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# Women's Ritual Art and Intergenerational Knowledge: A Visual Ethnography of Jhuti Practices in Bhadrak District, Odisha

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to document and analyze the contemporary practice of Jhuti, a women-led ritual art in Bhadrak District, Odisha, by examining its visual motifs, ritual functions, intergenerational transmission, and emerging generational shifts. The research investigates how Jhuti operates as a gendered knowledge system that integrates cosmological symbolism, ecological values, and domestic ritual authority. **Methodology:** The study employs a two-year visual ethnography (2021–2023) combining participant observation, semi-structured interviews with 97 women practitioners, and photographic documentation across seven administrative blocks. Data were analyzed using thematic coding, motif cataloguing, and cross-generational comparison to identify patterns in ritual participation, material use, symbolic repertoire, and transmission modes. **Findings:** The research documents twenty-eight distinct Jhuti motifs and reveals a structured symbolic repertoire dominated by Lakshmi paduka (95%), lotus (79%), and conch (71%). Ritual participation remains high during major festivals, particularly Manabasa Gurubara (98%). Jhuti knowledge is transmitted primarily through matrilineal teaching (74%), though reliance on observational learning increases among younger women. Significant generational differences emerge: older women emphasize communal-religious meanings and traditional mud-floor contexts, while younger practitioners favor individual-artistic framings, cement/tile surfaces, and digital modes of learning. The ethnographic vignette demonstrates that embodied, tactile correction remains central to skill transmission and cannot be replaced by digital replication. **Implications:** The findings highlight urgent needs for heritage preservation strategies that support embodied knowledge transmission, address material-infrastructural constraints in urban settings, and integrate Jhuti into educational and community spaces without detaching it from its ritual cosmology. The study provides evidence to inform policy interventions aligned with UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage framework, emphasizing sustaining living practices rather than aestheticizing them. **Originality and Value:** This study offers the first systematic visual ethnography of Jhuti in Bhadrak District, providing an empirically grounded motif catalogue, cross-generational analysis, and detailed documentation of embodied teaching practices. By demonstrating Jhuti's function as a gendered knowledge system situated at the intersection of devotion, ecology, and domestic authority, the research contributes new conceptual and empirical insights to the fields of ritual studies, women's art traditions, and intangible heritage preservation.

**Keywords:** Embodied knowledge; intangible cultural heritage; Jhuti; ritual art; visual ethnography

## Introduction

Women's ritual arts across India, from Warli paintings in Maharashtra to Madhubani in Bihar, constitute matrilineal systems of knowledge transmission that integrate aesthetic practice with domestic spirituality, ecological symbolism, and community identity (Agarwal, 2015; Dalmia, 1988; Jha, 2024). These art forms function not merely as decoration but as visual repositories of ancestral wisdom transmitted through generations of women who preserve cultural memory and environmental ethics through everyday rituals. However, women's domestic ritual arts, particularly non-commodified practices like Jhuti in Odisha, face accelerated decline due to modernization, weakened intergenerational transmission, and marginalization within formal heritage discourse (Stefano, Davis, & Corsane, 2012). This loss represents not only aesthetic diminishment but also the erosion of indigenous ecological knowledge embedded in ritual practice.

Kapur's (1978, 1997) pioneering work established women's folk art as intellectual contribution affirming cultural agency within patriarchal structures, challenging hierarchies between 'high' and 'folk' art. Rural women have historically claimed cultural authority through domestic ritual arts wall paintings, floor designs, and ceremonial decorations encoding cosmological knowledge and maintaining matrilineal transmission (Mukhopadhyay, 1994; Pillai, 2023). While scholars such as Dalmia (1988) and Jha (2024) have examined Indian folk art through cultural and aesthetic frameworks, Odishan Jhuti remains underexplored.

Jhuti is a ritual art practice in which Odishan women create intricate designs using rice paste (*pithau*) on domestic surfaces during festivals and life-cycle ceremonies, believed to invite prosperity and fortune (Dash, 2018; Pathy, 1990). Through Jhuti, women claim ritual authority in the domestic domain, maintain matrilineal transmission networks, and assert cosmological knowledge often excluded from male-dominated temple traditions (Dash, 2018; Hans & Das, 2012). Despite growing literature on indigenous ecological knowledge (Berkes, 1999), the environmental dimensions of women's domestic ritual arts remain underexplored a critical gap given contemporary discourse linking cultural and ecological sustainability.

Comparable women-led domestic ritual arts reveal how creativity, ecology, and devotion intersect in sustaining cultural memory. In South India, Tamil Kolam drawn daily with rice powder encodes cosmological order and ecological ethics through feminine devotional acts (Nagarajan, 2018; Sarin, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). Similarly, Japanese domestic aesthetics emphasize impermanence and simplicity ritualized through natural materials and ephemeral designs embodying harmony between gender, art, and nature (Lewallen, 2017; Proser, 2020). Parallel studies from Africa and Latin America, alongside broader UNESCO assessments in Southeast Asia, highlight how women's ritual arts function as ecological knowledge systems supporting environmental sustainability and social identity (Ankyiah, 2023; Demori, 2019; Paulucci, Tamayo Osorio, & Domingues, 2022; UNESCO, 2001).

Despite global recognition of women-led ritual arts as vital to cultural and ecological continuity, Jhuti in Odisha lacks adequate scholarly attention. Reports from Odisha's Department of Culture (2021) indicate declining household Jhuti practice across regions. While Odia art forms like Pattachitra have received scholarly focus (Kanungo, Sethi, & Pritam, 2020, 2021; Tripathy, 1998), Jhuti remains understudied (Dash, 2018). Ethnographic studies on Jhuti's sustainability, regional variation, and symbolic meanings are limited, emphasizing urgent need for academic research on this underrepresented art form.

This study adopts an interdisciplinary framework integrating three theoretical perspectives. First, feminist epistemology (Harding, 1987) guides analysis of Jhuti as autonomous women-generated knowledge system challenging patriarchal hierarchies that discount domestic knowledge. Second, practice theory (Bourdieu, 1977) understands Jhuti as embodied practice where ritual meaning is produced and reproduced through repeated action. Third, UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage framework (2003) informs preservation strategies and recognizes Jhuti as living heritage requiring protection. This integrative framework enables understanding Jhuti not merely as aesthetic object but as dynamic knowledge system integrating cosmology, ecology, and gendered agency.

This study provides the first systematic visual ethnographic documentation of Jhuti in Bhadrak District, Odisha. By centering women's ritual agency, symbolic meanings, and ecological knowledge, it challenges conventional framing of folk art as merely decorative, positioning Jhuti as gendered knowledge system. Research objectives are to: (1) document Jhuti motifs through visual ethnography; (2) analyze their symbolism from gendered perspectives; (3) examine Jhuti's alignment with natural cycles and sustainable materials; and (4) assess threats and revitalization prospects.

This study articulates three interrelated propositions: Proposition 1: Jhuti practice demonstrates characteristics of autonomous knowledge production (ritual authority, symbolic innovation, matrilineal transmission) challenging narratives of patriarchal domination. Proposition 2: Motif selection and material use reflect indigenous ecological knowledge embedded in agrarian seasonality and sustainable resource management. Proposition 3: Intergenerational transmission patterns reveal adaptive resilience through negotiation between tradition and modernity, rather than simple linear decline.

Jhuti's decline signals broader erosion of indigenous knowledge systems, highlighting urgent need for interdisciplinary strategies supporting cultural sustainability and women-led heritage preservation. By centering Jhuti's integration with nature, ritual, and gendered agency, this study offers novel understanding of traditional arts as both cultural identity and ecological consciousness.

