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## **Current Status of Dokra Craft in Bikna: A Case Study of Bankura District, West Bengal, India**

**Payel Kundu**

Guest Lecturer, Department of Geography

Bankura Zilla Saradhamani Mahila Mahavidyalaya & Bankura Sammilani College, West Bengal, India

### **Abstract:**

*Handcraft industries play an important role in the livelihood and economy of rural people of the developing countries like India. The ancient craft 'dokra' of Bikna village is not an exception of this concept. Dokra metal casting is one of the oldest traditional techniques of metal casting in India. In recent year, the products of Dokra artisans are in great demand in domestic and foreign market because of its medieval simplicity enhancing folk motifs and forceful form. But in today's globalised world where fashion and luxury industries take maximum share in trading market, it is so difficult for sustenance of dokra art and craft in the market. But only their love and respect to their occupation make it possible to run parallel with modern society. Despite its high demand in international market and wide geographical importance, the dokra artisans of bikna are facing a lot of problems. So, the proposed research study is a modest attempt to provide an account of dokra craft in Bankura and socio-economic condition of Bikna village. In this paper, various problems relating with this art has been assessed and an attempt regarding solution of problems has been also suggested.*

**Keywords:** Handcraft industry, 'Dokra Craft', 'Lost Wax Process', 'Kain kuya Mal', 'Learned by being', socio-economic condition.

### **1. Introduction**

The ancient craft of Dokra metal casting was once widespread throughout India, but is now 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. The name 'Dokra' was used to indicate a gaggle of craftsman of nomadic type scattered over Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh recognized by their beautifully shaped and decorated metal products. The Dokra kamar of Bengal migrated from Chhatisgarh. The proximity of this region to the copper source and easier trade link with market transform their migratory character to settle in groups in different parts of Bengal. Cire Per due, a French term meaning lost wax is the name given to the method of 'Dokra Casting'. Many of the famous statues have been made through this process. Pure bee wax, dammer resin, mustard oil is used in the preparation of moldable wax. A replica of the desired product is made with wax on a clay core with all its finer specifics of design and decorations. A few layers of finely prepared clay paste are applied over the metal and dried in the shade. The traditional themes of these cast metal sculptures include images of Hindu gods, tribal gods, bowls, elephants, horse, bird, necklaces, earrings etc. These communities have been subject of an action research project initiated and coordinated by the National Institute for Science, Technology and development studies NISTADS within the Indian Council for Scientific and industrial research CSIR. The first detailed study of cire per due work in the Bankura District was carried out in the early 1960's by Ruth Reeves (1962). This work has been the primary source for many subsequent reports and academic thesis (Krishnan, 1976) According to Sen (1994) "Perhaps the poorest craft group of West Bengal, the dhokras are the most interesting and creative. In recent year, under the pressure of all embracing industrialization and changing social values, they have been forced by the loss of their natural rural market to diversify their products and are seeking with the help of the government and some voluntary agencies".

#### **1.1. Objectives**

The research study is mainly aimed at the following objectives-

- i. To give an account of dokra craft and the short history of dokra workers in Bikna village.
- ii. To study socio-economic condition of the study area.
- iii. To identify the present problems relating with this art and point out some suggestions to overcome the major problem existing in this village.

## 2. Database and Methodology

This study is primarily empirical. But both primary and secondary data have been effectively used in this study. Secondary data have been collected from various documents such as book, magazines, journals, old research papers, publication report, articles as well as internet. Primary data have been collected from field survey. The techniques of primary data collection are observation method and interview schedule. The primary and secondary information are analyzed and represented by various cartographic techniques.

### 2.1. Sample Selection

To fulfill study objectives and find out inherent explanation of the research, sampling procedure is very important step of methodology. For this work, I have selected 105 households of Bikna village using random sample techniques for further study.

### 2.2. Location of the Study Area

Bikna is a village in Bankura -2 block in Bankura district of West Bengal state. It belongs to Burdwan Division. This village is situated at 23°15'19" North latitude and 87°05'38" East longitude extending 5 km towards east from district headquarter Bankura, 1 km from Bankura- 2 and 176 km from state capital Kolkata. Bikna is surrounded by Bankura-1 towards west, Onda block towards south, Gangajalghati towards north. The elevation of Bikna village is 89m above sea level. It is one of 154 villages in Bankura-2 block along with villages like Mobarakpur and Daman Bandi.



