Tradition of Brass-Metal Working : A Study Among the Morias of Muslimpatty Village in Hajo , Kamrup District, Assam.

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ABSTRACT : Brass-metal industry is an important craft of Assam from the social and economic point of view. In case of marriage, birth and other religious purpose this is plays an important role. In Assam this is an important field of study. Within this study, the information like the present status and the past status of brass-metal industry in Assam, How people are related with this working and affect their social and economic condition. And the most important part in this study is to know how this traditional industry is survived in present market environment. Hajo is one of the famous places of pilgrimage in India. Hajo is popularly known as panchatirtha (five shrines) for the Hindus. In this paper also studied about the people of Morias who were traditionally related with this working in Hajo. The concerned data were collected through empirical field work by applying appropriate anthropological research methods.

Keywords : Brass-metal working , effects on economic life ,tradition ,Morias .

I. Introduction:

HISTORY OF BRASS METAL WORKING:

The history of brass-metal working in the state of Assam is associated with the settlement of Morias. The Morias are Muslim people who are given this name because of their practicing this traditional work.

ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTE ON MORIAS: The Muslim community in Assam can be divided in to three social groups, viz; the Syeds, the Sheiks and the Morias. The Syeds claims themselves to be the descendents of Prophet Muhammad and occupy the top position in the social hierarchy of the Muslim [1]. The sheiks, who are considered mainly as convert Hindus comprise the middle stratum. The Morias, who are known for their expertise in brass metal work, are considered to be the lowest in the hierarchy. It may not be out of place to mention here that there is another common appellation, Garia, which refers to the Muslims of Assam. there are several views regarding the origin of the term Garia. Mention may be made of Hunter (1987) [2] who holds the view that the Garias are those Muslims who adopted the
profession of tailoring. In another view, they are considered to be the local people, who accepted Islam for which they were ex-communicated by their brethrens. Almost all the Muslim of Assam belongs to the Sunni sect and they are more or less endogamous in nature.

The Morias amongst whom the rapid study was conducted are regarded as the descendent of those Muslims who were taken prisoners by the Ahom king, Suhungmung sometime in 1532A.D[3]. Chronicles of Assam relate that the Mohammedan king of Bengal sent these troops to invade Assam under the commandership of one Turbuk in the early part of the 16th century. The troops successfully brought up to kaliabor. However, the aforesaid Ahom king subdued the force at Dikrai Mukh and beheaded the commander. The vanquished followers of Turbuk (the commander) were taken in to captivity by the Ahom king. It is said that those captives were assigned different activities like agriculture, wood cutting. Royal elephants care .etc. in all of which they turned out to be utterly misfit. It was only when they were left to their own choice. These renewed brass artisans still remember that they successfully proved themselves to be experts of making brass utensils and decorative items. Turbukas their leader. There are some scholars who do not consider the Morias as a section of the Musalman people. Robinson (1841) [4] described them as a very impure tribe. No doubt; the Morias being the earliest Muslim settlers in Assam must have adopted many Assamese Hindu customs, manners and mode of life because of which they have become incompatible to the new Mughal invaders or immigrants. This must be the reason why Shihabuddin Tallish, the chronicler of Mirijhmula, said that they were Musalman only in name and knew nothing about Islam.

The ethno name “Moria” is said to have been given by the neighboring Assamese thereby denoting the nature of the profession which requires constant beating on the metal i.e. Brass. In Assamese word, moriowa /mariba means beating. They are found mostly in small packets of rural and per-urban areas. It has already been mentioned that the Morias are placed in the lowest stratum of the Muslim social hierarchical order in Assam. The Syeds and the sheikhs who are higher maintain social distance from the Morias. Consequently the latter practice marriage endogamy. Ali (1994) [5] reports that the Morias are now on the verge of giving up their traditional profession. Items of brass and other metals, manufactured in the factories have gradually posed a big threat to the economic viability of these traditional brass artisans.

