

Socio- Cultural History of Bidriware in Karnataka

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Abstract:

Bidriware is a heritage metal craft of Bidar, which is as old as Bahamani period. Its production may be divided into four main stages casting, engraving, inlaying and oxidizing. It is made from a type of soil found in Bidar. The majority of Indians aren't even aware of this art. Bidriware, on the other hand, is well known and is in demand outside of India also. These goods are currently shipped to roughly 93 different countries. However the traditional method is today undergoing many changes. Next, recently many Bidri Artisans are living their artistic work as it does not pay well. Their socio-economic condition is very poor. Thus new scientific and technological techniques may help the artisans to improve their economic status and preserve the dying Bidriware.. To study a unique art of Karnataka. To enhance and encourage Bidri art. To create interest and knowledge about Bidri art among Indians and foreigner. The study will be a descriptive and analytical one. By and large historical approach has been adopted in the description. All the writings and documents in various languages constitute the primary source. Books, research articles and critical evaluations by experts and other scholar's opinions constitute the secondary sources. Along with survey, interview, questionnaire and field work method adopted in this research. Bidriware is a fusion of major religions and culture of India, as rulers have patronized it from time to time. Bidriware has seen significant diversification in the current century, most likely as a result of national and international exhibits creating new markets. The majority of the demand for Bidri produced nowadays comes from tourists. It helps with the local history writing. It provides employability to many people. It promotes the Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary study.

Keywords: Bidar, Karnataka, Soil, Bahamani dynasty, Metal craft, Heritage

Introduction

India is a nation rich in culture. India has a rich cultural heritage with a long history of arts, crafts, and other creative endeavours. Each region of India has its own unique art and culture. Among its Bidri art is prominent in Karnataka since 14th century Bahamani period ¹ to till date. Its production process consists of four main steps: casting, engraving, inlaying, and oxidation. It gains popularity due to a certain type of soil found in Bidar. ² The word "Bidri" comes from the city of Bidar, which is also the birthplace and current location of the Bidri production core. Afterwards, it is sold throughout India and outside. 95 countries throughout the world are exporters of Bidri products. ³ Bidar and Karnataka gained recognition and popularity thanks to the artistic creations of the Bidri artists based on the effects of globalization and westernization on Indian society. Numerous customary Indian arts and crafts are in a declining state. Also, artists are losing their jobs and losing their artistic vision. The pressing need of the hour is to conserve and spread among the populace our indigenous art and

¹ See for detail Hasoon Khan Sherwani, The Bahmanis of the Deccan, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Ltd, New Delhi, 1985, pp.34-52.

² Handicrafts Bidriware of Bidar, Karnataka Indian Handicrafts Continuing Tradition sponsored by the office of the development Commissioner, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, West Block, Puran, New Delhi. PP.1-5.

³ M.M.Boralkar, Vishwa Prasiddha Bidrikale, Kannadanadu Lekhakara Mattu Odugara Sahakara Sangha Niyamita, Gulbarga, 2011, pp. 35-38 (Kannada).

culture. State and national winners of Bidri artisans, their current standing, and their contribution to Indian art and culture will be highlighted. Bidri art features sustainability and is equipped with a Gtag. It also makes sure that the makers of these things, the craftspeople, benefit economically. In addition to the socio-economic circumstances of Bidri artisans and Bidri art in Karnataka will be reviewed in this paper. To preserve and conserve Bidri Art and popularise Bidriware among the Indians and abroad.

Aims and Objectives of Study:

- To study a unique art of Karnataka. To enhance and encourage Bidri art.
- To create interest and knowledge about Bidri art among Indians and foreigners.
- To study the present status of Bidri Artisans.
- An assessment of their contribution to tradition and culture will be undertaken.

Research Methodology

The research will be both analytical and descriptive. The historical approach has been used most of the time. The study was written using both primary and secondary sources. The research employed questionnaires, surveys, interviews, and observation techniques. In addition to visiting locations connected to Bidri art, taking pictures and recording. Included in the work are books, interviews, newspapers, archives, and museum visits.

Interpretation and Analysis:

History: This craft was brought to Bidar under the Bahmani dynasty.⁴ According to legend, monarch Ahmed Shah Wali imported several highly trained labourers, including some who were specialists in gold and silver work, from Iran to help build Rangin Mahal. Abdul bin Kaiser was skilled in creating exquisite items of outstanding artistic quality and inlaying gold and silver on zinc alloy.⁵ The former Sultan established a training centre at the Mahmud Gawan Madrasa (college) in Bidar because he was very interested in this skill. With the support of the royal family, this craft attained a high level of proficiency. The majority of the artisans this institution trained chose to work in this field. As a result, this trade attained a high level of excellence while flourishing under the royal patronage of the Bahamani rulers, the nobility, and other wealthy families. Bidriware is a significant class of Indian Islamic metalware that was manufactured from the early 17th century to the present. Bidriware items have been crafted into a multitude of shapes and embellished using a wide range of techniques. The rulers and wealthy people of Rajasthan, the Punjab Hill States, Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Western India utilised them, as did the Deccani and Mughal nobility.⁶ Bidri work is exclusively produced in Bidar and Hyderabad these days.