Figure 1: Google Map of Bikna Village

#### 2.2.1. Dokra Makers of Bankura

One of the major remaining foci for the Dhokra craft is some kilometers to the north of Bankura in West Bengal. Thirty-six related families live in a close knit clan community in Bikna village. According to Dhiren Karmakar interviewed in September 2001, their fore fathers were nomads who came from Chhotonagpur. The actual caste origin of the Bikna artisans is obscure. This may be due in part to a process of gradual "hinduisation" (K.S. Singh, 1993) though their religious practices are from the Hindu mainstream. The craft has historically been associated with so called 'tribal' people of India covering modern regions of Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh. Some of dokra families appear to have migrated into alluvial plains of Bengal finally settling around Bankura, Purulia, Midnapur in 1962. Despite its antiquity and wide geographical dispersion, it appears that the work of dokra maker was always marginal to the domestic economy of India and did not achieve the importance of manufacture of wealth contains. No records of this artisan industry survive from pre-colonial days and standard documentary resources such as Risley's monumental Tribes and castes of Bengal (1891) must be seen as reflecting both anthropological fashions of their era. Ruth Reeves (1962) refers to the Bankura Dokra as 'Kain Kuya Mal' (which possibly derives from association with the traditional measuring vessels known in Bengal as 'Kunke'. Though originally Dokra craft developed at Bikna village of Bankura-2 block under Bankura Sadar subdivision but artisans of Patrasayer of Bisnupur Sub Division produce Dokra items with very fine polish products.



Figure 2: Portrait of an Artisan in Bikna



Figure 3: Clay Pasting over Wax Replica

2.3. Socio-Economic Condition of Study Area

2.3.1. Population Characteristics

A group of individual living in a place is called population. It is most important determinant for development of any place. The total surveyed population of Bikna village is 527. Among them, male population is 287 and female population is 240. So, it is clear that percentage of male population is higher than female in this village.

People	No of Population	% People
Male	287	54.46
Female	240	45.54
Total	527	100

Table 1: Population Characteristics of Bikna

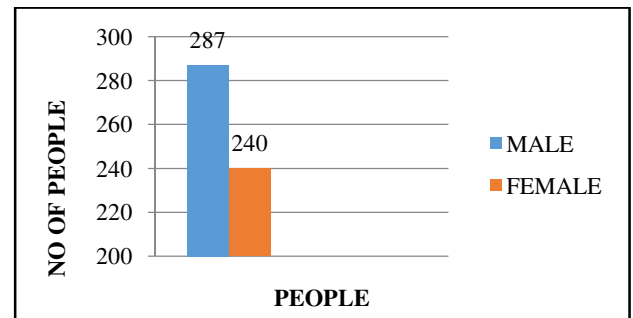


Figure 4: Population Characteristics  
Source: Field Survey

2.3.2. Family Size

Family size is a major social determinant. It explains the tendency of family planning of people. In Bikna village, 48 houses have 1 to 4 population members. It is small family size. 52 houses have 5 to 8 population members and only 5 houses have 9 to 12 population members. From the above discussion, it is cleared that major people are unconscious about the bad effects of population growth in this village.

Family Size	No. of Family	% of Family
1 to 4	48	45.71
5 to 8	52	49.52
9 to 12	5	4.76

Table 2: Family Size of Bikna Village

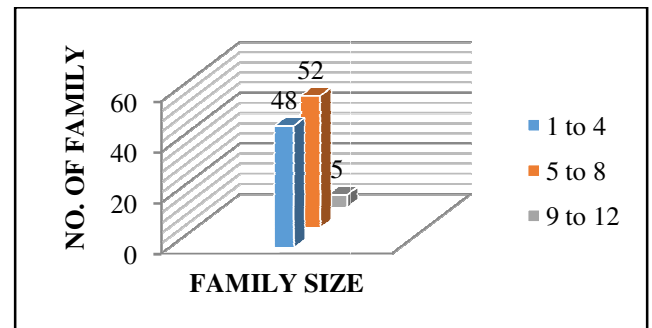


Figure 5: Family Size of Bikna  
Source: Field Survey

2.3.3. Caste Structure

Caste wise population distribution is important criteria to express population diversity in an area. In Bikna village, 48.57% houses belong to general category, 28.37% houses belong to SC Category, 2.86% houses belong to ST category and 20% houses belong to OBC category. So, it indicates that major people of this village are categorized as Above Poverty Level.

