



## **INDIAN KNOWLEDGE OF FOLK CRAFTS IN JANGALMAHAL REGION: A CASE STUDY OF DOKRA CRAFT IN BANKURA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL**

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### **Abstract**

The Folk and traditional crafts are one of the crucial areas in studying materialistic culture. It is guided by the socio-ethnic factor of concerned region. The rural artisans' produces variety of craft items by using traditional knowledge and some conventional tools with the purpose of fulfilling the socio-cultural needs of the concurrent society and make fabrication of local cultural traits. The artisans are usually popular for their majestic craftwork and magical touch. The article gives thrust on Dokra craft of Bankura district. It tries to emphasize on documentation for traditional techniques of craft making and analyses the role of Dokra craft in accelerating socio-economic wellbeing of concerned artisan's community.

**Keywords:** *Traditional crafts, traditional knowledge, cultural traits, dokra.*

### **Introduction**

Indian knowledge system focuses to motivate and accelerate further research in connection of solving contemporary socio-economic issues. The Indian knowledge system (IKS) is based on age old Vedic literature, the Puranas, the Vedas and the Upanishads (Mandavkar,2023). The rural and traditional professionals have engaged in various IKS based activities like art and craft work, folk song, dance, festivals, cuisines etc. It provides immense opportunities of employment for youth and under privileged sections by imparting skill-based training and workshops. The IKS helps to promote local heritage, culture, ethnicity, conventional technology through conservation approach. Additionally it showcases the unique heritage to Indians as well as for the world. Its aiming to occupy around 10% of the global tourism and imparts massive employability for rural youth (ibid).

The Traditional knowledge refers to innovative and conventional knowledge systems which incorporates creativity, cultural signature, innovations which have been usually transmitted from parental generation to the recent and are continuously evolving in respect of changing environment. The nature of such technology is very primitive and transmitted to next generation which safeguards the existence, identity and rights of the indigenous peoples. Folk craft is traditional craft practice which usually prepared by using locally available raw materials by using simple tools, techniques and simple instrumentation. It helps to recreate local resources and preserved rural societies. The folk craft represents material culture which considered as tangible in form of craft form and intangible in sense of traditional knowledge. It reflects

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the cultural identities of a artisans community of that very region. It incorporates traditional techniques, skills, expertise which is transmitted generation after generation. In each rural society of Jangalmahal region, there are some specific socio-cultural groups, which are traditionally expertise in making crafts. In Bankura district of West Bengal, numerous crafts like terracotta of Panchmura, stone crafts of Susunia, Baluchari craft of Bishnupur, Conch-shell craft, lantern craft, wood carving of Bishnupur, Brass metal craft etc. Majority of the population in said craft villages (more than 90%) is engaged in craft making sector along agricultural practice. In the paper, Dokra craft of Bikna village in Bankura district have been discussed.

### **Dokra Craft at a Glance**

Dokra is a typical form of handicraft and known as older version of nonferrous metal casting. This type of metal casting has been practiced in Indian sub-continent since 4,000 years long (Chatterjee, 2015). This metallic craft form is practiced by some aboriginal natives of eastern India. These tribes had a nomadic feature and engaged in primitive form of agricultural practice. This nomadic tribes was finally settle down in various part of India like West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh. In West Bengal this tribes are found in Bankura, Jhargram, Purulia and Paschim Medinipur districts. The dokra craft itself having high demand in country as well as in world market for its primitive look, simplicity, antique design and attire. The semi-skilled and skilled artisans are produced such enchanting form of craft motifs through the magical hand, expertise and instinctive creative sense which evolved over a decade's (ibid). Recently in urban culture this dokra item bears a symbolic value of sophistication and royalty. In Bikna village of Bankura district a large number of artisans remained at an extreme poor condition and they have to leave the craftsmanship and shifted metro cities like (Kolkata, Bangalore) to find rational wage based employment opportunities.

**Research Methodology:** This is an empirical research study. A proper amalgamation between primary and secondary data has been administered in sake of research study. A total number of 50 sample respondents have selected through random sampling technique method. The primary database was collected by field visit in Dokra village. The observation method along with focus group interview, structured and unstructured schedule was administered for collecting primary database. The sources of Secondary data were various documents like articles in journals and magazines, books, and various websites.