Material and Process: the main basic materials required in this industry are zinc, copper, silver and a particular type of earth. The other subsidiary raw materials needed are lead, tin, copper, sulphate, ammonium, chloride, wax, ground oil, castor oil, resin etc.⁷ The process of production may be divided into four main stages viz, casting, engraving, inlaying and oxidizing.⁸

Techniques of Ornamentation: Bidri art is produced by the following techniques- *Tehnishan*, *Zarnishan*, *Zarbuland*, *Tarkashi*, and *Aftabi*⁹

⁴ See for detail, G.Yazdani, Bidar, Its History and Monuments, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1995, pp.91-100.

⁵ Susan Stronge, Bidriware Inlaid Metalwork from India, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1985, p.15.

⁶ Jagdish Mittal, Bidriware and Damascene work in Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad, 2011, p.11.

⁷ See for detail, Bidar District Gazetteer, Government Press Bangalore, 1977, pp.186-188.

⁸ For detail, Sujit Narayan Sen, Catalogue on Damascene And Bidri Art in the Indian Museum, Indian Museum, Calcutta, 1983, pp.8-10.

⁹ Rehman Patel "Karnataka Bidri Kale Vandu Adhyana, Indian Royal Academy of Art and Culture, Gulbarga,, 2012, pp.110-125.(Kannada).

Unique feature: The soil that is utilised to adorn the art pieces is a distinctive feature of Bidriware craftsmanship. Artists from the interior regions of the Bidar fort¹⁰ gather this soil, which hasn't seen rain or sunlight in generations. Ingredients in the soil give Bidriware its glossy black hue.

Production: We must bear in mind that Bidriware was never a mass-produced craft, and the work thus produced in future will find admirers among those who care about quality and are willing objects.

Marketing: New designs are being produced to cater to modern tastes and increase sales of products. Through the Karnataka Handicrafts Development Corporation and wholesale dealers, the Bidri goods are sold both locally and internationally. The Hindus craftsmen preferred the swastika, the lotus, human figures, etc., while the Muslims craftsmen favoured Persian motifs.¹¹

Bidriware designs: The intricate nature of Bidriware craft demands painstaking efforts from the artists. Today more than 250 types of Bidri articles available in the market. The Bidriware is solid. It does not dent or break unless struck or hurled with great force. It does not rust either. The entire process of manufacture of Bidriware is carried on with great expertise and celerity by different sections of the people.

Culture and society: Unlike the goldsmiths, coppersmiths, ironsmiths, carpenters, and weavers who, in accordance with ancient Indian custom, belonged to a specific caste of artisans (i.e. Barabalutedari) , the Bidri craftspeople did not belong to a hereditary artisan caste. Men from any caste, Muslim or Hindu, may acquire one of its unique industrial techniques. In this field, the importance of a good designer and inlayer's contribution to the final product made them indispensable. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Bidriware industry was in poor condition. Heyne notes that "the men (Bidri workers) complained of want, in an employment which now scarcely supplied food for five families that remain after in the past having been the source of subsistence for a huge number of their own caste"¹². Both Hindu and Muslim women participating the Bidri producing centres. The majority of Bidri artists are Muslims, although many members of much caste are now engaged in this art form. And conversed in Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, and Urdu.

Culture and Folk Practices of the region:

- A lot of trade secrets were passed down orally from generation to generation. Originally, the inlay was made of pure silver, brass, or even gold for royalty. Currently, white metal stands are used instead of pure silver, which has a finer luster.
- Bidriware, a type of metal craft, was heavily dominant during the Bahamani and Nizam periods, and it has the potential to provide fame and wealth to India. It was favoured by numerous monarchs. The nation has gained recognition and popularity thanks to Bidriware's beauty and grace. New technologies can be used to bring this back to life.
- Scientific approaches are used in the craft of Bidriware. Scientific research and development will aid in preserving Bidriware's legacy. This comprises novel materials, restoration processes, presentation strategies, and intervention technologies that can raise the caliber of Bidri metal crafts.
- There is a need to safeguard the use and application of old symbols and designs into innovative forms. Bidriware is a fusion of major religions and culture of India, as rulers have patronized it from time to time. Thus every culture had its influence on the craft. One can call it a fusion of cultures and it requires a chance for global exposure.
- The traditional knowledge and techniques can be clubbed with modern technology to involve local communities, artist groups, and some master artists in the wide production. It is important to protect the appropriation and creative application of antiquated symbols and designs. Bidriware is a blend of India's major religions and culture, since it has been

¹⁰ Rajendra Yarnale, Vishwa Vikhyat Bidri Kale, Kalyana Karnataka Sasnskritik Parishat, Gulbarga, 2004, pp. 44-46.(Kannada)

¹¹ H.Shehbaz, Safrani,. Deccani Drawings Reflections on life, p.11.