Caste Structure	General	SC	ST	OBC
No. of Family	51	30	3	21
% of Family	48.57	28.57	2.86	20
Degree Value	174'51"	102'51"	10'17"	72'

Table 3: Caste Structure of Bikna

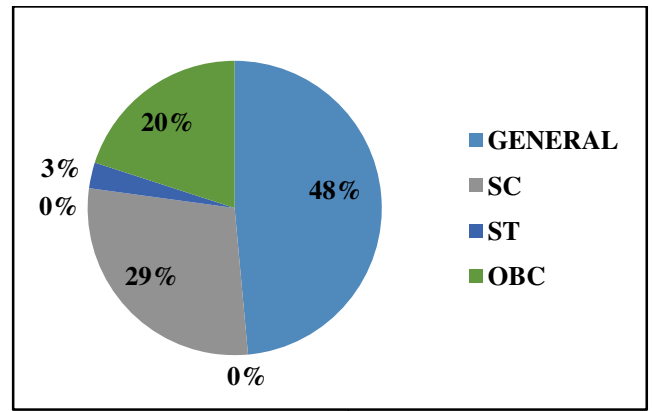


Figure 6: Caste Structure of Bikna  
Source: Field Survey

**2.3.4. Employment Situation**

Occupation is important determinant for living. It determines the economic status of any place. In Bikna village, various occupational structures have been existed. Out of total working population, 31.32% people are engaged in Agriculture, 36.14% people are involved in Dokra art, 6.62% people relate to labour work and 25.9% people are engaged in service. So, from the above discussion, it is clear that majority of people are involved in Dokra Craft to survive their traditional craft. Both male and female members are involved in production mechanism of dokra craft as the dokra making is a part of daily rhythm of the village.

Occupation	Agriculture	Dokra Industry	Labour	Service
No. of People	52	60	11	43
% of People	31.32	36.14	6.62	25.9
Degree Value	112'46"	130'7"	23'51"	93'15"

Table 4: occupational Structure of Bikna  
Source: Field Survey

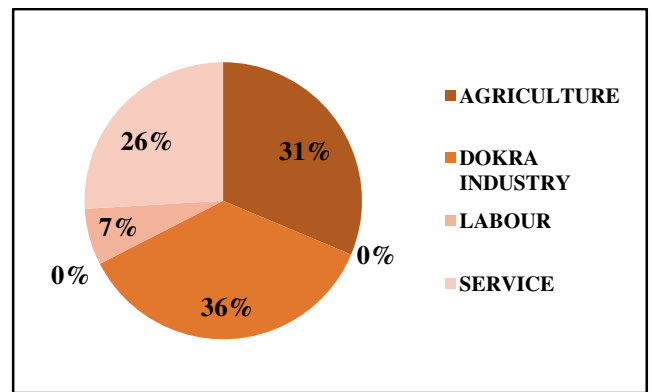


Figure 7: Occupational Structure of Bikna

**2.3.5. Level of Education**

Education is a process by which one can understand his and her position in the society. It is not a process of learning for living best but a leading process of socialization for future adjustment. In the study area out of total population, 471 people are literate and 56 people are illiterate. Though the literacy rate is high, standard of education is not good. Out of total literate population, 160 people are primary standard, 125 people read up to class eight, 90 people belong to metric standard, 70 people are higher secondary standard and 26 people belong to graduate level. In this village, 56 illiterate people belong to dokra craft worker. The main reason behind poor standard of education is poor financial condition, lack of awareness, ignorance and negligence of parents.

