

POTTERY AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE IN ASSAM: A STUDY OF JORHAT AND SIVASAGAR DISTRICTS

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Abstract- Pottery is an essential element of the form of a civilization. It throws light on the food habits of the people; their religious and social customs and also technological advancement attained by the people even their economic conditions. It also provides a more satisfactory basis for interpreting historical archaeology or history as such. So the study of pottery without reference to its social context remains unrealistic or unfruitful. In this paper an attempt has been made to establish a link between the pottery and its technology with special reference to the two districts of upper Assam. The study is depending on the particular Kumar caste on their pottery making methods and socio-economic pursuit in recent period. The study of the potters of two districts namely; Jorhat & Sivasagar of upper Assam is our prime investigation field. The production of pottery involves mainly the recognition of clay, manufacturing process, designs and decoration, firing and socio-cultural bearing in which the pot is manufactured, distributed and used. The Kumar potters are distributed in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh and Dhemaji districts of the upper Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Pottery making is as old as traditional occupation. It is their hereditary pursuits through female line and its importance aesthetic appeal, unique technique and skill. The field research on the Kumar people in upper Assam, examines the present status of crafts and artisans, technique of pottery production and sale of finished products. The study concludes that the Kumar people lives under the shroud poverty and unless urgent measures are taken, this important craft may not survive. So, we can sum up the paper with a new prospect and future for our young generation to upgrade pottery craft into an employment generated industry of Assam.

Key words: Kumar potters, Traditional Occupation, Technology, Upper Assam

I. Introduction

Geographically, Assam is situated on the both bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra and as heartland of whole North East India surrounded by hilly states of Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. It has at present total area of 78,438.00 square km and varieties of art and culture flourished in the state. Assam is very beautiful with is luscious greens, exotic animals, migratory birds and Ahom architectures. This is well known that Assam with its scenic beauty, soil, topography, rainfall, climate and rich flora and fauna found in vast areas of the region. The district of Jorhat and Sibsagar has a wide reputation on the pottery making tradition from the past to present.

II. Objectives of the Study

- To observe the technological change in pottery industry in the study area.
- To assess its impact on Hiras and Kumars of the Sibsagar and Jorhat districts.

III. Survey and Methodology

In preparation of the present study historical method of analysis has been adopted. For the data collection both primary and secondary sources have been extensively investigated. The survey of the present study is concerned with two districts of Jorhat and Sivasagar in Assam. The both districts has a historical importance of pottery culture and technology in recent period.

IV. Review of literature

Scholar Cox opines that before man learned to chip stone (the Palaeolithic periods) he had learned to make clay cups. Further, he stated that young children intensively love to make mud pies and from the mud pie to mud cup is short step. From the first scientific history writer Sir Edward Gait, his book entitled A Short History of Assam, mentioned about the pottery culture in our region. Cantlie (1984) observed in Sivasagar district that the fact that Brahmans refuse to act as their priest

has not prevented them (Kaibarta) from adoption Brahmanical rites as they have differentiated a class of Brahmans out of their own caste. This system is also prevalent among the Hiras. The Hiras have been referred to earlier and their status is as the Kaibarta Brahmins. Gogoi (1995) stated that in Assam, Kumar and Hira are two distinct caste group making pots since time immemorial and they still practice this craft particularly in villages. The emphasis has been laid down not only in its technology and typology but also on the other hand socio-cultural information which includes social interaction, organization of production, spatial and temporal distribution, marketing etc, of the Kumar in Assam in this study. It is assumed that this ethnographic study of ceramics may solve the technological, typological and many other related problems as regards to the growth and development of curtail industry in Assam since prehistoric period.