**Present status of the brass-metal industry**

Brass-metal industry is an important craft of Assam and presenting a one cultural part of Assamese societies .Baishya (1986)[6] mentioned that the small-scale industries in the district of kamrup were developing during 1970-71 to 1980-81. This working affect the economic condition of our sate also. The social and economic point of view it have great role in our religious life. In case of marriage, birth and other religious purpose this is playing important role. But today’s this tradition is facing many developmental problems .It loses its shine ,
values etc. In present market the implements which are easily available people used them. So this industry going to loose its identity.

II. Hypothesis:

A hypothesis is an assumption about relations between variables. It is tentative explanation of the research problem or a guess about the research outcome.

1) Most of the people accepted this Brass-Metal working as their traditional work in Muslimpatty village, Hajo of kamrup District.
2) The occupation of Brass-Metal working greatly affected their economic life.
3) In present day market this industry is loses its values.
4) Brass-metal implements play an important role in religious Practices.

III. Objectives of the Study:
The study has been taken up with the following objectives

The prime objective of the present study is –
1) To study about the people of Morias.
2) To study about the brass-met working.
3) How people are related with this working and affect their social and economic condition.
4) To study about the techniques which methods they were used for making the implements.
5) To study, how this industry are survived in present market environment.

IV. Methodology:
The primary data for the present study is collected from Muslimpatty village in Hajo of kamrup District, Assam. Fieldwork are done for collecting the primary data. For primary data the methods like interview method, Observation method, case study method, and genealogical method are used. Besides this the secondary data are collected through from the Books, Journals, and Articles etc.

V. Result and Discussion:
The Morias accepted this work traditionally. From the collecting data it was found that in many family accepted this occupation inheritably, if father are brass-metal workers then son also became brass-metal worker. Today’s many people accepted other occupations due to economic problems. The brass-metal working is a seasonal work like during the puh, Magh, Phagun, Bohag, Jeth and Ahar the calendar of assamese month people working and other month they have no work so they faced economic problems. On the other hand the workers are worked under of one person he is an owner, the local people called him Mahajan. The raw materials are not available in their own villages they are buying from Mahajan and the
Mahajan Buying this from the city and after that selling these among the village worker. Morias, the brass-metal workers make the brass-metal wares and selling to Mahajan they get little profit but Mahajan selling that utensils to cities and earned high profit .so all these are the reason for this industry loses its values and people accepting other occupations .

The brass-metal implements play an important role in many cases like religious purpose , decoration purpose and household purpose . The village people said that during the season of marriage like in Bohag the assamese month in that time they selling in high quantity in comparison to other month because they used brass-metal implements in functioning the rituals of marriage .The people also feeling proud to give the gift of brass-metal wares .these are expensive so many people used the easily available low coast implements .so this industry going to survive problems .But its need a great attention because this tradition is the pride cultural heritage of Assam .on the basis of some quality like durability ,beauty ,health and hygiene issues and household usability this brass-metal implements are significant .so if the government make trademark for this industry it is very helpful in case of surviving this industry .

Process of working in steps:

The brass sheets are cut and beaten to shape over the anvil known as Belmuri Chutuli. Other implements of work are the hammers , pincers ,and chisels of various sizes . Goat skin bellows attached to a hole in the floor of the workers , hut complete the simple furnace. when it is desired to join two sheets of brass together , nicks are cut in on edge , into which the other edge is filled and the two are then beaten flat. a rough paste is made of ‘pan’, a substance which consists three parts of sheets brass and one part of soldier and borax is the smeared over the point. The metal is heated, the pan melts and the union is complete”

1.1: Methods of manufacture: The traditional method of brass metal industry comprises different techniques e.g. shearing; forging, soldering, polishing, filing, designing etc. the application of this techniques varies from article to article. That means each article needs different treatment. The treatment also varies from part to part of an article. Generally the process involves different phases. The phases are discussed in details:

**i) Shearing:** It is actually cutting or lapping of metal by shears. Shear is a heavy cutting instrument (Scissors). They call it Kasi.