Education Status	No. of People	% of People
Primary	160	33.97
Eight Standard	125	26.54
Madhyamik	90	19.11
Higher Secondary	70	14.86
Graduate	26	5.52

Table 5: Level of Education of Bikna  
Source: Field Survey

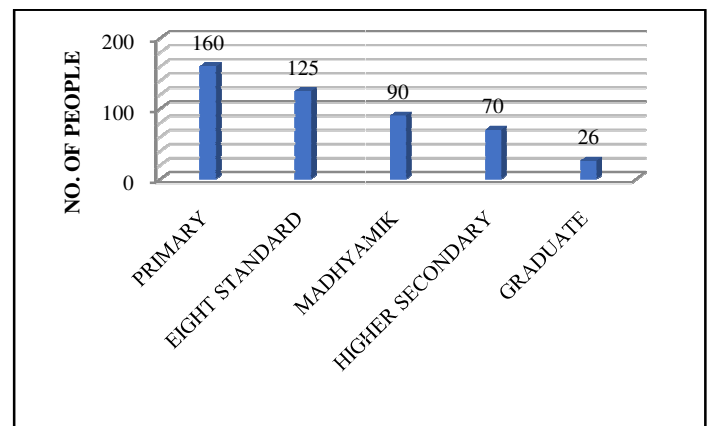


Figure 8: Level of Education of Bikna

**2.3.6. Drinking Water and Sanitation**

Water is most essential element for living. In Bikna village, various sources of drinking water exist. Among them, Tap and Well play a major role in respect to other drinking water sources. In Bikna village out of total households, 45.71% houses take water from tape, 33% houses take water from well, 18.1% houses take water from tube well and 2.86% houses take from other places or use pond water which is again unhygienic one. Status of sanitary system determines the consciousness of healthy life. In the study area, 54.29% houses have sanitary system and 45.71% houses have no sanitary system. This is because of ignorance and unconsciousness of healthy life.

Sanitary System	Have	Have not
No. of Houses	57	48
% of Houses	54.29	45.71

Table 6: Source of Drinking Water

Source of Water	No. of Houses	% of House
Tap	48	45.71
Well	35	33.33
Tubewell	19	18.1
Other	3	2.86

Table 7: Sanitary System of Bikna

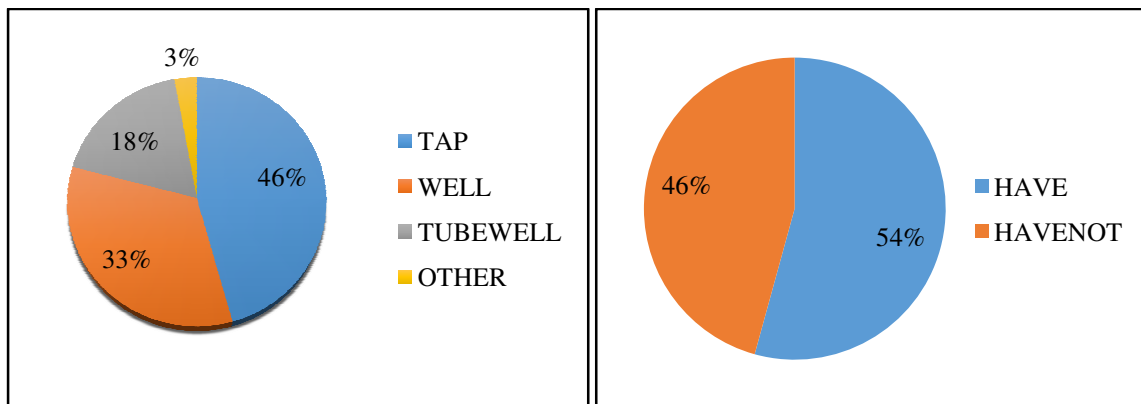


Figure 9: Source of Drinking Water of Bikna  
Source: Field Survey

Figure 10: Sanitary System of Bikna  
Source: Field Survey

**2.3.7. Addiction**

Alcohol is the main addicted material among dokra workers of Bikna village. Taking of drag among young generation is very popular. Workers generally take alcohol to get relief from physical exhaustion. In study area, 30.19% houses are addicted to alcohol, 49.06% houses are addicted to smoking and 11.32% houses are addicted to tobacco. But, taking of alcohol by young generation is unexpected.

