

WOOD CRAFT AND CARPENTRY IN SILLANWALI: EXPLORING THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF THE ARTISANS

Bushra Ejaz

Department of Anthropology, PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi

Corresponding Author:

Bushra Ejaz

PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi

bushraroy@gmail.com

Abstract: Handicrafts are getting tremendously popular in the global market. Many developing countries are exporting handicrafts to the developed world, creating a new source of revenue and employment. Sillanwali in Pakistan is famous for its handicrafts and has always fascinated people with keen interest in handicrafts and traditional furniture. Sillanwali is known throughout Pakistan and at international level for its wooden handicrafts with colorful geometric patterns and oriental designs. The current research is a qualitative analysis of occupation of carpentry which involves the knowledge, skills, techniques and tools adopted by handicraft makers. Utilization of these handicrafts is not only for practical purposes but also decorative. It is an attempt to explore a renowned wood work being done in the district for over decades. The data was collected through participant observation and in depth; interviews of 45 workers and owners of Sillanwali handicraft main market. The results indicate that the artisans involved with the occupation have majorly chosen the field on need rather than interest basis. The profession skill and techniques are passed on to the next generation; thus lack of access to global economy, knowledge regarding profitability of new trends and designs severely hinders the industries growth.

Key Words: Traditional Handicraft, Artisans, Carpentry, Raw wood, Carving, Tools

INTRODUCTION

Artisanal products are the products made by artisans, either completed by hand or with the help of small and simple tools or machines (UNESCO 1997). Handicrafts are mostly defined as items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools, exquisite in design and traditional in nature. They are objects of utility as well as objects of decoration. The term handicraft is used for everything that used to be made by hand before industrialization, and that includes stone-work, shoe-making, ceramics, weaving etc. "It is a fact that handicrafts have very ancient origin. They have customarily received royal and aristocratic patronage and handicrafts men were honored by other communities". (Jena 2010). Traditional handicrafts are also a source of livelihood for the millions of rural and tribal people in the era of globalization (Reddy and Raipally 2015). We see that brand, companies, nations and culture endowed with different level of heritage implement innovative strategies that result in successful exploitation of their heritage for both economic and cultural advantage (Reddy and Raipally 2015). In Indo-Pak region, the history of handicrafts is deeply embedded in ancient civilization of Indus valley (3000BC-1600BC).

Today however, the art of handicraft has transformed and upgraded itself to an industrial level due to heavy progress in technology. Pakistan is a country having rich tradition of art and craft from time immemorial. "Handicrafts are traditionally used for everyday purposes, such as baskets for storage or transportation of goods, clothing for everyday wear, or furniture for household use" (Szydlowski 2008).

"In Punjab there are many sites which are famous for their special crafts like *kundan* and pure silver jewelry and *phulkari* work in Bahawalpur, cane work from Mianwali, in Punjab, and pottery and ceramics in Fateh Jhung" (Taha 2011). Lahore is famous for brass items making and Faisalabad is famous for cotton and woolen cloth manufacturing industry. Wood was lavish in olden times and the natural temperate, soft qualities, its texture, color and grain lent itself to good workmanship. "Wood is used in building for various purposes, viz: decorative, functional and structural" (Adesogan 2013). Carpenter use wood for various purposes mostly making of furniture, houses and household items. "The requirement of mankind multiplied with the passage of time" (Yousaf 1991). The carpenter, with the help of his tools contented the growing needs of the

community. A carpenter is a tradesperson that works with wood as well as material like plastic etc. They construct and repair structures and their parts using wood and other material. Carpenters use different types of skills and techniques to make an item that can truly be called an art piece. The most common technique is frame and carving. "The worker squat on the floor on uncovered soil and create the pieces of furniture and other woodcrafts" (Yousaf 1991). Wood carving is the most beautiful art work that artisans do in their decorative items. "Carving is a personal expression a simple art from that goes back thousands of years" (Sabol 2008). There are five types of carving, carving in the round, relief carving, chip carving, incised carving and pierced carving. Through various carving techniques and with the help of tools like hammer, tape measure, utility knife, chisel, nail set, screwdriver, carving knife, gouge, V tool the artisans create multiple master pieces. They are made of wood with iron or steel blades edges and point. "A cutting material to size, whether wood dry wall or yet metal is a big part of what a carpenter does" (Haun 1999).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper relied on both primary and secondary data. The primary descriptive data was obtained through direct observation and interviews of senior master artisans. The secondary data was gathered from various resources i.e. internet, books and research papers. The study is mainly descriptive in nature. The handicrafts chosen for the study include wooden toys, candy jars and baskets. Data were collected from 45 artisan workers, working in Sillanwali workshops.

