

Pelletes-Bite (Cut-Thread) Cloth for a Sustainable Source of Income in Kalabari of Rivers State

By

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Abstract

Pelete-Bite wrappers are originally imported from India to Nigeria as Indian madras. These fabrics are transformed into traditional Kalabari wrappers by female artisans, who are inspired to earn their living through the aesthetic practice of cutting threads in Indian Madras to form intricate designs. The paper posits that learning to cut cloth among Kalabari women is a voluntary decision that begins at age 6, with no prescribed kinship affiliation. Pelete-Bite fabrics are created by using a razor blade or a penknife to cut threads, thereby allowing new designs to emerge. Pelete-Bite is a vital means of livelihood for many Kalabari women. The paper explores the economic and social significance of the Pelete-Bite (cut-thread) wrapper, highlighting its potential for income generation. This study reveals that Pelete-Bite, as a craft, provides a reasonable income for Kalabari female artisans, preserves their cultural heritage, and promotes social order. The paper concludes that Pelete-Bite (cut-thread) craft can be a viable means of livelihood, offering opportunities for economic growth, entrepreneurial development, and cultural preservation. Among the recommendations, the study proposes that community chiefs, elders, and well-meaning indigenes establish craft centres in each community within the Kalabari Kingdom to enhance skills and make Pelete-Bite marketable beyond the country.

Keywords: Artisans, Craft, Entrepreneurial, *Pelete-Bite*, sustainable.

Introduction

The Kalabari people are a subgroup of the Ijaw ethnic group in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. They are specifically on the Island, in the mangrove area, as riverine people; their traditional life has centred on trading and fishing. The culture of a people is their way of life, which includes their language, norms, marriage practices, clothing, and more. They have a rich history in traditional cultural outfits. These groups are known for creating different cultural fabrics used for various ceremonies. Pelete-Bite is a crucial cultural practice among the Kalabari ethnic group. Pelete-Bite (cut – thread)

wrappers are made out of modifying the imported Indian Madras (George wrapper) by cutting out some part of the threads on the wrapper to form symbols of Kalabari identities through creating patterns and designs on the fabrics. The idea of the Kalabari Pelete-Bite (cut thread) has influenced the design of Indian textiles (Indian madras) in a way that they copied the Kalabari cut thread design. This means that some of the newly imported Indian madras resemble the Pelete Bite (cut Thread) design. See plate 5

According to Barbara (1995), Pelete-Bite is created by removing selected threads from imported Indian Madras or Injiri to produce a wholly new design and appearance of the fabric. This art is practised predominantly by Kalabari women. Eicher (2005) described the pattern Pelete-Bite as the maker's choice from various Indian Madras patterns, such as background colours of Indigo, red, and burgundy (sometimes dark green), offset with white, yellow, and black. Bell-Gam et al. (1999) posit that the Kalabari are regarded as the most enterprising in re-designing the original imported Indian Madras (George or Asisa) in Kalabari parlance into a 'Pelete-Bite', a lacy cloth with parts removed from the original piece, hand-produced by Kalabari women.

Ugiomoh and Wogu (2009) argue that the design orientation of the cloth primarily distinguishes the two garments. The authors further noted that the designs typically found on Pelete Bite range from squares, triangles, cones, and circles, as well as shortened versions; a combination of these forms characterises this design. The principal

artisans in this craft are women. This group of artisans passes on the unique trade to their children, relatives, and any members of the community who are interested. The Pelete-Bite wrapper is a key indicator of the Kalabari people's cultural identity, particularly in terms of cultural attire. The art of Pelete-Bite is learned by anyone interested in cutting cloth, whether as a hobby or as a gainful occupation. From the age of six, a female child whose parents are interested in cutting cloth can be sent for apprenticeship under the guidance of a relative or friend who is highly knowledgeable in the Pelete-Bite (cut thread) craft. Although some of these women are self-taught artisans, they began cutting cloth by looking at samples of already cut cloth and gradually following the pattern until their hands were strong enough to cut different patterns of Pelete-Bite wrappers. This paper is focused on the entrepreneurial aspects of Pelete Bite (cut thread) wrappers

Methods and Techniques

The methods and techniques of Pelete-Bite are similar to those of other fabric production methods. Fashion designers are conscientious and meticulous; many factors are considered before embarking on production. For this production, a few steps are taken:

A. Fabric selection:

The artisans will begin by selecting a piece of George wrapper, a plaid or checked cotton fabric. With these types of Indian madras, you will be able to get your desired design and pattern.

B. Choosing of motifs:

A motif is a unit of design. This unit of design is used at random to form a pattern on fabric. The Kalabari women select motifs or patterns to be used in creating the cloth. They do not just choose any motif or pattern; these motifs are drawn from their cultural background to preserve their heritage. In some cases, women use personal motifs, either to immortalise their creativity or to facilitate customisation.

C. Cutting and Removing Threads:

The tools needed for this craft are a needle, a penknife, or a razor blade. A razor blade or penknife is used to cut off unwanted threads to form a pattern. In contrast, the needle is used to pick up the cut-off threads at both ends and remove them. This is done continuously till the desired repeat patterns are obtained. It is important to note that the removal of the lighter-coloured threads is a fundamental component of the *Pelete-Bite* design conceptualisation (Eicher and Erekosima, 1982).

D. Finished *Pelete-Bite* (cut thread) Wrappers:

The *Pelete-Bite* artisans complete the cut cloth by transforming Indian Madras (George Wrapper) into a unique aesthetic Kalabari wrapper. These wrappers are used according to the ceremonies that suit each wrapper. Some of the patterns are suitable for marriages, burials, masquerade festivals, and other contexts.