## Methods

We employed visual ethnography with interpretive qualitative approach to explore Jhuti as cultural expression and ecological knowledge among rural women in Bhadrak District, Odisha, India. Units of analysis included both the art form and women who create it, recognizing their meanings and practices as inseparable. Fieldwork was conducted from December 2021 to November 2023, spanning multiple festival cycles and seasonal variations in Jhuti practice. Bhadrak District, located in northeastern Odisha (20°43' to 21°13'N, 86°6' to 87°E), covers 2,505 km² with population of 1.507 million (Census 2011). The district borders Balasore (north), Jajpur (south), Bay of Bengal and Kendrapara (east), and Keonjhar (west). Most residents live in non-urban areas with agriculture as primary livelihood.

We collected primary data from 97 women practitioners across 23 villages representing seven administrative blocks: Basudevpur, Bhadrak, Bhandaripokhari, Bonth, Chandbali, Dhamnagar, and Tihidi. Purposive sampling targeted practitioners aged 15–70 years who had practiced Jhuti for minimum three consecutive years or were recognized in their communities for ritual, motif, and material knowledge. We excluded individuals no longer engaged in Jhuti creation or lacking contextual understanding of practice. To examine intergenerational transmission, we included ten young participants (15–19 years) representing learner cohorts and providing insights into evolving perceptions of tradition

and modernity. In eight villages where fewer than three practitioners were initially identified, we used snowball sampling, resulting in inclusion of 23 additional participants and ensuring representation of both experienced and less publicly visible practitioners.

We conducted semi-structured interviews (30–60 minutes each) in participants' homes, courtyards, schools, and community spaces. Interviews focused on preparation techniques, design motifs, ritual meanings, material use, and seasonal variations. We employed free-listing exercises to document local terminology and symbolic associations. All interviews were conducted in Odia by the lead researcher, a native speaker, ensuring linguistic comfort and capturing nuanced cultural expressions. We documented village-specific motif terms in local dialect and subsequently translated them to English for analysis.

We performed participant observation during key festival periods and household rituals across three seasons (summer, monsoon, winter) when Jhuti is most actively practiced. This allowed detailed recording of creative processes, social participation, and contextual significance. Research instruments included interview guides, field notebooks, sketch pads, and photographic documentation. Participant observation provided direct engagement with women practitioners during Jhuti-making sessions. We recorded each stage from mixing rice paste (*pithau*) to executing motifs on walls and floors through photographs, field sketches, and descriptive notes. These visual records were supplemented with contextual observations about ritual settings, materials used, and collective participation. We consulted secondary sources including archival photographs, regional craft manuals, and previous ethnographies to enrich contextual understanding and trace historical continuity in practice.

We translated interview transcripts and analyzed them thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring patterns in symbolism, materials, ritual contexts, and generational perspectives. We based motif categorization on visual characteristics, spatial application (walls, floors, entrances), and ritual associations. Two researchers independently coded interview transcripts to enhance reliability. We refined initial codes through iterative discussion, achieving 85% inter-coder agreement. We conducted triangulation of interviews, observations, and secondary materials by: (1) cross-checking motif names among informants; (2) comparing interview claims with observed practices; (3) verifying symbolic interpretations through multiple sources (practitioners, local scholars, archival texts). This process enhanced credibility and reliability of findings (Cunningham, 2001).

We obtained informed oral consent from all participants before interviews and observations. Participants received information about research purposes, their right to withdraw anytime, and confidentiality assurances. We maintained anonymity using codes to identify informants (e.g., CB-19 for informant number 19 from Chandbali). We used photographs showing faces only with explicit permission. This research was conducted according to social and cultural research ethics principles.

## Results

Fieldwork conducted between December 2021 and November 2023 across seven administrative blocks of Bhadrak District documented twenty-eight distinct Jhuti motifs (Figures 1 and 2). Observations and semi-structured interviews indicate that Jhuti remains an active women-led ritual practice, performed primarily during major religious and seasonal festivals such as *Manabasa Gurubara*, *Kartika Purnima*, *Raja Sankranti*, and *Lakshmi Puja*. The continuity of Jhuti across these ritual cycles reflects the persistence of

matrilineal knowledge transmission and the central role of women in maintaining domestic ritual aesthetics.

As visual ethnographic evidence, Figure 1 presents a series of contextual images (1a–1o) that capture the lived environments, ritual spaces, and social interactions in which Jhuti is produced. These photographs illustrate how Jhuti is integrated into the everyday and ceremonial life of households—appearing on mud-house façades, sacred Tulasi altars, indoor and outdoor ritual floors, wedding spaces, and community settings. The images also show women preparing materials, teaching younger generations, and participating in collective ritual events, thereby demonstrating the embodied, communal, and intergenerational character of Jhuti practice in Bhadrak District.

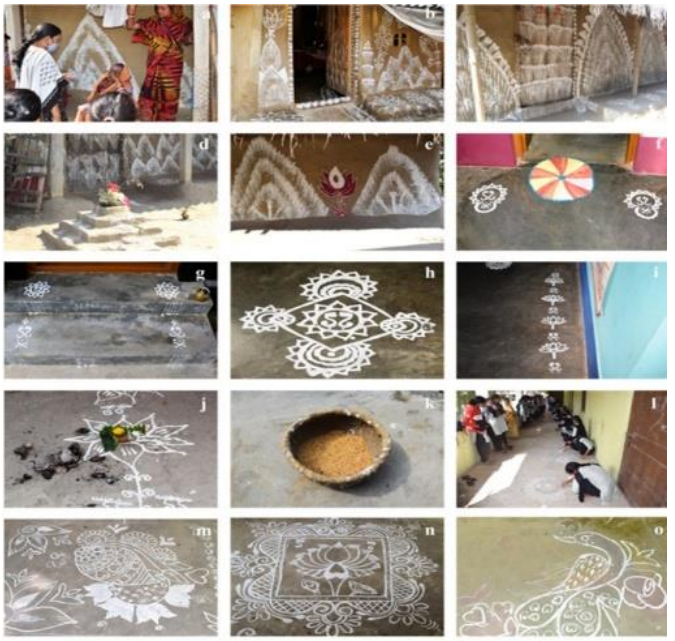

**Figure 1 Visual ethnographic documentation of Jhuti practices in Bhadrak District**

Figure 1 (a–o) presents a contextual visual record of Jhuti practice as observed across households and community spaces in Bhadrak District. Image (a) captures interviews with women practitioners who articulate the inherited knowledge, ritual obligations, and seasonal rhythms that shape Jhuti-making. Images (b) and (c) show Jhuti motifs adorning the façades of mud houses, where the white rice-paste designs serve both aesthetic and protective functions during ritual observances. Image (d) depicts Jhuti created on the *chaura Tulasi*, the sacred basil altar that forms the spiritual center of many Odishan households, highlighting the intimate connection between domestic devotion and women's artistic expression. In image (e), colored Jhuti appears on mud-house walls, indicating its use during heightened festive occasions requiring intensified ritual decoration. Images (f) through (i) illustrate the placement of Jhuti on indoor and outdoor floors during *Manabasa Gurubara*—a month-long Thursday observance in *Margasira* dedicated to Goddess Lakshmi—where symmetrical motifs and auspicious patterns mark the ritual purification of household space. Image (j) documents the use of Jhuti in a marriage ceremony, symbolizing blessings, transition, and the establishment of a new

domestic order. Image (k) shows Jhoti on the outer wall of a hut, including a motif representing a pile of accepted rice offerings that signifies agrarian prosperity and divine benevolence. Image (l) captures a Jhuti competition held at a university, demonstrating contemporary efforts toward revitalization through educational settings. Finally, images (m) through (o) display motifs featuring shells, lotuses, and peacocks—three highly symbolic elements associated with fertility, purity, beauty, and the presence of Goddess Lakshmi—revealing the depth of ritual iconography embedded in women's everyday artistic practice.

