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Socio-economic status of Dokra Artisans’ – a case study of Burdwan District, West Bengal, India

Raj Kumar Samanta*

Research scholar, Department of Geography, University of Burdwan, West Bengal, India

**Corresponding author*

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‘Dokra craft’,
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A B S T R A C T

Handicraft industries play an important role in the livelihood and economy of rural people of the developing countries like India. The ancient craft ‘dokra’ of Dariapur village is not an exception of this concept. But in today’s globalised world where fashion and luxury industries take maximum share in trading market, it is so difficult for sustainance of dokra art and craft in the market. But only their love and respect to their occupation make it possible to run parallely with modern society. In this paper an account of their livelihood, socio-economic conditions of dokra workers, marketing situation, various problems relating with this art has been assessed and an attempt regarding solution of problems has been also suggested.

Introduction

The ancient craft of ‘dokra’ metal casting was once widespread throughout India, but now it is restricted to a small number of groups of traditional artisans in widely dispersed locations. One significant nucleus of this craft exists among related groups of families in Bikna village of Bankura and Dariapur of Burdwan in West Bengal, India. The name ‘Dokra’ was formerly used to indicate a group of nomadic craftsman, scatted over Bengal, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh in India. It is now generically applied to a variety of beautifully shaped and decorated brassware products created by ‘lost wax’ process. The lost wax casting in an ancient craft tradition. The traditional

themes of these cast metal sculptures include images of Hindu gods, tribal gods, bowls, elephants, horse, birds, cattle animals, necklaces, ear rings, anklets, kajal holders, vermilion pot etc. Dokra craft in characterized by its primitive simplicity, charming folk motifs, rustic beauty and imaginative designs and patterns. A small amount of coating of clay paste is applied over the wax replica and dried out in the shadow. It is then covered with a thick layer of clay keeping a hole on top. Molten metal is poured into the mould to replace wax layer. The cast is then taken out to give finishing touches and perfected with immense love, care and creativity.

Location of the Study area

Dariapur is located in Dignagar-2 Panchayat under Ausgram-I block of Burdwan District, W.B. The Post Office is Gonna-Dariapur and the Police Station is Ausgram. It is located just at a distance of 1.5 Km from Guskara railway station.

Major objectives of this study includes :-

1. To give an account of dokra art & craft.
2. To know the short history of dokra workers.
3. To study the socio economic conditions of dokra workers.
4. To identify the present problems of dokra art and artists.
5. To provide some clue to overcome the major problems.

Materials and Methods

This paper is based basically on the primary information, collected through field survey in this village. Secondary information have been collected from guide books, internet, journals etc. Then these are classified, tabulate, analysed and represented by various cartographic and simple calculation techniques.

About the dokra worker

Baster district of Chattishgarh was the original living place of dokra artisans'. From there they spread towards Orissa, Bihar. From Orissa they came to Bengal for permanent living. In West Bengal they are found in Bankura, Midnapur (W&E), Purulia, Burdwan and in Birbhum. In Burdwan, they are found in Aklaxmi, Balsi, etc. The dokra worker of 'Dariapur' in Burdwan and 'Bikna' of Bankura district are very famous. They settled here in 1962. Earlier they were called Mals or, Malars. But now they are famous as Karmakar or,

Dokra Kamars. Among dokra worker who make and repair kitchen and household utensils are called Ghatra Kamars. They are landless persons. They lies in the category of other backward caste. Though their financial condition is poor but for caste factor they are categorized as APL (Above Poverty Line) community. Both male and female members are involved in the production mechanism. Their native language is 'Malhar' (language of Baster district). Food, dress and shelter are like Bengali people. Main occupation of such people is dokra works. They belongs to Hindu religion. Marriage system is like Bengali people. They respect on 'Bengali Dev-Devi' like Manasa, Kali, Biswakarma etc.

Socio-economic conditions of 'Dokra' worker

Population characteristics

Dariapur dokra village has forty two families. Total population of this village is 231. Among them female number is 126 and male number is 105. Most interesting feature relating to population is the maximum share of female population i.e 54.55% of total population. Possible cause for this situation is the early death of male member due to malpractices in life style like alcoholic nature and attack of various diseases.

