



MANAGING DWINDLING GLAZE OF JAIPUR BLUE POTTERY: A CASE OF RAJASTHAN, INDIA

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Abstract: *The art of making blue pottery was first developed and managed by Mongol artisans who combined Chinese glazing technology with Persian decorative arts. The blue pottery industry has been working in Jaipur since 17th century, and periodically getting fresh doses of life from the Royal family of Jaipur. In foreign countries there has been continuous demand of blue potteries but in the absence of good management and governance it is not met efficiently and effectively. Majority of artisans belong to underprivileged castes and are working in this un-organized industry for about two decades. Lack of cooperation and coordination among artisans has lead to exploitation in terms of wages and welfare practices. The technology and machines involved in making the final product is very primitive, time consuming and not updated through systematic research and development. The raw materials required for manufacturing blue pottery items are found in abundance in neighboring areas of Jaipur. Forty to sixty percent of product is wasted in the manufacturing process, which is a lot to account for. It requires time and skill of four to five days of an artisan to prepare a vase of 24 inches with intricately made designs using beautiful color combinations. Hence, the present paper focuses on existing status of this art in the handicraft industry and the management measures that could be taken to keep this art alive for future generations.*

Keywords

Extinction art, Jaipur Blue Pottery, Management of Export, Coordination of Artisans, Glaze and health hazards

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EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF THE ART IN JAIPUR

Handicrafts can be defined as objects made by skilful use of one's hands (Tyagi, 2008). Handicrafts possess the fragrance of age-old traditions holding sentimental values for the cultural heritage to which they are associated with for example, pottery, metal wares, sculptures, etc.

The art of Jaipur Blue Pottery was developed by Mongol artisans by combining Chinese glazing technology with Persian decorative arts. The art came to India through Persia. Earlier, Egypt and Mesopotamia were in possession of blue tiles. This art introduced by Muslims in India, underwent transitional changes. While it declined during the conservative Mughal king Aurangzeb's time, it later flourished in Jaipur due to royal patronage by Ruler Sawai Ram Singh II (1835-1880) (Nath, 1987). In the preliminary epoch, Jaipur Blue Pottery was simply used to mass produce tiles to embellish mausoleum, catacomb and fortresses in central Asia. Jaipur Blue pottery has seen ups and downs in almost two hundred years of its existence (Dipti, 2002).

ROYAL PATRONAGE

The modernization of Jaipur was first brought about by Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II (1835-1880) (Nath, 1987). After Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, he was considered as the most progressive Head of the Jaipur State (Nath, 1987). He took steps to pioneer new measures of reform, improvements and developments. Embellishing Jaipur with amenities of modern life and made it not only one of the most picturesque capitals of India but also a reforming and modern State. During a traditional kite flying festival he was spellbound to see two brothers from, Uttar Pradesh winning every competition. Later, the brothers revealed that they had coated the thread with the powder of blue-green glass which they used to make pottery. Sawai Ram Singh II who was an art lover Impressed by the technique encouraged them to start the work in Jaipur (Sahai, 1987). They were made the head of the Museum and school of Arts and hence, Jaipur Blue Pottery came to be established in Jaipur. The rulers of Jaipur were exceptionally inclined and supportive to blue-glazed ware that was the reason why many a cool marble hall in Rambagh Palace (Earlier His Highness residence) has as its centre piece a bubbling fountain lined with ravishing Jaipur Blue Pottery tiles (Nath, 1987). These tiles were also used extensively in the building of the splendid city of Jaipur. After Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh, Rajmata Gayatri Devi 1939-1970 wife of His



Highness Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II encouraged the art and also identified great painter and muralist of that time, (Late) Shri K S Shekhawat to revive this art in early 1960s (Sahai, 1987)

PATTERNS AND MOTIF

Earlier the designs were mainly dominated by floral and animal prints but with the passage of time Persian designs were also being incorporated so as to attract and appeal to a more sophisticated and erudite clientele. During the mid-19th century, the Jaipur Blue Pottery products mainly depicted the courtroom scenes, royal ladies in the gardens and geometrical designs (Nath, 1987). Some decorative arts could be seen incorporating Chinese motifs with the Rajputi depictions as well. The influence of other cultures in the patterns and designs brings a contemporary look to the masterpiece. Latest appendage to the design format of Jaipur Blue Pottery is the clip art, portraits of the client, experimentation and innovation with other colors, which is worth noticing (Gupta, 2011). This exclusive manufacture of the product according to the taste of the client has given a much required novelty and freshness to the art.

