

## **The Pottery - A Cultural heritage in New Style: An Ethnographic Study in the Villages of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal**

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**Abstract:** The pottery was originated in Neolithic period, present in recent time and will exist in future. The knowledge and skill of pot making is transmitted from generation to generation within the Kumors community. It is a craft distinctive of agrarian economy. Today pottery in India is fairly a large business with so many small and large scale industries making high class pottery all over the nation. In West Bengal, pottery is also one of the most popular crafts made by Kumors mainly found in the districts of Bankura, Murshidabad, Medinipur (both purba and paschim), Nadia and North 24 Parganas. But it is also a mentionable fact in rural West Bengal that many of the Kumor families are unable to cope up with the forces generated by globalization as well as industrialization and urbanization. Therefore, a large number of Kumor families have been giving up their traditional occupations and searching for some alternatives. On the other hand, those Kumor communities are coping with the forces generated by globalization, industrialization and urbanization have been earning huge amount of cash money. It has been happening in the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli where the Kumors are more interested to make globally demanded terracotta figurines and show pieces by giving new shape, size, decoration and colour instead of traditional style. So we can say that, the pottery, a cultural heritage has been changing its old style in various places of west Bengal. The pottery will may exist in new style in future. The traditional pots are requiring preserving for the future generation otherwise these may be extinct from the country. Therefore, the author did field work among the Kumors of above mentioned two villages for finding out the reasons of why and how the size, shape, decoration, colour and types of traditional pottery have been changed by the Kumors.

**Keywords:** Pottery, Kumors, Terracotta figurines, Occupations, Globalization, Industrialization.

### **Preamble**

Cultural heritage often brings to mind artifacts (paintings, drawings, prints, mosaics, and sculptures), historical monuments and buildings, as well as archaeological sites. But the concept of cultural heritage is even wider than that, and has gradually grown to include all evidence of human creativity and expression: photographs, documents, books and manuscripts, and instruments, etc. either as individual objects or as collections. Today, towns, underwater heritage, and the natural environment are also considered part of cultural heritage since communities identify themselves with the natural landscape. Moreover, cultural heritage is not only limited to material objects that we can see and touch. It also consists of immaterial elements: traditions, oral history, performing arts, social practices, traditional craftsmanship, rituals, knowledge and skills transmitted from generation to generation within a community. Intangible heritage therefore includes a dizzy array of traditions, music and dances such as tango and flamenco, holy processions, carniv-

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als, etc. The deliberate act of keeping cultural heritage from the present for the future is known as preservation or conservation.

The pottery was originated in Neolithic period (Beals and Hoijer 1953, 322; Sankalia 1962), present in recent time and will exist in future. The knowledge and skill of pot making is transmitted from generation to generation within the Kumors community. It is a craft distinctive of agrarian economy. Today pottery in India is fairly a large business with so many small and large scale industries making high class pottery all over the nation (Jana 2007). In West Bengal, pottery is also one of the most popular crafts made by Kumors mainly found in the districts of Bankura, Murshidabad, Medinipur (both purba and paschim), Nadia and North 24 Parganas. But it is also a mentionable fact in rural West Bengal that many of the Kumor families are unable to cope up with the forces generated by globalization as well as industrialization and urbanization. Therefore, a large number of Kumor families have been giving up their traditional occupations and searching for some alternatives. On the other hand, those Kumor communities are coping with the forces generated by globalization, industrialization and urbanization have been earning huge amount of cash money. It has been happening in the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli where the Kumors are more interested to make globally demanded terracotta figurines and show pieces by giving new shape, size, decoration and colour rather than traditional productions. So we can say that, the pottery, a cultural heritage has been changing its old style in various places of west Bengal. The pottery will may exist in new style in future. The traditional pots are requiring preserving for the future generation otherwise these may be extinct from the country. Therefore, the author did field work among the Kumors of above mentioned two villages for finding out the reasons of why and how the size, shape, decoration, colour and types of traditional pottery have been changing by the Kumors.

