

Significance of Vedic craft in present socio- economy -A study of earthen pottery industry of west Bengal

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Abstract:

Since the prehistoric times the cultural evolution is an ever-going eternal process. The various metallic utensils as well as potteries were a part of that ever developing evolutionary process. Human beings according to the needs and necessities kept on changing their modes of livelihoods. When various archaeological excavations are conducted historians have witnessed the reminiscent of the livelihood of these prehistoric generations. In west Bengal also one has evidenced the various art, crafts, and utensils of daily household elements from the different ages of the historical developments.

Key words: Vedic period, earthen crft, prehistoric, Bengal potery, British period.

Introduction: The terracotta architectures have always been in vogue since the early ages of human civilizations. Evidences of such architectural exploits are excavated from the various parts of the Indian sub continent. Though it's not very much evident that terracotta potteries and architectures being available in the early stone age still archaeologists are of the opinion that in 1960 renowned archaeologist James Mellart recovered various clay potteries from Anatlia Valley of Turkey which he claimed to be ten thousand years old. Again in Thailand evidence of these clay potteries are also available which are considered to be 6800 years old, even in Baluchistan also well decorated clay potteries are available of 4000 B.C. So these architectures and potteries help us a lot to have a deep insight of the people of our early ages. The hidden stories of their lives and their livihood, their habitats, their untiring efforts of adjust inclement nature weather and finally they also reveal various minute nuances about the period in which they flourished,

Vedic reference on clay craft : The usage of clay potteries are well mentioned in the sacred Rig Veda also. In Rig Veda we get the references of various terracotta items. Not only the utensils of daily usage but other artefacts also like earthen dolls or other toys made by terracotta. So its quite obvious that not only terracotta was used to make daily utensils but also its used for entertainment purpose also. In the Yajur Veda also the mention of the

term “kulal” gives us an impression the these potters were present during that period of the vedic age, as “kulal” refers to the society of potters. Next shift in our focus is on the Indus Valley civilization. When an intensive exaction was conducted where it was quite evident that terracotta utensils, jewellery, and various potteries were extensively used during the Indus Valley civilizations. So its no more a hidden fact that terracotta architecture developed and flourished in the Indian sub continent only. It flourished almost around five thousand years ago. During that period of time its the terracotta which played a major role in making various household items and as well as the earthen dolls and toys. Through various extensive excavations the historical remnants of that period not only give us a deep knowledge about their household life and social life but also various useful information about that period of time. Various figures and calligraphy on the earthen pots, toys and the dices provided a vivid knowledge of the era.

Age old significance of Bengal pottery and its diversity: In Our undivided Bengal we find the references of the potters and how their pottery business flourished during that time. Niharranjan Ray has already mentioned that in the ‘Komouli Manuscript’ of that period the existence of potters and their clay potteries are mentioned very distinctly.. besides this Niharrajan also mentioned about the eloquent descriptions about these craftsmen of clay potteries in the Nidhanpur Manuscript. Archaeological records have shown marvellous craftsmen in pottery in the excavated remains of places like Paharpur and Moinamoti. Coarse hand mde pottery- bowls, jars, vessels , earthen toys and dolls give a vivid description of the social life and also a knowledge of their culture.

In recent times also from the village named Chandraketugar of the south 24 parganas of Westbengal historians have excavated the the remains of earthen pots nad pottreis and crockery and other samples of objects made if clay which gave a detail overview of the Khorosthi manuscript. An earthen pot of Kushan Age has an inscription written on it which in its contemporary language of that period which reads that ‘one should plant seeds’. Besides that in a earthen tablet of the Shunga age we witness an inscription of a date tree from which the date juices are collected by some local method of juice collection. Its evident that during that time these activities were quite common during that. society

The people of west Bengal mostly thrives on agriculture. Agricultural rural civilization and culture acts a benchmark for most of the inhabitants of this state. Flourishment of artefacts like the making of clay potteries, preparing various indigenous food items like ‘misti’, ‘sandesh’ , ‘roshogolla’, various terracotta items and jewelleryes, the decorations made on the flooring of a house during any festivals, different festivities which initiated and sustained idol making ,etc are considered to be the native livelihood of this state. Actually not only for sustenance but also the cultural heritage of this state contributes to the

development of these works of clay and terracotta. The potters who are in local Bengali language known as “kumor” or “kumbhakar”, developed their business which gradually from a microcosmic to macrocosmic level. It started as a cottage industry but with the process of time it spread to a large scale industry where potteries, idols and various other architectures are created and also sold for business purpose. The potters along with their creations influenced the poets of various periods of Bengali history. The famous Bengali poet Sri Mukundram in his “Kobikankan Chandi” had given a lucid and authentic descriptions of the community of potters during his time. Again in the magnum opus Ramayana of Krittibash Oja we get a vivid allusion of the ‘kumor’ or ‘kumbhakar’ of that era.