While Figure 1 illustrates the ritual settings, social interactions, and domestic spaces in which Jhuti is produced, a closer examination of the motifs themselves reveals the aesthetic depth and symbolic system that underpin this women-led artistic tradition. Beyond their ritual placement and functional roles in household ceremonies, Jhuti designs embody intricate visual grammars shaped by cosmological beliefs, ecological knowledge, and intergenerational creativity. To analyze these patterns more systematically, the second set of images isolates the motifs from their ritual contexts, presenting them as distinct visual compositions. Figure 2 therefore offers a catalogue of Jhuti motif variations (b1–b15), enabling a focused exploration of their geometric structures, symbolic elements, and stylistic diversity as practiced by women across Bhadrak District.

**Figure 2 Catalogue of Jhuti motif variations created by women in Bhadrak District**

Figure 2 (b1–b15) presents a catalogue of Jhuti motifs that highlights the remarkable aesthetic sophistication and symbolic richness embedded in women's ritual art in Bhadrak District. These designs, created exclusively using rice paste, demonstrate an exceptional command of symmetry, line precision, and spatial balance. The motifs range from concentric mandalas with densely layered petals (b1–b5) to star-shaped and eight-directional patterns (b6–b7) that reference cosmological order and protection from the eight cardinal directions. Floral arrangements, swirling tendrils, and leaf-filled circular formations (b8–b10) reflect the artists' close relationship with ecological cycles and agrarian symbolism. Additional motifs (b11–b13) reveal the interconnection of petals,

spirals, and dot clusters that articulate themes of continuity, fertility, and social unity among women practitioners. More elaborate compositions (b14) incorporate crown-like or radiant structures that are often associated with heightened ritual significance, while the iconic footprints of Goddess Lakshmi (b15) appear as central emblems of prosperity, purity, and divine presence within the household. Together, these images demonstrate how Jhuti operates as a codified visual language—one that synthesizes cosmology, ecological knowledge, devotion, and artistic skill into a living heritage maintained by women across generations.

## 1. Motif Repertoire and Symbolic Associations

Across the surveyed households (n = 97), field documentation identified a consistent repertoire of Jhuti motifs produced using *pithau*, a rice paste prepared from pounded dry rice and applied freehand with the fingers or the palm onto floors, thresholds, and walls. The repertoire reflects a structured visual language in which women select motifs according to ritual purpose, seasonal timing, and symbolic potency. The most frequently occurring motifs—*Lakshmi paduka* (95%), lotus (79%), and conch (71%)—appeared predominantly during *Manabasa Gurubara*, where they signify prosperity, purity, divine presence, and ritual protection. Additional motifs such as the peacock (67%), fish (51%), turtle (45%), and elephant (34%) were also widely documented, each linked to culturally embedded themes of fertility, abundance, stability, and auspiciousness within agrarian households. As summarized in Table 1, the distribution of these motifs highlights a coherent symbolic repertoire in which women employ specific designs not merely for decoration but as intentional embodiments of ritual meaning and cosmological belief aligned with the household's ceremonial calendar.

**Table 1**. Frequency of Common Jhuti Motifs Documented in Bhadrak District (n = 97)

| Motif | Cultural Symbolism | Observed Frequency (%) |
|---|---|---|
| ***Lakshmi paduka*** | Prosperity, divine presence | 95 |
| **Lotus** | Purity, creation, divine energy | 79 |
| **Conch** | Sacred sound, protection, ritual power | 71 |
| **Peacock** | Beauty, fertility, renewal | 67 |
| **Fish** | Fertility and abundance | 51 |
| **Turtle** | Stability and longevity | 45 |
| **Elephant** | Elephant | Elephant |

Note: Frequencies reflect household-level observations and respondent self-reports collected during fieldwork (2021–2023).

The distribution of motifs in Table 1 reveals a clearly hierarchical symbolic structure

within Jhuti practice, in which motifs associated with Goddess Lakshmi dominate the visual repertoire. The exceptionally high frequency of *Lakshmi paduka* (95%) underscores its central role as the primary emblem of divine presence and household prosperity, reflecting women's ritual obligation to welcome the goddess during auspicious periods, especially *Manabasa Gurubara*. The lotus and conch—appearing in 79% and 71% of households—further support this Lakshmi-oriented cosmology, as both motifs function as extensions of purity, generative energy, and protective ritual sound. Motifs with ecological and agrarian associations, including the peacock, fish, turtle, and elephant, occur with lower but still substantial frequency, indicating that households selectively incorporate symbols of fertility, abundance, stability, and auspiciousness in accordance with seasonal needs and agricultural rhythms. Together, these patterns demonstrate that Jhuti motifs are not arbitrarily chosen; rather, they reflect a culturally structured system in which women deploy specific designs to invoke divine favor, align domestic space with cosmological order, and reinforce ritual identity across the ceremonial calendar.

## 2. Ritual Participation Patterns

### a) Participation by Demographics

During *Manabasa Gurubara*, overall participation in Jhuti creation among married women was exceptionally high, with 98% reporting that they prepared designs every Thursday for the worship of Goddess Lakshmi. As shown in Table 2, participation levels varied across demographic groups. Women aged 41–55 years recorded the highest involvement (88%), followed by those above 55 years (79%), while participation was comparatively lower among women under 40 years (61%). A similar pattern appeared across education levels: women with primary schooling exhibited the highest engagement (95%), those with secondary education reported 89%, and those with undergraduate or postgraduate experience reported 75%. Residence type further differentiated participation, with rural households demonstrating full adherence (100%), compared to 95% in semi-urban areas and 75% in urban settings. Collectively, these patterns indicate that Jhuti practice remains most consistently sustained among older, rural, and less formally educated women..

**Table 2.** Weekly Participation in Jhuti Practice During *Manabasa Gurubara* (n = 97)

| Demographic Variable | Category | Participation Rate (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Overall married women** | _ | 98 |
| **Age Group** | Under 40 years | 61 |
| | 41–55 years | 88 |
| | Over 55 years | 79 |
| | Primary | 95 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Education Level** | Secondary | 89 |
| | Undergraduate/Postgraduate | 75 |
| **Residence Type** | Rural | 100 |
| | Semi-urban | 95 |
| | Urban | 75 |

The demographic patterns presented in Table 2 indicate that Jhuti participation during *Manabasa Gurubara* is shaped strongly by age, educational background, and place of residence. Higher participation among women aged 41–55 years (88%) and those over 55 (79%) suggests that ritual adherence is most firmly maintained within older age groups, whereas the lower rate among women under 40 (61%) points to a gradual weakening of continuity among younger cohorts. Educational differences similarly reveal a declining gradient, with primary-educated women exhibiting the strongest engagement (95%), followed by those with secondary schooling (89%) and those with higher education (75%), reflecting the closer alignment of Jhuti practice with less formalized and more agrarian-oriented lifestyles. Residence-based variation further reinforces this trend: rural women reported full adherence (100%), compared to a slight reduction in semi-urban settings (95%) and a more substantial decline in urban contexts (75%). Overall, the distribution suggests that Jhuti practice is most robust within rural, older, and less formally educated demographic groups, indicating both the cultural embeddedness of the tradition and areas where transmission may be weakening.