¹² Benjamin Heyne, " An account of Biddery (Vidri) ware in India", in " The Asiatic Journal, No.III, March, 1817, pp.220-22.

patronized by emperors on occasion. Therefore, the craft was influenced by every culture. It's possible to refer to it as a fusion of civilizations, and it needs exposure to different cultures.

- Local communities, artist collectives, and a few master artists can be included in the widespread production by combining traditional knowledge and skills with contemporary technology. Create training facilities; Offer tax-free marketing services. Create unique policies to support the economic growth of craftspeople.

Bidri Artisans Conditions:

- According to the craftsmen's Household Survey, the majority of them lack adequate accommodation. Many of them are renting rooms without access to electricity, water, or a bathroom, among other amenities. Their financial situation also appears to be extremely dire, especially considering that their incomes are insufficient to cover even the most basic needs. It might be necessary to find ways to make quick money available to private parties until "Psychological Preparedness" for strong cooperative organizations is attained. Today Government allotted few houses for Bidri artisans. Bidriware articles are much demand in foreign countries but today less artisans are in this industry.¹³
- Bidriware is a fusion of major religions and culture of India, as rulers have patronized it from time to time. It is the responsibility of every national and international artist in the globe to give the bare minimum of facilities and to support the Bidriware craftspeople
- In spite of government facilities, the condition of the art form is very serious. Very few artisans produce Bidriware, the art form is becoming extinct and sale of articles is not satisfactory.¹⁴
- Bidriware has seen significant diversification in the current century, most likely as a result of national and international exhibits creating new markets.¹⁵
- The majority of the demand for Bidri produced nowadays comes from tourists. Instead of huqqas, smokers now need cigar and cigarette boxes and ashtrays; necklaces, cufflinks, and tie pins are also made. A recent trend is the creation of objects that serve no purpose at all. Examples include wall plaques that show zodiac signs and folk dancers, as well as sculptures that take their cue from Ajanta wall paintings.
- It's time for art enthusiasts, marketing firms, and groups that promote handicrafts to band together in order to preserve and elevate this wonderful art form. In order to spread the Bidri art, one must get in touch with government organizations, large hotels, Hollywood and Bollywood film festivals, training facilities, research centers, word-of-mouth publicity, etc.
- Local people should change their sense and uplift this rich art by purchasing it and present it in any occasions as a gift, instead of buying the ordinary plastic and glass items which has no value in front Bidri articles.
- The only ways to stop the declining Bidriware are to employ science and technology, educate Bidriware artisans, and promote excellent craftwork and Bidriware among the younger generation.

Findings and Conclusion:

- An Indian craft is called Bidriware. So it is important to preserve and conserve its components while educating the next generation about this art. Bidar gained notoriety and popularity thanks to the Bidri artisans who spread the word about this dying art form and kept practicing it. Old symbols and designs must be preserved and applied in novel ways; senior craftsmen' knowledge and cultural heritage will be preserved in this way.

¹³ On basis of Interview with Mohd. Salemmuddin , President of Bidar Bidri Youth Mandal, Bidar on 16th Feb .2024.

¹⁴ Abdul Aziz, Development Programmes for Weaker Sections, Printwell publishers, Jaipur,1989.pp.81-100.

¹⁵ See for detail Nalini Waghmare, Socio-Economic Conditions of Bidriware Artisans in Bidar District, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune ,.pp.178-185.

- The Documenting the Bidriware artisan's opinions on Bidriware and its sporadic changes is beneficial for maintaining culture and tradition. The majority of artists carry on this craft through hereditary processes. So, in order to preserve the art for future generations, chronicle it now.
- The Bidriware is an outcome of Indian Knowledge System. It has an impact on the way of life the artisans live and conduct themselves. The art of making which involves knowledge and technology is undergoing tremendous changes.
- Protect Indian culture, which is urgently needed. The current generation ignores Indian culture in favour of focusing more on western culture. Therefore, the research will aid in fostering a love of Indian cultural heritage.
- Including Bidriware in the Curriculum of High Schools and Colleges to promote Indian metal art.
- Royal patronage played an important role to encourage Bidri. From the fourteenth century onwards, especially in eastern lands, the arts of the books provide the best documentation of courtly patronage. It is unfortunate that such antiques are not found in Bidar itself. At least now the government or non government organization should come forward to collect some unique Bidri pieces and should be displayed in the museum for the benefit of coming generation.
- Now days the screen print works which look like Bidri work are available in the market. The government should ban it urgently. Otherwise the 650-year-old art and the artisans will definitely suffer.
- It increases the skill development among the new generation.
- It helps to provide the employment to many people.
- Through it tourist attract towards it.
- It helps with the local history writing. It provides employability to many people. It promotes the Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary study.

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