Uniqueness of Bengal clay art and the diverse forms : The potters or ‘kumor’ according to the need of society and according to various cultural necessities made various kinds of artefacts be it various pots and utensils on one hand and the earthen dolls or the earthen idols on the other hand. These earthen dolls in small size and form are used as playing tools for small kids whereas when these clay dolls are made in big form and size they put forward to us various idols which are used for idol worship. The making of earthen idols provides us with the story of the journey of the evolution of Bengali clay dolls. To start with, since the very early period a secular religious practice known as “Broto” (a Bengali term for a religious practice) used these earthen dolls for the purpose of worship. These earthen dolls specially made for these religious uses play an important role to bring these earthen dolls to the forefront in our society. Gradually these small earthen dolls were given the shape and forms of magnificent idols which are worshipped in the various religious ceremonies.

World famous Krishnagar clay dolls : On the other hand in the 18th century in the ruler of Krishnagar, Raja Krishnachandra patronized a particular and exclusive kind of earthen dolls. According to historical facts Maharaj Krishnachandra wanted to start ‘idol puja’ for that purpose he asked the idol makers of Nator which is in Bangladesh to come and create these earthen idols for idol worship. During that time only before the ‘Puja’ or festival only the idol makers could make these earthen idols whereas throughout the year they used to idly dally away their time. For the artistic expression the potters started to make various other figures and dolls throughout the rest of the year. Thus they started to make various potteries and earthen dolls. The craftsmanship and precision with which these dolls are made it made these earthen dolls quite distinct from other earthen dolls prepared in other parts of west Bengal. The way the limbs and facial expression of these dolls gives them uniqueness and makes them an exquisite piece of architecture. The folds and crease of their clothes were made with such accuracy and clarity that it gives an impression of reality.

The situation of earthen craft under British rules:

During the period of time India was under the British rule. The British started to spread their influence on common people as well. They influenced every sector of the society and their concepts of realistic art exert an influence on these artists also. On the one hand the modern and realistic concepts of art on the one hand and the commonplace simple art form of native Bengal both provided impact on the artefacts of that era. These kind art form was appreciated both by the patron king Maharaja Krishna Chandra as well as by the English rulers. Though the craftsman or potters of that period didn't have immense name and fame but its the Britishers only who propagated these clay art forms in a worldwide platform. Though the ancestors didn't acquired much name and fame still their progenitors continued with these profession to gain enough importance and popularity. So during the British rule many British rulers and eminent people arrived in India for various official purpose and some of these eminent persons tried to promote these kind artistic work in the international market. One of them was Charles Archer, who was one of the British administrators; he took efforts to send the clay potteries and clay idols of Krishnanagar to some International exhibitions. In the year 1851 in London an exhibition took place which was known as "Exhibition of the Worker's of Industry of all Nations". In that exhibition Sriram Pal who was an artisan of clay pottery of Krishnanagar, represented the East India Company with his creations. Probably he was also the first person who got acclamation and medal of clay-made potteries and other art forms. Again his work was applauded in the "Exposition Universele of Paris". Again in the year 1867 the clay arts of Sreeram Pal and Raghunath Pal were exhibited again in one of the exhibitions of Paris. with the passage of time Sreeram pal, Raghunath Pal, Rakhachandra Pal started to bring fame to Krishnanagar with the clay potteries and idols. Though idols in miniature forms are well accepted still even often these artists made big human size idols also for special reasons. Those idols were given exact human features and and garments to adorn them. They are generally used for the purpose of idol worship. In the Peabody museum of America these kinds of idols are kept for the purpose of exhibition.

Conclusion: A few year of study and at the same time visiting the place with a previous experience of rural economy, my personal observation says humbly, that the artisan are reluctant in many ways. Because a certain amount of income they earned if not in every month but including the pic seasons or festival time ,the average monthly income is not alarmingly low ,that sometime portrait wrongly everywhere. The expectation of the maximum craftsman are very low and they are not aware of deserve more income, so they have settle themselves mentally with conditions that is present. There are ,in Ghurni, world famous artisans are present, very busy with their sculpture making craft ,with their personal gigantic workshop spread over few 'ekors' of field and innumerable different size sculpture of clay, make someone astonish and proud .Those work has conquer the appreciation of art

lovers throughout the world. But there are an amount of inequality that more similar of Vedic class division's those who didn't work on that larg scale do not ready to accept the prosperity reality of Nadia clay doll making business. They are in denial mood to that this craft can ensure both fame and money if it can be twisted with some corporate approach, and the reasons behind their opinion are not hard to understand on sympathetic note.

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