

Folk Handicrafts of the Ceramics City – Khurja

Kiran Khevaria*

Research Scholar

Abstract – India is a country where history of crafts and traditions are very rich, legacy, heritage and cultural. Due to modernization and mechanization, a lot of crafts were slowly beginning to get lost in history, but the love of craft, design and tradition helped the revival of Indian Craft Industry. Ceramic products in 'Khurja' in the Bulandshahr district region of Uttar Pradesh are known all over the world where few products are made into some designer pieces or beautiful art wares or vases and others are made into variety of useful crockery's.

A detail study in this context shows an overview about the origin of the history of traditional Khurja's folk handicrafts and its market culture throughout the world. A great contributory factor towards the setting up of the concentration of small scale ceramic industries in Khurja shows the positive attitude of the government of Uttar Pradesh. This paper explores the study of the evolution on folk handicraft of doab area with special emphasis on 'Khurja' which aims to trace the existence of the tradition of art practices of pottery making in ceramics and critically analyze the present market trends of pottery.

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INTRODUCTION

The ceramics history reflects the changing tradition and rituals of civilizations. The method to shape and design the ceramic products have been passed down through generations to which new insights and technical developments are added to create different types of products. Ceramic products are known all over the globe and it is one of the common crafts made in many parts of the world, where few products made into designer pieces or beautiful statues or vases and others are made into variety of useful crockeries.

An initial survey (IDS) found information on 100 pottery manufacturing clusters in India. The ceramic crafts has been an important craft of the Indian civilization, still it is a unique craft of India. The method to shape and design the ceramic products have been passed down through generations to which new insights and technical developments are added to create different types of products.

In India, Doab areas have very popular traditions, belief systems and arts & crafts which are well-preserved. Uttar Pradesh is one of the most famous places for its rich heritage of art and craft.

'Khurja' is a city in the Bulandshahr district in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Khurja, also known as 'The Ceramics City', supplies a large portion of the ceramics and pottery all over the country. The products of Khurja are famous for their beautiful design and different creations from clay. This craft is

recognized, certified, supported in development and sales by UP government.

The cluster in Khurja, produce predominantly white ware and some small amounts of terracotta. Terracotta tiles are popular in Southern India, while utility items made from red clay are ubiquitous in the country and tend to be made by the smallest and also more rural units. There is a new demand for high fired terracotta ware in the export markets which is being met by some larger units in Khurja. A lot of ceramic products as well as a small amount of high fired terracotta are produced here to export worldwide and some of them are distributed all across the India. Many villages and towns have small traditional pottery units making low fired utility items.

In earlier days, most of the ceramic articles were made in white color and later on color and designs were added to it to make the look appealing and eye catching. Ceramic products are generally made for cooking and groceries and later creativity is added to the art which produced unique designs of artifacts and products made of ceramics. The products are famous for their beautiful design and different creations from clay. This made craftsmen open their minds for new designs and explore different ways to make them better with every production of their products. Their main products are kitchen ware, pots and big vases which is used for decoration purpose.

A description of history has been given in brief about the baked clay pottery of Khurja. It is believed

that People with knowledge of pottery from Egypt and Syria accompanied the Afghan King Taimur Lung when he passed by Khurja during an easterly campaign over 500 years ago. They started with the red clay pottery and then they moved on to blue glaze. On the red clay articles with a white engobe, they painted floral designs with cupric oxide and applied a soft glaze containing glass and borax etc. It is also said that some potters had been moved to the region during Mughal.

During World War II, ban was imposed on various metals for making household utensils and import of ceramic goods was drastically curtailed. To meet the demand of ceramic wares mainly for war hospitals, the Government of Uttar Pradesh established a ceramic unit. After the war, the factory was closed down in 1946 due to lack of demand of its products. The factory was equipped with three small kilns, two chimneys and three ball mills. The Government of Uttar Pradesh made a thoughtful consideration for the utilization of the available machinery, other capital items and instead of closing it down, converted into a Pottery Development Centre. It was the first pottery related to common facilities Center in the country where entrepreneurs were provided the facilities for firing their green wares in the Govt. kilns on payments of a .