### b) Festival-Based Participation and Motif Distribution

Festival-based participation patterns showed clear variation in both involvement rates and motif selection. During the ritual calendar, participation was highest for *Manabasa Gurubara* (98%) and *Kartika Purnima* (95%), followed by *Dola Purnima* (87%), *Diwali* (72%), *Raja Sankranti* (63%), and domestic wedding rituals (59%), as summarized in Table 3. Each festival featured distinct motifs aligned with its symbolic and ritual requirements: *Lakshmi paduka*, lotus, and rice motifs were consistently used during *Manabasa Gurubara*; *boita* (boat), fish, turtle, and wave patterns appeared prominently during *Kartika Purnima*; deepa (lamp), lotus, and conch were common during *Diwali*; and floral vines, butterflies, peacock elements, and Radha-Krishna footprints were frequently drawn during *Dola Purnima*. For *Raja Sankranti*, households favored floral vines, peacock motifs, and earth symbols, while wedding rituals featured elephants, conch, mango leaves, and rice motifs. Overall, these patterns demonstrate a diverse motif repertoire that households apply selectively in accordance with the ritual calendar, with motif choice reflecting the ceremonial themes and symbolic expectations of each festival.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Common Jhuti Motifs and Participation Rates by Festival (n = 97)

| Festival/Event | Participation Rate (%) | Common Motifs Used | Symbolic Purpose/Belief |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Manabasa Gurubara* (Nov–Dec)** | 98 | *Lakshmi paduka*, lotus, rice motifs | Welcome Goddess Lakshmi, ensure prosperity and abundance |
| **Diwali** | 72 | *Deepa* (lamp), lotus, conch | Dispel darkness, invite divine light, purify home |
| ***Kartika Purnima*** | 95 | *Boita* (boat), fish, turtle, wave patterns | Honor maritime heritage, pray for protection and success |
| ***Dola Purnima*** | 87 | Swing patterns (*dola*), floral vines, butterflies, Radha-Krishna footprints, peacock, conch | Celebrate divine love, renewal, spring arrival |
| ***Raja Sankranti* (Juni)** | 63 | Floral vines, peacock, earth symbols | Celebrate fertility, earth's rejuvenation, womanhood |
| **Pernikahan/Ritual domestik** | 59 | Elephant, conch, mango leaves, rice motifs | Invoke blessings for marital harmony and fortune |

The distribution in Table 3 highlights the strong alignment between ritual events, participation intensity, and motif selection within Jhuti practice. The highest engagement during *Manabasa Gurubara* and *Kartika Purnima* reflects the centrality of these festivals in domestic ritual life, with motifs such as *Lakshmi paduka*, lotus, and *boita* serving as primary visual markers of prosperity, purity, and maritime heritage. Participation declines across subsequent festivals but remains substantial, indicating that motif production remains closely tied to the ritual calendar even outside major events. The motif variations—ranging from deepa and conch during *Diwali* to floral and peacock motifs during *Raja Sankranti*—demonstrate that women employ different symbolic vocabularies depending on the festival's thematic focus, whether invoking divine presence, celebrating renewal, or marking seasonal transitions. Overall, the patterns suggest that Jhuti functions as a flexible, festival-specific visual system in which motifs are chosen not arbitrarily but in accordance with culturally encoded ritual meanings and seasonal associations.

### c) Temporal Practices

Timing of Jhuti preparation showed moderate variation across households, with most respondents completing their designs on Wednesday evening (68%), while the remaining 32% prepared Jhuti on Thursday morning. As shown in Table 4, adherence to the traditional Wednesday-evening schedule was highest among rural participants (91%),

compared to 54% among those in semi-urban settings. Conversely, semi-urban practitioners were more likely to prepare Jhuti on Thursday morning. Respondents commonly explained that completing Jhuti the evening before allows the design to be in place at dawn, aligning with the belief that Goddess Lakshmi is expected to "see the design first thing in the morning."

**Table 4.** Timing of Jhuti Preparation Before Lakshmi Puja (n = 97)

| Jhuti Drawing Time | Overall (%) | Rural (%) | Semi-urban (%) | Typical Reported Reasons |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wednesday evening (traditional)** | 68 | 91 | 54 | Aligns with belief that goddess arrives at dawn |
| **Thursday morning** | 32 | 9 | 46 | Time constraints, convenience |

The distribution in Table 4 suggests that temporal adherence to Jhuti preparation is strongly associated with residence type, reflecting differences in ritual continuity across household settings. Rural women demonstrate significantly higher conformity to traditional timing rituals, with 91% preparing Jhuti on Wednesday evening, while semi-urban participants exhibit more flexible patterns, splitting between Wednesday evening (54%) and Thursday morning (46%). This variation indicates that while the belief in Lakshmi's dawn arrival remains influential, practical considerations such as time constraints and changing daily routines play a larger role in semi-urban environments. Overall, the temporal data highlight a gradual shift from strict ritual timing toward more adaptable practices, particularly among households outside rural settings.

## 3. Practitioner Perceptions and Social Meanings

Interview data indicated that women ascribed multiple meanings to Jhuti practice, with the most frequently reported perception describing it as an act of spiritual devotion associated with Goddess Lakshmi (91%). Many respondents viewed Jhuti as both a spiritual and aesthetic activity (78%), while others highlighted its decorative and cultural value (63%). Additional meanings included its association with cleanliness and domestic order (54%) and its role as a medium for expressing women's artistic skill and creativity (49%). Respondents articulated these views using phrases such as "drawing Jhuti so Lakshmi enters our home," "keeping the home pure and sacred," and "showing women's skill," reflecting a combination of ritual intention, aesthetic sensibility, and domestic responsibility. Beyond individual perceptions, ethnographic interviews and participant observation revealed broader social meanings attached to Jhuti (Table 6). Women's ability to produce neat and elaborate designs was widely understood as a marker of discipline, respectability, and cultural competence, with skilled designs often attracting

praise from neighbors during festivals. Informants also emphasized that Jhuti is transmitted matrilineally as a moral and cultural lesson from mothers to daughters, while neglecting the practice—especially during major rituals—may invite subtle social criticism. Collectively, these findings show that Jhuti operates both as a devotional practice and as a visible indicator of women's ritual knowledge and social identity within the household and community.

**Table 5.** Perceptions of Jhuti Practice Among Women Respondents (n = 97)

| Perception Category | Description | Respondents (%) | Example Coded Response |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Spiritual act (*puja*, devotion)** | Focus on ritual purity, prosperity, Lakshmi worship | 91 | "Drawing Jhuti so Lakshmi enters our home" |
| **Spiritual + aesthetic** | Combines faith with creative self-expression | 78 | "Keeping the home pure and sacred" |
| **Aesthetic/cultural expression** | Valued primarily for decorative and cultural aspects | 63 | "Decorating the home to please the goddess" |
| **Aesthetic/cleanliness aspect** | Emphasizes domestic order and purity | 54 | "It makes the home clean, bright, and beautiful" |
| **Gender-based expression of skills** | Highlights Jhuti as medium for showcasing creativity, design, traditional craft, and women's social identity | 49 | "Showing women's skill" |

The distribution in Table 5 demonstrates a layered structure of practitioner perceptions, with spirituality forming the dominant frame through which women understand Jhuti. The fact that 91% describe it as an act of *puja* situates Jhuti firmly within the domain of ritual devotion, while the strong overlap between spiritual and aesthetic interpretations (78%) indicates that women do not view artistic expression as separate from religious obligation. The presence of aesthetic and cultural motivations (63%), alongside cleanliness-related meanings (54%), suggests that Jhuti is embedded in broader domestic practices that merge ritual purity with household presentation. Meanwhile, the 49% who emphasized skill expression reflect the importance of Jhuti as a gendered craft

through which women articulate competence and creativity. Taken together, these patterns show that Jhuti is perceived not through a single lens but as a multidimensional practice combining devotion, aesthetics, domestic order, and embodied skill.