RESULTS

The current study is an anthropological attempt to explore and provide qualitative data on wood craft artisans of Sillanwali. The study encompasses experiences of handicraft artisans and craft workers engaged with carpentry for their livelihood. These artisans skillfully make wood and handicraft using raw materials produced locally.

Table.1: Opinion about Adoption of the Occupation

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
On Interest	13	28.9
Family occupation	8	17.8
Economic need	24	53.3
Total	45	100

The table reveals the respondent's motives behind adopting this particular occupation of

carpentry. The results show that 28.9% joined as for their interest, 17.8% responded that it has been there family occupation since generations thus they are keeping the art alive by being a part of it while 53.3% came into the occupation due to lack of education, job opportunities and their economic needs.

Table. 2: Duration of Association with the Occupation

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1 to 2 years	16	35.6
10 / 20 years	17	37.8
20 / 30 years	12	26.7
Total	45	100

The above table distributes various artisans with respect to the duration they have been associated with the profession of carpentry and wood craft. The results indicate that the majority of the craft workers are in to this occupation for the last few decades

Table. 3: Responses on Ascribed or Acquired Occupation

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Inherited	10	22.2
Acquired	35	77.8
Total	45	100

Table 3 reveals that majority of the respondents that is 77.8% had acquired this occupation as a source of livelihood, while 22.2% had inherited this occupation from their families.

Table. 4: Opinion about Skill Acquisition

How did you learn these skills?	Frequency	Percentage
Informal training	24	53.3
Formal training	21	46.7
Total	45	100

The table shows that 46.7% craft workers had attained a formal training from a local master artisan (*ustad*) while the rest got informal training from either their family or their senior co-workers.

DISCUSSION

Carpenters construct, install, and repair structures and components made of wood and wood substitute structures. Majority of the wood workers of Sillanwali are males; women are not much involved in the occupation. However women are running this business as small cottage industry. Main items of wooden handicrafts which they make include clocks, fruit baskets, toys, candy jars and some other accessories like

key chains and *surmadaini* (cohal box). Study revealed that most of the people adopted this business as they were illiterate and their participation was purely need based instead of interest based. Reason behind not taking preferring the business is that due to technological advancement and industrialization the business sphere has become fairly multidimensional their approaches. Changing trends have decreased the profit margins. Economy of Sillanwali is widely based on agriculture; however a little portion of economy also consists for its wooden handicrafts which are largely exported to other cities, provinces and even to other countries. "They are not well aware about up to date trends of the market as a result unable to improve their skills and design capabilities and not ready to learn new things"(Iqbal 2010). Since the profession and skills are both inherited from the forefathers, and the artisans are rarely involved in learning new trends or are aware of the global market thus the business is not able to boom. It was realized from the study that 37% people doing this business from 20 to 30 years. People of Sillanwali take keen interest in carpentry. They also use different methods and materials to make these items. The designs have been passed from generation to generation. Mostly it stays within the same families. Workers learn the skills from their father because of their inherited occupation. And also learn from their masters. Many young workers start working from early childhood in workshops. They learn more basic skills through; 31% artisans learn from self-observation. There is the small handicrafts shop in the town accessible to common people. Workshops are also located in towns where workers and masters do their work. Mostly people engaged with this industry were of the opinion that they have learnt this art from their teachers who taught them the use of traditional tools and also build traditional designs. Because of financial constraints of manufacturer and lack of interest of the government institutions, this community has no access to the potential markets of the world.

CONCLUSION

This wood craft industry has a great potential to enhance the household economy of rural areas in Sillanwali. Most of the people associated with this industry are illiterate so fail to learn new techniques and usage of latest tools in an efficient way. Mostly people associated with this industry don't have huge capita to expand their

business on massive level so they can't invest their money in making new items which is totally a risky approach. Major problems like energy crises, lack of latest information about tools and technology are considered to be the major hurdles in the growth of this industry. Workers feel hesitation in making new designs due to the lack of information about the marketability and latest trends. The research reveals that if serious concern is shown towards the problems faced by the owners and workers who are directly or indirectly linked to this industry, rural economy can be improved manifolds.

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