The more modern phase of pottery manufacture began in the 1940s, with the establishment of a pottery factory by the UP Government in 1942. This unit was set up to meet the demand for sanitary ware, as imported supplies were disrupted by the war. A decade earlier, in the 1930s, the UP Government had appointed a Professor H N Roy from England with training in ceramics to conduct trials on white ware pottery in Khurja. He was to generate interest amongst the traditional potters in making white ware from conventional raw materials.

In the year 1946 the UP Government established the Pottery Development Office (PDO) to promote the pottery industry in Khurja and provide training to entrepreneurs and workers. The number of potters in Khurja started to increase. The Khurja pottery cluster experienced a stronger growth in the late 1950s and 1960s. The 1950s and 1960s were characterized by a number of interventions and support measures for the industry. In 1955, Dr Sharma returned to Khurja and reported that if we use raw materials and equipment available in India along with the Japanese techniques for making fine porcelain were adopted, fine porcelain could be produced in Khurja. He also promoted an improved type of profile for jiggers, expanded use of setters and improved saggar designs (Sharma 1976). In 1961 the All India Handicrafts Board invited a German pottery expert, Mr William Mosech, to train people in the making of glazed red clay pottery and artistic pottery using common clay. From the mid-1980s the Khurja pottery cluster started to witness higher growth rates. There are about 23 export oriented pottery units in Khurja.

Khurja is the home town of Pathans of Khurja, who in 2004 celebrated their 400th year of arrival in India in Khurja, making them one of the oldest Pathan communities to settle in the Gangatic Plains. They are among the most important power groups in Khurja. There was a huge population of Pathans before 1947, when India was divided and many left for the newly created Pakistan. The town has a large area called Pathanwada (Pathan's place) where the pathans live. However, on outskirts of the town, another tribe of Pathans also inhabit in an area called "Barah Basti" meaning "Twelve Localities". Late Nadir Shah Khan of Khurja was considered as a Leader of Pathan's in India, he died in 1960's in Khurja. The town was surrounded all around by a wall with five gates- Delhi-Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Shikarpur, Pahasu and Jewar.

Khurja is an important centre for trade, commerce and Industrial town in Bulandshahr district. The main items produced by independent pottery units in Khurja are crockery wares, Art wares, Electrical goods, Scientific goods, Sanitary goods, Sanitary wares, Bone China crockery, Electronics, ceramic jars, refractory's, grinding valves, ceramic tiles. Most pottery units in Khurja manufacture crockery (stoneware), HT/LT insulators and decorative wares (stoneware). There are only a few specialized units that manufacture sanitary wares, bone china and chemical porcelain.

The main material which is used to make the products is clay. Clay is an interesting natural material which is used to create variety of objects for everyday purposeful items to show pieces. Two to three varieties of clay powder is mixed in dough of clay. The types of clay used are Quarts clay, Phosphate clay, Bikaner clay and china clay. The second stage is to mold the ceramic article. Molds are prepared from POP as they absorb water and allow the article to obtain the shape. The third stage is to color the products oxide chemical. Colors are used which is obtained from iron, Zinc, Cobalt or cobalt carbonate, chromium oxide, iron oxide, nickel oxide, etc. Chromium oxide can yield a variety of colors: red, yellow, pink, brown, and especially green. Nickel Oxide is used to produce greys and browns. The colors are mixed with glaze solution and applied on the products which show its reaction while heating and bring out the required color. The Glaze solution is used to give and shine to the product. It adds a decorative dimension of color and texture on the finished products. Kiln is used to bake the articles after making them. Jigger and Jolly machine is used to make the small articles with the help of the mold.

Surprisingly, given the amount of raw materials required, none of the raw materials required for making pottery are available locally in Khurja. It is quite likely that with the growth of the industry after the initial government support, after a point in time, its size provided economies of clusters which together with relatively close access to metropolitan

markets could overcome the disadvantage of raw materials.

