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Lahthi of Muzaffarpur: Identity, Craft, Community & Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

Traditional crafts in India function not merely as economic activities but as carriers of identity, memory, and community knowledge. The Lahthi (lac bangle) craft of Muzaffarpur, Bihar, represents one such living heritage where material culture, gendered practices, and local economies intersect. This study, based on secondary data, examines Lahthi through four interlinked lenses: identity, craft practice, community organisation, and cultural heritage. The findings indicate that Lahthi production is embedded in intergenerational knowledge systems, where artisanal skills are transmitted within families and neighbourhood clusters. The craft's aesthetic vocabulary—characterised by vibrant colours, glass embellishments, and symbolic designs—links everyday adornment with ritual significance, particularly in marriage customs and regional festivals.

Beyond its cultural value, Lahthi sustains livelihoods, especially for women artisans engaged in home-based and cluster-supported production systems. Recent institutional interventions, including cluster development initiatives and market linkage programs, have contributed to improved income opportunities and greater visibility of the craft beyond local markets. At the same time, the study highlights structural challenges such as raw material constraints, competition from synthetic substitutes, and changing consumer preferences.

By situating Lahthi within debates on intangible cultural heritage and craft-based rural economies, the article argues that its survival depends on balancing tradition with adaptive innovation. The craft thus emerges as both a cultural marker of Muzaffarpur's regional identity and a dynamic socio-economic resource.

Keywords: Lahthi craft, Lac bangles, Intangible cultural heritage, Craft-based livelihoods, Material culture and identity, Women artisans, Community-based production, Traditional knowledge systems

1. Introduction

Traditional crafts in South Asia occupy a unique position at the intersection of material culture, identity formation, and livelihood systems. Far from being merely aesthetic artefacts, handcrafted objects often function as carriers of memory, markers of social belonging, and repositories of intergenerational knowledge. In India, where regional diversity shapes distinctive craft ecologies, localised artisanal practices continue to define cultural landscapes even amid rapid industrialisation and market modernisation. Within this context, the Lahthi (lac bangle) craft of Muzaffarpur district in Bihar represents a compelling case of how a seemingly modest object of adornment can embody layered meanings of identity, community cohesion, and intangible cultural heritage.

Muzaffarpur is widely recognised for its agricultural and cultural distinctiveness, yet its artisanal traditions have received comparatively limited scholarly attention beyond broader studies of Bihar's handicrafts. Among these traditions, Lahthi — handcrafted bangles made from processed lac resin and embellished with pigments, glass pieces, and decorative motifs — holds enduring social relevance. These bangles are not simply ornaments; they are embedded in the symbolic economy of everyday life. Worn during festivals, marriages, and life-cycle rituals, Lahthi signify marital status, auspiciousness, and regional belonging, particularly among women. Thus, the craft operates simultaneously in aesthetic, ritual, and social domains, linking material production with cultural meaning.

From a craft studies perspective, Lahthi production exemplifies the characteristics of hereditary artisanal systems: skill transmission through family lineages, home-based production units, gendered division of labour, and reliance on locally available or regionally traded raw materials. The use of lac — a natural resin secreted by the insect Kerria lacca — situates the craft within long-standing South Asian traditions of organic material use. However, the Muzaffarpur variant has evolved stylistically and technologically through local innovation, market preferences, and interactions with traders, making it a dynamic rather than static tradition. This adaptive quality challenges romanticised notions of "unchanging tradition" and instead highlights craft as a living, negotiated practice.

The community dimension of Lahthi production is equally significant. Artisans are often concentrated in specific neighbourhoods or clusters where production, social life, and cultural exchange overlap. Workshops double as spaces of learning, collaboration, and social interaction, reinforcing collective identity. Women's participation is particularly notable: many are engaged in colouring, decorating, finishing, and sometimes marketing the bangles. Their involvement extends the craft's role beyond cultural symbolism to tangible socio-economic empowerment, contributing to household income diversification and greater decision-making agency within families.

At the same time, Lahthi craft operates within a changing economic environment. The expansion of machine-made substitutes, fluctuating raw material supply, and shifting consumer preferences have posed challenges to traditional artisans. In response, institutional interventions — such as cluster development programs, skill upgradation initiatives, and efforts toward geographical branding — have sought to reposition the craft within contemporary markets. These processes illustrate how heritage practices are increasingly mediated by policy frameworks and development discourse, transforming the relationship between craft, community, and commerce.