Family size

64.29% family have total 2 to 5 population members. It indicates smaller family size. Only two families have above 10 members. It is clear from the above table that maximum people are conscious about the bad effect of population growth.

Employment situation

Out of total population only 84 members are engaged in dokra art. Here also the female

have maximum participation than man. Number of female workers are 46 i.e 54.76% of total dokra worker. Out of 42 total families, only 33 families are linked with dokra work which is the 78.57% of the total families. Nine non dokra families are linked with migratory black smithing, porter's work and agricultural works. There are eleven families which are engaged in both dokra work at season and other jobs at off season or, of these families some members do dokra work and other member of such families at the same time do non-dokra works. Some children also help their parents in dokra work. The age of such children are below 15 years. It hamper their education, normal physical growth, general health and mental condition. There are fourteen child labours from eight families.

Education

The level of education among dokra society is very poor. Total literate person is sixty four out of 231. It is 27.71% With respect to total population. Out of 64 total literates, a male literates are 39 in number and female literates are 25 in number. In respect to total literates, male literacy is 60.94% and female literacy rate is 39.06%. Total female literacy with respect to total female population is 19.84% and total male literacy in respect to total male population is 37.14% respectively. Boys and girls read upto class eight generally. The main causes behind this poor literacy condition are the language problem, poor financial condition, lacking of school nearby and lack of awareness. Ignorance and negligence of parents are the main causes of poor literacy rate of women. Besides girl children are engaged in various household activities from very early period.

Health condition

Various Health problems facing by dokra workers.

Among dokra society a variety of health problems are seen. The problem of breathing, asthma, cold etc are major one i.e 33.33% out of total patients. Pollution by dust, smoke etc are the main cause behind it. Previously 10-15 persons were suffering from T.B disease. Now due to treatment, the number has reduced which is only 5 in number. Staying of long working period in heat, smoke and the habit of alcohol taking is the main cause of T.B. Visual problem, particularly lower vision is another major problem i.e 22.22% out of total patients. Smoke, dust, fire causes this physical disorder. Touching with various production material causes skin diseases. Besides long working period at heat causes headache.

Sometimes accidents also happen at the time of production process like falling of molten brass in hands of legs, burning by fire etc. It handicaps the organ. There are twelve members with mark of such physical disorders. For any health problem they go to Guskara for medical check up. Sometimes, they go to 'Ojha' to get recovery from health problems. They also believe in 'jhar-fuk', 'maduli', 'jalpora' etc which locally famous.

Income, expenditure and savings

They belong to poor section of society. The level of income is not satisfactory to run their daily life. On an average, the monthly income of a dokra family is around Rs. 5000 and average family member is 6. Now it is very tuf to sustain with this money for entire month for six members.

Within Rs. 4001 to 7000 monthly income group, there are maximum concentration of families i.e 29 which is just 69.05% of the total families. Above Rs. 7001, there are only four families. The main cause of lower income are lack of order, lack of job throughout the year, unwillingness to do

other jobs, lazy & alcoholic nature of worker etc. In most of the family total income equals to total expenditure, that mean there is no savings in their hand so they get problem when any sudden deases come. After maintaining all monthly expenses, there is very little savings in their hand. Main expenditure include fooding, dress, medical treatment, child's education etc.

Nature of savings

From above table it is clear that 64.29% families have no savings. It indicates very difficult situation. The main cause is lower income and increasing price rate and living expenses. Savings upto Rs. 500/month is not a good condition also in which only 12 families belong to.

Housing condition

They live in a underprivileged housing condition. Interhouse space is very little. It is unhygienic also. There is no house yard and house wall. Cooking place is also attached with balcony. The picture is like slums.

Out of 42 families, 21 families i.e 50% of the total families have mud house with straw roof. Only 12 families have asbestos, tin and tile roof mud house. Six family have quarters which were formed at the time when Smt. Indira Gandhi was the prime minister of India. Financial crisis is the main cause for maximum adopting of houses of mud with straw roof. Three high income holding and agricultural land holding families have cemented house.

Out of 42 families, 28 families have single room house and 14 families have double room house which is 66.67% and 33.37% respectively. Thirty nine families have electricity and three families have no electric connection.