PRESENT STATUS

Jaipur Blue Pottery is manufactured in three clusters of Jaipur viz. Sanganer, Kot Jewar and Neota (Gupta, 2011). According to a report, around 300 artisans are working in this industry and are keeping this art alive, but, because of certain problems in the management of manufacturing process, the production of this art has hit the bottom. Artisans do not use quality standardized tools and techniques for preparing the dough hence the quality of the final product are compromised (Gupta, 2011). It has been noticed that due to lack of standardisation in mixture the product absorb moisture, as a result its shape changes during the process and consequentially rejected by the importer in quality sample checking. The porosity of the product makes it fragile and lot of damage is seen during transportation and the manufacturer has to bear the loss (Bhatnagar, 2006). Apart from the presence of lead in compositions, the blue pottery also suffered from defects like water leakage due to higher porosity, fragileness due to lower strength, glaze blackening etc. (Maiti, 2003). Neither Government nor entrepreneurs have seriously undertaken value chain management at various steps of manufacture like, drying the articles during rains, updating of kiln to control temperature, standardization of the tools for preparing mixtures, usage of new techniques



for painting the motif, introduction of new patterns and designs in the art, etc. To dry up the moulds, the industry uses sun light; hence during rains all artisans are literally without job. No capacity building or welfare programs are organized in order to enhance their potential. Payments to the artisans are made on the basis of the number and size of articles produced. Lack of marketing efforts has brought the art to near extinction.

Rural Non-farm Development Agency (RUDA) and Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) made limited efforts to cobble together the techniques and processes like, making a gas furnace instead of the traditional wood kiln, making lead free glaze, and developing a systematized export chain, eventually increasing the productivity, but as these programmes were not self-sustained so, the whole effort collapsed once the support was withdrawn (Bhatnagar, 2006). A regular handholding and supportive supervision would have definitively ensured a successful outcome.

COMPETITION WITH OTHER COUNTERPARTS

Jaipur Blue Pottery is somehow surviving by incessantly battling with its inbuilt system, Achilles' heel. The other threat that the Jaipur Blue Pottery is facing is from its own sibling, i.e. the Khurja pottery (Khurja is in Uttar Pradesh, an adjoining State of Rajasthan) and the machine-made Chinese pottery (Gupta, 2011). Khurja pottery is similar to Jaipur Blue pottery with minor differences like; it is made from clay, uses brown and green colors and different designs and patterns. The positive points of Khurja pottery are that it is cheaper and durable than the Jaipur Blue Pottery. The negative point is that the color combination and designs are not as stylish and elegant as Jaipur blue pottery.

LIMITED INNOVATIONS IN THE ART

Of late, the entrepreneurs of Jaipur Blue Pottery have initiated some changes and innovations on their own to increase their profit and keep this art alive. Some of these innovations worth mentioning are, introduction of pink pottery, golden-black pottery, use of new convoluted and intricate designs, enhancing the range of durable products, incorporation of Jaipur Blue Pottery in other handicrafts like iron work, wood work, etc (Gupta, 2011). Other landmarks introduced by some of the entrepreneurs on a small scale that brought a remarkable development in this art are the innovation of gas furnace which is more environment - friendly and reduces wastage up to 30% and the other one is introduction of lead-free glaze which made it kitchen-ware friendly (Bhatnagar, 2006).



Modernization and novelty in the range of products is also a notable change. An art which was restricted to making tiles and pots has now ventured in the arena of jewellery, door knobs, key-chain holders, trays, coasters, mugs, dinner sets, and much more. This amalgamation with other handicraft will provide Jaipur Blue Pottery an enhanced impetus.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF THE COMMUNITIES INVOLVED

Handicraft industry occupies a pivotal position in the economic dynamism of various countries. Handicraft is one of the important industries employing a large number of people on its workforce. A wide range of activities are involved in it (Meena et al. 2012). Majority of the artisans working in this un-organized industry for as long as two decades belong to minorities, Schedule Caste (SC) and Other Backward Class (OBC) these mainly includes Kumawats, Kumhars, Raigars, Muslims and Bairwas (Gupta, 2011). These castes are still exploited in terms of wages and are not provided with social, economic or job security or any kind of welfare. The reason which compelled these castes to leave their ancestral land and business and came to work in an occupation which was dominated by the potter communities of India is under researched. It has been reported that initially some families from these castes migrated from their native villages to Sanganer town in search of some lucrative opportunity (Gupta, 2011). To earn for their subsistence they started working in cottage industries owned by the local entrepreneurs and finally settled in as a labor in blue pottery. Meena, 2011 also pointed out the poor working conditions of Jaipur Blue Pottery industry workers which were improperly adjusted workstations and chairs, awkward, limited and repetitive movements, poor illumination and heat from kiln. All these conditions lead to decrement in production of company due to Muscular Pain, Chest pain, Insomnia and Abdomen pain, Shoulder Blades, Cough and Cold, gastric and digestion problems. A questionnaire survey from 120 workers of four different handicraft industries of Jaipur revealed that major factors which influence and decide quality of work life are work environment, job security, co-operation with co-workers. The productivity could be increased by ergonomic interventions, reducing musculoskeletal disorders and hence improving quality of work life (Meena, 2014).