Despite its cultural and socio-economic importance, scholarly engagement with Lahthi remains fragmented, often appearing only as a passing reference within broader surveys of regional crafts. There is a need for focused analysis that situates the craft within debates on identity construction, heritage preservation, and community-based production systems. Understanding Lahthi through these lenses allows for a more nuanced appreciation of how material objects contribute to cultural continuity while simultaneously adapting to modern pressures.

This article addresses that gap by examining the Lahthi of Muzaffarpur through four interconnected dimensions: **identity**, **craft practice**, **community structures**, and **cultural heritage value**. Using secondary data, it explores how the craft functions as a symbol of regional identity, how artisanal knowledge is organised and transmitted, how production sustains social and economic networks, and how the tradition is being repositioned within heritage and development narratives. By doing so, the study contributes to broader discussions in craft studies, cultural sociology, and heritage research,

demonstrating that small-scale artisanal practices like Lahthi are vital to understanding the lived textures of culture in contemporary India.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Craft, Material Culture, and Identity

Scholarly engagement with traditional crafts has increasingly moved beyond descriptive ethnography toward understanding craft objects as forms of material culture that actively participate in identity construction. Material culture studies argue that objects are not passive artefacts but socially embedded entities that carry meanings shaped by use, context, and cultural interpretation. In this framework, adornments such as bangles function as identity markers, signalling gender, marital status, community affiliation, and regional belonging. Ornamentation, particularly in South Asia, has been widely interpreted as a symbolic system through which social values are expressed, reproduced, and negotiated.

Within Indian contexts, craft objects often operate at the intersection of the sacred and the everyday. Scholars have noted that ritual objects and bodily adornments mediate relationships between the individual and the collective, embedding personal identity within larger cultural narratives. Bangles, in particular, are strongly associated with notions of auspiciousness, fertility, and marital continuity. However, most of this literature remains general, rarely engaging with region-specific bangle traditions such as lac-based Lahthi. This reveals a gap in connecting broader theories of material culture and identity to localized craft practices.

2.2 Hereditary Craft Systems and Knowledge Transmission

Traditional craft production in India has long been organized around hereditary systems in which skills are transmitted through family and community networks. Such systems are characterised by tacit knowledge, apprenticeship models, and experiential learning rather than formalised technical education. Craft knowledge is often embodied — residing in the artisan's sensory engagement with materials, tools, and processes. This embodied knowledge enables subtle variations, improvisation, and adaptation, which keep traditions dynamic over time.

Research on artisanal clusters highlights how spatial concentration of craft communities fosters shared learning, cooperation, and collective problem-solving. Workshops serve not only as sites of production but also as social spaces where technical, cultural, and economic knowledge circulates. Yet, while cluster-based studies have examined textiles, metal crafts, and woodwork extensively, smaller-scale crafts such as lac bangle making remain underrepresented in academic discourse. There is limited systematic analysis of how such crafts maintain continuity while adjusting to market and policy-driven changes.

2.3 Gender, Craft, and Household Economies

The relationship between gender and craft production has drawn attention within development studies and feminist economic scholarship. Home-based crafts frequently rely on women's labour, often blurring boundaries between domestic responsibilities and income-generating activities. Such participation can enhance women's economic visibility and bargaining power within households, even when the work is undervalued in formal economic statistics.

Studies on handicrafts in rural India suggest that women's involvement in decorative and finishing processes is particularly prominent, reflecting gendered divisions of labour that align with socially constructed notions of dexterity and patience. At the same time, these roles can offer pathways to financial autonomy and social mobility, especially when linked with market access initiatives. However,

literature also cautions against romanticising empowerment narratives, noting that women often remain positioned within low-value segments of the production chain. In the context of Lahthi, a focused inquiry is needed to understand how women's roles intersect with cultural symbolism and economic agency.

2.4 Craft, Heritage, and Cultural Sustainability

In recent decades, traditional crafts have been reframed within the discourse of intangible cultural heritage. This perspective recognises practices, skills, and knowledge systems as living heritage that requires safeguarding through community participation and supportive policy frameworks. Heritage scholars emphasise that preservation should not imply freezing traditions in time; rather, sustainability depends on enabling adaptive change while maintaining core cultural meanings.

Simultaneously, development-oriented approaches have linked craft revival with rural livelihoods, tourism, and creative economy strategies. Government programs promoting cluster development, skill upgradation, and branding seek to integrate traditional crafts into contemporary markets. While such initiatives can enhance visibility and income, they also reshape production structures, aesthetic choices, and power relations within craft communities. The tension between heritage preservation and market adaptation is a recurring theme in craft literature, yet empirical cases from eastern India — including lac-based crafts — remain relatively scarce.

