



Pottery Making: A source of livelihood in Manipur

¹*Pardita Ningthoujam, MPhil, Dept of Tourism and Travel Management,
Anna Adarsh College for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India,*

²*M.Sophia Rashida, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Tourism and Travel Management, Chennai, Tamil nadu, India.*

Abstract

The tradition of pottery making is an aged old cultural tradition in Manipur. This piece of art continues to be a prime source of livelihood in certain areas of the state where 'pottery Making' is carried out in a larger scale such as Andro, Thongjao, Sekmai etc. However little effort has been made to preserve and protect this craft. This paper intends to revisit the essence of Pottery making and to serve the purpose of comprehending an in-depth knowledge about pottery making. A Complete literary and field study have been carried out during the process to present and discuss the socio economic aspect of pottery making in the state. An attempt was made to showcase and highlight the importance of this form of art and to preserve our own cultural heritage.

Key Words: Pottery, Livelihood, Essence, Craft.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pottery making has been one of those old livelihoods which were created in the olden times. On the basis of archaeological records, the usage of Pots and pottery in Manipur dates back from early Neolithic period [1]. With the advancement of technology, there is a rapid increase in production of modern utensils and pots but the importance of traditional earthen ware has always maintained its glory. The earthen wares are also known to enrich the food and drinks with rich minerals and nutrients. People of Manipur mastered the art of pottery making from their early times. This art has been passing down through many generations. It is said that the invention of fire coincided with the invention of pottery in Manipur [2]. This art continues to be an essential activity in the economic life of certain section of people of the state. With the popularization of steel vessels, the use of earthen wares may slightly decrease but they have become part and parcel in socioeconomic lifestyle of the state. In Manipur society, earthen pots have been an indispensable household item since time immemorial. However, pottery making differs from one place to another with difference in socio economic background and availability of raw materials. Varied types of pottery wares are traditionally produced in the state such as black ware, red ware, gray ware etc with different shape and sizes.

1.1 Study area and Methodology

This study was conducted in the sites of pottery making of Thongjao and some other places. These villages are purposively selected as the entire population of the village is indulging in pottery making which will easy to study the potter community. Case study, group discussions and interviews are being

conducted to gather the information from the community. On the basis of the responses given by the potters, the main problems and concern are been identified.

1.2 Socio Economic Aspect

Pottery making plays a significant role in the socio economic and religious aspect of the state. From the ancient time till the present generation, pottery is closely connected with the cultural life of the people [3]. It is use in every occasion of life from birth till death. In the state, there are mainly seven areas where pottery making is carried out. They are Nongpok sekmai, Andro, Thongjao, Chairel, Ningthemcha Karong, Nungbi and Oinam. This carft has been the main occupation for the families of these communities since early times. Poverty level acts as the main economic benchmark that helps in the identification of the financially weaker section of the society. Income per month plays a vital role in shaping the socio-economic lifestyle of a community. Proper planning will surely help in the improvement of the monthly income condition of the workers of these villages.

Table -1 cost of production

Cost of production of one cycle		
Particulars	amount	Cost
labour for soil excavation	2 man	600
Wood/straw for oven	30 kg	1000
Rent of the land	-	500
Producer's own family labour	Unskilled and skilled labour	2000
total		4100

Table 1 shows the manufacturing cost for a cycle of pottery making. One cycle takes two weeks and lots of process went throughout the process as discussed earlier. As some of the potters need to use potential land, they have to buy even the soil from the farmers; it cost around Rs.500 for one cycle, to bring the soil to the site and excavation of soil from the field also take some more Rs.1000. which need two man days labour to get the job. After that the rent of working site and farmers own labour cost nearly Rs. 2000 which includes skilled man and unskilled man to complete the entire job. The fuels for the firing also will cost another Rs.500. It cost around Rs.4100 to complete the whole process.

1.3 Result and Discussions

Pottery making is an art which take long processing days. The potters of Manipur still continue to follow the indigenous way of making pots. However the steps are slightly different in some places because of the geographical and socio economic difference. The steps involved can be discussed in the following ways:

Sourcing – Pots cannot be prepared with any type of soil. The potters need to gather the soil either from their own backyard, agricultural land or from nearby lakes or rivers. According to the potters the clay should contain the hard clay and sand in a proportion of 8:2. Mainly they opt loamy soil which has a tight but smooth texture. The indigenous knowledge of the selecting soil is taught only to the sons of a potter not to the daughters. According to the community teaching this technique to their daughter is creation of the chance of piracy of their ancient knowledge. Daughters may marry in some other clan of

people in such case the monopoly of this special knowledge will not belong to the potter community only but to the other clan also. [4]

Preparing the clay – This work is mostly done by the women, the big soil or mud rocks are broken down into finer particles and kept into a vessel with full of water for some hours or one night or more than that. Next day the excess water is drain out and the leftover soft clay is use for making the pots. In some cases the artisans feels there is a lack of sand in the mixture they can put some more mud or sand into it and mix, roll and make the mixture or paste ready. If the mixture is not properly made, during the sun drying process or in the firing process, the pots can break into pieces.