Baruah (2005) mentioned that the art making pottery had come down from ancient times in Assam. Old literature, epigraphs, foreign accounts, excavations and manuscripts prove that handicrafts had played an important role in the daily life of the people in ancient Assam. Among the various crafts pottery was one of the important village crafts. Barua (1969) argued that the Kumali and Nidhanpur grants mention potters and potter's pit in ancient Kamrupa. H. K. Barpujari stated from a reference in the Harshacharita to the different presents sent by Vaskarvarmana to Harsha 'drinking vassals embossed by skilful artists, molasses in earthen pots, cups, among other thing drinking vessels or ceramic small cowries made of lotus fibre etc'. The Nidhanpur grant refers to Kumbhakara-garta or pit where from the pottery-makers used together their materials for wheel. As the same pit was used by different persons, it shows a rudimentary form of corporate activity. The Kumbhakaras are also mentioned in the Kumali grant. Proof of the existence of such art is shown by some specimens with designs on them discovered from Tezpur, Da Parbatia. The seal of Bhaskarvarmana may be noted in this connection.

Phukan (1987) in his book 'Loka Kalpa Dristi' which is a study on folk arts and crafts of Assam very aptly stated that owing to the influence of Neo-Vaishnavism, many of the traditional Assamese customs have diminished as a result the diversity of pottery crafts has been drastically reduced. Assam still contains large population in process of conversion. The composition of caste is also subject to rearrangement as a result of the general tendency to level upwards. The Kalita who has given up ploughing describes himself as Kayastha and seeks to validate his claim by marrying his children within the Kayastha caste. The kalita sub- castes- Goldsmith kalita, potter kalita, Palki-

bearer kalita etc. are found in the study area from the past. Saraswati (1966) have mentioned about the Muslim potters in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, contrary to that in Assam, Muslims generally do not practice pottery making. However, there is only one group of Muslims, known as Moria who still work with brass. Such a Moria Muslim village is there at Hajo. It is a fact that some of them are the users of ceramics. Particularly poor people use pitcher (kalah), for water carrying and storage, small pitcher (Tekeli) for food stuff preservation and bowl (charu) for cooking. Many scholars are being observed on pottery culture in the Assamese society from past to present. H.K. Barpujari (1994) stated that the two classes engaged in the manufacture of pottery in Assam proper, the kumar were not denote any particular caste or sub-caste, but applied to kalitas, koches and keots who themselves or their ancestors made articles of earthen wares. The Hiras also produced the pottery in Assam. Choudhary (1987) however reported that the art of making pottery was known from very early times. Some of the best specimen's of pottery with artistic and decorative designs belonging to the 5th century to 6th century A.D. have been discovered from Dah-Parbatia, some specimen's have also been found in Tezpur and near Sadiya. The clay seals of Bhaskar Varman also point to the fact that the art of clay modelling was developed. Moreover, Bana (Harasarita) mentioned among the presents of Bhaskar 'drinking vessels' embossed by skilful artists, molasses in earthen pots and 'cups of ullaka diffusing a fragrance of sweet wine'. In fact, it proved the well developed pottery industry of Assam at that period. But it was difficult to ascertain whether it was manufactured by the indigenous potters or imported to Assam.

The pottery culture and technological changes have great societal implications from past to present. The forgoing studies or research have focused on various causes of pottery culture degradation; slow down of production, ecology of river land area and also few measures for protecting it. Historian aim at studying the relationship between potter and pottery culture from the historical point of view, on the other hand scholars and historian has great interest for innovation new perspective on pottery making culture for next generation in Assam to promote our socio-economic upliftment. The understanding of pottery by the potters are very much significant for the purpose of new design, marketing, field of study and taking of new polices for better production.

V. Genesis of Pottery and Technological Changes

The history of pottery culture is very old and ancient. Pottery making culture was flourished from the ancient period to gradually it came to light in the modern age. In the world history it was first started in China. Pottery is a very powerful tool for the interpretation of the past. Pottery is also called ceramics or ceramic art. It is also considered one of the landmarks of the Neolithic Revolution along with agriculture and sedentary way of life. In historical context, Pottery provides some of the most useful data on chronology, site to site relationship ritual and dietary practices, the economic relationship of production and exchange and many other aspects of cultural behaviour. Pottery is one of the tangible creations of man and it has become an integral and inseparable component of the culture of the human society.

