
Bamboo, Cane and Pottery a Folk Art form of Barak Valley: A Hazard to Local Identity

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ABSTRACT

Assam is rich varieties in forest resources. Most of the forests are richly stocked with canes of various species. Canes are raw material of great versatility and form an integrated part of the life style and economy of Assam and North East as well as Barak Valley. People of Assam owe cane products with distinctive style of creating typical design in cane crafts my study based on mainly Historical Background of Bamboo, Cane and Pottery making of Barak Valley. My intention is to make an evaluative study of Bamboo, cane and Pottery making of those districts with analysis, and a comparative appraisal of Bamboo.

Bamboos, Cane are the most commonly used materials in daily life of Assam including whole north-eastern region. This region has rich sylvan resources, and most of the forests are rich depositories of various canes species. 'Cane' is a raw material of great versatility. The making of cane products is perhaps the most universal, of all the crafts practiced by a large number of indigenous artists, those are scattered throughout the state.

Barak Valley is in the southern region of the Indian state of Assam. The place is named after the Barak River. Barak valley mainly consists of three districts namely Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. Silchar is the most important town in region.

These Bamboo, Cane and Pottery making have become a significant cultural landmark in Barak Valley from daily used food item, utensils, household furniture etc. If we date back to history, we find that Pottery making great tradition from Vedic, Indus Valley Civilization and Cane is one of the oldest creations of man. People use it when the civilization starts. It made by joining grass with grass and interlocking leaves with the minimum tools. Some facts can be enumerated from the ways of the starting era of human civilization. It is considered that the people before civilization being in the forest used to use cane in various means for fulfillment of their needs.

KEY WORDS: *Bamboo, Cane, Pottery, Folk Art, local identity and North-East*

OBJECTIVES:

1. Historical Background of Bamboo, Cane and Pottery making of Barak Valley.
2. make an evaluative study of Bamboo, cane and Pottery making of those districts with analysis
3. To discuss the aesthetic quality of Bamboo, Cane and Pottery objects of part of art and craft.
4. A comparative evaluation of Bamboo, cane and Pottery making.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on Bamboo, cane and Pottery making of the three prominent places of Barak Valley and a comparative analysis. For that, the researcher has done undertaken a critical evaluation with the help of both the primary data and secondary data. The sources of primary data are personal interview of the Craft artists and the Potters specifically. The secondary data includes government or private aided commissions, journals, magazine, souvenirs and different news papers, information from the Internet.

INTRODUCTION

Assam is situated in NE region of India. Geographically Assam is the land of hills, plains and rivers. She is surrounded by Bhutan, Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, West Bengal and Bangladesh. The river Brahmaputra crosses through the state from North-East to the South-West. The state is divided into two river valleys- Brahmaputra valley and Barak valley.

Assam is the land of diverse anthropological races and communities, ethnicities, casts and class differences, heterogeneous cultural practices, languages, religious practices etc. In different periods of history, different communities migrated here from different regions of the world. So, she is like a living archive of diverse communities where the diversities coexist together. Some names of the ethnic communities living here are Bado, Kachari, Barman Kachari, Sonowal Kachari, Mech Kachari, Hojai Kachari, Hajong, Tiwa (Lalung), Mising (Miri), Karbi, Deori, Dimasa, Phakial, Aitonia, Duonia, Turung, Khamyang, Xhampti, Ahom, Tai Ahom, Chutia, Matak, Borahi, Koch Rajbanshi, Choudang, Rabha, Singfau, Assamese, Tea-tribes, Bengali, Nepali, Marowari, Mushlim, Bihari etc. There are also many number of communities based on religion. Those communities are *Brahmanincal* or *sakta*, Vaishnav, Christian, Mushlim, Sikh, and Buddhist. Some tribes have their own religion, deities and gods.

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Folk Art:

The discovery of folk art are in India is a 20th century phenomenon in the wake of the national consciousness, which was generated due to the imposition of British concepts in art. The other factor may be the increasing interest in folk and traditional art throughout the world and rapid and enthusiastic adaptation by Modern and post Modern artists. In India, folk art was discovered in Bengal and began to be collected by the Tagores, Ajit Ghosh and other artists and connoisseurs early in the 20th century.

