

What did the time bring? – An Enquiry on the Changes in the Traditional Occupation of Kumbharan

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Received: May 6, 2018

Accepted: June 6, 2018

ABSTRACT

Kumbharan community is acknowledged for their blessed hands to effectuate the art of pottery which is their traditional occupation. The inimitable nature of this community has been encountering with changes as the time passes by. It calls for a journey from the traditional times to the modern, post globalised era. Manifestation of these changes can be seen in their traditional occupation as well. While traditionally made pottery had witnessed a downfall with the arrival of alternatives such as aluminum and steel in the 1980's, recent market preferences promote and give increasing value to traditional artifacts. In this context, it becomes relevant to examine the traditional occupation of the Kumbharan, the changes that have come about in it and the challenges that it faces. Examining these changes and its impacts are being addressed in this article.

Keywords: Kumbharan, Traditional Occupation, Pottery, Change, Challenges

Introduction

Traditional occupation plays the central role to the lives of that community's members. Ups and downs in the traditional occupation accordingly reflected in that community. While defining, traditional occupations will mean those occupations that have been followed by successive generations of indigenous people and their communities, and are rooted in customs and practices that were established prior to colonization of the region in the 19th century. This includes traditional occupational practices which were largely subsistence-oriented before, but now are wholly or partly market oriented (ILO, 2000).

Different kinds of art developed over the period of time have been celebrated and some of those have caused a change of face of the whole world. The invention of potter's wheel marked a significant point in the course of the development of human society. The art of pottery is considered to be one of the ancient handicrafts which tells volumes about a civilization. It carries great traditions and histories of a particular culture. Pottery refers to the creation of objects that are made up of hard brittle material produced from non-metallic minerals by moulding them while the material is wet and then firing them at high temperatures. They are often made up of clay, porcelain, steatite, etc (Case study-Pottery-Evolution and significance). There is in pottery a thread of connection with the earliest traditions of civilization and culture. Pottery forms, even simple ones like cups or plates still symbolize for us in a particularly direct way some of the most fundamental of human activity (Rhodes, 1973: xviii).

The art of pottery making is associated with the traditional occupation a particular community in India. Widely known as Kumbharan, potters in India are known in different names in various regions. Excepting in Kashmir valley, where they are called Karal, in the whole of western, central, northern and eastern India the potters are known as Kumhars or Kumbhars. In West Bengal, potters are also referred to as Kumor. In southern India, they are called Kusavan in Tamil, Kusavan or Kuyarvan in Malayalam, Kuvara or Kumbara in Kanarese, Kusave in Tulu and Kummara or Kumrulu in Telugu. Etymologically, all these names have been derived from the original Sanskrit word Kumbhakara, 'pot-maker'. In parts of western Orissa, potters are also known as Bhande which is the derivation of the Sanskrit word Bhandu, a pot (Saraswati B., Behura N.K., 1966). Constitution of India has identified them under the category of Other Eligible Castes. Kumbharan community shares a set of commonalities despite of the regional differences. Kumbharan is seen in village communities who lives as a separate colony from other village members. They are endogamous by nature but not keeping a complete anonymity towards the village members.

Review of literature at a glance

Modern time has brought about many changes among traditional communities, especially with regard to their traditional occupation. Pottery making has also undergone certain changes over the past 20 years. Generally, modernity calls for several new alternatives against the older ones to be pursued as occupation to the people. In recent years, the globalization of the markets and the technological revolution has brought the drastic and rapid changes in the relative importance of the individual sectors and

occupations in the Indian economy (Sumathi A., Sujadevi V., 2016). This means that more and more people will have to adapt a change of job or career during their working life. This study also shows the incident of occupational shifting among a potter community. Baidyanath Saraswati (1979) observes that at many places pottery is supplied to towns by the village potters and in such cases middlemen enter into the transaction. This shows the changes that have happened in terms of the traditional occupation of Kumbharan. Globalization accounts for such changes the marketing and selling structure of pottery by Kumbharan. Encyclopedia of Social Change edited by Laxmi Devi (1996) says that a large number of traditional rural artisans are facing challenges as a consequence of urbanization and modernization process and they are at the verge of decline. Baidyanath Saraswati (1979) has noticed that in the periodical markets and fairs, the goods were often sold for money but hawking in the villages was generally seen. This is with regard to the traditional way of selling the products by Kumbharan where nowadays they do not follow such method rather go to markets to sell it off. This involves a change from traditional times to modern time. He has also observed the occupational mobility in the traditional occupation among potters.

Methodology

This article is based on the qualitative approach which has used case studies for gathering and analyzing the data. Narrations and shared experiences communicated by the respondents have contributed to the collection of relevant data. The study is conducted in the Kumbharan community of Alur village (a total of 32 households), in Thrissur district of Kerala, India. Kumbharan community had arrived here and started their settlement in the form of a colony centuries ago. They have been a part of the larger village community for a very long time. This scenario provides for a wider scope of learning and understanding when it comes to the matters of changes occurred in their traditional occupation over times as well as the challenges they face now. In-depth interviews were also carried out with few key informants with the help of a semi-structured interview guide to get more data. Apart from the collection of primary data, a certain set of secondary data also have been tapped from secondary sources. This includes the socio-economic-caste survey reports from Kandanassery Panchayat and books and articles.