The Kumar's as social and professional caste whose contribution's helped to form the first civilization ubiquitously in the world. Archaeologist has been using ethnographic analysis from present day and reconstruct past pattern of life from the earliest days of pre-historic studies. In the early days ethnographic data used by them was derived from the studies conducted by social anthropologists. The interests of social anthropologists were mainly concentrated on social-religious institution, customs and look only a marginal interest in the economic organization of technology and material culture of these societies. Archaeologists are however more interested in these latter aspects of primitive societies. It is also felt that the kumar and pottery are the two colloquial terms and the present exercise as the kumar or potters is aimed to discuss here through the genesis and evolution of the classical profession respectively to the oldest crafts in the world in the widest sense.

Pottery is an essential element of the form of a civilization. It throws light on the food habits of the people; their religious and social customs and also technological advancement attain by the people even their economic conditions. It also provides a more satisfactory basis for interpreting historical archaeology or history as such. So the study of pottery without reference to its social context remains unrealistic or unfruitful. The production of pottery involves mainly the recognition of clay, manufacturing process, designs and decoration, firing and socio-cultural bearing in which the pot is manufactured, distributed and used.

The study of the pottery culture attracted widespread attention during the last decades. Pottery as a process has been a subject to concern not only to the academic historian but to a great extent; it has become a theme for major interest of the demographers, socio-economic planners, administrators

as well as policy formulators. In the less developed or developing countries, pottery has been considered not only as an index of economic development but also an important factor for sustainable livelihood of the Kumar peoples i.e., social and natural patterns of environment. Pottery is a process of social change and it has triggered changes in the internal as well as external society of the countries, states and districts. Pottery is regarded as a key indicator of change and development leading to transformation in economic, social and cultural lives of the people in the upper Brahmaputra valley. Pottery culture is conceptually assumed to consist of three components viz, demographic, economic and social. The social and economic factors are important but demographic factor is crucial one. On the other hand the pottery culture is one of the changing concepts of our day to day life. Pottery and Kumar's are two sides of a coin and both are also inseparable in their origin. Among the all fields of study, the researcher found lots of negative and positive factors behind the development of the pottery particularly on the region. The pottery culture has adversely affected by ecology, economy, and socio-cultural system of our environment. Thus, as the result of gradual process and slow growth of production, it has broken down the traditional values and behaviour pattern of the peoples among the Kumar. Pottery culture and Kumar's both terms are complex with their inter relationship. The relationship between pottery and Kumar's (natural & social) starts right from the inception of the human existences on the earth. Due to impact of modernization and commercialisation or technological developments of the pottery culture and the Kumar's living of standard gradually improved.

VI. Genesis of pottery: Neolithic Pottery

The pottery of Neolithic times is often coarse and handmade, representing pale grey or burnished grey, red, orange or pale-red, brown, black and cream slipped. There are found in different Neolithic sites of India. The sites are Brahmagiri, Sangana, Kallu and Nagarjuna konda in the districts of Chitradurga and Bellary Karnataka Guontur (Andhra Pradesh) Piklihal in the Deccan, Kuchi in Orissa and Burzaham in Kashmir, Daojali Hading in Assam.

Chalcolithic Pottery

Chalcolithic, signifying a phase characterized by the introduction of metal, specify copper and bronze. Pal divided the Chalcolithic pottery into two categories viz. Harappan and post-Harappan. The great bulk of Harappan pottery is wheel turned but some handmade pottery have been recovered

from the lower level of the exacted sites. Pot making by the same method is also observed among the potters of Assam and the tribe of North East India. Besides, basketry is a very popular and most useful industry, particularly in rural area of Assam. In the upper Assam are also well known, like other areas of Assam for its excellent basketry in the entire N.E.I.

Harappan and Post-Harappan pottery

Harappan pottery is generally plain with some black painted decoration. Large number of terracotta figurines has been found here. They were mainly used as toys or cult figures. A variety birds' animals and male and female figurines are also found. Various models of terracotta carts are remarkable. In India simple earthenware and glazed pottery made with superior quality of clay or ceramic have been in use for centuries. Potters have traditionally been an integral part of village society. In Harappan excavations are probably the earliest. Following it there is long tradition of terracotta flourishing even today. There terracotta objects include figurines of gods, goddesses, items of daily use and decorative pieces. They have a red dark red colour. The pots are generally shaped on potter's wheels and after that other art works and decorations are done. The figurines were made by hand. In some areas of Assam and Manipur even shaping of the clay for all earthen ware is done by hand without the help of the wheel. In some places the size of vessels made on wheel is amazingly large exhibiting the skills of the workmen.