Ethnographic interviews and participant observation confirmed that Jhuti functions as visual marker of women's ritual knowledge and social membership (Table 6). Respondents noted that women's ability to produce neat and intricate Jhuti is widely viewed as sign of diligence and respectability. Informant quotations illustrated that women are socially evaluated or praised based on Jhuti work quality, with skilled designs earning admiration during festivals.

**Table 6.** Observed Patterns of Social Recognition Related to Jhuti Practice (n = 97)

| Evidence Type | Observed/Reported Pattern | Representative Quotation |
|---|---|---|
| **Interview responses** | Skill in Jhuti equated with domestic discipline and respectability | ""If a woman's Jhuti is not neat, people say she is careless in her duties" |
| **Intergenerational teaching** | Jhuti transmitted as moral and cultural lesson from mother to daughter | "My mother taught me to draw Jhuti properly, it shows we know our tradition" |
| **Community recognition** | Skilled designs receive praise and social approval | "People come to see my Jhuti and say it brings good fortune to our home" |
| **Social sanctions** | Neglecting Jhuti invites subtle criticism | "If someone doesn't make it during festivals, others whisper about her" |

Table 6 highlights the social mechanisms through which Jhuti functions as a marker of women's identity, status, and cultural competence. Skill in creating neat and intricate designs is widely associated with domestic discipline, leading to positive social recognition during festivals, while lapses in performing Jhuti can result in subtle criticism, illustrating its role in maintaining social expectations. Intergenerational teaching emerges as a key route of transmission, framing Jhuti not only as a technical skill but also as a moral and cultural lesson passed from mothers to daughters. Community recognition—where neighbors visit to view well-executed Jhuti—shows that the practice generates symbolic capital within the social environment. Conversely, the presence of social sanctions for neglecting Jhuti underscores its role as a normative domestic obligation. Together, these patterns demonstrate that Jhuti operates as a social currency in women's lives, reinforcing cultural belonging, moral discipline, and communal visibility.

## 4. Intergenerational Knowledge Transmission

Across respondents, Jhuti knowledge was predominantly transmitted through matrilineal learning, with 74% reporting that they were taught directly by mothers or grandmothers, while 19% acquired skills through informal observation of others and 7% learned through participation in community events (Table 7). Age-based variation was evident, with transmission from older female relatives highest among participants over 55 years (88%) and lowest among those under 40 (52%). Respondents frequently recalled learning Jhuti during childhood, as illustrated by statements such as, "My mother taught me to draw footprints every Thursday; she said it brings prosperity to the home." Field observations further confirmed the central role of elder women in sustaining Jhuti knowledge, who consistently described the practice as a sacred obligation and demonstrated associated motifs, including *dhana shashya* (winnowed rice heaps) drawn on exterior hut walls as markers of agrarian prosperity. These findings indicate that intergenerational instruction remains the primary mechanism through which Jhuti techniques, meanings, and ritual obligations are maintained within households.

**Table 7.** Intergenerational Jhuti Knowledge Transmission Among Respondents (n = 97)

| Age Group (years) | Learned from Mother/Grandmother (%) | Learned Through Observation/Peers (%) | Learned Through Community Events (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Under 40** | 52 | 31 | 17 |
| **41–55** | 76 | 17 | 7 |
| **Over 55** | 88 | 9 | 3 |
| **Overall (n = 97)** | 74 | 19 | 7 |

The distribution in Table 7 highlights a strong reliance on matrilineal transmission for sustaining Jhuti practice, with 74% of respondents learning directly from mothers or grandmothers. The sharp increase in such transmission among older women (88%) compared to younger participants under 40 (52%) suggests a generational weakening in traditional modes of learning, accompanied by a shift toward observational or community-based exposure. The relatively higher proportion of younger women learning through peers or community events indicates diversification in learning pathways, likely reflecting changing social structures and household dynamics. Overall, the table reveals that while matrilineal teaching remains dominant, its strength varies significantly by age cohort, signaling potential future challenges for the continuity of Jhuti knowledge if traditional mother–daughter instruction continues to decline.

## 5. Generational Differences in Practice

### a) Material Preferences

Generational differences were evident in the types of household surfaces used for Jhuti preparation. As shown in Table 8, older women aged 55 and above predominantly

used mud floors, with 82.4% reporting continued reliance on traditional earthen surfaces, while only 17.6% used cement or tile flooring. In contrast, younger practitioners under 40 showed a strong preference for modern household surfaces, with 76.5% using cement or tile floors and only 23.5% maintaining mud-floor settings. Women aged 41–55 displayed a similar pattern to the younger group, with 73.5% using cement or tile floors. Overall, these findings demonstrate a clear generational shift in material preferences, with older women maintaining traditional mud-floor contexts and younger cohorts increasingly adopting cement or tiled surfaces for Jhuti practice.

**Table 8.** Floor Type Preferences by Age Group Among Jhuti Practitioners (n = 97)

| Age Group (years) | Sample Size n (%) | Mud Floor n (%) | Cement/Tile Floor n (%) | Dominant Practice |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Under 40** | 29 (29,9) | 7 (23,5) | 22 (76,5) | Cement/tile floor |
| **41–55** | 34 (35,1) | 9 (26,5) | 25 (73,5) | Cement/tile floor |
| **55 and above** | 34 (35,1) | 28 (82,4) | 6 (17,6) | Mud floor |

The distribution in Table 8 indicates a pronounced generational divide in preferred surfaces for Jhuti drawing, reflecting differing levels of adherence to traditional material contexts. The high proportion of older women using mud floors (82.4%) underscores the persistence of traditional ritual settings among senior practitioners, whereas the predominance of cement and tile surfaces among younger and middle-aged women (76.5% and 73.5%, respectively) suggests increasing adaptation to modern domestic infrastructures. The gradual decline in mud-floor usage from the oldest to the youngest age cohort points toward an age-related transition in practice environments, with traditional surfaces concentrated among older generations and contemporary surfaces more common among younger households. These patterns illustrate that generational change is not limited to symbolic or perceptual aspects of Jhuti but extends to the physical settings in which the practice is carried out.

### b) Motivational Framing

Generational differences were also reflected in the ways women described their motivations for practicing Jhuti. As shown in Table 9, older women (55+) predominantly framed Jhuti as a communal and religious act, with 74% emphasizing collective worship and shared ritual responsibility, consistent with statements such as "We draw together for the goddess." Among middle-aged participants (41–55 years), motivations were more evenly distributed, with 47% expressing communal-religious framing and 35% articulating mixed motivations that combined ritual obligation with personal skill. In contrast, younger practitioners under 40 most frequently described Jhuti as a form of individual artistic expression, with 41% identifying creativity and design as their primary motivation, illustrated by comments such as "This is my creativity." Additional qualitative accounts further reflected shifting generational orientations, including reports that some younger women engage less consistently in Jhuti, as noted by a 57-year-old informant: "Now my granddaughter learns from YouTube but doesn't want to do Jhuti."

Overall, these findings indicate a clear generational divergence in motivational framing, ranging from communal-religious emphasis among older women to more individualized artistic interpretations among younger practitioners.