Making of pot – After the clay is prepared, the pulps of the clay are then use to start molding the pots with the artistic hands of a potter to take the structure of a pot of their choice.

Sun drying – The pots are then kept in the sun for drying. After the drying process of the pots, they are then kept in a room till it will again go for firing.

Coloring of the pots (optional) – The potteries are being colored with many techniques such as red hematite soil. The making of this color is also very different and unique according to the places.

Preparation of firing chamber – The firing chamber is basically a place which is being heated to a very high temperature. This chamber is specially design and constructed from special heat using that insulate heat by absorbing heat. It should be made to produce the right amount of heat to bask the pots. Otherwise the potters set up a place where they burn the firewood or straws and the pot are fired in the fire for some hours.

Firing process – Husks of about one foot are kept on the heat chamber and about $\frac{3}{4}$ inches of straws are being spread above the husks. Then the pots are kept horizontally one after another. These pots are then covered with fine ashes of about 6cms and start the fire.

Marketing – The Villagers or the potters sell their products in the local market and people intentionally visit their places to buy the same for every occasion. However things have drastically change and selling rate of these pots have decrease in the last few days. Also the potters source their products to the wholesalers who have a retail shop in the city.

2. PROBLEMS

The main concern of this livelihood which the artisans faced is the lack of proper raw material (Soil) for the pottery. According to them the soil texture and quality is not smooth and tight like olden times. The organic content in the soil is very low that the holding capacity of each particle becomes negligible due to the high use of inorganic fertilizers which ruined the quality of the soil. According to the potters, there is also a concern in the low income price of the product from the wholesaler. The price what they were getting some times back in the weekly markets have increase due to the decrease in local demand. This has hugely impacted the livelihood of the potters. At present times, the traditional Manipuri pottery is seen declining because of the rapid replacement of modern utensils. Also, the time consumption and hard labour needed in the making process of traditional pottery has become a hurdle for the younger generation to continue this craft. Again the lack of marketing opportunities such as demand and supply linkages is lagging way behind. There is no proper channelization of these crafts to reach the global market which eventually discourages the younger generation specially the potters to carry forward this legacy as full time. This eventually leads to the downfall of our indigenous cultural heritage.

3. SUGGESTIONS

There is an urgent need to take necessary steps to solve the problems face by the artisans of Manipur, Here are some suggestions:

1. It is necessary to guarantee the supply of high quality soil. Providing high quality soil will improve The quality of the pots they produce therefore it will help to increase the demand in the market.
2. Price of other raw materials like good quality of brushes and colors has to be lowered so that they are within the reach of the poor workers.

3. The pottery workers must innovate new designs and produce unique products so that the demand of the products manufactured by them rise in the market in spite of existence of high competition [5]. They must come out of their monotonous design and think of something new to stay back in the competition. Besides, the Government and NGO`s must also extend their helping hand by providing them proper financial assistance and support for their improvement.

. 4. Banks should come forward and provide them with loans at low rates of interest.

5. For the expansion of the demand of these products in the market, proper promotion of these products has to be done. Local panchayat has to play a great role in this aspect. Publishing Brochurs and weekly magazine can also sensitize the market. Besides, social media can also uplift the situation of the potters by spreading awareness and promoting their products. This can become an indispensable tool for promoting products on the market. These craft must also be sent to participate trade fair organizes by state and central Governments. Local government agencies, associations, NGOs need to move forward in order for these initiatives to be preserve this art.

4. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt of the fact that the pottery industry of Manipur has been facing several problems since a long time period. However, the industry has a good future prospect which will surely improve the socioeconomic lifestyle of the workers if steps are taken by the Government to solve their problems. Proper promotion of the industry can only be brought about through expansion of the market of products manufactured by the workers [6]. Not only the local panchayat, but also the State Government and Central Government must come forward and take steps to solve the problems. If it is done, then the pottery industry of Manipur will not only bring about the development of the study area but also will strengthen the economic foundation of India in general and Manipur in particular.

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