Ceramic Pottery

Potteries made with porcelain and ceramic also have a large variety. Unlike earthenware where all the stages of manufacture are performed purely by hand or traditional means, in ceramic pottery the help of machines is also taken. In some cases it is made with hand, painted and decorated by craftsmen but finally baked in modern furnaces. In some cases the shape is given through moulds but painting is done by hand and again baked in modern furnaces. There are a number of famous centres of this sort of pottery. In Rajasthan, Jaipur is an important centre. Here the pottery made with quarts has a blue colour.

Terracotta Craft of Assam

Assam is a rich reservoir of traditional craft and culture. Among them, Clay and Terracotta productions are exquisite examples in immaculate craftsmanship. The 'Kumar' and 'Hira' are two

traditional potter communities of Assam who produce a wide variety of clay and terracotta productions which are utilitarian yet unique in nature. Terracotta has dominated the handicraft scene of Assam since time immemorial and the tradition of terracotta itself handed down from generation to generation. Clay and Terracotta craft provide a reasonable number of employments to the potter communities particularly Hiras and Kumars. At the Gotanagar in Jalukbari of Guwahati one of the spot verification has been completed and found the centre of 'Kumarjyoti Udyog' maintained by Mahananda Kumar. Instead wheel turn pottery crafted by potters from neighbouring Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat and Sivasagar are sold. At Majuli the Kumar people not only done pottery work, but they turned into weaver. The tendency towards specialization in pottery is mainly because of the economic advantage of skilled workmanship and specialized tools and the fact that potter's clay is not found everywhere. In the case of Chinatali, Salmara, Dhakinpat, Modaibill and Biringabari gaon in Majuli, not only are they sited where clay and fuel are both easily available but are also located along the trade route. It is from Salmara that the products are distributed to the surrounding village as well as important and big market centres such as Lakhimpur, Arunachal Pradesh, Jorhat town, Sivasagar etc. on the otherhand, Dibrugarh, Sadiya-Saikhowa Ghat in upper Assam in south bank, Lakhimpur-Dhemaj in north bank had always been an important market centre for indigenous earthenware is testified to by Majulial pottery, particularly types like the water pitcher, flower pots and the ordinary cooking pot. The potters also directly sold their wares on the different big market days by sheltering the boats.

The present state of Assam may be divided broadly into two river valleys, the Brahmaputra valley, watered by Brahmaputra through the length from Sadiya in the N.E. to Dhubri in the west and by its tributaries on both sides of its bank and the Surma valley watered by Surma valley. Apart from the above findings and analyzed historical data the researcher would be said that socio-economic condition of Kumar's are not as good as other caste during the ancient period, but geo-cultural factors, socio-economic growth at present of Assam may be helped to develop their day to day life with pottery culture. It may be hoped that in the recent period new industrial percept and new industrial technology signify pot-making system into a new method of earning money among the Kumar's of Assam. The two potter castes Kumar and Hira communities though outwardly they are appeared to be same but they show differences in the distribution of characters. Considering the pottery making culture as an uneconomical occupation many people of the Kumar community of the

upper Assam became agriculturist by giving up their traditional and inherited craft specialization to make pottery. Sometimes it found that the potter people search more cultivable land for better agricultural operation to be shifted from their ordinal villages to settle there permanently. Now-a-days, it has found that these people have no any connection with their age old traditional and inherited craft due to non-profited field of marketing.