LIMITED USE

Jaipur Blue Pottery enjoyed a great export market, but it was limited to the decorative items only (Rai, 2005; Bhatnagar, 2006). The presence of lead in it restricted its range of products



to make an entry into kitchen wares. Although some of the items like tea pot, coffee mugs etc. were introduced at that time but people's rising awareness about the harmful effects and possible health hazards constrained the production line of kitchen ware. To counter this problem, Rural Non-farm development Agency-RUDA took help from Ceramic and Glass Research Institute - CGRI, Ahmadabad and prepared lead-free glaze (Rai, 2005; Bhatnagar, 2006). This product was welcomed by the manufacturers initially but slowly they started refraining themselves from it because lead-based glaze provided the desired shine and whiteness to the product, which the lead-free glaze could not provide.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Many management issues like lack of coordination among stakeholders, short of progressive human resource management practices, inappropriate leadership, absence of Research and Development, unplanned marketing, value chain management etc. have also hampered the growth of this art. Absence of economic, social and job security for the artisans, lack of an indigenous market to bring recognition to the product, absence of quality assurance from the manufacturers, no standardization of the technique, not giving importance to maintenance of any protocol to check the workability, purity and measurements of the raw material sometimes leading to the rejection of the whole manufactured lot worsens the problems.

MOTIVATION FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT TO THE EDUCATED YOUTH

Entrepreneurship development program was started by Small scale industries institute and central government undertaking for those who were at least educated till X standard. Setting up this criteria became an essentiality for the organization because of the exploitation other illiterate artisans were facing from the hands of the middlemen and the exporters (Rai, 2005).

UNEXPLORED EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES

In the countries UK, USA, Canada, there is a heavy/strong demand of Jaipur blue pottery, but there is no organized way or support by the government. Inadequate planning and attention paid by the stakeholders has relegated Jaipur blue pottery handicraft into an all time low of failure experiments in cottage industries. The exploitation of indigenous and the export market opportunity were never given appropriate importance to boost the Jaipur blue pottery and it still goes unexplored. Jaipur Blue Pottery, if exported in an organized



manner, is very likely to get over-whelming responses and this art can touch the sky with its vibrant colors and designs.

In 1995, the government also withdrew the Sales tax from this industry to bring down the prices also, the export subsidy and other taxes have been waived to provide impetus to the struggling art form (Rai, 2005)

HEALTH HAZARDS FOR ARTISANS

The artisans who are involved in the manufacturing of the Jaipur Blue Pottery face many health hazards. These are getting major cuts from using glass cullet leading to cuts, injuries and infections. The artisans mainly women involved in this business, grind the glass cullet manually, which could lead to fatalities. The dough is prepared manually and the artisans inhale a lot of dust while making a mixture. To prevent the overheating in kiln artisans have to manually takeout the firewood from the kiln which may lead to serious injuries.

SUGGESTIONS

It is high time when stakeholders have to take the initiatives to revive the Jaipur Blue Pottery. The entrepreneurs need to take the leadership role in order to perk up the cottage industry. Some of the suggestions are as follows:

- Innovation in preparing a shinier, whiter lead-free glaze should be done so as to gain acceptance from the buyers.
- Collective efforts for research and development need to be conducted to reduce porosity and increase the strength, which in turn will increase the durability of the product
- Standardization of the quality and composition of the raw material needs to be introduced so as to improve the value of the final product.
- The entrepreneurs need to be motivated for the use of economical and eco-friendly options for kiln like, gas furnace, electric furnace and electric grinders which would drastically reduce the wastage and provide a safe and healthy working environment to the artisans.
- There is a need to develop an inland and export market for the Jaipur blue pottery. This can be done through following measures- organizing exhibitions in different states of India, use of electronic media to facilitate online meeting and shopping. Organization of the meetings with big exporters and importers will facilitate the



market of Jaipur Blue pottery, with the support of government and non-governmental agencies.

As a final point, Jaipur Blue Pottery requires more such fresh doses of innovations, in terms of designs, range of products, colors and strength, which can be facilitated by the coordination and cooperation of the Government or Non-governmental agencies.

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