“DHOKRA” THE TRIBAL ART OF CHHATTISGARH STATE

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ABSTRACT

The performing arts industry in India reached INR236 billion in 2012 and is expected to witness a CAGR of 2.5% over 2012—2018 to reach INR275 billion in 2018. The industry will primarily be driven by new and innovative forms of fund raising by theater and dance groups and a growing demand for Indian culture at an international level. During April-September 2016, handicraft exports from India increased by 13.5% y-o-y to US$ 1.9 billion (~INR130 billion). Total export of handicrafts from India is expected to grow by 10% to US$ 3.5 billion (INR239.6 billion) in FY16-17. Chhattisgarh has evolved up as the most exaggerating investment store among its other competitive states in different section like art, agriculture, production, mining, technology, and biotechnology etc. Chhattisgarh is filled with exotic handicrafts which are still unreachable to the customers at national and international level; such is the “Dhokra” art. Dhokra art involves intricate patterning of clay core with wax ribbon and then coating with a mix of clay and hay.

Keywords :- Handicraft; Cottage based-Industry ;Dhokra art ;Ecofriendly craft;Row material ;Methods & Techniques; Employment;

Introduction:-

Dhokra art is the famous art of Chhattisgarh, making it favorite folk style for many customers, collectors, decorators, or furnishers etc. Dhokra art is inspired by tribal themes of animals, mythical creatures, human creatures, natural shapes etc. The region is rich tradition of craft and culture. The Dhokra craft is fiend in Bastar, which is a district in the southern part of the state of Chhattisgarh. Bastar is bound by the states of Orissa and Maharashtra on its east and west, respectively. Of the total population of bastar, more than 70% are tribal including the Gond, Abhuj Maria, Darda Maria, Bison Horn Maria, Munia Doria, Dhruva, Bhatra and Halba tribes. Other communities carrying out specific occupations are also found in the district, such as the Ghadwas, who are engaged in the Dhokra craft. The city of Raipur in Chhattisgarh is the most convenient place from where one can access Baster. The clusters in Bastar for the Dhokra craft are Kondagaon and Jagdalpur, which are situated 225 kms and 298 kms respectively from Raipur

Dhokra art is the characteristic feature of Chhattisgarh art. Each piece of Dhokra art is characterized by intricate attention of the artist to provide its authenticity. It is an ancient method by which metal art-crefts are made through wax casting techniques. It is an ecofriendly craft as it uses scrap useless metal.

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Dhokra is a non-ferrous metal that is cast into various products by using the lost-wax casting technique. This sort of metal casting has been undertaken in India for over 4,000 years and the same method is still being used. One of the earliest known lost wax artifacts is the dancing girl of mohenjo-daro. Dhokra is the oldest form of metal casting and popular because of its simplicity. It is the specialty of Chhattisgarh. It is very important handicraft because of its labour extensive and largely exclusive folk character. Bastar district of Chhattisgarh provides the most distinct Dhokra crafts.

Dhokra crafts are made manually by casting of brass and bronze metal with the help of wax vanishing technique. The process of making Dhokra craft is very old however; it provides such intricate works of the local deities, sun, moon, jungle, flora and fauna etc. to provide a decorative look on it.

HISTORY:-

The Dhokra craft has been discovered in the relics of the mohenjodaro and Harappan civilizations, which proves the historical and traditional importance of the industry. The statue of the dancing girl, unearthed at mohenjodaro is proof of the origin and continuity of the craft. It is this continuity of tradition, coupled with the intrinsic starkness and vitality of the art form, which makes Dhokra products coveted collectors' items in India and Abroad for connoisseurs, scholars and laypersons alike.

The Dhokra art is a major attraction in Bastar. The Ghadwas are small artisan groups who produce brass or bell metal objects. In Bastar, many folk stories are told about the origins of the Ghadwas, the foremost among which is the following tale: three hundred years ago, the ruler of Bastar, Bhan Chand was presented a gift, a necklace crafted in Dhokra craft for his beloved wife, which made him aware of the beauty of the craft.
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To honour the craftsman, he decided to bestow the title of Ghadwa on him, which is derived from the word ghalna, meaning to melt and work with wax. Therefore, since these people prepare the craft items by melting the metal through the use of the lost wax technique, they are given the name 'Ghadwa'. Another derivation of the name comes from the word gadhna, which means to make. Gadhna means the act of shaping and creating, and it is probably this term that gives the artisans, who cast the objects, mainly made of brass and copper, their name. In some regions, the craftsmen are also called Ghasia, Khaser, Mangan, and Vishwakarma.