***Aim and Objectives of the Present Study:*** The aim and objectives of present study is to throw light on why and how the Kumors of Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli villages have been changing the size, shape, decoration, colour and types of traditional pottery in new style. Moreover, the present paper gives emphasis on cultural heritage value of this craft as it is inherited from past generation maintained in the present although in new style and bestowed for the benefit of the future generation.

***The areas of Observation:*** The present study has been under taken in two villages, i.e. the Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli villages located under the jurisdiction of P.S: Duttapukur, Sub- Division: Barasat, Dist: North 24 Parganas. These two villages i.e. Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli are located near to the Kolkata metropolitan city. Here the modern system of transportation and communication are available.

***Methodology of the Present Study:*** In order to collect data as per requirement of the above mentioned aim and objective the following methods and techniques have been used. In the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli 50 Kumor families are selected by simple random sampling technique and then their census is taken. The Participant Observation, Intensive interview, Case Studies, and Photographic methods were used for collecting data about impacts of modernization, industrialization and globalization on pottery and how far the potters have been coping with the forces generated by progressively larger system comprising region and nation with a global appeal. Data from secondary sources like books, journals, and internet sources have also been utilized for the present study. Relevant descriptive statistics have also been used to analyze the data properly.

**Findings and Discussions:** The selected 50 families of the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli consisting of 266 souls. Among the 266 people 144 are male and 122 are female (Table-01 shows the distribution). Among the 266 people 146 are Kumor, 57 are Namasudra, 34 are Kayastha, 03 are Brahmins, 11 are Mushahar, and 15 are Muslim (Table-02 shows the distribution). Among the 266 people 122 male people and 78 female people are primarily engaged in pot making (Table-03 and 04 shows the distribution). The table 05 and 06 shows according to caste/communities and age group wise distribution of labour force and non-labour force of the male and female populations respectively of the fifty selected families in the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli. Most of the Kumors made different types of terracotta figurines by hand and a few types of pots by hand and on wheel.

Table 1: Age groups wise distribution of population of the fifty selected families in Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli villages.

SL NO.	Age groups	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
01	0-04	04	1.50	07	2.62	11	4.12
02	05-09	05	1.87	04	1.50	09	3.37
03	10-14	07	2.62	08	3.00	15	5.62
04	15-19	17	6.37	13	4.87	30	11.25
05	20-24	18	6.75	11	4.12	29	10.87
06	25-29	19	7.12	12	4.50	31	11.62
07	30-34	15	5.62	14	5.25	29	10.87
08	35-39	17	6.37	11	4.12	28	10.50
09	40-44	15	5.62	10	3.75	25	9.37
10	45-49	06	2.25	06	2.25	12	4.50
11	50-54	09	3.37	08	3.00	17	6.37
12	55-59	08	3.00	09	3.37	17	6.37
13	60+	04	1.50	09	3.37	13	4.87
Total		144	54.13	122	45.87	266	100

Table 2: Caste/ Community and Sex wise distribution of potter population of fifty selected families in the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli.

SL NO.	Name of the caste/ community	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%	
01	Kumor	Hindu	86	32.33	60	22.50	146	54.75
02	Namasudra		25	9.37	32	12.00	57	21.37
03	Kayastha		18	6.75	16	6.00	34	12.75
04	Brahmin		02	.75	01	.37	03	1.12
05	Mushahar		07	2.62	04	1.50	11	4.12
06	Muslim	Muslim	06	2.25	09	3.37	15	5.62
Total			144	54.13	122	45.87	266	100

Table 3: Age groups wise distribution of Labour force and Non- Labour force of the Male population in the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli.