**Table 9.** Perceptions of Jhuti Practice Across Age Groups (n = 97)

| Age Group (years) | Sample Size n (%) | Communal-Religious n (%) | Mixed (Ritual + Skill) n (%) | Individual-Artistic n (%) | Example Coded Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Under 40** | 29 (29,9) | 6 (21) | 11 (38) | 12 (41) | "This is my creativity" |
| **41–55** | 34 (35,1) | 16 (47) | 12 (35) | 6 (18) | "Both faith and decoration are important" |
| **55 and above** | 34 (35,1) | 25 (74) | 7 (21) | 2 (5) | "We draw together for the goddess" |

Table 9 reveals a structured generational gradient in how practitioners conceptualize the purpose of Jhuti. The strong dominance of communal-religious motivations among older women (74%) underscores the continued alignment of Jhuti with collective worship and shared ritual responsibility in older cohorts. Middle-aged women exhibit a transitional pattern, with substantial representation in both communal and mixed categories, suggesting that they navigate between inherited ritual obligations and emerging personal or aesthetic motivations. Younger women's higher tendency toward individual-artistic framing (41%) reflects shifting understandings of Jhuti, in which the practice is increasingly viewed as a creative or expressive activity rather than primarily as a ritual act. The distribution across age groups thus signals a generational transformation in motivational orientation, with older women upholding traditional ritual meanings and younger practitioners adopting more individualized interpretations of Jhuti's purpose.

## 6. Ethnographic Vignette: Three-Generation Jhuti Session

An ethnographic observation conducted in Chandbali village in March 2022 documented a three-generation Jhuti session involving a grandmother (age 67), her daughter-in-law (age 42), and granddaughter (age 19). The session began in the early evening as the eldest woman prepared *pithau* by mixing powdered rice with water in a small brass bowl, testing the paste's consistency by allowing it to drip from her fingertip. Once satisfied with the texture, she initiated the drawing process by demonstrating the formation of a lotus motif, positioning her fingers to model the desired petal shape. Her instruction to the younger women—"Hold your three fingers together like this, or the

petals won't be even"—framed the session as both instructional and embodied.

As the motif developed, the grandmother worked with focused, silent concentration, maintaining steady hand movements and careful attention to symmetry. The daughter-in-law and granddaughter observed closely, occasionally asking questions or attempting portions of the design. Their engagement was more conversational, with intermittent discussion about household matters woven into the activity. The complete motif, measuring approximately 60 × 60 cm, took around 75 minutes to complete from preparation to finishing touches. Throughout this process, the spatial arrangement of the participants, their positioning around the design, and the sequencing of actions reflected an established rhythm of shared practice.

A clear instructional dynamic emerged when the granddaughter's paste application produced uneven lines and dripping forms. The grandmother responded by gently adjusting her hand position and advising, "Fingers closer together, lighter pressure," illustrating a tactile method of correcting technique. This moment, observed repeatedly across similar sessions, demonstrated how Jhuti knowledge is taught through direct bodily guidance rather than verbal explanation alone. The interaction provided concrete evidence of how practical skill, ritual comportment, and aesthetic standards are transmitted across generations through shared practice and embodied demonstration.

The three-generation vignette illustrates how Jhuti knowledge is transmitted through embodied, practice-based learning rather than through verbal instruction alone, highlighting the centrality of tactile correction, imitation, and shared spatial engagement in sustaining ritual skill across generations. The grandmother's focused ritual posture contrasted with the more conversational and casual engagement of younger women, reflecting broader generational shifts in ritual framing observed throughout the study. The instructional moments—such as adjusting finger positions and demonstrating pressure control—demonstrate how aesthetic precision, ritual comportment, and technical competence are communicated through bodily demonstration, reinforcing the finding that matrilineal transmission relies heavily on intimate, co-present, and iterative forms of teaching. At the same time, the granddaughter's intermittent difficulty and reliance on direct correction echoes the patterns of weakened transmission seen among younger cohorts, suggesting that without such embodied encounters, Jhuti knowledge may not be fully sustained through observational or digital exposure alone. Together, the vignette underscores the irreplaceable role of intergenerational co-practice in maintaining Jhuti's ritual, aesthetic, and technical continuity.

## Discussion

This study documented twenty-eight Jhuti motifs in Bhadrak District that reveal the non-verbal visual language through which Odisha women express cosmological, ecological, and social meanings. The dominance of the three main motifs *of Lakshmi paduka* (95%), lotus (79%), and shellfish (71%) indicates an established common vocabulary in conveying prosperity, purity, and protection. The study's core findings suggest that Jhuti functions as a dynamic gender-based knowledge system, in which women exercise ritual authority in the domestic realm (91% describe it as *puja*), transmit skills matrilineally (74% learn from mothers), and receive social recognition for their skills. However, the data also reveal a significant transformation: urban participation decreased to 75% compared to 100% rural retention, direct pedagogical transmission decreased from 88% (over 55 years old) to 52% (under 40 years old), and motivational framing shifted from communal-religious (74% of the elderly) to individual-artistic (41%

of the younger generation).

From a semiotic perspective, Jhuti motifs serve as visual signs that connect material practices with metaphysical beliefs. Practitioners describe Jhuti not as a decoration but as *a seva* (ritual service), emphasizing its communicative and performative nature. The repetition of motifs such as *Lakshmi paduka*, lotus, and *matsya* forms a grammatical embodied devotion, in which each design becomes a propositional act that affirms household well-being and cosmic renewal. Interpretive differences between generations of older women emphasize the efficacy of ritual while younger practitioners reframe Jhuti as a cultural expression demonstrating evolving semiotic fluency (Cohn, 2020). This evolution reflects not the decline but the adaptive vitality of the living visual language. Jhuti natural motifs that include leaves, grains, boats, and ripples embody an ecosemiotic relationship where the making of the sign reflects the cycles of agriculture and the monsoon, while the mastery of the motif gains communal recognition that links ritual skills to identity and belonging (Sethi, 2024).

The findings show that Jhuti is a gender-based cultural authority site where women exercise interpretive agency in the realm of domestic rituals. The multiplicity of meaning articulated by practitioners 91% describe it as a ritual offering, 78% as an aesthetic expression, and 63% emphasize decorative value challenges the binary framing of ritual art as "sacred" or "secular." The female narrative itself rejects such categorization, as one informant expresses: "I draw for Lakshmi, but I also enjoy making her beautiful" (CB-27, age 45). The social significance of Jhuti goes beyond personal devotion to communal evaluation, where women's ritual competence is publicly assessed through Jhuti qualities. This social surveillance paradoxically empowers women, as Jhuti mastery gives them ritual authority and cultural recognition within patriarchal structures. Unlike male-dominated temple rituals, Jhuti positions women as guardians of domestic chastity a form of what Butler (2020) calls "performative reconstitution" through repetitive embodied actions.

Intergenerational transmission data reveal fractures in these knowledge systems, with observation-based learning increasing from 9% (over 55 years old) to 31% (under 40 years old), suggesting a shift from pedagogical transmission to informal imitation. This pattern differs from Tamil Ponds, where Nagarajan (2018) found 79% of urban women under 35 still receive formal mother-daughter instruction, perhaps because Tamil Nadu's institutionalized Pond competition creates incentives for intergenerational teaching. The decline in direct transmission of Jhuti reflects broader structural changes: urbanization reduces the co-residency of multigenerational households, women's participation in the labor force limits ritual time, and digital media offers alternative sources of knowledge, with 17% of younger informants referencing YouTube tutorials. However, the overall retention of 74% of matrilineal transmission indicates resilience, where women continue to claim Jhuti as feminine heritage despite adapting its meaning and material to modern contexts.