There are three broad steps in manufacturing ceramics: preparation of the raw materials, preparation of the green ware and firing.

First Step: Clay is ground and mixed in a mixer. The clay is then mixed with water and made workable.

Second Step: Clay is poured into moulds; extra material is cleaned or trimmed. Additional parts such as handles added if required.

The green ware is loaded onto trays and then placed in kilns. Terracotta and earthenware is fired immediately whilst porcelain and some other products are first glazed and then fired.

Surprisingly, given the amount of raw materials required, none of the raw materials required for making pottery are available locally in Khurja. So why Khurja became a home for the largest pottery cluster is a little bit of mystery but it suggests that the earlier historical developments were more than sufficient to provide the necessary impetus to the growth of this cluster in Khurja. It is quite likely that with the growth of the industry after the initial government support, after a point in time, its size provided economies of DFID Project R7413 Part Two Policy Research International 14 clusters which together with relatively close access to metropolitan markets, could overcome the disadvantage of raw materials. Raw materials are thus procured through local agents in Khurja, of which there are about 25.

In addition to these, there are other raw materials and also chemicals that are used in the glazes such as zinc oxide, zirconia, barium carbonate, chromium oxide and soda feldspar. A few pottery units are sufficiently large and financially strong, so as to procure the raw material directly from places like Rajasthan, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bikaner, Bihar etc. and certain chemicals from Agra, and as such do not have to deal with intermediary traders.

The ceramic industry is highly labor intensive, requiring skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labor at every stage of production. The minimum number of workers in a unit in Khurja ranges from about 7 to 10, and the maximum reported is around 30 to 40. An independent unit, whose production is one ton per day, or 300MT per annum, will need about 40 to 50 workers. Many units are larger than the above and in fact require up to 300 workers. The firms have several incentives to report fewer workers than the actual numbers. As the numbers of workers go up the firms have to provide more benefits, comply with stricter labor laws and so on. The workers are further grouped into smaller numbers of "permanent" and

larger numbers of "temporary or contract" labor for legal reasons.

Ceramic ware is produced both for the domestic market and for export. But over all export markets are unlikely to be more than 10-15% of total production. There is an increased import of ceramics in the higher price range and the smaller units face competition from large scale manufacturers also.

Khurja's pottery products are sold all over India and also exported. Within India products are sold directly and also indirectly through middlemen, shopkeepers and large godown owners. In a survey, units ranged from those with 100% direct sales to the market to others who sold everything through traders.

There are about 23 export oriented pottery units in Khurja. Export clients include countries such as the United Kingdom, USA, Australia, New Zealand, United Arab Emirates etc. The major export items are ceramic artware, insulators and scientific porcelain. Historically Khurja's export levels have been low due to the cluster's inability to meet the stringent quality requirements of export clients. In 1999-2000, exports were valued at 148.2 million Rupees, representing between 6-10% of aggregate production. This proportion is reasonably typical, although exports have on occasion represented up to 15 per cent of Khurja's aggregate ceramics production.

CONCLUSION

Khurja is a city in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) famous for ceramic products since around 400 years. Ceramic products in 'Khurja' in the Bulandshahr district region of Uttar Pradesh are known all over the world where few products are made into some designer pieces or beautiful art wares or vases and others are made into variety of useful crockery's. This craft is recognized, certified, supported in development and sales by UP government.

By all counts and proven results, it is no wonder that Khurja have become a major city for the largest pottery cluster. A great contributory factor towards the setting up of the concentration of small scale ceramic industries in Khurja shows the positive attitude of the government of Uttar Pradesh. It is also clear that the evolution of folk handicraft of Khurja with special emphasis of the existence of the tradition of art practices where new insights and technical developments are added to create different types of products of ceramics. An overview also has been discussed about the origin of the history of traditional Khurja's folk handicrafts and its market culture throughout the world.

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Corresponding Author

Kiran Khevaria*

Research Scholar

E-Mail – tomar.kiran@gmail.com