### **Dokra craft in Bikna**

**Location and Physiography:** Bikna is village located in the Bankura II CD block under Kesiakole PO in Bankura Sub-Division of the Bankura district of West Bengal. The location coordinate of the village is 22<sup>0</sup>96' N and 87<sup>0</sup>16'E. This village located 5 km. towards north from Bankura town The famous *Dokra* craft produced in this village. It is Physiographically located on the undulated Bankura upland of Rarh plains of West Bengal. It is merged with Bankura uplands in the west and Bankura-Bishnupur Rarh plains in the north east. The western region is a part of undulating Chotonagpur plateau. The red lateritic soil and scrub jungle with Sal forest are prevalent in this region. The undulating lands have a rich coal mines at the northern part along with Damodar river

**Demographic Profile of the Village:** As per 2011 census it had a total village population was 3876. The male and female population was 1961 and 1915 which corresponds 51% and 49% respectively. The population below 6 years was 450 and total number of literate person was 2565 which corresponds 74.87% of the total population. The rural and urban population distribution was 89% and 11% respectively in this village.

**Dokra Craft an Overview:** The main raw materials are Brass and Bee wax. The majestic novelties and decorative items are produced in this village. It has a rich historical significance as it is one of the ancient forms of folk crafts that are made by casting techniques. This Dokra system of metal casting is made with wax which is the oldest form of metal casting known as '*Cire Perdue*' or lost wax process, which can be

traced from Indus valley civilization. This designer and decorative craft article of Dokra artisan has a great national and global demand for its primitive simplicity and enchanting folk motifs form.

The small artisan community lives in this village are involved in craft making practices. Nearly 36 families forms a close kinship and engaged in craft making sector. This artisan community is scattered nomads whose forefathers came from Chotonagpur plateau and later adopted the sanskritised surname 'Karmakar' which is closely associated with English surname 'Smith'. This artisan community was incorporated in the gradual process of 'Hinduisation' (Singh, 1993) through adaptation of some religious practices belongs from hindu mainstream. In spite of having rich traditional knowledge, sense of craft making, wide geographical entity the craftsmen remains deprived from main stream economy and didn't achieved the adequate financial wealth for their livelihood. This craft was historically known as Tribal crafts of India having a widespread variety in Jharkhand, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, later they have migrated to the alluvial tract of Bengal and finally settled down in Bankura, Purulia and Midnapore district in the year 1962. Recently for technological enhancement an organization named NISTADS got engaged in developing more safe, convenient and eco-friendly furnaces for Dokra artisans. With a suitable amalgamation of existing traditional techniques and contemporary globalized techniques a more potential and sustainable furnace and production technology are adopted in recent times. Ruth Revers (1962) refers the Bankura Dokra crafts as 'Kain Kuya Mal' which possibly derives from the knowledge association of the traditional measuring vessels known as 'Kunke' in Bengal. Besides The village Bikna, under Bankura Sadar subdivision, the artisan of Patrasayer of Bishnupur subdivision also produced very fine and polished Dokra items.

The term Dokra used to indicate a group of artisans of nomads who scattered over vast portion of eastern and central India produced beautifully shaped and decorated ornaments, idols and home decors characterized by its antique expression, exotic beauty, imaginative design and patterns. Historically it is one of the earliest lucrative craft article made of non-ferrous metal casting in human civilization (Dhar, 2018). The most lightning part about the indigenous craft is that in USA and European country the Dokra crafts secure its market craze and demand in a very sustainable way. The primitive looks, traditionalism, ethnic touch and tribal flavor are the principle factor for its huge market demand and popularity. This craft figures have an exotic finish which adds a special appeal in itself.

Around 1000 years ago the king of Bastar in the state of Chattisgarh was gifted a Dokra jewellery (neckless) for his wife. He was so pleased and charmed by its exotic expression and honored the craftsmen with the title of 'Ghadwa'. It derives fromn the term 'Ghalna' means *melting wax*. This craftsmen community also reknowned as Viswakarma, Kansaria, Ghasia, Mangan in di8ffrent entity of the state. The lost wax process is so conventional and the primitive bronze made 'dancing girl' idol was excavated from Mahenjo-daro in the Indus Valley Civilization was made of same processes. In addition its primitiveness is found in three old Sanskrit texts namely Manasara Silparatna and Manasollasa which brings same evidances that justified the said matters (Dhar, 2018). Around 100 years ago the Dokra artisans of central and eastern India are moved towards Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and become decentralized in various part of India. The major geographic clusters of Dokra crafts are Chattisgarh, Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh, Puri, keonjhar Khurda and Mayurbhanj in Orissa, Bankura and Midnapore in West Bengal and some semi-tribal pockets in Madhya Pradesh (Dhar, 2018).