The wheel is very important for Kumar potters. It not only gives momentum to the production of the potter but they maintain a parental attachment to it. In fact, the wheel symbolised their identity. Also it isolates them from the other group of potter-the Hiras. Kumar considered the wheel as very sacred and attributes divinity to the wheel and its accessories perhaps they not allow women to touch the wheel. The pot making culture was as an inherited and traditional craft of their own but in these days it practise is confined to a few families only. In fact the craft is declining among the Kumar potters not only upper Assam but also in all part of the Assam. The reason is they pointed out are that young generation is not interested with the craft because of low status of the Kumar potters in social hierarchy. It has been observed that very few male and female potters among the Kumar community are employed them in the particular pottery making culture.

In the modern complex world, every society today faced with serious socio-economic and political problems. These problems need systematic and practical solution. Problem solving is a technical process. It requires among all other things accumulating of new knowledge. Research provides the means for accumulating of new knowledge and wisdom. Here we will discuss the concept of commoditization with special reference to handicrafts. Keeping this in mind researcher has presented three case studies of pottery technology in handicrafts. These case studies pertain to the districts i.e., Sivsagar, Jorhat, Majuli, Golaghat and Dibrugarh in the Upper Assam to focus the clay work.

VII. Techniques of pottery making

The study carried a vast area where pottery was made by the kumar potters in their house for the business purpose. The whole process of the pottery making consists of application of different techniques at each stage. They first collect the fine quality of white sand and Kumarmati or Hiramati or clay, then it preserved for making, preparation of clay, making of tapal, gol and dan, giving of final shape to earthen potteries and preparing the bhati or furnace for burning dry earthen items for

final stages. These steps helped to the potters to manufacture earthen works. These stages are following-

Stage-I: Adult male potter brings the white sand from local river-base and store it near the house or courtyard in gara (trench) for preparing of final potteries product.

Stage-II: After the collection of the kumarmati in the Month of February and March (Magha-Phagun), they do it with the help of kodal or spades, basket and khan or flat long wooden piece. Before the making pottery they worship the earth with betal-nut and agarbatti for successful compilation earthen work. The experience potter verified the clay for colour and started to make it with new shape.

Stage-III: Before keeping the clay in gara the maker make a layer of white sand in the pit. Both male and female participate to putting clay up to certain level, then they made another layer of clay in the same way and thus the process of making one layer after another in a continues process. During the period the local soil and jute bags covered the clay. It takes some time to final shape.

Stage-IV: The fourth stage is called the matikhunda or malting the clay. Clay is prepared by the women potters for making earthenware. The numbers of pieces is made by spade and water is sprinkled for softness. Clay soil is trashed in uniformly with the help of gayen and mixed with water and white sand for preparing the suitable clay for making pottery.

Stage-V: This stage also very important for the potters to produced the earthenware. Potters bring tapals from gara to the courtyard for making small gols and dise shape plate, chakti with pressure and movement of both palm and hands. They used wheel or chak for making potteries on the other hand some potters also used dan to manufacture clay work. The proper hard work has done by the kumara potters in this stage.

Stage-VI: After the used of wheel or chak the pottery vessels are putting to the firing place or it safely preserved in a place and it is firing the entire vessels. A few days has remained in the burning place and after it the colouring the female potter in the vessels. The amount of the fuel depends upon the number of potteries to be fired. Generally, the work is done at the interval of 10-12 days. Then these earthen objects are sold in the market and the Kumar potters earn some money for their

livelihood. They produce some earthen articles like Baira, Chilim, Dupdhani, Karah, Tekali, Saru, Saki, Sakidani, Karahi, malasaru, bontisaki etc.

VIII. Conclusion

It is true that pottery culture has been radically transformed the basic structure and functions of traditional society as like as caste, marriages, education, politics etc. It has attempted to find the pottery culture has been increasingly changing the social as well as natural life of the particular pot making people. The finding of the paper is to be eco-friendly relationship with the pot making peoples of upper Assam. The next finding is to be pot making culture always a natural way of industry. Another important finding is to be proper uses of clay work and it generated the employment engagement in recent period. It has observed that rapid growth of pot making is to be very positive result to our environment as well as society. Pot making craft has no effect on the society. Among them this clay work has some shortcomings. One of them is to be lack of financial help or facility to the potters, lack of modern technological industry and lack of market. Above all, in the sum up, we have a positive look to the pot making culture in future among the Kumar potters of upper Assam.

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