The history of folk art must be traced in indirect references found in early writings. The earliest manifestations of folk art could be distinguished through the archaeological findings although such findings are not much as folk art materials, made for certain purpose, are perishable and easily destroyed. The usefulness of such objects expires once they have served their rituals and religious purpose. Sculpture and Paintings produced specifically for domestic or public festival are completely disregarded once these are over. They are laid aside or thrown into River or the

sea, while the murals and the paintings on mud floors outside the houses are left to fade in the sun and crumble away in the rain.

In India, some form of folk art is found in most provinces in local variations. The range of work is immense: terracotta's, wooden and clay toys, puppets, dolls and images, paintings objects of pith and cane, rag, leather, embroidery, metal objects, and objects of miscellaneous materials most of which require some form of craftsmanship, and show a lively imagination and of uncultured understanding of the materials.

We can better understand contemporary Indian art activity if we understand the influence of folk-art. A number of Indian artists have turned to the rich and widespread tradition of folk-arts for inspiration. Beside the large variety of folk miniatures and manuscript illustrations, including astrological manuscript and tantra texts, Indian folk-art include painting on Sholapith from Assam; Pata Painting from Vishnupur, Midnapur and Kalighat in West Bengal; rural decorations and reliefs on mud walls such as Sanjhi, Ahoi, Diwali etc. from Uttar Pradesh; Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana, ritual decorations from Orissa; Mithila folk painting (commonly known as Madhubani paintings) from Bihar; Warli painting from Maharashtra; Kalamkaris from Hyderabad; Pichawais and Phads, such as Pabuji ki Phad from Rajasthan; Kanthas embroidery from West Bengal; and a whole range of embroideries and appliqués from Gujarat, Haryana, Manipur, Rajasthan and Chamba. In addition there are tribal metal casting and wood carvings and vast range of terracotta images of gods and goddesses, and other votive figures from Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, (particularly Bastar), a wide range of painted clay and wooden figurines and toys from Orissa, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, and floor decorations on ceremonial occasions all over the country.

Bamboo and Cane

Cane is a great raw material which people used in their daily life and they decorate their home with the product of cane. It is a branch of a tree. It is a round shape tree. In times considered cane as a grass. It is in different size and found especially in the forest of Assam and northeast well as Barak valley and Silchar. But in current time people cultivate it in the hills area like Naga Hills, Mizo hills, Bhuvan hills etc. people start to use cane before civilization till now but in different manner. People use cane not only in India but also in different countries like China, and many other countries.

Canes since ancient time have provided the raw-material of different furniture and other utility items. These are essentially rural craft connected with every day needs of the people. Not only for basket but furniture also bags, jewellery boxes and other decorative items.

Cane is a medium or material from which the urban as well as the rural people of Silchar make different product, designable showpiece, different furniture etc and from these they earn and make their life possible. In Silchar there are not so much industry or earning sources. But cane is such material from which they make their life possible in such un-industrial area like in Silchar.

At present, there are vast untapped resources of bamboo that can open avenues for utilization of bamboo for many productive works. Such a huge surplus of bamboo is not to be found elsewhere in India. The prospect of establishment of several pulp and paper plants, big and small, on bamboo alone, is tremendous.

Various cottage and small-scale industries in Assam are dependent on the supply of different kinds of cane and reeds. It is observed that generally three species of cane are exploited in commercial quantities-Jati (*Calamus tenuis*), Tita (*Calamus leptesadix*) and Lejai (*Calamus floribundus*). Some less important qualities like Sundi (*Calamus garuba*) and Raidang (*Calamus flagellum*) are also extracted. Cane is also found in abundance almost throughout the state. There are a few more varieties of bamboo and cane used for manufacturing of different products. A kind of muli bamboo locally known as 'muli bazail' is used for making umbrella handles. Two other varieties of bamboo locally known as 'Mrithinga' and 'Bethua' and different varieties of canes locally known as 'sundi', 'barjali', 'harua', 'golla' etc. are required for making furniture and baskets.