2.5 Research Gap

Existing scholarship provides valuable conceptual tools for understanding craft as material culture, hereditary knowledge system, gendered labour domain, and heritage practice. However, these strands of literature rarely converge in studies of specific, regionally embedded crafts like the Lahthi of Muzaffarpur. Most references to lac bangles appear in broad surveys of handicrafts, lacking detailed analysis of their identity functions, community organisation, and evolving heritage status.

This study addresses that gap by integrating these theoretical perspectives into a focused examination of Lahthi. By situating the craft within debates on identity, community-based production, gendered labour, and cultural heritage, the research contributes to a more grounded understanding of how small-scale artisanal traditions operate within contemporary socio-cultural and economic transformations.

3. Conceptual Framework

Traditional crafts can be analytically understood not as isolated production activities but as **embedded socio-cultural systems** in which material practice, identity formation, and community organisation interact. Drawing from material culture theory, craft studies, and heritage discourse, this study conceptualises Lahthi of Muzaffarpur as a **four-dimensional system** linking **craft practice, identity construction, community structure, and cultural heritage value**.

3.1 Craft Practice as a Cultural Process

Craft practice extends beyond technical production; it represents a culturally informed process involving tacit knowledge, embodied skill, and symbolic design choices. The making of Lahthi involves material transformation (lac processing), aesthetic decisions (colour combinations, ornamentation), and ritual relevance (designs suited for festivals and marriage). These elements position the craft as a site where culture is materially enacted. Thus, production is simultaneously economic and expressive, embedding social meanings within objects.

3.2 Craft and Identity Formation

Material culture scholarship posits that objects function as markers of identity. Lahthi bangles, worn dur-

ing significant rituals and everyday life, signal marital status, femininity, and regional belonging. The craft therefore contributes to **collective identity** at two levels:

- **Personal identity** – through bodily adornment and gendered symbolism
- **Regional identity** – as Lahthi becomes associated with Muzaffarpur's cultural profile

This suggests that craft objects serve as mediators between individual self-representation and shared cultural narratives.

3.3 Community Structure and Social Organisation

Lahthi production is organised within family- and cluster-based systems where economic activity is embedded in social relationships. Knowledge transfer, labour division, and production coordination occur through kinship and neighbourhood networks. Workshops function as social spaces that sustain cooperation, mutual learning, and cultural continuity. This aligns with theories of embedded economies, where economic exchange is inseparable from social ties.

Community organisation also shapes who participates in which stage of production, often along gender lines. Women's roles in colouring, decorating, and finishing bangles link household labour with market-oriented production, situating the craft within broader debates on gendered livelihoods.

3.4 Craft as Cultural Heritage

From a heritage perspective, Lahthi represents intangible cultural heritage because its value lies in **skills, techniques, and cultural meanings**, not merely in the finished product. However, heritage status is not static; it is continuously renegotiated through policy initiatives, market exposure, and cultural promotion. Efforts such as cluster development, branding, and institutional support reposition Lahthi from a local craft to a recognised cultural asset, influencing both production patterns and symbolic value.

3.5 Integrated Model

Based on the above dimensions, the study proposes that **craft practice acts as the foundational driver**, influencing both **identity formation** and **community organisation**, which together shape the **perceived cultural heritage value** of Lahthi. At the same time, heritage recognition feeds back into craft practice by encouraging preservation, innovation, and market adaptation.

Core Relationship Structure:

Craft Practice → Identity Construction

Craft Practice → Community Structure

Identity + Community → Cultural Heritage Value

Heritage Recognition → Transformation of Craft Practice

This cyclical relationship highlights craft as a **dynamic socio-cultural system**, not a static tradition.

4. Hypotheses

Drawing from the conceptual framework, the following propositions guide the analysis:

H1: The intensity of engagement in traditional craft practices is positively associated with the strength of regional and cultural identity linked to Lahthi.

H2: Strong community-based production structures enhance the continuity of traditional knowledge and skills in Lahthi craft.

H3: Women's participation in Lahthi production contributes significantly to both household livelihood strategies and the social sustainability of the craft tradition.

H4: Institutional recognition and heritage-oriented interventions positively influence the perceived cultural value of Lahthi but also lead to adaptive changes in production practices.
H5: The interaction between identity significance and community organisation mediates the transformation of Lahthi from a local craft into a recognised cultural heritage asset.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative, interpretive research design** grounded in secondary data analysis. Given that the objective is to understand Lahthi of Muzaffarpur as a socio-cultural system rather than to measure numerical outputs, an interpretivist approach is appropriate. The research seeks to explore meanings, relationships, and contextual dynamics linking craft practice, identity, community organisation, and cultural heritage.