SL NO.	Age groups	Pot making	%	student	%	No work	%	Total	%
01	0-04	0	0	0	0	04	2.77	04	2.77
02	05-09	0	0	04	2.77	01	.69	05	3.47
03	10-14	02	1.38	05	3.47	0	0	07	4.85
04	15-19	09	6.24	08	5.55	0	0	17	11.79
05	20-24	18	12.49	0	0	0	0	18	12.49
06	25-29	19	13.18	0	0	0	0	19	13.18
07	30-34	15	10.41	0	0	0	0	15	10.41
08	35-39	17	11.79	0	0	0	0	17	11.79
09	40-44	15	10.41	0	0	0	0	15	10.41
10	45-49	06	4.16	0	0	0	0	06	4.16
11	50-54	09	6.24	0	0	0	0	09	6.24
12	55-59	08	5.55	0	0	0	0	08	5.55
13	60+	04	2.77	0	0	0	0	04	2.77
Total		122	84.66	17	11.79	05	3.47	144	100

Table 4: Age groups wise distribution of Labour force and Non- Labour force of the Female population in the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli.

SL NO.	Age groups	Pot making	%	House work	%	Student	%	No work	%	Total	%
01	0-04	0	0	0	0	0	0	07	5.73	07	5.73
02	05-09	0	0	0	0	04	3.27	0	0	04	3.27
03	10-14	02	1.63	0	0	06	4.91	0	0	08	6.55
04	15-19	04	3.27	04	3.27	05	4.09	0	0	13	10.64
05	20-24	05	4.09	05	4.09	01	.81	0	0	11	9.00
06	25-29	09	7.37	03	2.45	0	0	0	0	12	9.82
07	30-34	11	9.00	03	2.45	0	0	0	0	14	11.46
08	35-39	09	7.37	02	1.63	0	0	0	0	11	9.00
09	40-44	09	7.37	01	.81	0	0	0	0	10	8.19
10	45-49	06	4.91	0	0	0	0	0	0	06	4.91
11	50-54	07	5.73	01	.81	0	0	0	0	08	6.55
12	55-59	08	6.55	01	.81	0	0	0	0	09	7.37
13	60+	08	6.55	01	.81	0	0	0	0	09	7.37
Total		78	63.88	21	17.19	16	13.10	07	5.73	122	100

Table 5: Caste/ Community and Age group wise distribution of Labour force and Non- Labour force of the Male population of fifty selected families in the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli

Caste/ Community	Age groups	Pot making	%	Student	%	No work	%	Total	%
Kumor	0-14 Years	01	.69	03	2.08	02	1.38	06	4.16
	15-59 Years	71	49.30	06	4.16	0	0	77	53.43
	60+ Years	03	2.08	0	0	0	0	03	2.08
Namasudra	0-14 Years	0	0	03	2.08	0	0	03	2.08
	15-59 Years	21	14.57	0	0	0	0	21	14.57
	60+ Years	01	.69	0	0	0	0	01	.69
Kayastha	0-14 Years	01	.69	01	.69	01	.69	03	2.08
	15-59 Years	14	9.71	0	0	01	.69	15	10.41
	60+ Years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brahmin	0-14 Years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	15-59 Years	02	1.38	0	0	0	0	02	1.38
	60+ Years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mushahar	0-14 Years	0	0	02	1.38	01	.69	03	2.08
	15-59 Years	04	2.77	0	0	0	0	04	2.77
	60+ Years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Muslim	0-14 Years	0	0	01	.69	0	0	01	.69
	15-59 Years	04	2.77	01	.69	0	0	05	3.47
	60+ Years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		122	84.66	17	11.79	05	3.47	144	100

Table 6: Caste/ Community and Age group wise distribution of Labour force and Non- Labour force of the Female population of fifty selected families in the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli

Caste/ Community	Age groups	Pot making	%	House work	%	Student	%	No work	%	Total	%
Kumor	0-14	01	.81	0	0	06	4.90	05	4.09	12	9.82
	15-59	24	19.11	13	10.65	05	4.09	0	0	42	34.39
	60+	06	4.90	0	0	0	0	0	0	06	4.90
Namasudra	0-14	0	0	0	0	02	1.63	02	1.63	04	3.27
	15-59	20	16.38	03	2.45	02	1.63	0	0	25	20.47
	60+	03	2.45	0	0	0	0	0	0	03	2.45
Kayastha	0-14	01	.81	01	.81	0	0	0	0	02	1.63
	15-59	13	10.64	01	.81	0	0	0	0	14	11.46
	60+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brah-	0-14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	15-59	0	0	01	.81	0	0	0	0	01	.81

min	60+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mu-shahar	0-14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	15-59	03	2.45	01	.81	0	0	0	0	04	3.27
	60+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mus-lim	0-14	0	0	0	0	01	.81	0	0	01	.81
	15-59	07	5.73	01	.81	0	0	0	0	08	6.55
	60+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		78	63.93	21	17.21	16	13.10	07	5.73	12 2	100

According to the opinion of the Kumors of the above mentioned two villages the demand of traditional productions has been going down due to impact of mainstream market expansion, industrialization and urbanization, modernization, and globalization. The reasons which are generated due to aforesaid factors are mentioned below:

**Impacts of Mainstream Market Expansion:** Near about 20 to 25 years ago the Kumors produced traditional productions like *Hari, Kolshi, Sara, Karai* etc. This earthen ware had a great demand in the locality. During this period the local people believed that the food cooked in earthen pot was good for health. So the local people cooked food in earthen utensils, preserved water in earthen pitcher, preserved food grains in earthen container. So the earthen pots had a great demand at that time. In later period the mainstream markets have expanded gradually in this locality. Now the local people easily access the local markets like Barasat, Duttapukur as well as Kolkata from where they can easily purchase fashionable industrial products, plastic products according to their choice. So, at present the local people are less interested to purchase earthen pots.

**Impact of Industrialization and Urbanization:** Different types of utensils made of different metals are now manufacturing in the industries for example, Plastic, Pharmacol glass, China clay, Aluminum, Iron etc made utensils are available in the local markets. The local people had been using metal utensils in domestic purpose because these are more fashionable, superb-looking and durable than earthen pots. In previous time in the locality the earthen glass, tea cups were used in domestic purpose as well as in ceremonies and festivals. But now- a- days the caterers are contracted to serve the foods to the guests during marriage, rice feeding and funeral ceremonies. The caterer used plastic or glass made utensils to serve the food. Even in confectionary, tea stalls, the plastic, paper, glass made utensils are being used instead of earthen pots. So the demand of earthen pots has fallen down in the locality. Therefore, the Kumors had to invent some other alternative products for sustaining their traditional occupation in future. At present time most of the Kumors in these two villages produce mainly terracotta figurines, show pieces, religious items, plates, glasses etc. These products have a great demand in regional, national and global markets.

**Impact of Modernization:** The inhabitants of Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli villages and surrounding areas have come in contact with more modern style of life than the past. The local people are now more interested to use and decorate their house by fashionable utensils as show-pieces. They thought that the earthen utensils used by the backdated people only. Therefore, the local people purchase industry made fashionable goods of different metals by expending more money instead of earthen pots. So the Kumors had to face challenge of modernization. They are now producing various nice looking colourful earthen ware than industrial products like flower vase, pillars, *var* etc.