'Murta' (*Clinogyne Dichotoma*), a plant of the reed family or patidai, is required for making the famous "SitalPati" (cool-mat). For manufacture of 'japis' (umbrella), a type of palm leaves locally known as "tokow pat" are used. A 'fulam japi' (decorated bamboo umbrella) requires, besides palm leaves, coloured wool, cotton, dyed yarn, mica, etc. for colouring and varnishing of their products, the artisans use the following materials- 'bhatar phen' (boiled rice juice), 'amrapata' (*Hibicus Subdariffa*), 'tamarind leaves', mezentia (a kind of chemical dye stuff), kalabati chach (lac) resin, methyated spirit, rabi mustafi, etc.

Apart from forests, bamboo is also plentiful in the villages throughout the State. Even though Assam has been traditionally rich in bamboo, bamboo craft from Assam do not figure prominently in the handicraft market of India and Assam's share in the export trade is negligible. Cane and bamboo are the two most commonly-used materials in daily life in Assam. Products ranging from household implements to construction of dwelling houses to weaving accessories to musical instruments are made in bamboo. No mechanical devices are used in the craft, which is mainly a household industry. Besides basket-weaving, bamboo is used chiefly in the construction of houses and fencing. The craft traditionally provides part-time employment to cultivators in the lean season, although, increasingly, full-time artisans engaged in commercial activity can be found now.

Bamboo products are in evidence everywhere in Assam. There are innumerable types and shapes of the bamboo basket, varying with the use to which they are put. The men of the household usually weave the bamboo baskets. Each district has its own distinctive style. In general, conical baskets are used as carrying baskets and square or round bottomed ones are used for storage. An example is the Assamese bamboo basket from Silchar. The japi, the traditional sun-shade continues to be the most well-known of bamboo items. It has been in use since the days when the great Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang came to Assam. Visitors were welcomed with japi(s), decorated with colourful designs and motifs. Dolls and toys are also made with cane and bamboo. Apart from human and animal figures, toy shotguns and musical instruments are crafted. Umbrella handles made of bamboo are a speciality and have designs of leaves, creepers, plants, rings, and crosses etched on them. A special variety of bamboo known as the muli is used for the handles.

Cane and Its Species

There is so many species of cane is found in forest of Assam, Silchar and northeast. Canes are different in size, some are very big in size and some are small. But every species of cane has equal value in the market and the cane industry. Cane is only round size. There are various types of can found in those region

This species of cane is northeast as well as Silchar. Though here is so many types of cane found in the forest but the best species of cane is the Ranidung and the and the cane industry and the craft man prefer this cane to make the fashionable products and furniture because this species is the best cane rather than the other.

Cane is also found in abounded almost throughout in Assam Silchar. Various cottage and small scale industries in Silchar are dependent on the supply of kind of cane and reeds. It is observed that Galla cane is very much available in Silchar than any other species of cane. Another species is also available in Silchar is railu. The local name of cane is jail beth which is very famous in Silchar. Though Silchar is rich in cane raw material but not as much rich as the hills area like Halflong, Monipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh etc. The cane of the forest of Silchar is not so available to grow up a industry in full swing. So the cane industry of Silchar buys cane from Halflong, Monipur, mizoram and the other hills areas. But the craftsman who make cane product in their home, they only use local cane to make the cane craft and furniture. Generally three species of cane are exploited in commercial quantities. These are Raidung, Latthma, and galla.

Cane Products

Name of some cane products manufactured for use in domestic purposes is Cane Sofa, Tukri (Paddy Tukri, Stone Tukri, and Soil Tukri), Mura, Flower Vase, Tray, Light Stand, Cane Basket, Cane Table, and Cane Handbag.