Investments And Grants Provided-

The performing arts industry is funded through several mechanisms in the form of grants, donations by the Central and state Governments, private corporations, foundations, trusts, and developmental organizations. However, when compared to global nations, the state of the Indian industry remains bleak. Several new initiatives have also been undertaken by the Government of India for promotion of the textiles industry, including handicrafts.

Opportunities In The Industry-

Increasing national and international exposure across theater, dance and crafts industries; upgradation of new technology and settings; rising global demand; and emergence of varied performances being experimented as sources for performance are providing opportunities for the industry to capitalize on. Development of creative clusters within Smart Cities will provide additional opportunity that the industry can leverage.

Key Challenges In The Industry -

Raising funds/sponsorship; dearth of infrastructure spaces to perform theater and dance; and inclination toward other creative arts platforms are the major challenges faced by the industry. The Government needs to adopt certain measures to improve the current status of the industry as it is a means of livelihood for a large section of society.
Handicraft Industry-

Handicrafts constitute an important segment of the Indian economy as it is one of the largest employment generators. The sector employs about 7 million people directly and indirectly, which include a large number of women and people belonging to the weaker sections of the society. It is a decentralized, highly labour intensive, cottage-based industry, spread across the country. Originally, handicraft started as a part time activity in the rural areas; however, it has now transformed into a flourishing economic activity due to a significant growing market demand over the years. While most of the manufacturing units are located in rural and small towns, there is huge market potential across all Indian cities as well as outside the country. In addition to the high potential for employment, the sector is economically important from the point of low capital investment, high ratio of value addition, and high potential for export and foreign exchange earnings for the country. In fact, the industry has seen a consistent growth of 15% over the last few years and handicrafts has contributed significantly to the foreign exchequer of the country through exports. Each state in the country has been contributing through one or more crafts and has made tremendous progress during the last decade. Handicrafts also have a big potential as they hold the key for sustaining not only the existing set of artisans but also for increasingly a large number of new entrants in the crafts activity. There are more than 67,000 Indian exporters/export houses promoting regional art and craftsmanship in the domestic and global markets. However, despite the large production base, the market at an international level is still unexplored. There is a huge demand for the Indian handicraft products in both national and international markets and India is one of the important suppliers of handicrafts to the world market; however, India’s share in
the world handicraft exports is less than 2%. To match the demand and supply with quality, there is a requirement for greater technological support and innovation in the industry. Moreover, the handicraft sector suffers due to its unorganized nature along with additional constraints like lack of education, capital, and low exposure to new technologies, absence of market intelligence and weak institutional framework.

**Scheme-**

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<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sanchalit Yojna 2016</td>
<td>Prashikskhan Yojna</td>
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<td>Avjar-karmshala yojna</td>
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**Process -**

In the craft production process of Dhokra, it is bees-wax and not metal that gives material shape to the creative images that are formed. In Chhattisgarh, these artists, rather craftsmen, are clustered in Bastar district, wherein they are concentrated in the region around Kondagaon and Jagdalpur.

1. **Raw Materials:** The basic raw material used for making Dhokra articles is brass, which is procured in the form of used brass utensils or any other brass scrap. The brass scraps are available locally from traders who either collect them locally or source them from Dhamtari and Raipur. The brass scrap is available for Rs. 220 to Rs. 250 per kg of scrap, depending on the availability and market conditions. The other raw materials required are:
   - Aari Mitti/Chikti Mitti (Black Soil)
   - Bhoosa (Rice Husk)
   - Rui Mitti (Riverside Soil)
   - Gobar (Cow-dung)
   - Lal Mitti (Red Soil)
   - Sem Patta (Bean Leaves)
   - Mome (Wax)
   - Jalawan (Fire Wood)
   - Koyla (Wood Coal)

2. **Tools:** Almost all the tools are made by the artisans either themselves or with the help of the local blacksmith or carpenter. The tools used in Dhokra craft are:
   - Hammer
   - Wooden mallet
   - Pichki-pharni
   - Chisel
   - Pliers
   - Tongs and
   - Wire brushes
3. Process: There are two main processes of lost-wax casting: solid casting and hollow casting. While the former is predominant in southern India, the latter is more common in central and eastern India. In solid casting, instead of a clay core a solid piece of wax is used to create the mould; hollow casting, on the other hand, is the more traditional method and entails the use of the clay core.

The entire process can be broadly divided into the following five major parts:

- Modelling
- Moulding
- De-waxing
- Casting and
- Finishing.

Product Range: Now-a-days, the common Dhokra products made include images of Ganesh, Durga and the Nandi bull, lamps, lamp-stands, candle-stands, ash-trays, pen-stands, human forms, figures of Maria and Mareen (tribal figures), door handles, flower vases, mobile holders, face masks, water jugs, and key rings.

