganj, Mathabhanga and Dinhata blocks in West Bengal as Sitalpati clusters. Ghughumari and its surrounding area in Cooch Behar are the major hubs of Sitalpati. A folk-art centre with community museum at Ghughumari, Coochbehar has been developed under the Rural Craft Hub project by the West Bengal Khadi & Village Industries Board.



Total artists: 3807
% of women : 61%



Ghughumari

Ghughumari in Coochbehar I Block is one of the most prominent hubs of Sitalpati. Twice in each week, Sitalpati haat takes place at Ghughumari, which is the largest market of Sitalpati. Here, the traders purchase from the weavers directly. The hub has grown over the years, and many weavers are now micro-entrepreneurs having their own business units. They don't just make mats. They also have expanded the product range by adding new and innovative products. Ghughumari has evolved into an attractive cultural tourism destination with diverse natural and cultural assets.



Artists

The craft of Sitalpati though practiced across the district of Coochbehar, is prominent in the areas of Ghughumari, Dhaluabari, Atharomala, Gangaler kuthi, Pushpadanga in Coochbehar and Deocharai, Ghogarkuthi in Tufanganj I and Baisguri in Dinhat I. Some of the artists have grown as entrepreneurs and runs their business units. Pintu Dutta and Purna Chandra Dutta are leading entrepreneurs. Santosh Bhowmick, is a highly skilled artist who weaves different kinds of mat with colour strands.

Sushama Dey is a young artist who has excelled in reviving the traditional motifs and designs used in Sitalpati. Some of the women also run their own business units. Jyotsna Dutta is known for her intricate jewellery works. Jaya Dey is a young artist skilled in designing traditional motifs and other patterns.

Coochbehar and Tufanganj both have societies. Pradip Dey and Ramchandra Pal lead the society "Cooch Behar I No. Block Patishilpa Samity Ltd" in Coochbehar. While at Tufanganj, Kajal Pal and Manindra Chnadra Dey take the charge of the society "Tufanganj 1 No Block Patishilpa Samabay Samity."

Artists :

Cooch Behar - I Block

Pradip Roy	8670805055
Ramchandra Paul	9883996542
Santosh Bhowmik	6296703152
Rina Dey	7430959760
Malati Dhar	7001770175
Sushama Dey	7908252137
Sandhya Rani Dey	8906215794
Gita Rani Pal	9749241908
Jyostna Dutta	9064745638

Tufanganj - I Block

Kajal Paul	9382043762
Manindra Ch. Dey	8016390114
Bhajan Dey	7811054684
Shipriti Dey	7866894218



Products

Sitalpati was traditionally used as sleeping mats, but with the passage of time, capacity building and upskilling of weavers have resulted in the production of diversified products such as bags, folders, hats, mobile covers, coasters, panels and other home décor items.



Mats



Bags

Laptop covers and sleeves





Purse & Pouches

Container





Planter



Tray



Resource Centre




A resource centre has been made in Ghughumari with the support of the West Bengal Khadi Village and Industries Board. Run and managed by the local community of weavers, the resource centre serves as a collective space dedicated to promote, preserve and safeguard the tradition of Sitalpati weaving. Different types of Sitalpati, along with traditional processes adhered for making the craft are showcased in the resource centre.





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