Discussion

The major concerns about the cases start with the images of the changes that have occurred in Kumbharan community of Alur village in terms of their traditional occupation. The changes can be classified with regard to technology, variety of products, marketing structure, methods of selling and attitudes and beliefs across generations. Also the cases unanimously highlighted the issues of various challenges they face in modern times.

From all the cases it is evident that there is an involvement of technology in association with the techniques used in pottery making, their traditional occupation. Changes in tools used to collect clay from Spades to JCBs, transportation changes from manual methods to the dependence on motor vehicles, changes in the methods of pottery making from using a manually operated potter's wheel to a motorized one, changes seen in the handiwork replaced by using of moulds and changes in accommodating materials other than clay are the major technological changes observed in Kumbharan community. All the cases have admitted that it requires manual power largely in order to do pottery making. Machines have definitely brought a change in this matter, when modernity came in. However, it is remarkable to recall that the invention of potter's wheel changed the world to a path that seemed to be rapid in the technological progression. It is a coincidence now where the progression of technology pays back to the potter community in terms of easy methods for their traditional occupation. A wide variety of clay products could list out from the discussions with all the respondents. This in fact, is very trending today where the traditionally made products using natural resources are being branded under giant international companies globally. This is reflected in the variety of products Kumbharan make in terms of its use, design, size, colour and so on. Changes in the marketing and selling methods of products among Kumbharan are evident with the course of time. The scope of market has been changing and it is never static. It is a known fact that Kumbharan produces products out of clay from the ancient times. So, not much of advertising was needed in olden times where there was no concept of competition but a simple market system. Globalization paved way for a much complex market and a sense of competition put stress among the producers to survive in the market. The idea of advertisement spread vastly due to this occurrence. However, a not so small reflection of the same could be identified among Kumbharan as well. They use different marketing strategies today like putting up banners, giving advertisements in local notices etc. All cases have informed about the hawker's nature connected with their traditional way of selling the products. All cases also indicate that it was the women of the community who were in charge of these activities. The selling

methods have changed way to a new style where local dealers come to Kumbharan colonies and buy the products in bulk. They also bring vehicles so Kumbharan need not be worried about the transportation too. No formal training is discussed in any of the cases which mean the transmission of traditional knowledge is purely on the basis of hereditary among Kumbharan community. The elder generation teaches the basic lessons to the younger generation. The traditional occupation of Kumbharan is stapled with divinity as they believe that the inborn skills they possess are by the mercy of *Mariyamman*. However, it has been analyzed that the attitudes towards their deity are different across generations. The older generations look at *Mariyamman* with great respect and fear while the younger generation with due respect is not showing any sort of fearfulness towards their deity.

All cases have unanimously reported the unavailability of raw materials for their traditional occupation. This naturally causes the price hike of the raw materials. Besides, the young minds who do not want to continue their traditional occupation is an added affliction to this chaos among Kumbharan. Many in the community seek job prospects in the Gulf countries. Since this issue is something basic relating with their traditional occupation, the continuity and sustainability of pottery making among Kumbharan is in a chaotic state. Kumbharan is deeply concerned about this matter but at the same time they are helpless when it comes to solving it.

Conclusion

The course of time has been reflected with a lot of changes in Kumbharan community in terms of their clothing, food habits, attitudes and way of life in general. It is found that Kumbharan community has undergone many changes in the post globalised era especially in terms of their traditional occupation. This article reveals that the globalised world has reach out in an extensive way, which is capable to impinge on even the smallest of any community. It is shown in terms of the changes in both material and non-material culture. Globalization has shifted key relations between producers and consumers and broken many links between labor and family life (Appadurai, 1949). Kumbharan community also exhibits changes those are outcomes of globalization. It is found that the vigorous nature of changes has finally led to the discontinuity of the traditional occupation of Kumbharan community.

This study would suggest for a discussion on the new motto holds by the larger society, "Go Back to Nature". It is found in this study that the tendency of society to use biodegradable products has increased which in turn works beneficial to the Kumbharan community. This trend has created positive impacts on Kumbharan while they develop a high self-esteem. Besides, this study also proposes few matters to be discussed. As per the findings, the nature of marketing and selling has changed from the hawker's style to the dealings with the middlemen. Also another finding of this study shows the minor participation of women in the traditional occupation of Kumbharan in modern times. However, in the direct way, those are not identified it as a challenge Kumbharan face but rather they look at those as a part of "positive" changes over times since it saves the human labor and cost. Nevertheless, Kumbharan holds its uniqueness in certain aspects despite of times and changes that bring about.

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