Addiction	No. of Houses	% of Houses
Smoking	26	49.06
Drinking	16	30.19
Tobacco	6	11.32
Other	5	9.43

Table 8: Addiction of Bikna Village  
Source: Field Survey

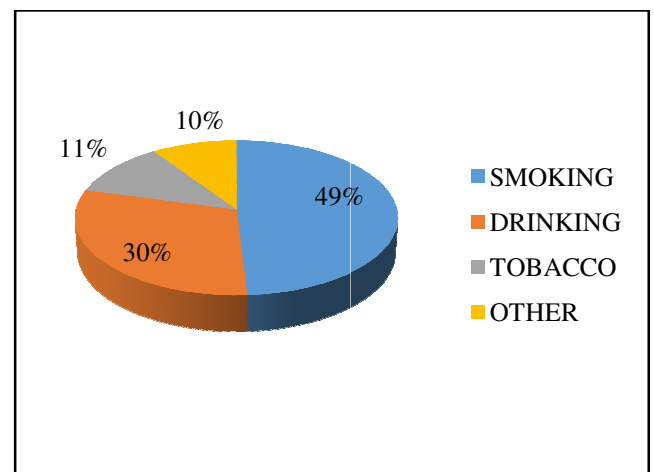


Figure 11: Addiction of Bikna Village

### 2.3.8. Becoming an Artisan: Growing up in Bikna

Like most traditional craft people, the Dokra artisans of Bikna have no formal system of apprenticeship. The craft to coin a phrase is 'learned by being'. Children in Bikna grow up in an environment where the dokra craft is everywhere around them. Every spare corner of the village is taken up by drying moulds or artifacts in various stages of preparation. Small children learn soon to imitate their elders, playing with clay making cares and eventually graduating to detailed modeling in 'Dhuno'. It is difficult to make a living at all unless the family is fully engaged in the craft. This militates against extended education. Most children manage two or three year of schooling. But, the appeal of joining the adult is very alluring and social pressures to contribute are great.

### *2.4. Problems*

Though Bikna village is growing up as an artisan, it is facing a lot of problems at present-

1. The traditional mode of production lacks flexibility in production, suffers from low productivity and high cost of input raw material. This has resulted limitation in marketing of dokra products beyond a geographical area restricted mostly within the state.
2. Lack of standard education, employment and sanitary system in the study area.
3. Lack of training and workshop to adopt modern technology related to this art.
4. Rising price of end product is attracting fewer buyers which are disappointing matter for these artisans.
5. Ineffective infrastructure of the co-operatives found at Bikna gather low profit margin for the artisans.

### *2.5. Solutions*

The problems of the study area will be solved by some remedial measures-

1. There must be a youth training centre to teach them new techniques and training should be arranged by Govt. for skill development of dokra worker.
2. Modern marketing strategies need to be adopted for selling finished products.
3. To increase awareness about negative impact of drug addiction, illiteracy and unhygienic environment.

### **3. Conclusion**

The Dokra artisans of Bankura District have been pursuing this occupation for over 50 years based on their inherited skill. But now days, it faces several problems in marketing. In view of shortage of financial resources, advertising publicity cannot be undertaken by artisans. Absence of systematic marketing network has been discouraging factor in this sector. Care should be taken to popularize crafts in home markets creating awareness among the home consumers. Care should be taken to ensure that with innovation, originality of craft is truly maintained. Generation of gainful employment in the trade is possible only through extending the scope of marketing. However, extension of market of Dokra items calls for introduction of flexibility in the production technique, improvement in quality and increase in productivity. During last 10-15 years, some young artisans of Ghatra Kamar Community have adopted the skill of Dokra Crafts and engaged themselves in commercial production of Dokra items. As a result, traditional dokra craft of Bankura has spread outside Bikna village. The settlement of migrated dokra artisans and small clusters of dokra artisans are coming up at patrasayer, Keshiakole, Moldubka with the support of Khadi village industries Board. The initiatives have been taken by West Bengal Craft Mission who has been proactive in organizing creative and technical workshop for dokra artisans.

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