Jhuti art also serves as a medium of cultural memory through which Odisha women transmit ecological, devotional, and social knowledge. Elderly practitioners consistently describe Jhuti as *smarana* (commemoration) and *seva* (ritual service), emphasizing its role in remembering ancestral traditions through repetitive symbols such as *padma* (lotus) and *matsya* (fish) that act as mnemonic codes. However, younger women are increasingly reproducing Jhuti designs using stencils, synthetic paints, or mobile-based drawings, indicating a gradual shift from embodied ritual performances to aesthetic appearances. This intergenerational variation reflects the shift described by Assmann (2011), from 'communicative memory' rooted in living practice to 'cultural memory' maintained

through mediated and material forms. Jhuti's symbolic grammar its symmetry, repetition, and ritual materiality embodies the culturally learned graphic system described by Cohn (2020), conveying meaning through participation rather than formal instruction. The observational vignette of the study illustrates a critical moment the transmission of knowledge is realized: when the grandmother corrects the position of her grandson's hand with the instruction "Fingers are tighter, pressure lighter," she is transmitting knowledge that cannot be fully captured through video tutorials or digital images. The shift from direct instruction to observational leaning signals an epistemological transformation from *knowing-through-doing* with a teacher to *learning-through-watching* without pedagogical correction, raising questions about the depth and resilience of transmitted knowledge. As Ingold (2013) notes, true skills are acquired through "attention, imitation, and improvisation in practice," not through separate visual reproduction.

Field observations reveal that Jhuti art serves as a space where women combine ecological observation with ritual creativity, transforming domestic areas into symbolic landscapes. Motifs such as *tulasi* (sacred basil), *padma* (lotus), and *kalasa* (container) symbolize fertility, purity, and renewal values that are inextricably linked to agricultural and seasonal cycles. The distribution of the festival motifs reveals a close synchronization with the agrarian calendar of Odisha: *Manabasa Gurubara* (November–December) coincides with the rice harvest and displays rice motifs and *Lakshmi paduka*, *Kartika Purnima* (October–November) honours maritime heritage with *boita* (boat) and fish motifs, while *King Sankranti* (June) celebrates Mother Earth's menstruation with flower tendrils and earth symbols, synchronizing the female reproductive cycle with the earth's regenerative cycle. The use of traditional *pithau* (rice paste) materials embodies an ecological ethic embedded in agrarian subsistence, encoding the dual relationship between nutrition and purity. However, the data reveals a sharp decline in the use of traditional materials: while 82% of women over 55 maintain traditional mud and *pithau* floors, only 23.5% of women under 40 do so. The shift to cement/tile floors (76.5% under 40 years old) and synthetic paints carries significant ecological and ritual implications. Elderly informants explain material incompatibility: "Paste does not adhere well to polished floors; it drips and looks dirty" (CB-56, age 63). This infrastructural shift, driven by modernization aspirations and urban cleanliness requirements, inadvertently undermines the ecological sustainability of practices. Synthetic paints lack the biodegradability and ritual offering dimensions of *pithau*, which is traditionally eaten by birds and ants after festivals an act of ecological sharing that strengthens the interconnection between humans and non-humans. These findings resonate with Ingold's (2000) concept of *taskscapes* culturally meaningful activities integrated with ecological and temporal rhythms, in which each Jhuti motif articulates the interdependence between humans, plants, and divine forces.

The analysis showed a constellation of interrelated factors explaining why Jhuti practice declined among younger cohorts despite high overall ritual participation retention (98% during *Manabasa Gurubara*). First, the material-infrastructural factor: urbanization has fundamentally changed the domestic landscape of Odisha, with 100% of rural households retaining Jhuti practices versus 75% urban. This 25% point shift is partly explained by surface changes, where 91% of rural practitioners use traditional mud floors while 76.5% of urban practitioners under 40 years old use cement/tile floors. Traditional rice paste "does not work on shiny tiles" (CB-44, age 36), forcing the use of synthetic paints that alter the aesthetic and ritual properties of the practice. These findings contrast with Nagarajan's (2018) study of Tamil Ponds, where only 34% of Chennai practitioners have left the mud surface a difference of 42 percentage points suggesting that the Jhuti

face more severe infrastructural constraints, likely because the Ponds have been institutionalized through government-sponsored competitions and cultural festivals. Second, the motivational-skeletal transformation: among women over 55, 74% frame Jhuti in communal-religious terms ("We draw together for the goddess"), while 41% of women under 40 frame it as an individual-artistic expression ("It's my creativity"). This shift from a collective-devotional to an individual-aesthetic orientation reflects a broader shift in women's subjectivity, influenced by education, exposure to contemporary "art" discourses, and individualization of religious practice. However, this interpretation should not be simplified as "secularization," as even among the youngest cohort, 21% maintained a communal-religious framing and 38% adopted a mixed orientation, indicating a diversification of meaning that Harrison (2020) calls "inherited resilience." Third, structural transmission barriers: the decline in direct mother-daughter instruction (from 88% over 55 to 52% under 40) reflects the restructuring of women's households and work patterns. Urbanization reduces multigenerational co-residency, with 89% of rural households reporting living with a mother or in-laws while only 34% of urban households do. Without the physical presence of the elderly during the key ritual period, pedagogical transmission is disrupted. Women's participation in the formal workforce creates time constraints, with 46% of semi-urban practitioners switching from traditional Wednesday evening preparation to Thursday morning due to "time constraints, convenience," changing the framing of ritual practices from anticipatory action (*preparing* for the arrival of the goddess) to concurrent action (*rushing* to finish before worship). Digital media offers an alternative mode of learning that bypasses transmission materialized, with informants reporting that granddaughters "learn from YouTube but don't want to do Jhuti" (CB-57, age 57), suggesting that while visual representations of Jhuti are widely circulated, the knowledge embodied for her performance is weakening.

The transformation of the Jhuti motif in the Bhadrak District demonstrates Appadurai's (1986) concept of the "social life of the object," in which the cultural significance and purpose of the artifact evolves depending on its social context. Among elderly women, Jhuti continues to maintain ritual authority as *seva*, a sacred act performed to protect the threshold of the household and to honor the gods. However, for younger practitioners, Jhuti increasingly functions as a decorative or digital motif, separate from its ritual roots, signaling a shift in the "value regime" from spiritual offerings to aesthetic expression. Similar changes have occurred in other Indian floor art traditions such as the Tamil Pond, Jharkhand Aripan, and Bengali Alpana, which were once central to household rituals but are now often created for festivals, tourism, or digital media (Dutta, 2024; Modak & Rani, 2022). However, the Pond benefits from organized revitalization efforts and documentation programs, while Jhuti is still distributed informally through domestic internships. The participation of urban Jhuti which decreased to 75% is comparable to Nagarajan's (2018) report on 72% of urban Pond practices in Chennai, but rural retention of Jhuti (100%) exceeds rural Pond practices (89%), suggesting Jhuti remain more embedded in agrarian contexts despite similar urban pressures. This difference may reflect the lack of commercial commodification of Jhuti while Ponds have been integrated into Tamil Nadu's cultural tourism and arts economy, Jhuti remains an uncommercialized domestic practice, limiting its visibility but perhaps preserving its ritual authenticity.