Phases Of Development: Even though the Dhokra shilpis have been operating within the rigid technological framework provided by tradition, their art form has not remained static. Over the years, they have responded to newer and newer forms and motifs. We can identify five major phases of development in their art.

Phase I - is defined by the original Dhokra repertoire, which is simple and stark in keeping with the maker’s lifestyle and philosophy.

Phase II - came into being when the Dhokra shilpis took to settled life and started making new items consistent with the requirements of a food-surplus economy. Their work now included rather ornate Hindu gods and goddesses. Interestingly, in their own shrines, the Dhokra shilpis of Bikna have retained worship of their own creations (horses, elephants, etc.) in addition to Bhairon, who is a form of Shiva and a deity consistent with no vegetarianism.

Phase III - is characterized by two major developments: patronage extended by the state and the social elites; and interaction with creative sculptors like Meera Mukherjee. She successfully imbibed in her own work techniques and motifs of the Dhokra art and, once accepted as an insider, introduced the Dhokra shilpis to new forms. It is during this phase that the stylized Bankura horse, hitherto a preserve of the Kumbhakars (clay shilpis), was successfully adopted for casting in metal.

Phase IV - a relatively recent phenomenon, has been thrust upon the Dhokra shilpis by the demands of the cheap souvenir market. This phase is characterized by such “novelty” items as a Ganesh with an umbrella. Much of the work is pure kitsch. Such has been the impact of this phase that shilpis now describe their creations not in their own words but in the vocabulary given to them by the traders. Very often, when the traders descend on the shilpis’ village to make purchases they pay exploitatively low prices. In such cases the shilpis seek to indirectly raise their wages by lowering craftsmanship and compromising on the quality of the inputs. Thus they may use inferior quality of scrap and substitute coal tar for dhuna.

Phase V - ushered in at Bikna and Dariapur by NISTADS in 2001, is defined by technological improvements accompanied by an enhanced sense of worthiness and Help in marketing (thanks to support from Cottage Emporium, Tribes and Manjusha). Remarkably, creative levels have risen to match
the technology available. Not only are the shilpis making bigger and better artefacts, they have also added new forms and motifs on their own.

Current Scenario:-

The artisans practising the Dhokra craft are Ghadwas, who fall under the Backward Classes, and are not tribals. But the artisans claim that their ancestors were tribals who migrated from Maharashtra and settled in Bastar centuries ago. Hence, the tribal imagery of the Dhokra craft can be traced back to the ancestral lineage of the craftsmen.

The clusters of Dhokra craftsmen are spread in and around Kondagaon and Jagdalpur. More than 600 Dhokra artisans are reportedly working in this area. Only a handful of these artisans have, however, organized themselves under self-help groups (SHGs) or societies, most of which have become defunct now. Due to the demand for and popularity of Dhokra products, work is always available. Hence, the locals have started migrating from other daily wage jobs to Dhokra work. Various training programmes are also being organized by the Government to induct and train new craftsmen in this industry.

The Ghadwas engaged in this craft virtually serve the tribals, as Dhokra products constitute an essential part of the lifestyle of the tribals. It is said that a tribal's life is incomplete without these products, as both their birth and death are celebrated through rituals that cannot be undertaken without the use of Dhokra-made idols. Traditionally, the Ghadwa craftsmen used to supply the villagers with utensils for their daily use.

This craft is essentially dominated by men, but women also assist them in activities like making of the design with wax, and cleaning and polishing of the products after they are cast. The men take up heavier activities involving greater effort like casting, melting the metal, and handling the furnace. But the participation of women in the craft is increasing.

The current state of the craft is satisfactory but the following problems are causing obstacles in its development:

- **Availability of Raw Material**: Brass, which is the most essential raw material in this craft, is mainly used, while scrap brass utensils, which are collected from the surrounding region by the traders and sold to the artisan, also constitute the raw materials for the Dhokra craft. But with changing times and lifestyle habits, the usage of brass utensils has gone down and they are being replaced by steel or plastic. This is leading to a shortage in the supply of raw materials. The scrap that is available through these traders is also not up to the mark and has a lot of impurities.
Lack of Working Capital: The artisans do not have enough capital to procure brass and start their own production. Most of the traders and buyers provide the raw material themselves and get the work done. This inhibits the artisans by preventing them from working independently instead of depending on the traders. Most of the times, the artisans are left with a lot of unfinished stock, and even if the complete mould is prepared, they may not have money to carry out the actual metal casting.

Missing Marketing Links: Currently, due to the increasing popularity of the Bastar Dhokra craft, there is a demand in the market for these products but due to the lack of a linkage between the buyer and the artisan, these artisans are dependent on local traders, who act as intermediaries. Most of these artisans thus end up being exploited.