### **The Ethnic Procedure of Dokra Making**

**The methods:** The Dokra artisan produced the artifacts in 'Lost Wax Casting' (Cire Perdue) process. A little amount of clay layer pasted over the wax replica and leave it for drying in the shadow environment. After this, a thick layer of clay is taken to cover up the article keeping a hole on the top. The molten layert then mould to replace the wax layer. The metal cast is taken out to impart a finishing touch and make it perfect for show of purposes.

**The basic ingredients:** Brass and scarp metal, woods, mustard oil, coal and clay soil, gum, tar, wax are taken as basic raw materials for crafts production which mostly collected from local market places.

**The tools:** Various tools and instruments like welding machine, hammer, drill machine, gas welding machine, buffing instruments are used in this purpose.

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**The Techniques of Production:** The lost wax hollow casting methods (Cire-Perdue) for preparation of Brass-Metal (Dokra). Crafts follow the six sequential stages which are given below:

- i. Core- Making stages.
- ii. Modelling
- iii. Moulding
- iv. De-Waxing
- v. Casting
- vi. Finishing, polishing and getting final touch up.

### **Bikna Shilpadanga: A Brief Overview**

The Dokra making history of this village is so glorious and about 150 years old. From the Choto Nagpur belt some number of craftsmen community shifted in Rampur village near Bikna. From there they have finally commuted and permanently resides in Bikna village. Nearly 70-75 artisan family closely associated and forms a close kinship to produce craft articles. Nearly 300-315 families (male-165 and female-150) engaged in this craft work (Dhar, 2018). The village is situated near NH-60, under Bankura block-I and under jurisdiction of Burdwan division. In the very north Amarkanan and Gangajalghati and in the south Onda block situated (ibid). The *Karmakara* community is scheduled under sub caste metal worker. But in reality they are deprived from all opportunities of being a OBC caste. As they doesn't have any valid caste certificate in favour of it (ibid).. The literacy rate found to be satisfactory from assessment of field data (ibid).. Most of the cases the growing children of craftsmen learned the craft techniques very innately as they lives that environment where the Dokra crafts arte abandoned everywhere besides them (ibid).. Therefore the youth artisans learn so quickly from their elder generations as they playing the clay balls from their childhood and eventually graduating towards clay modelling. The teenagers after completing their schooling have engaged in Dokra crafts making profession due to hold their hereditary profession and social norms. The *Karmakara* artisans produced lucrative and spectacular Dokra metal crafts which symbolizes the village as well as the district in pan India as well as the globe.

### **Infrastructural Set-up**

The only Bengali medium school is Bikna K.P.S. Vidyapith established in 1964. It offers education upto class XII standard with an accommodation of 20 computer, library, playground etc. The Manohari Devi Bajia DAV Public school is an English medium Co-educational school established in 2001. The state highway-9 connected the village with Durgapur, Bankura, Asansole, Jhargram, Midnapore very easily. The nearest railway station is Bikna under the Adra railway division. Kanchanpur Block Primary health centre are the major state run healthcare unit located in this village. Besides that Narrah and Manakanali are the secondary day health care unit present in this village.

### **Results and Analysis:**

**Table: 1 - Socio-Economic Profile of sample respondents at Bikna village**

<b>Socio-Economic Profile</b>		
<b>Demographic Parameters</b>		
<b>Respondents Gender</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	36	72
Female	14	28
<b>Respondents Age</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
15-20	5	10
21-25	12	24
26-30	21	42
31-35	7	14
36-40	3	6

< 40	2	4
<b>Educational status</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Primary Level	15	30
Secondary and HS	20	40
College and Higher education	7	14
Technical and Vocational Education	6	12
No formal education	2	4
<b>Marital status</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Married	41	82
Unmarried	7	14
Widowed/ divorced	2	4
<b>Respondents monthly income</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
< 5000	10	20
5000-15000	28	56
15000-25000	8	16
25000-35000	3	6
> 35000	1	2

Source: Author's survey.

Table 1 shows the status of demographic variables of the selected respondents. As per gender profile, there were 72% male and 28% female found among sample respondents. This indicates that the craft practice was basically male dominated. There was a tendency of early age marriages among females in said craft village. In age related survey it was found that the majority of the respondents (66%) were between 20 to 30 years, followed by 30 years to 40 years (20 %) and greater than 40 years (4%), This could be an important parameter for considering during analyzing the result that productive age group artisans are dominant in practising *Dokra* craft. The literacy level of the respondents is also surveyed, and the majority of the respondents have completed secondary and higher secondary exam (40%), followed by primary level of education (30%) and college level UG education (14%). It become an important criterion for interpreting the results of the study, as educational status was a vital predictor for development of the artisans community. The majority of the sample respondents comes under the income category of 5000-15000 (56%), followed by less than 5000 (20%), 15000-25000 (16%), 2000-35000 (6%), and more than 35000 (2%). This could be an important parameter to consider during interpretation the results as income of artisans family was a crucial predictor for holistic development of artisan's community.