**ii) Forging:** The metal is hammered in this process systematically to turn it a desired shape. They have some big impression of wood which are quite similar to different parts of an article or pot. The method sheets are kept on the impressions and turned to the shape by hammering.
iii) Soldering: Solder is a fusible alloy for uniting metals. By soldering different parts, the articles are joined. The artisans prepare the alloy themselves. The mixture contains borax, brass and zinc. They grind the mixture first. For application they add water into the mixture and apply to the portion to be joined. Heat is applied on the mixture which melts it and affixed the joints. Sometimes hammering is done on the joints.

iv) Cleaning: cleaning is done by dipping the article in water which is added with sulphuric acid. Dipping is followed by brushing and cleaning with water. Generally it is done by the females.

v) Polishing: polishing is done in the home made polish machine or kunda. In this machine the wooden rod is inserted through a bottomless pot or a hollow article. The pot is fitted tight. Two persons work jointly in this case-one for driving the machine and another for performing the polish work. Polish is done with cutting the pot by chisel or cheni. Different parts are cut differently to give a nice shape and glaze.

vi) Designing: Designs are done sometimes by cutting in shapes and sometimes by the impression of hammer.

In olden days they collected the raw material in the form of a solid ball. But now a day the raw materials are found as plain sheets or as round plates. The thickness of the sheets varies from 0.1c.m to 0.5c.m. Approximately. For a particular article they need both plain and round sheets of different size.

TIME and LABOUR USED FOR MAKING WARES

Five persons include for making brass-wares

1. One person preparing the coil for firing. He breaks the coil in small pieces by hammering.

2. One person cutting the brass sheet in desirable measure. Because before making the wares they already take measurements what quantity of brass sheet used for complete the wares.

3. One man beating the brass for joining and making the brass wares.

4. One person making the design in the brass wares. They used hammer for design

5. One person, especially female they cleaning the implements. And they used soil, dry grass, and sand.

Production -
A number of objects are found to be made in the village. Each of these items has a name with a particular function.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>ITEMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOUSEHOLD USE</td>
<td>Ghagori, Kalah, Chariya, Thali, Heta, Khanti, Lota, Sarai, Jug, Stand Bati, Chamosh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELIGIOUS PURPOSE</td>
<td>Dhupdai, Dhunadhani, Gocha, Chaki, Dhunari.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS</td>
<td>Naggra and Doba, Tal, Bortal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ART WARES</td>
<td>Bata, Kharu, Kandle stand, Japi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODERN OBJECTS</td>
<td>Water filter, Tray</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOME WARES ALLO USED IN RELIGIOUS PURPOSE:

LOTA are used in religious purpose. The Muslim people before performing the namaz they washed their open body part like face, hand, foot. And for this purpose they carried water in this lota. The Hindu people also used this implement.

TAL AND BARTAL – The Hindu people used in religion purpose like kirtan, bhajan.

Bata- The people used this implement for serving betel nut to peoples.

VII. Conclusion:

The metallic industry in India is as old as the Indus valley civilization. Copper is considered as the earliest metal used by men. As a part of tradition both bell and brass metals are used to produce variety of utilitarian and decorative articles and still have a place in assamese society. Brass is a metal alloy made of copper and zinc. From the study on brass-metal work in Muslimpatty village in Hajo area it is found that people in the village has been practicing brass-metal working since long past. Reference from genealogy, it can be drawn that the same metal technology is in continuing since 135 years back. Review of literature speaks about the presence of brass metal working community in various part of Assam and other parts of North East India as well but there is no concrete archaeological study conduct in any part of Assam. This industry going to lose its value day by day so if government make
some trade mark for this industry then it is helpful for the people who are accepting this working as a their occupation. The cottage and village industries including brass-metal industry have importance in socio-economic life of the state. so the development and substance of this industry is very important and for that concern authorities must take necessary actions and built some support systems to keep alive the glorious tradition.

References: