

An Ethnographic Study on Crafts of the village Susunia, Bankura, West Bengal

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INTRODUCTION:

Most of the societies do not have a word for art. Perhaps that is because art, particularly in societies with -relatively little speciation, is often an integral part of religious, social and political life. Craft or art appears in human history at least as far back as 28,000 years ago.

Some definitions of art emphasize its evocative quality from the viewpoint of a person who creates it, arts or crafts expresses feeling and ideas, from the viewpoint of the observer or participant, its evokes feeling and ideas. The feeling and ideas on each side may or may not be exactly the same. And they may be expressed in a variety of ways - drawing, painting, carving, weaving, etc. An artistic work or performance is intended to excite the senses, to stir the emotions of the beholder or participant. Of may produce Feelings of pleasure, repulsion, or Fear, but usually not indifferences.

But emphasizing the evocative quality of art may make it difficult to compare the art of different cultures because what is evocative in one culture may not be evocative in another. For example a humorous story in one culture may not be funny in another.

Thus most anthropologists agree that art is more than an attempt by an express or communicate feelings and ideas.

Artistic activity are always in part cultural involving shared and learned patterns of behaviour, belief and feelings we tend to think that anything useful is not art.

If a basket has a design that is not necessary to its function, we may possible consider it crafts or arts, especially if we keep it on a shelf.

In our society, we also insist that to be

considered art, a work must be unique. This aspect is clearly consistent with our emphasis on the individual. However, even though we require that artist be unique and innovative. The art they produce must still fall within some range of acceptable variation. Artists must communicate to us in a way we can relate to, at least learn to relate to, often they must follow certain current styles of expression that have been set by other artists or by critics, if they hope to have their art or craft accepted by the public. The idea that an artist should be original is a cultural idea; in some society the ability to replicate a traditional pattern is more valued than originality.

So, crafts or art seems to have several qualities: It expresses as well as communicates. It stimulates the senses, affects, emotions and evokes ideas; it is produced in culturally patterned ways and styles. It has cultural meaning. In addition, some people are thought to be better at it than others. Arts does not require some people to be full time artistic specialists, many societies in the ethnographic record had no fulltime specialists of any kind. But, although everyone in some societies may participate in some art.

It is usually thought that certain individuals have superior artistic skill.

Area and People:

The village situated on village's north side bounded by Rarnnathpur. In the east side of Susunia bounded by Shiulbina village and Susunia hill. In the west side by Methala village and Gandheswari river & as well as south side bounded by Pancha shimul & Biskoder village.

The soil type of Susunia is likely different.

Maximum area of this village covered by Kankar & small gravels. Sometimes saw the late rite soil and in the lower level found brownish sandy soil. Overall the soil is not suitable for agriculture.

Actually the Susunia village situated in the hilly region specially there is less amount of trees but there are some common trees like Shall, Hetal, Ucalliptas, Palash, Mahul, Palm, beate & grabs like Xerophytes etc. Plants are available.

Many domestic animals are found in the village. Cow, goats, ship, buffalo, dog and hen duck domestic birds are available without its crow, Cuckoo, Doyel etc. birds are seen. Different reptiles are most important fauna of the village.

The settlement pattern of Susunia is closed and liner type. Houses are built up on the side of village road. Especially houses are colonially selected. Houses are built by stone, mud and then plastered by mud and roofs covered by tin or hay or leaves. Doors are made by bamboo strips or wood.

The villagers are travel by bus, motor van to go near distance place. They also travel by bicycle, motor cycle, tracker, van etc. for long travel villagers are used to their nearby rail station. For transportation they also use to bullock cart.

In the Susunia village those who are economically good they used electric for light, fan, radio, television.

Main source of water in the village are ponds & tube well For drinking purpose they used mainly tube wells.

Sanitary status of the villagers is very poor. except for a few members of the villagers all of them used to latrine in open area.

There are many Different tribes, and castes were seen in the village.

In the village Susunia there are five anganwari centers, two primary school under Sarba Siska Abhiyan and also a high school (10 + 2) providing arts group. Those who are interested on science they go to Bankura High School to learn.

Susunia Village economy is not good.

Their economy mainly dependent on stone crafting, day labour and agriculture.

There are several number of private health center both Allopath Homeopathy, & herbal clinic is there. There are also Govt. sponsored primary health centers. Nearest Government hospital are Sabaria & Bankura Medical Collage & Hospital.

There is a market in the Susunia village. Various types of vegetables, fish, meat, and fruit are available. There are soft drinks; snacks etc's shop was seen. Saloon, Tea shop also have seen.

Crafts of Susunia :

It has been found that three different kinds of crafts are present in this area. Stone crafting is a great practice of this village. It is very popular practice and these stone arts are also exported. Besides stone artefacts, the making of 'Bel Kata' 'Mach kata' are also done here.

On the way towards the Susunia village there is a manufacturing factory, 'Shri Shri Krishnanda Shilpayan'. This factory has two branches - 'Nilay Shilpayan which is operated by the chief artist Astik Singha Babu and another is 'Shilpayan', operated by the artist - Nayan Dutta.

Nayan Dutta is the senior most artist and he guides all other artists working under him. He has been awarded with the National award twice, in 1988 and in 2005. Astik Singha Babu got National artist award. The other workers also received several awards like Panchanan Karmakar got state awards twice and Sanjay Karmakar got it once. Altogether there are 11 workers in the factory.

The workers are receiving training here for about ten years from Nayan Dutta. Nayan Dutta, himself, took training for 2 years from another eminent artist of Mahabalipuram, Madras named Mr. S. Darai raj Shilpi. This art of making images with stones started and flourished under the works of Mr. Shahadeb Karmakar in the Susunia village.

According to the artists they not only have markets in Asansol, Bankura, Kolkata, but also in Bombay, Delhi and Chennai.

Sometimes their piece of art even flourishing in America, Japan, Middle East Countries. Most of the workers won prizes in Majestic, district level, state level, and even in National level Competition.

The stones, with which they make their images, are collected from the foothills of the Susunia hill. They are white in colour. They obtain coloured stones like black stones, red stones from Rajasthan and Orissa. The stones that are collected from Orissas are called 'Kindumundi', 'Muguni', the stones that are collected from Rajasthan are called 'Rajasthan mograna', from Jaipur 'soft Stones' are collected.

In the factory a huge lump of white stone under construction have been found. The workers were engaged in making of Durga Murti with it. This idol was ordered by some customer of Bankura. it costs Rs. 95,000. The idol was 6 feet 9 inches long, 4 feet 4 inches broad. There was also a Kali Murti which costs Rs. 21,000, These Murtis also include 'Shiv Lingo' made of black stone which is a granite taken from Rajasthan. It costs Rs. 8,000. The cost of coloured stones is twice that of the white stones. The workers informed that they buy the coloured stones at Rs. 14 per kg. Another beautiful piece of art was present. It was a Durga Murti engraved on a stone which was of a size of one rupees coin. It costs Rs. 1000.

The workers told us how they manufacture the images.

Firstly, the lump of stones are given shape by means of chisel and hammer. Then after giving the required shapes, it is smoothened by a 'file. the piece is polished by sandpaper, before applying colours a special gum 'Araldite' containing raisin and hardener is applied on the image. Then colour is applied. The colours include Asian Paints, 'Apeolite' 'Premium Glass enamel' which costs Rs. 91 per 500 millilitre.

The implements that are used are 'haturi' and 'chisel' (Cheni). They are of larger and smaller sizes which are used according to the size of the stone.

Some recent developments of stone

crafts are as follows:

i) When Shahadev Karmakar started the craft of making stone images, then it was done just done as a hobby, both the interest and income behind the craft was less. Thus, it took a lot of time for Susunia to accept s'tone art as a recognised craft.

ii) Susunia is divided into two parts :-

- a) Pahar Susunia village
- b) Hallua Susunia village.

Gradually, the people of Pahar Susunia village understood the beauty and popularity of their hill stones and started making stone crafts within most of their Houses.

iii) This event was followed by the development of some factories of stone crafts in the villages which included the allocation and involvement of many young workers into this art.

iv) Very soon, their market started expanding. The orders which were used to come from local to be nearby like Bankura, Kolkata, Asansol, and now it started coming from out of station, from the places like Bombay and Delhi. Their work even got recognised abroad.

v) As they gained fame, money also followed. They did not limit their work within Susunia hill stones. They started buying coloured stones by different homes from Rajasthan, Orissa and Jaipur.

vi) During the initial days, the artists used crude implements of large sizes. The images produced by this were without fine finishing touches. But the varying sizes and the appearance of-the now implements available now give the evidence that both the quality of the craft and implements producing the craft have developed.

vii) The recent problem that this craft is witnessing nowadays is the prohibition of collecting stones from the foot hills of Pahar Susunia by the Government of West Bengal. According to them, it was destroying the natural beauty of the hill spot.

viii) The above reasons had a twofold effect:-

- a) The collection of stones from outside of the Susunia village.

b) The increase in the price of the local white stones.

There are other crafts too which are practice over here. Among them, 'Bel Kata', 'Mach Rata' are very popular.