Findings from Bhadrak District show that Jhuti art is at the crossroads between tradition and change. While older women pass on Jhuti as a ritual obligation embedded in daily and seasonal rhythms, younger generations tend to see it as an aesthetic or recreational activity, often cut off from the original ritual time. The use of synthetic paints,

pre-designed stencils, and digital templates marks both innovation and disconnection in practice being realized, reflecting Smith's (2006) concept of "authorized heritage discourse," in which living traditions are at risk of being aestheticized rather than actively practiced. Nonetheless, Jhuti remains a symbol of cultural identity and domestic sanctity, with many practitioners adapting motifs to fit into smaller urban spaces or social media formats, reflecting Harrison's (2020) idea of "heritage resilience." The continued use of key symbols such as *kalasa* and *tulasi* suggests that even in altered mediums, the core semiotic language remains intact, maintaining the connection between devotion, ecology, and gender-based authorship. The data show that these shifts are not uniform but differentiated according to geographical location, age cohort, and level of education: rural women with primary education (95% participation) maintain the most consistent practices, suggesting that Jhuti remains the most vital where it is most embedded in agrarian life and kin-based social networks, while educated urban women (75% participation) show more selective involvement, often restricting the practice of Jhuti to large festivals or family events rather than weekly rituals.

The strength of this research lies in its immersive visual ethnography approach over two years across three seasonal cycles, allowing for comprehensive documentation of ritual practices in their natural context. Data triangulation through semi-structured interviews with 97 practitioners, participant observations, and visual documentation strengthened the credibility of the findings. Purposive sampling in seven administrative blocks provides an adequate geographical representation of rural and semi-urban contexts in Bhadrak District. Thematic analysis with *85% inter-coder* agreement shows the reliability of qualitative interpretation. However, this study has some limitations that must be acknowledged. First, *purposive sampling* in the seven blocks of Bhadrak District limits generalizability to other regions of Odisha, particularly urban centres such as Bhubaneswar or tribal areas in western Odisha where the context of practice may differ significantly. Second, *cross-sectional design* captures *snapshots* of intergenerational differences but cannot establish causal mechanisms or temporal sequences. While the study looked at the correlation between age, urbanization, and change in practices, determining whether these reflect cohort effects, period effects, or aging effects requires longitudinal data. Third, self-reported data on the frequency of practice may be subject to social desire bias, potentially exaggerating participation rates, particularly during *Manabasa Gurubara*. Direct observations are limited to specific ritual events and may not represent variations throughout the year. Fourth, the study focused exclusively on female practitioners, potentially losing insight from non-practitioners or women who have stopped Jhuti, limiting understanding of the legacy process. Fifth, the male perspective does not exist; while Jhuti is a women's practice, household gender dynamics and male valuations of these traditions remain unexplored, limiting the understanding of family support structures. Finally, while the research documented material shifts, ecological impacts such as rice consumption levels, synthetic paint sources, or environmental sustainability metrics were not quantified.

The findings of this study demonstrate the urgent need for multifaceted preservation strategies. First, video documentation of expert practitioners can formalize emerging modes of observational learning, given that only 52% of women under 40 receive direct instruction. Digital platforms must display both the finished product and the embodied process hand position, paste consistency, temporal correction that static photography cannot capture. Second, the curricular integration of Jhuti practice into the art curriculum of local schools can create a formal pedagogical space for transmission, although it must be done carefully to avoid reducing Jhuti to an "art practice" that is separate from its ritual

context and cosmological meaning. Third, festival-based *revival* events at community temples can strengthen collective practices, given that participation remains highest during *Manabasa Gurubara* (98%). Intergenerational Jhuti competitions, in which grandmothers and grandchildren collaborate, can strengthen matrilineal transmission while accommodating younger women's aesthetic innovations. Fourth, to address infrastructural incompatibility (76.5% of women under 40 years old use cement/tile floors), developing portable surfaces or ritual mats that mimic the texture of mud can facilitate the practice of Jhuti in urban spaces while maintaining traditional material techniques. Fifth, social media campaigns that emphasize creative innovation rather than ritual obligations may resonate better with younger cohorts, given that 41% of younger women frame Jhuti as an individual-artistic expression. Displaying contemporary variations alongside traditional motifs can frame Jhuti as an evolving living tradition rather than a static historical artifact. These strategies are in line with UNESCO's framework for protecting intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003), which emphasizes the transmission of life rather than museumization.

Future research should extend geographically to compare Jhuti practices in urban Bhubaneswar, western tribal Odisha, and coastal areas to understand how ecological and demographic contexts affect the persistence and transformation of the practice. Longitudinal studies that track transmission across three generations in the same household over many years are needed to establish the causal mechanisms and temporal sequence of changes. The research should also integrate male perspectives to understand household gender dynamics and family support structures, as well as interview women who actively choose not to practice Jhuti to understand the factors driving discontinuity. In addition, quantification of ecological impacts through material flow measurements (kg of rice/households/month) and comparison of traditional versus modern Jhuti material life cycle assessments can provide an evidence base for sustainability claims. Despite these limitations, the study provides the first systematic visual ethnography of the Jhuti in Bhadrak and establishes *a baseline* for future comparative and longitudinal research. By documenting contemporary practices in detail, this study provides a reference point to track future changes in this important tradition, while also reinforcing the argument that women's domestic ritual art is not a subordinate or ornamental practice but a legitimate epistemological knowledge system that requires serious scientific and policy recognition in efforts to preserve the intangible cultural heritage of Indonesia and South Asia.

## Conclusion

This study provides the first systematic visual ethnographic documentation of Jhuti practice in Bhadrak District, revealing the depth and complexity of this women-led ritual art as a dynamic system of knowledge, devotion, and ecological symbolism. Across 97 households, the findings demonstrate that Jhuti remains a vital element of domestic ritual life, with motifs such as Lakshmi paduka, lotus, and conch forming a stable symbolic repertoire aligned with Odisha's ritual calendar. Participation patterns further show that Jhuti continues to be practiced widely during major festivals such as Manabasa Gurubara (98%) and Kartika Purnima (95%), affirming its centrality to household worship. At the same time, the research identifies clear generational differences in materials, motivations, and modes of transmission, with older women emphasizing communal-religious meanings and traditional mud-floor contexts, while younger practitioners increasingly adopt individual-artistic framings, modern surfaces, and digital learning pathways.

The study makes several key contributions to the scholarship on women's ritual arts, intangible heritage, and visual ethnography. First, it demonstrates that Jhuti functions as

a gendered knowledge system in which women not only perform ritual obligations but also exercise aesthetic agency, ecological literacy, and social authority. Second, by cataloguing twenty-eight distinct motifs and documenting their ritual use, the study provides an empirical foundation for analyzing Jhuti as a codified visual language that synthesizes cosmological, ecological, and social meanings. Third, through intergenerational analysis, the research offers new insights into how embodied learning—tactile correction, imitation, and co-practice—operates as the core mechanism of knowledge transmission. Finally, the ethnographic vignette enriches existing literature on embodied pedagogy by illustrating how ritual knowledge is embedded in gestures, rhythms, and intergenerational relationships that cannot be replicated through digital media alone.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The purposive sampling of households in seven blocks of Bhadrak District limits the generalizability of findings to other regions of Odisha with different demographic and ritual contexts. The cross-sectional design also restricts the ability to distinguish whether generational differences reflect age effects, cohort effects, or broader social changes. Self-reported participation may be influenced by social desirability, and the study does not capture the perspectives of non-practitioners or young women who choose not to engage in Jhuti. Future research should expand to urban and tribal regions, incorporate longitudinal methods to trace transmission over time, and examine the ecological and material sustainability of Jhuti in greater depth. Including male household perspectives and analyzing the role of digital media in reshaping Jhuti practices would also offer valuable contributions. Overall, this study establishes an essential empirical and visual foundation for future comparative and policy-oriented work, underscoring the need to recognize women's domestic ritual arts as vital components of intangible cultural heritage deserving sustained scholarly and institutional support.

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