The study is conceptual-empirical in nature: it integrates theoretical perspectives from craft studies, material culture research, and heritage discourse with documented evidence about Lahthi production and its socio-cultural environment.

5.2 Data Sources

The analysis relies exclusively on **secondary data**, drawn from multiple categories to ensure contextual richness and triangulation:

1. **Academic literature** – studies on craft traditions, material culture, gender and handicrafts, and cultural heritage frameworks.
2. **Government and institutional reports** – documents related to handicraft development, cluster initiatives, and traditional industry support schemes.
3. **Cultural documentation** – articles, regional cultural accounts, and descriptive records on Bihar's craft traditions.
4. **Media and development narratives** – coverage highlighting artisan livelihoods, women's participation, and evolving market linkages.

These sources provide insights into historical evolution, production organisation, social roles, and contemporary transformations of Lahthi craft.

5.3 Analytical Approach

The study employs **thematic analysis** to interpret the collected secondary material. Information was coded and organised around four core analytical categories derived from the conceptual framework:

- Craft practice and knowledge systems
- Identity and symbolic meanings
- Community structure and gender roles
- Cultural heritage value and institutional influence

Rather than treating these as isolated variables, the analysis examines how they interact to form an integrated craft ecosystem. This relational approach allows the research to move beyond description toward explanation.

5.4 Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis is the **Lahthi craft system of Muzaffarpur**, conceptualised as a socio-cultural production network. This includes:

- Artisans and households engaged in production
- Community-based organisation of work

- Symbolic use of Lahthi in cultural contexts
- Institutional and market structures influencing the craft

The focus is therefore not on individual artisans but on the **collective system** through which the craft operates.

5.5 Rationale for Secondary Data Use

Secondary data analysis is appropriate for three key reasons:

1. **Cultural-historical perspective** – Understanding craft traditions requires long-term and contextual evidence that secondary sources provide.
2. **Accessibility and ethical considerations** – The study synthesises existing documented knowledge without intrusive field intervention.
3. **Conceptual integration** – The aim is to connect dispersed knowledge streams rather than generate micro-level quantitative measures.

5.6 Limitations

Reliance on secondary sources means the study may not fully capture recent micro-level variations or individual artisan perspectives. Some data may reflect institutional or media framing rather than direct artisan voices. However, triangulation across multiple source types reduces bias and supports analytical reliability.

6. Results and Findings

The thematic analysis of secondary sources reveals that Lahthi of Muzaffarpur functions as an **integrated socio-cultural system** in which material production, symbolic meaning, and community organisation are mutually reinforcing. The findings are presented across four interlinked dimensions derived from the conceptual framework.

6.1 Craft Practice as a Living Knowledge System

Evidence indicates that Lahthi production is sustained through **tacit, embodied knowledge** rather than formalised training systems. Skills related to lac heating, shaping, colouring, and decorative embedding are acquired through observation, repetition, and intergenerational learning within family-based units. This confirms that craft practice is not merely a technical act but a **cultural process** involving sensory judgement, aesthetic memory, and ritual awareness.

Importantly, the craft demonstrates **adaptive continuity**. While traditional methods remain central, artisans incorporate new colour schemes, embellishment styles, and market-oriented designs. This shows that Lahthi practice is dynamic, supporting the proposition that heritage crafts evolve in response to social and economic contexts rather than remaining static relics.

Supports H1 and H2 – Active engagement in practice reinforces both identity meanings and continuity of knowledge.

6.2 Lahthi as a Marker of Identity

The analysis highlights Lahthi's strong role in **symbolic identity formation**. Bangles are linked with marital status, auspiciousness, and womanhood, particularly during festivals and life-cycle rituals. Wearing Lahthi is not simply decorative; it expresses cultural belonging and participation in shared traditions.

At a broader scale, Lahthi contributes to **regional identity construction**. The craft is associated with Muzaffarpur's cultural image, joining other regionally recognised products in representing local

distinctiveness. This demonstrates how material objects can operate simultaneously at **personal and collective identity levels**, validating the conceptual link between craft and identity.

Strongly supports H1 – Craft engagement correlates with identity expression and cultural belonging.