Sanitation and drinking water

Sanitation condition is not satisfactory. Forty families have no latrine and toilet i.e 95.24% families. It is a difficult situation for women. For bowel clear twenty five families go to open space and fifteen families go to community latrine. Drainage condition is also bad. There is no proper drain to channelize water. In rainy season the problem of stagnation of water occurs. It causes mosquito growth and stomach diseases. The garbage disposal system is not good. It is stored here and there. There is no any family which have own tube-well. So for drinking water they all depend on community tube-well. When it is out of order, then inhabitants take water from other places or use maximum pond water which is again unhygienic one.

Fuel utilization and power consumption

For cooking or, for burning of raw dokra items fuel wood from nearby forest, coal and cow dung cakes are used. Fuel wood from nearby forest is easily accessible and it is free of cost. Out of forty two families, 10 families used only fuel wood from forest, 12 families use fuel wood and coal and 20 families use fuel wood and cow dung cake as fuel. The use of fuel wood and cow dung cake percentage is more i.e 47.62% out of total families.

Indebtedness condition

Taking of loan from various sources is a common feature of dokra workers. Lack of savings and financial crisis forced them to take loan from bank, money lenders. They also take money advances from order party. There are about 18 families i.e 54.55% who do this job. As they have no liquid money so they adopt this way. It is a safe way but not risk free. If advance amount is exhausted then the family get into trouble.

Table.1 Family size

Sl. No.	Population Range	No. of families	Percentage share
01	2 – 5	27	64.29%
02	6 – 9	13	30.95%
03	10-13	1	2.38%
04	14-17	1	2.38%
	Total	42	100%

Source – Field Survey

Table.2 Various Health problems facing by dokra workers

Headache or Bodyache	Breathing problem, allergy, asthma, cold, cough	T.B	Visual problem	Skin diseases	Stomach diseases	Heart disease	Kidney problem	Hearing disorder	Disease type
03	12	05	08	03	02	01	01	01	Number of sufferer
8.33%	33.33%	13.89%	22.22%	8.33%	5.56%	2.78%	2.78%	2.78%	Percentage share

Source – Field Survey

Table.3 Income, expenditure and savings

Range of monthly income (Rs.)	No. of families	% Share
Below 4000	09	21.43%
4001 – 7000	29	69.05%
7001 – 10000	03	7.14%
Above 10000	01	2.38%
Total	42	100%

Source – Field survey

Table.4 Nature of savings

	Amount (in Rs. / Month)	Families	Percentage share
01	No cash excess in hand	27	64.29%
02	100-500	12	28.57%
03	501-1000	02	4.76%
04	Above 1000	01	2.38%
	Total	42	100%

Source – Field survey

Table.5 Housing condition

No	House type	No. of families	Percentage
01	Mud + Asbestos roof	4	9.5%
02	Mud + Straw roof	21	50%
03	Quarter	6	14.29%
04	Single storied cemented house	3	7.14%
05	Mud + Tin roof	6	14.29%
06	Mud + tile roof	2	4.76%
	Total	42	100%

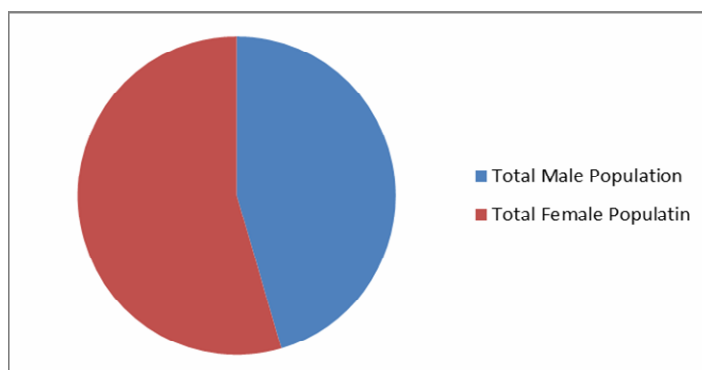
Source – Field survey

Table.6 Indebtedness condition

	Type of Loan	Family	Percentage
01	No Loan	04	12.12%
02	Loan in Bank	04	12.12%
03	Loan from money lenders	07	21.21%
04	Taking Advances from order suppliers	18	54.55%
	Total Dokra Working Families	33	100%