**Impacts of Globalization:** The Kumors of the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli are coping up with the forces generated by globalization. The Kumors of these two villages have been producing their products as per global demands instead of traditional products like *Hari* (Pot for boiling rice), *Kolshi* (Pitcher), *Karai* (Frying pan), *Sara* (Earthen lid), etc and different types of terracotta figurines like the Lord Ganesh, the Goddess Laxmi, Lord Buddha, Rama, Laxman, Sita, Sun God, different animals and other show-pieces since last few years. A few Kumors of these two villages have been making Glasses, Plates, *Tather dali* (Plates for giving marriage gifts), *Ghat* (sacred water pot), *Khuri* (Ice-cream cup) etc. These products have a good demand in local as well as in national markets. Some of the Kumors have been producing globally demanded various types of religious articles like *Dhunochi* (Incense pot), *Laxmir Ghat* (Pitcher for depositing money), *Ghat* (sacred water pot), different types of *Pradips* (earthen lamps) etc. The Kumors of these villages are also making locally, nationally, and internationally demanded different types of colourful pillars and dustbins. According to the opinion of the Kumors all the above mentioned products have a great demand in the local, national and international markets. The demand of the Lord Ganesh, Lord Buddha, Goddess Laxmi, colourful Pillers and Dustbins has been increasing day-by-day in the international markets. These items are now exported to various countries like Japan, Thailand, China, South Korea, North Korea, Srilanka, and USA. The merchants who are living in metropolis like New Delhi, Jaipur, Bombay, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Madras, Lucknow used to purchase these products from the Kumors of the Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli villages. These products are exported to the above mentioned countries by these merchants. The demand of glossy and colourful terracotta figurines as well as pots have been increasing day-by-day in regional, national, and global markets. Therefore, the Kumors of the above mentioned villages are producing pots and figurines of various colours and shapes imbibing new style.

**From old Style of Production to New Style:** To produce such glossy polished terracotta figurines and pots of new style suitable clay is required. The sticky alluvial soil is suitable for making such glossy and polished figurines and pots. This alluvial clay is sticky in nature and need not requires mixing any type of tempering materials. It is a recent alluvial soil of the river Ganga and is not available in this locality. Such alluvial soil is only available in Canning and adjoining areas of South 24 Parganas in West Bengal. Therefore, the Kumors have to bring such alluvial clay from Canning area of South 24 Parganas. There are so many clay merchants in Canning area who supply clay to the Kumors of Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli villages. The Kumors of these villages request to any of the clay merchants over telephone or mobile phone to supply clay as per requirement. After getting order, the clay merchants supply the clay to his client as early as possible by a truck. Each truck of clay worth is Rs.8000 only. After receiving the clay, the Kumors transfer the money to the bank account of the merchant through net banking system. Sometimes, the clay merchant visits to his client's house personally and collects cash personally from the clients. The Kumors of these two villages pulverized the clay and then it is shifted through an iron sieve to find out the impurities of the clay. The glossiness, finishing and polishing of the pottery depends upon the kneading of the clay. Well-kneaded clay produces well-finished, polished and glossy pots and figurines. Generally the Kumors of the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli kneaded the clay by stamping. This kneaded clay is further kneaded by means of a machine. After kneading in the machine it becomes fit for making polished and glossy pots. The kneading machine kneaded a lot of clay in shorter time-period which reduced the labour cost. Most of the Kumor families possess a kneading machine. Those Kumors who have not a kneading machine used to rent from the neighbours. So the Kumors of these villages have introduced modern tech-

nology for kneading clay. Even the Kumors of these two villages have been using various chemicals instead of clay to make fashionable pillars, dustbins and show pieces like Mat, Gypsum, Resin, Accelerator, and Catalyst.