6.3 Community Organisation and Social Embeddedness

Lahthi production is deeply embedded in **community-based structures**. Artisan households often operate within clustered neighbourhoods where production, knowledge exchange, and social interaction overlap. Workshops serve as informal institutions of learning and cooperation, confirming that economic production is intertwined with social relations.

Gender roles emerge as a critical feature. Women's involvement in colouring, decoration, and finishing processes connects household labour with income generation. Secondary evidence suggests that this participation contributes to greater financial contribution within families and enhances social recognition of women's roles. However, tasks often remain segmented, reflecting persistent gendered divisions of labour.

Supports H2 and H3 – Community networks sustain knowledge continuity, and women's participation strengthens both livelihood systems and social sustainability of the craft.

6.4 Cultural Heritage Recognition and Institutional Influence

Lahthi is increasingly framed within the discourse of **cultural heritage and traditional industry revival**. Institutional interventions, cluster initiatives, and branding efforts position the craft as a regional cultural asset. This recognition elevates its symbolic status and improves market visibility.

However, findings show that heritage recognition also introduces **structural transformation**. Design modifications, standardisation of products, and market-driven adaptations reflect the influence of development frameworks. Thus, heritage status does not freeze tradition; instead, it reshapes production logics.

Supports H4 – Institutional recognition enhances perceived cultural value while prompting adaptive change in practice.

6.5 Interrelationship Between Identity, Community, and Heritage Value

The data reveal that Lahthi's transformation into a recognised cultural heritage asset is not solely policy-driven. Rather, it emerges from the **interaction between strong identity symbolism and cohesive community organisation**. Cultural meaning provides legitimacy, while community structures ensure continuity and production capacity. Together, they enable the craft to be mobilised within heritage and development narratives.

This confirms that heritage value is socially constructed through lived practice and collective participation, not merely assigned through official designation.

Supports H5 – Identity significance and community organisation mediate the elevation of Lahthi into heritage discourse.

Summary of Findings

Dimension	Key Insight	Hypotheses Supported
Craft Practice	Embodied, adaptive knowledge system	H1, H2
Identity	Personal and regional identity marker	H1
Community	Socially embedded, gender-participatory production	H2, H3
Heritage	Recognition increases value but transforms practice	H4

Dimension	Key Insight	Hypotheses Supported
Integrated System	Identity + community shape heritage status	H5

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Lahthi operates as a **dynamic cultural ecosystem** rather than a simple handicraft activity. Craft, identity, community, and heritage form a mutually reinforcing system that sustains both cultural continuity and socio-economic adaptation.

7. Discussion

The findings position Lahthi of Muzaffarpur not merely as a regional handicraft but as a **dynamic socio-cultural system** that bridges material practice, symbolic meaning, and collective organisation. This discussion interprets those findings in relation to broader theoretical debates in craft studies, material culture, gendered livelihoods, and heritage discourse.

7.1 Craft as Cultural Process, Not Static Tradition

The evidence challenges romanticised notions that traditional crafts are unchanging remnants of the past. Instead, Lahthi production illustrates the concept of **adaptive continuity** — where core techniques and symbolic meanings endure, but aesthetic forms and production strategies evolve. This supports contemporary craft theory which views tradition as a negotiated process rather than a fixed inheritance. By integrating new designs and market preferences while retaining material and ritual relevance, Lahthi demonstrates how living traditions balance preservation with innovation.

Thus, craft practice functions as a **cultural process**, continually rearticulating meaning through material transformation. The act of making Lahthi is itself a site where cultural memory is enacted, reinforcing the idea that heritage resides as much in practice as in the object.

7.2 Material Objects and Identity Construction

The study reinforces material culture perspectives that objects actively participate in identity formation. Lahthi bangles mediate between body and society, marking gender roles, marital status, and participation in ritual life. Their association with Muzaffarpur further shows how craft objects can scale from **individual identity markers** to **symbols of regional belonging**.

This dual role illustrates how material artefacts operate within what may be termed a symbolic economy of adornment, where aesthetic choices communicate social information. Lahthi thus contributes to identity not through abstract narratives but through everyday bodily practices.

7.3 Community Embeddedness and Social Sustainability

The embedded nature of Lahthi production within clustered artisan communities highlights the continuing relevance of **socially embedded economies**. Production is inseparable from kinship ties, neighbourhood networks, and shared cultural norms. Such embeddedness provides resilience, enabling knowledge continuity even in the absence of formal institutional training.

Women's participation adds another dimension: the craft links cultural symbolism with economic agency. While gendered divisions of labour persist, involvement in value-adding stages integrates women into market processes and enhances their visibility in household economies. This supports the view that traditional crafts can act as **micro-sites of socio-economic negotiation**, where cultural practice and livelihood strategies intersect.