Different designs, patterns and colours of *Pelete-Bite*



Plate 1: Ready for use *Pelete-Bite*
Source/Photograph: Joe-
Mgbakiri, U. Year: 2025



Plate 2: Ready for use *Pelete-Bite*
Source/Photograph: Joe-Mgbakiri,
U. Year: 2025



Plate 3: Ready for use Pelete-Bite Source/Photograph: Joe-Mgbakiri, U. Year: 2025

The Entrepreneurship in the Production of *Pelete-Bite* and Its Benefits:

The paper focuses on the entrepreneurship aspect of **Pelete-Bite**. An entrepreneur is a person or group of people who takes an idea or business plan and creates a profitable Business out of it. Entrepreneurs create job opportunities for citizens. The Kalabari artisans of *Pelete-Bite* are known for this, though few of them practice this art of cutting cloth as a leisure activity. Despite the domestic responsibilities these women face in their various homes, they strive to make ends meet through this craft. These artisans are full-time entrepreneurs; some of them have 5 to 10 apprentices and workers under them, from which they produce so much *Pelete-Bite* for the consumers. These entrepreneurs are earning substantial income from cut-thread wrappers. They are breadwinners in their different homes. The artisans are well-to-do; as such, the communities they belong to recognise them as prominent members. The economic benefits of the *Pelete-Bite* Producers are enormous.

Income Generation: The artisans sell their handmade, redesigned wrappers. This craftsmanship provides a considerable income. Women typically retain financial autonomy as they continue this craft. There are also social benefits associated with artisans. One such example is Empowerment: a significant social benefit associated with women. These women empower female youth and women in their communities through the craft of *Pelete-Bite* (cut thread). They

achieve a high level of recognition by empowering people. They also participate in other related community activities. The craft of traditional wrappers of the Kalabari people cannot be overstated. The entrepreneurs are highly influential women in their local communities. As entrepreneurs, they are among the decision-makers in the community. They initiate the majority of community projects; it is clear that the *Pelete-Bite* (cut thread) wrapper entrepreneurs make a meaningful impact in their homes and communities.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PELETE-BITE (CUT-THREAD) WRAPPER

Pelete-Bite (cut thread) is an essential traditional Kalabari textile. The cut thread wrapper represents a unique imported Indian madras. *Pelete-Bite* artists are unique and highly creative; the women utilise the medium for pure aesthetic expression. It is evident that people, in one way or another, will wonder how the inspiration for cut thread came to be, or may be curious to know the first group of Kalabari women who began the craft. Art, as we know, is the creative expression of what is within us, producing unique works. Therefore, art is the artistic creation of forms, objects, and functional items for aesthetic purposes. The artisans used the artistic.

Creativity is innate in them, enabling them to create this fantastic, intricate *Pelete-Bite*. The significance is numerous, but to mention a few.

1. One of the significant aspects of *Pelete-Bite* craft is the preservation of Kalabari cultural heritage. The symbols used for the wrappers are Kalabari cultural symbols. This art of *Pelete-Bite* (cut thread) has brought to life all symbols that would have gone extinct.
2. **Cultural Identification:** *Pelete-Bite* (cut thread) is one wrapper design that identifies the Kalabari Ijo group of Rivers State. In tribal fashion identification, each tribe showcases their cultural attire during ceremonies. *Pelete-Bite* is one of the wrappers that identifies the Kalabari ethnic group and the entire Rivers State.

3. **Creative and Aesthetic Appeal:** The creativity in the production of *the Pelete-Bite wrapper* calls for questioning how traditional unschooled women were able to redesign foreign George wrappers to suit their culture creatively. The aesthetic features of these designs are so beautiful and distinctive. The women utilise the textile medium for pure aesthetic expression.
4. **Empowerment:** The artisan, having established themselves through the craft of cut-thread wrappers and having also trained and empowered some of her apprentices, also stands as the financial pillar of some homes. This craft of *Pelete-Bite* (cut-thread) wrapper has automatically moved such families out of unemployment, especially the female children, because the art of Pelete-Bite is seen as a craft for girls and women.

Conclusion

The Kalabari people of Rivers State have a rich cultural history in their traditional attire. The art of Pelete-Bite (cut thread) is an age-old craft that has placed the artistic fashion of the Kalabari kingdom on the global stage. Pelete-Bite cloth is a significant art form in the Kalabari of Rivers State, where women are the primary practitioners of this craft. Pelete-Bite cloth is an art form that has brought considerable difference and innovation to the Indian madras. The women are not merely artisans but are part of a large-scale entrepreneurial venture that provides food for their homes. This art of cut thread wrapper stands as one of the vital wrappers in Kalabari communities. Pelete-Bite (cut thread) is a valuable traditional craft of the Kalabari people. The craft preserves the cultural heritage. Pelete-Bite is a treasured craft among the Kalabari and Rivers State at large. This craft has created opportunities for joy for interested women and young girls. The artisans support local economic development by being financially stable.

Recommendations

1. The study proffers that community chiefs, elders and well-meaning indigenes make provision for craft centres

for each community within the Kalabari Kingdom to enhance their skills and make their Pelete marketable even outside the country.

2. The government should also assist in building the skill acquisition centres in various communities. This will go a long way in eradicating unemployment.
3. Funding is one crucial factor that the attention of the government should be drawn to through the local government council to equip and fund the centres adequately.

Contribution to Knowledge

Pelete-Bite (cut thread) is not new, but this paper focuses on the entrepreneurial aspect of this art. The paper has contributed to the literature on Pelete-Bite (cut thread) as an art form of Kalabari women and in the context of entrepreneurship.

APPENDICES



Plate 4: Indian Madras (George wrapper) Source/Photograph: Joe–Mgbakiri, U. Year: 2025



Plate 5: Copied version of Indian Madras (George wrapper)

Source/Photograph: Joe–Mgbakiri, U. Year: 2025

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