The Kumors of these two villages frequently change the shape, colour and decoration of the pots and figurines to allure the customers. The Kumors have been involving the artists and designers to change the shape, colour and decoration of a pot and figurine to bring new style of old one. After giving new form and style of a pot or a figurine the dices are prepared. These dices are used for a few months to make pots and figurines and then it is replaced by new one. In such way the Kumors of these two villages have been producing new types of productions regularly. By this way they have been trying to increase the demand of their products in local, national and global markets. The Kumors of these villages made pots on electric motor driven wheel which reduces the physical labour and save the time of the Kumors. The Kumor can work on such wheel throughout the day with minimum physical effort and produces maximum numbers of pot. By introducing such modern technologies, the Kumors reduce their physical effort leading to increase profit. The Kumors of the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli, the wet pots are dried under a shed at least for one day. If the wet pots or figurines are kept under direct sun light for drying, cracks may be appeared on the pots or figurines. The cracked pots or figurines are valueless to them because these remain unsold. For appearing the glossiness on the pots or figurines the Kumor rubbed the same with a wet cloth. It is done when the pots or figurines are semi-dried. A few Kumors colour their products with terracotta colour. The colouring is done after drying of the pots or figurines properly. The coloured and uncoloured products are then fired in a *Bhati* (Kiln). The uncoloured fired pots and figurines are then coloured by applying either distemper or synthetic enamel colour. They use spray machine to colour the pots and figurines. The spray machine helps to colour evenly on the outer surface of the pots and figurines and also reduce time and labour leading to increase profit. The Kumors also engage painters to paint the pots and figurines for giving new colourful thematic style. They continue such new colourful thematic style for a few months and then it is replaced by another one. One day after colouring the pots or figurines is again polished by burnish (Lac liquid) for appearing glossiness over the outer surface of the products. It is done with the help of a spray machine. Before polishing, the artist paints the eyes of the figurines. These finished products are then packed in a paper or wooden box. Only one pot or figurine is inserted in a box. A large number of such boxes are packed in a large wooden or paper-made box. The large pot or figurine is rolled up with straw, *Farmacol* or sponge and then packed in a wooden box. The straw, *farmacol* or sponge will protect the products from outside blow. The glossy colourful pots and figurines have a great demand in regional, national and global markets. So, the Kumors of these villages engage in such types of productions and earn huge amount of cash money.

The Kumors of these two villages have been able to grow tie-ups with the pottery merchants of several metropolises like New Delhi, Joipur, Bombay, Jodhpur, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Chennai and other places of the nation. They also foster tie-up with regional merchants of Dakshindari in Kolkata, Siliguri, Durgapur and Asansol. The Kumor transports the products under order by a truck to merchant. After receiving the ordered products the merchant transfer total amount of money in bank account of the Client. The Kumors of the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli give advertisement about their products in internet as well as in local and national craft fairs like west Bengal handicraft fair by giving a stall in the fair. The pottery merchants are also give advertisement in T.V channels and internet about their products. The pottery merchants of New Delhi, Joipur, Bombay, Jodhpur, Lucknew, Bangalore, Hyderabad have grown a network with the merchants of different countries like Japan, Thailand, South and North Korea,

China, USA, Sri-Lanka and other countries. The Indian pottery merchants exported their goods either by air or by ship to the merchants of the foreign countries. The money is transferred through net banking system. The glossy coloured figurines of Lord Ganesh, Lord Buddha, Goddess Laxmi, a few types of Pillars, and Dustbins have a great demand in the above mentioned countries. In the Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli villages, pots are not only made by Kumors but also by the sub-caste of Namasudra and the people from Muslim community. Due to the global forces the demand of their products is increasing day- by- day in global markets. So the Namasudra and the Muslim people are being engaged in this business.

**Concluding Remarks:** In rural West Bengal, many of the Kumor communities are unable to coping up with the forces generated by mainstream market expansion, industrialization and urbanization, modernization and globalization for which a large number of Kumor communities are bound to give up their traditional occupation and searching the alternatives. Those Kumors are able to cope up with the forces generated by mainstream market expansion, industrialization and urbanization, modernization and globalization are presently able to earn huge amount of cash money. It happens in case of the villages Chaltaberia and Ramkrishnapalli. Every Kumor families want to hold up their traditional occupation which sustained their forefathers and made their social identity as well as occupational transmission generating a type of socio- economic heritage. Thus the cultural heritage of pottery got its continuum. But now- a-days being mounted with global economic pressure they can not bear this heritage with traditional technology, mechanism, style and skill. So to cope up with modern trends of global markets they are to adopt new skill, to innovate new technology and to invent new style in order to keep the survival of heritage- handicraft like pottery. But the rural Kumors, if rendered assistance both from governmental or non- governmental sectors, it may help to revive their traditional occupation in modern form and thus the Kumors may be able to cope up with the forces generated by mainstream market expansion, industrialization and urbanization, modernization and globalization in the jobs of pottery making as their primary occupation.

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