7.4 Heritage Recognition and Transformation

The findings also illuminate the complex relationship between craft and heritage discourse. Institutional recognition elevates Lahthi's status from a local practice to a cultural asset, enhancing visibility and

legitimacy. However, this process simultaneously introduces new production logics, including standardisation, branding, and design adaptation. This confirms heritage scholarship's argument that safeguarding does not imply stasis; rather, recognition often accelerates transformation.

Lahthi thus exemplifies the **paradox of heritage**: preservation efforts can both sustain and reshape traditions. The craft's future viability depends on maintaining a balance between market adaptation and cultural integrity.

7.5 Theoretical Contribution

By integrating craft practice, identity, community structure, and heritage value into a single analytical frame, this study contributes to a **systems-based understanding of traditional crafts**. It demonstrates that:

- Craft sustains identity through material-symbolic practices
- Community organisation ensures knowledge transmission and social continuity
- Heritage status emerges from lived cultural significance rather than policy alone
- Institutional interventions reconfigure, rather than simply preserve, tradition

This holistic perspective moves beyond treating crafts as economic sectors or aesthetic categories, positioning them instead as **cultural infrastructures** that support both meaning-making and livelihoods.

Overall, the discussion underscores that Lahthi survives not because it resists change, but because it **absorbs change while retaining cultural resonance**. Its endurance lies in the interplay between memory and adaptation, community and commerce, identity and innovation.

8. Conclusion and Implications

8.1 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the Lahthi of Muzaffarpur through the interconnected lenses of **identity, craft practice, community organisation, and cultural heritage**. The analysis demonstrates that Lahthi is not simply a decorative handicraft but a **living cultural system** in which material production, symbolic meaning, and social relationships are deeply intertwined.

First, the craft persists through **embodied, intergenerational knowledge systems** that combine technical skill with cultural memory. This ensures continuity while allowing adaptation to changing aesthetic and market contexts. Second, Lahthi functions as a powerful **identity marker**, operating at both personal and regional levels. Its role in ritual practices and everyday adornment embeds it within the symbolic fabric of social life. Third, the craft is sustained by **community-based production structures** where social ties support knowledge transmission, cooperation, and resilience. Women's participation illustrates how cultural practices intersect with livelihood strategies, linking heritage with household economies. Finally, heritage recognition and institutional support have enhanced Lahthi's visibility and value, yet also introduced adaptive transformations, confirming that cultural heritage is dynamic rather than static.

Taken together, these findings position Lahthi as a **dynamic cultural ecosystem**. Its survival depends not on isolation from change but on the capacity of artisans and communities to negotiate continuity and innovation simultaneously.

8.2 Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to scholarship in three key ways:

1. **Craft Studies** – It supports the view of craft as a cultural process rather than a static tradition, demonstrating how adaptive continuity sustains relevance.

2. **Material Culture and Identity** – It shows how everyday objects mediate identity at multiple scales, linking bodily adornment with regional cultural narratives.
3. **Heritage Discourse** – It highlights that heritage value emerges from lived social practices and community structures, not solely from institutional designation.

By integrating these perspectives, the research advances a **systems-based understanding of traditional crafts**.

8.3 Practical and Policy Implications

The findings also carry implications for craft development and cultural policy:

- **Community-centred interventions** are crucial, as knowledge continuity depends on social networks, not just infrastructure.
- **Support for women artisans** should extend beyond production roles to include training in marketing and enterprise development.
- **Heritage promotion strategies** must balance commercial expansion with protection of cultural meanings and artisanal autonomy.
- **Cluster development models** should recognise the social and symbolic dimensions of craft, not treat artisans merely as economic units.

Such approaches can strengthen both livelihood sustainability and cultural preservation.

8.4 Limitations and Future Research

As a secondary data–based study, the research does not capture detailed ethnographic insights from individual artisans. Future research could incorporate **field-based methods**, including interviews and participant observation, to explore micro-level experiences, gender dynamics, and generational change. Comparative studies with other lac bangle clusters could further illuminate regional variations in identity and heritage processes.

8.5 Closing Remark

Lahthi of Muzaffarpur demonstrates that traditional crafts endure because they are **socially meaningful, culturally embedded, and capable of adaptation**. They are not relics of the past but active participants in shaping contemporary cultural life. Recognising this dynamic character is essential for sustaining both the craft and the communities that keep it alive.

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