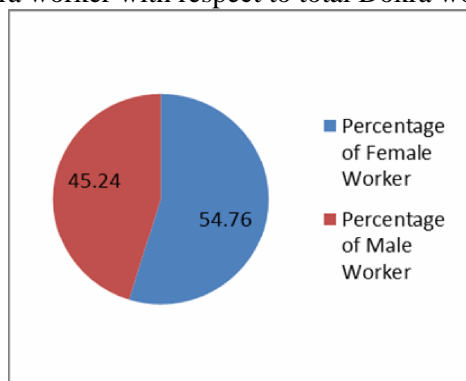
Source – Field survey

Fig.1 Pie Chart showing total Male & Female population of Dariapur dokra village



Pie Chart

Showing percentage share of Male & Female Dokra worker with respect to total Dokra worker.



Pie Chart

Showing Dokra & Non Dokra working families

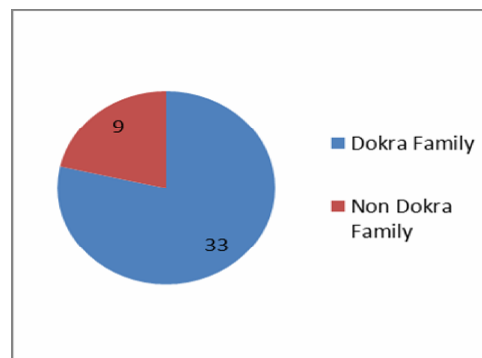


Fig.3 Pie Chart showing percentage share of total Male & Female literacy with respect to total literacy

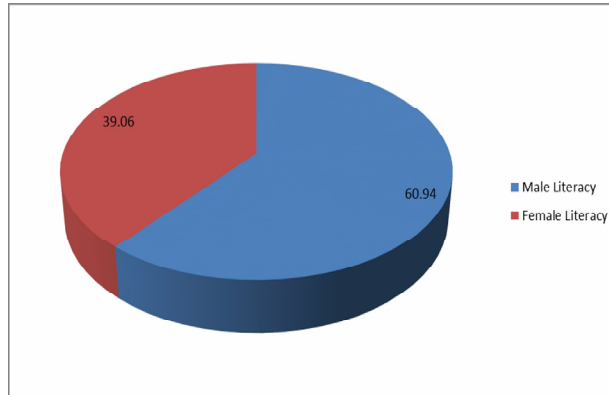


Fig.4 Pie Chart showing percentage share of families adopting various house types