Bamboo Products

The Bamboo can be used in making of different household items. Some of the products and their mechanism with utilities are given below:-

Tukri Paddy Tukri (Stone Tukri, Soil Tukri and Dhaki Tukri), Chalni, Kula, Potangi / Dhuchain, Dala, Jungi / Taail, Jhaphi, Kholoi/ Fish, Potangi, Polo, Jakai, Loo/Chepa, Dori, Parans, Bamboo Mats, Umbrella Handle, Chata, Kathi, Pakha, Khara, Jharu and Mura

Pottery:

Pottery in the Indian subcontinent has an ancient history and is one of the most tangible and iconic elements of regional art. Evidence of pottery has been found in the early settlements of Mehrgarh from the Indus Valley Civilization. Today, it is a cultural art that is still practiced extensively in India and outside of India. Until recent times all Indian pottery has been earthenware, including terracotta.

Of the indigenous art school, pottery is one of the most prominent art forms of the valley. Bengali life is full of festivals, particularly religious festivals and carving of different gods and goddesses on burnt clay pots is a typical obsession of the clay artisans. Besides, clay pots and utensils, flower vases, different essential things used in daily life are the common works of these

deft clay artisans. The clay used to make these items is of a very high quality for which the pottery works of this region is highly extolled everywhere in and around. The places particularly famous for pottery and other clay works are Panibhora Bekirpar which are in south western Cachar, Katlicherra which is in Hailakandi and Anipur situated in Karimganj. The potters of this valley produce a good number of percussion instruments like the left part of the tabla, mridangam, khol, Manipuri mridangas, pakhowaj etc. Mainly the rudrapal and kumbhakar community among the Bengali Hindus adopt for this profession. But then some members among the teagarden labourers who hailed from Uttarpradesh have attached themselves to this profession particularly in Nayabil, a place adjacent to Barjalenga tea estate in Cachar. But most of these clay-potters are not introduced to the modern techniques of pot-making. They live in places far away from the boon of electricity and there is nobody to make them acquainted to electric wheel or such other modern devices. There is no infrastructure for them to find an ever-widening market which is why many artisans are disentangling themselves from this family trade for the sake of bare livelihood. Lack of adequate infrastructure and patronage is thus pushing the immensely potential pottery art of Barak Valley to its death bed.

CONCLUSION

In the present era the proof of a clear development in the marketing of bamboo craft can be observed in the state. By government and non-government measures today a lots of people have come forward to take the craft towards a new opening. It is today unlike past is an open market & availability of same can be found in every place. South Assam constituting of three major districts viz Cachar, Karimganj & Hailakandi is not seen to be lacking behind. In the Cachar district in its headquarter Silchar around 30 shops are there promoting bamboo craft. In rural areas also shops and markets are found. The urban people who had to visit the production place before to purchase the same now days can avail the same at their doorstep. It is found to be a profitable business and a way of earning livelihood justifying that many unemployed youths of today have engaged themselves in propagation & promotion of the craft. Due to the demands and multiple usages in a cheap price for the consumers it is today a good bet to purchase on. The products made in south Assam are also now days supplied to adjoining states of the region like Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura. Some of the lucrative items even exported to foreign countries where lots of demands are existing. In the process of urbanization the bamboo also played a vital role. The engineers & contractors of South Assam purchase large & bulk quantity of bamboo mats for building construction where bamboo mats plays an integral part. Thus it also helps in a good revenue generation. Cane is very good natural resources three districts of Barak Valley. People use it in any requirements. The forest of Barak Valley has produced many types of canes and in a big amount and from it people can make so many required items, furniture and crafts. But now days we can see that people cut the forest in the global level but don't try to make any forest region. So if we spoil the forest like this one day it will come that we won't find any kind of cane and other natural resources. And gradually the cane craft will lose its originality and also the people of Barak Valley will lost their only way of living or survive. And it will harm our Barak Valley area as well as the whole world. Pottery in the Indian subcontinent has an ancient history and is one of the most tangible and iconic elements of regional art. Some Places of Barak Valley are famous for pottery and other clay works are Panibhora Bekirpar which are in south western Cachar, Katlicherra which is in Hailakandi and Anipur situated in Karimganj. The

potters of this valley produce a good number of percussion instruments like the left part of the tabla, mridangam, khol, Manipuri mridangas, pakhowaj etc.

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