

## Case studies: Sambalpur

**Smt. Kasturi Meher**, a women ST weaver from Beheramal village. She was weaving sambalpuri sarees, the traditional activity of her family. She was taking thread and design from a trader and weave sarees, which fetch them a bare minimum of around Rs.5000/- from the activity. As she had no such landed property, she found it very difficult to run the family with such meagre income from the traditional family activity of weaving. “It was a very difficult situation then, despite our family toiling, we could only manage meeting both ends with difficulty and also unable to cater to proper education need of my son”, as she narrated her story.



During 2019, Dunguripali Bunakara Producer Company was started in this area taking all marginalized weavers with a holistic approach towards capacity building, production process, marketing, soft skills & revolving fund assistance etc., with support of NABARD.

During capacity building & technical dissemination process the loom of Smt. Kasturi Meher was upgraded to take up higher count weaving. With this and introduction of new designs, the major challenge before the weaver for taking up higher count of weaving could be taken care of. Now she was able to producing 4 pcs of 2/120 count cotton sarees. For taking care of her higher credit needs she was facilitated to get a MUDRA loan of Rs of Rs.25,000/- ( Twenty thousand only) with an exposure of Rs.35,000/- ( Rupees thirty five thousand only) from Bank of Baroda, Dunguripali. Smt. Meher with the amount invested in procurement of raw materials and could able to directly market it through DBPCL. This has led her to earn an incremental income of Rs.3000/- to Rs.4000/- per month. With this she has repaid her bank loan within a year and also gone for expanding her activity with 02 other looms engaging other family members and now enhancing her family income to lead a comfortable life.

## The Weaver's Legacy: Pratap Kumar Meher



**Pratap Kumar Meher**, a 35-year-old weaver from Sonapur, Odisha, carries the weight of generations on his shoulders. The art of Sambalpuri saree making, with its intricate work and natural dyes, flows through his family like the Mahanadi river. For 17 years, Pratap has sat at the loom, his hands weaving magic threads into breathtaking sarees, each one taking seven to eight days to complete.

His dedication is evident in the beauty of his creations, but it comes at a cost. The long hours hunched over the loom have brought aches to his back and strains to his neck. These physical challenges are a constant reminder of the struggle behind the artistry.

Despite the hardships, Pratap remains committed to his craft. He finds solace in the knowledge that he is not just creating sarees, but preserving a tradition passed down through generations. He is grateful for the support of organizations like LTI Mindtree and Tisser, who recognize the importance of handloom weaving and empower artisans like him.

However, Pratap dreams of a future where the burden is lighter. He earns about 12- 15 thousand a month. His biggest hope is to get help with handloom machines. Perhaps with technological advancements, the process can become less strenuous and more productive. This would allow him to continue his craft for years to come, while also inspiring the next generation to take up the weaving legacy.

Pratap Kumar Meher's story is a testament to the unwavering spirit of India's handloom weavers. He is more than just a weaver; he is a keeper of tradition, an artist, and an inspiration for all who value the beauty and heritage of handloom sarees.

**Niranjan's** home bustles with the rhythmic clicks of the loom, a melody that has been the soundtrack of his life for over six decades. Alongside his nine-member family, Niranjan weaves magic with threads, meticulously crafting each Sambalpuri saree on a handloom. Their sarees are not just cloth; they are vibrant expressions of Odisha's cultural heritage, adorned with intricate designs and rich, natural dyes.

Creating a single masterpiece takes Niranjan a dedicated 7-8 days. Despite the long hours, the satisfaction of completing a saree is valuable to him. He earns Rs. 12,000-15,000 per month fuels his passion. This passion is further ignited by the support of organizations like LTI Mindtree and Tisser, who have empowered Niranjan and his community.



However, the weaver's art comes with its own set of challenges. The constant sitting required for long stretches takes a toll on Niranjan's body, causing backaches and neck strains. He faces eyesight issues as well due to ageing. These physical limitations are a constant worry, especially when considering the future of this art form.

Niranjan's biggest hope is for a smoother path for the next generation. He dreams of advancements in handloom technology that could reduce the physical strain on weavers. More importantly, he aspires for better pay and recognition for the dedication and skill required in this intricate craft.

Niranjan Meher's story is a call to action. It's a reminder of the human touch that breathes life into every handloom creation. As we admire the beauty of a Sambalpuri saree, let us also acknowledge the weaver's hands that weave not just cloth, but tradition, culture, and a legacy waiting to be cherished for generations to come.