### **Problems of Dokra Craft Village**

In spite of having huge demand of Dokra items in national and international markets, the Dokra artisans of Bikna have facing numerous issues. These are as follows :

1. The lack of capital, poor financial assistance from bank and other agencies become the major crisis for the development of craft sector. Thus poverty, malnutrition, unhygienic sanitation becomes major issues in regards of development of Dokra sector.
2. Illiteracy, lack of technical education, poor technological and infrastructural support becomes another crisis for growth of this sector.
3. Rising price of raw materials becomes a great hindrance for Dokra craft. As it increases the price of end product and the buyers will less attracted to purchase the craft items. It makes the artisans disappointed.
4. Lack of knowledge regarding new innovative craft design and lack of inspiration for doing some extra-ordinary effort becomes a major hindrance in the way of modernization of craft items.

5. The traditional Dokra craft are under threat of sharp decline as a stiff market competition is found with other machine made substitute and imported artifacts which are glossy, polished, more attractive and available within a pocket friendly budget.
6. In adverse weather like rainy season the craft production is interrupted and the artisans found a big trouble to earn their livelihood during this time.
7. The primitive techniques for production of craft is causing delay in progress of craft sector and remain unmatched in the fastest growing marketing age.
8. One of the most burning problem of Dokra artisans is about their loss of identity. As some outsider businessman (not belongs to original ethnic community of Dokra artisans) have established some factories and produces similar products for trade purpose in India and abroad. This gives a stiff competition with original artisans who produces craft items with traditional tools and techniques become unable to compete with machine made sophisticated craft items.

## **Conclusion**

Indian Knowledge System (IKS) incorporates traditional and antique knowledge from ancient India, its succession and challenges. It promotes further research scope in the subject domain of sociology, anthropology, folklore, cultural geography, economics, psychology and so on, aiming to establishes the measures of sustainable development from respective fields in a societal approach. It will actively work on spreading rich heritage, culture, tribal knowledge including indigenous learning method like art and craft practice, yoga, meditation, practicing ayurveda etc. The IKS will promote folk and cultural tourism which leads to accelerate regional economy in a sustainable way. It incorporates recreation and preservation of Indian knowledge in the sphere of human value. Recently UGC also incorporates 5% credit in the curriculum framework on an mandatory basis in IKS based courses (Mandavkar, 2023). The government and other educational institutions will play the role of catalysts for initiating educational research, training and workshops, short term courses, outreach activities at various corner of the country.

This study focuses about major hindrances which have facing by the Dokra artisans in regards of marketing and other financial issues. The acute lack of capital and funding allocation hampered the scope of business viability, marketing opportunities. the absence of strong market network, advertisement pulled the craft in a disadvantageous situation. Hence, the government and other agencies need to play a crucial role for strengthening and rejuvenating this craft sector. The voluntary contribution, care, spontaneous effort from artisans end is very needful at present context. The artisans need to undergo through various government strategies, policies in sake of holistic development of craft sector. The artisans may need to put more care and effort of making popular and customize craft items. The home consumers may also need to be aware about the age old traditional craft items so that they must buy the Dokra items whenever visits in this craft village to rejuvenate this sector. This will lead the Dokra craft towards an enlighten future.

The folk art and crafts are highly influenced by the modernization and westernization. The plastic and synthetic materials replaced original raw ingredients collected from lap of the mother nature. The artisans are forced to compete with modern machine made craft items. They also altered the natural appeal of craft motifs in order to exist in contemporary craft market by following the recent market trend which losses their originality. The Dokra craft is a versatile craft practice but due to rise of price in raw ingredients it only concentrated in making small idol of god and goddesses. The earning scope become very insignificant which demoralized young generation to exist in craft practice. Hence, the future of Dokra craft is become endangered. The artisans emerged as marginalized section in socio-economic stratum of the country. The loss their traditional ideas, cultural traits, design, work sharing, sociability, face contacts, harmony in nature and environment etc. Thus blind acceptance of modernization makes the Dokra artisans and artists to be vulnerable and endangered in this regard.

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