Working Hazards: This craft involves considerable risk in terms of the processes used in it such as casting, during which the temperature of both the crucible and the furnace is very high. This makes the craftsmen highly vulnerable to various health hazards. Apart from the casting, the moulds are prepared by the artisans while sitting on the floor, thereby causing most of them to contract problems like back pain.

Depletion of Forest Resources: Most of the raw material such as bees-wax and fire wood, is sourced from the surrounding forests. This is an imposing danger for the forest resources. Trees are being cut down and the forest cover is getting thinner, which is having an adverse impact on the environment and the climate of the region. Consequently, the forest department has put a ban on the collection of fire wood from forests, forcing the artisan to look for alternate sources of raw materials.

The organizations working in the region are offering the required solution and assistance to the artisans. One of these, Saathi Samaj Sewa Sansthan, is based in Kondagaon. The activities of this organization vary from sustaining, developing and marketing Bastar’s traditional arts and crafts to promoting literacy and heath education, and even sustaining the livelihood of thousands living in the region. Members of the Sansthan are also providing training and technical support to these artisans along with the financing and marketing of their products. They have helped form about 100 SHGs in the region, out of which 40 are specifically engaged in Dhokra. They market these products through exhibitions in various cities across India and also through organizations like Dastkar, Delhi, and Sasha Exports, Kolkata. The initiatives taken up by Saathi also include forest conservation, promotion of eco-friendly production methods and women’s empowerment. Saathi is also working on the sustainable consumption of natural resources and has introduced the concept of gas furnaces for artisans. Although this concept is still not very popular with the artisans, it is still a step forward in the right direction. Saathi works with designers from India and abroad to develop new and interesting products by using the local skills. It also encourages the artisans to do a correct pricing of their products and helps them in achieving the right cost. The organization arranges several training programmes for the artisans of this region. Saathi is also working on developing a raw material bank for the artisans.
Individuals like Rajendra Bhagel and Anil Lukkad are also making efforts to improve the situation in many ways. Anil Lukkad is a trader in Jagdalpur, who started as a Dhokra item collector and has now ended up as a retailer for Dhokra products. He has taken up the initiative to start a Dhokra museum for preserving the tradition and culture of this art. Dhokra artisans sell him their products or he provides them the raw materials and gets the products made from the artisans by compensating them for the design and labour involved.

Another exporter, Sushil Sakhuja, who has set up a finishing unit in Raipur, exports Dhokra artifacts. He purchases unfinished products from the artisans and gets the desired finishing done in his factory to enable these products to appeal to Western sensibilities.

![Graph: Exports of Handicrafts](image-url)

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Value Chain Of The Dhokra Craft:

- **International Consumers**
  - Export Houses
  - Government Emporium (Shabri, Mrignayni, etc)

- **National Consumers**
  - Haats (Dilli Haat), Shops, Outlets

- **Traders**
  - Chhattisgarh Hast Shilp Vikas Board (CHSVB)

- **Individuals**
  - Individual Artisan
  - Individual Workshop
  - NGO Workshop
  - SHG Groups

- **Markets**
  - Market @ Kondagaon, Jagdalpur, Raipur
  - Forest Depot/Forest
  - Market @ Kondagaon
  - Market @ Kondagaon, Tribal Collectors

- **Development**
  - Saathi (NGO)
  - Development Commissioner Handicrafts
Conclusion-
India a land of unity and diversity with many cultures and rituals is having a highly potential sate like Chhattisgarh which is rich in tribal handicraft. Baster district of Chhattisgarh is one of the tourist destinations in India. Chhattisgarh is overwhelmed with Dhokra craftsman, which have emerged during different periods of growth. The clusters of different sectors of Chhattisgarh come up for Dhokra art like Bastar, Kondagoan, and Jagdalpur. It is the major attraction of Bastar. By promoting the handicrafts of Basat we are not only revealing the hidden talents of the artisans to the world but also strengthening the Indian culture by escalating it in the global scenario. Traditional craftsman of Dhokra craft need help at benefits of higher social networking, technological assistance in absorbable and maintainable up gradation, help in marketing implying higher wages for employed labor force. If all these, the most important the most important is the help in marketing. "Lost craftsmen, because of illiteracy, ignorance and lack of social confidence, are unable to take advantage of government schemes or deal with buyers. If this generation can absorb technical improvements and adhere to Dhokra work with increased wages, the next generation will hopefully be able to demand and obtain higher prices from middlemen as well as bulk or individual buyers. So, there is need to advertise their goods and obtain orders from across the world through internet.

References


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