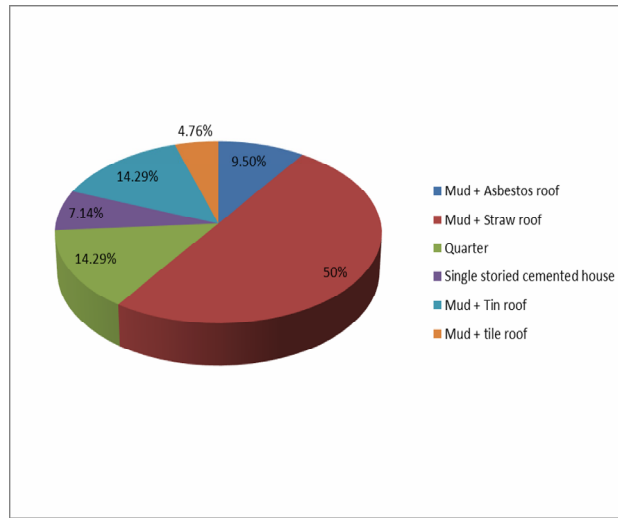


Fig.5 Pie Chart Showing Indebtedness Situation of Dokra Worker

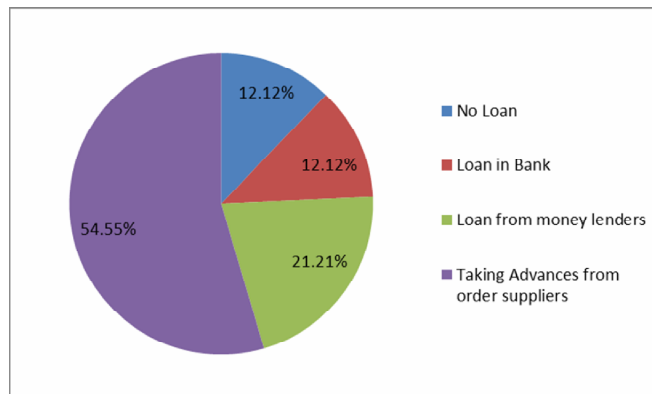
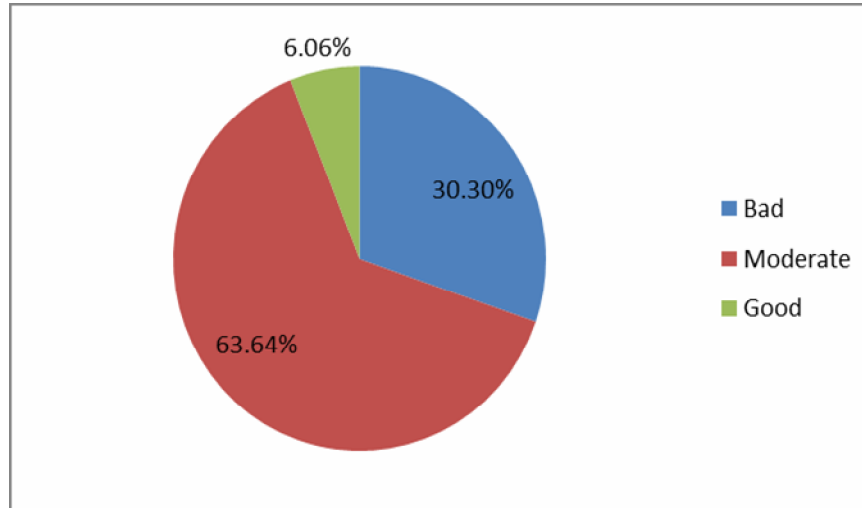


Fig.6 Pie charge showing financial satisfaction level of dokra worker



Marketing of dokra products

After production, marketing is the main job. Profit depends on good marketing system. They generally choose exhibition and fairs for selling the products. In this case 'Santiniketan mela', Bishnupur mela', 'Kalpataru mela' of Durgapur, 'Khadi-o-Hastashilpa mela' of Kolkata are important. They also go to Mumbai, Goa, Patna, Delhi, Bangalore, Bydrabad, Dhaka, Japan for product selling. Besides mela, they also sell by wholesaling. They sometimes take order from some companies and after production it is supplied to such companies or, order suppliers. Te price rate of a smaller item to larger item varies from Rs. 500 to 50000 also. High profile rich people, celebrity, film star, artist are the main customer. October to January is the main season of both production and selling. Rainy season & heavy summer are the off-season in which production is not generally done. For export of products there need heavy packing. Packing and transport cost goes to the artisans.

Drug Addiction

Alcohol are the main addicted materials. In this village only alcohol taking persons 4 in

numbers. Taking of drug among young generation is very popular. Worker generally take alcohol to get relief from physical exhaustion. But taking of alcohol by young generation is unexpected.

Both dokra handicraft and dokra workers facing some problems. These are

1. Increasing price rate of raw material & fuel.
2. Lack of help & planning.
3. More loan from money lenders & banks.
4. Lack of workshop, training.
5. Lack of Advertisement, Exhibition.
6. Problem of storage.
7. Lack of capital to take modern technology.
8. Various physical problems by dokra works
9. At off season they become workless.

Prospects

The problem of dokra art in Dariapur will be solved by some remedial measures :-

1. Here 'Bangla Natak.Com' (an NGO) is working in favour of the dokra workers specially for marketing of products.

2. A building has been constructed for storing the products and for exhibition cum selling in a cooperative manner.
 3. Local Panchayet and block should take some steps for the improvement of dokra workers.
 4. There need free health check up camp for dokra workers.
 5. Primary school is to be constructed in dokra para.
 6. Training should be arranged by Govt and by any educational institution for skill development of dokra workers and young generation.
 7. Arrangement of loan at lower interest.
 8. There need arrangement of exhibition & good advertisement system.
 9. Health and production insurance should be popularized.
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