Firstly, we dealt with 'Mach Kata'. It is the practice of making the hook of the fishing rod. This is generally done by the female members of the 'Karmakar' society, although there is no sex biasness. Even a man can do this job. my informer Sulekha Karmakar and her daughter Ruma Karmakar said that they do these jobs for their additional income. When they find their leisure time they used to prepare these hooks and sell them in the market at the rate of Rs. 17 for 1000 hooks. So they earn nearly Rs. 3000 per month. But they have a business of selling fishing rod hooks, the head of the family hire other people to prepare the hooks for them and then they take these to Botihora in Kadasol village near Durgapur to sell these in the factory.

The implements with which hook or 'Mach Kata' are prepared are as follows:-

- i) Haturi
- ii) Shape or chisel
- iii) Larger and smaller cheni
- iv) Handvice or Kathshala
- v) Jata.
- vi) Jatmura.

All of them work for the Mahajans or the money lenders. They give these fishing rod hooks to them and they sell it to the places like Kolkata and the other places, giving a little bit shares to them.

The next crafts which we dealt with was 'Bel Kata'. It is a kind of necklace which is made up of small beads which are taken act from the shell of the 'Bel' (fruit). These necklaces are put around the neck of the dead bodiess. This is a very old custom which is being in practice from a long time. No alive person is allowed to wear it as it may become the matter of worse. These are prepared by both the male and the female. My informant Pompa Karmakar told that this is also an additional income of her beside Mach Kata. Twenty necklaces are sold at the

rate of Rs. 14. They are sold in the market. The implements which are used for making these type of necklaces are as follows :-

- a) Dhanuk.
- b) Chhok.
- c) Tupi.
- d) Chachuni.

Description of the Implements are as follows :-

The implements which are used for the stone artefacts are :-

- i) 'Haturi'

It is a hammer which helps in striking the chheni to give the stone a desired shape.

- ii) 'Chheni'

These are of various size and shapes which are used according to their need the different carvings and shapes require the different types of chheni.

The implements which are used for preparing Mach Kata are as follows :-

- i) 'Choto Haturi'

It look| like a hammer and also works in the same manner. It is made to strike the steel wire to make straight.

- ii) 'Shape or chisel'

These are the two things assembled together. One which is made up of wood and takes a cylindrical shape and the other is a mail which is attached to it. On the upper surface of the wooden cylinder there is one nail and curved metal inserted into it. These give the wire a bent shape.

There is a particular distance between the nail and metal, this is to give the hook a fixed shape.

- iii) 'Larger and smaller Chheni'

These are more or less pentagonal in shape, they are used for cutting the wire. It is made up of iron.

- iv) 'Handvice or Kathshala'

This is also cylindrical in shape but with the two ends tapering. The steel wire is attached to it. It is made up of wood.

- vi) Jata.

It is rectangular in shape. It is generally manufactured in the Kamarshal. It is also made up of iron. The wire is put on it and then it is hammered.

vi) Jatmura

These all implements are impregnated into rectangular wooden block known as the Jatmura. These woods are brought from the nearby jungles. They themselves cut it and bring it from there. It is a very good income for them.

The implements which are used for preparing the belkata :-

i) Dhanuk

It consists of two parts :-

a) a, bamboo stick

b) a string attached to it giving it a shape of a bow. This is made to work side by side helping in drilling the shell of the 'Bel'. It is moved side by side.

ii) Chhok

It consists of a small wooden stick having bifurcated needle inserted into it. This is needed for driving.

iii) Chachhni

This is a flattened iron rod having one bent end. It is required to pick out all the soft part of the 'Bel'. At first, the inner surface of the 'Bel' is drilled and then simultaneously the outer surface. They drill the shell in such a manner that it takes the shape of small beads. Then a striking with the help of a needle taking the shape of a necklace.

iv) Tupi

This is a small part of the coconut shell which gives support to the Chhak.

Conclusion:

The meaning of ART and CRAFT according to Webster's' encyclopaedia dictionary, ART is the quality, production or expressions according to aesthetic example, of what it is beautiful, appealing or of more than ordinary significance.

Thus in the study an attempt has been made for an ethnographic study on the Karmakar community with special reference to their traditional occupation and subsistence.

The study will be used as a key resource to understand the subsistence pattern and also the overall view of the craft and art industry of the small village which is not widely discovered.

At a general comparative level the stone craft activities of the karmakar community of the Susunia village have an important implication for subsistence of the forgotten industry. Now what is necessary is to make an in depth study of the strategy or the technique and a documentation of traditional craft are urgently necessary.

References:

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