

**CLAY BASED WOMEN WORKERS IN SELECTED DISTRICTS /TOWNS
OF
WEST BENGAL & ODISHA :
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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Abstract

The basic objective of this project is to locate the clay based workers as traditional family based workers in different potters' colony in India, the kinds of work they are involved in and the overt as well as covert patriarchal nature of the occupation, by understanding the unsaid gender division of work and how clay work is intrinsically related to religion of India.

For this purpose we have selected two cities as sample areas – Kumbharpada in Puri and Kumartuli in Kolkata.

Traditional family based occupations in India is part of informal sector economy in India. There are various sub categories under informal sector jobs. For this project, home based workers have been taken into consideration. Home based workers (HBWs) are a particular class of workers who work at home or elsewhere in accordance with their own choice to supply goods or services as per prior agreement with customers/establishment. Their remunerations are included in the price of the goods or services provided by them and they do not employ workers on a regular basis. Workers, especially women workers have found home-based work a way of combining work and care responsibilities with least strain on family and community norms and expectations. These home-based workers include own-account workers, employers and home-workers from the above mentioned categories of self employed workers. The opposite of HBWs are Non-home based self-employment workers who are self-employed with own account trading but carry out the trading outside the household. They may work in areas near their household or may be in distant localities. They may be working as single entrepreneurs or may be helped by other family members or may in some cases employ wage labourers on a permanent as well as on a temporary basis, as part-timers or as full time workers.

This project deals with a special kind of home based work which have been prevalent in India for ages. They are known as traditional family based occupations. They may in some particular cases be placed under the wage-worker component of the unorganized sector of work, although in many other cases it may fall under self-employment.

Self-employed women come under both the categories of home-based and non-home based workers. According to WIEGO, self employment workers are those who own their own businesses, and are exposed to financial risk as they bear the cost of faulty or substandard work done under business contract; moreover, they have control over the job they do, how they do it, when and where they do it and whether they do it themselves, or hire other people on terms of their own choice to do the work that they have agreed to undertake, and can provide the same services to more than one person or business at the same time, provide the required

materials to complete the job; provide equipment and machinery necessary for the job other than the small tools of the trade; have a fixed place of business where, for example, materials and equipment can be stored; they further agree on a price for the job, provide their own insurance cover, such as public liability; control their own working hours in fulfilling the job obligations.

The traditional family based workers are known by their occupations for instance potters, fisher folk etc. Such kinds of jobs are still surviving in the present scenario but are facing extreme challenges, especially from newer job opportunities in the economy. The people belong to the same community or caste and are popularly known as biradris or as jaat-bhais (people belonging to the same jaat or caste/community). They speak a similar language and the same dialect and possess a special bonding, areas retain characteristics of two systems at the same time – the traditional and the modern, i.e. the village and the slum. This project highlights a typical home based family occupation known as pottery.

Clay-based work and/or pottery are a traditional kind of work practiced in India since ages. The artisans in this traditional occupation of pottery are known to the world in different local languages as 'Kumbhars', 'Kumars', 'Kumbhakars', 'Pals', potters etc. The term 'pottery' is derived from the Latin word 'Potium' or French word 'Poteric' which means drinking vessels. It is also applied to other similar kind of clay products. This project focuses on the existence of this traditional occupation in a city in India – Kolkata, the land of culture, heritage, festivals and idol-worshippers. Kumartuli – a potters' colony in Kolkata is the sample area selected for this purpose. The project also tried to locate the clay based workers in this potters' colony, the kinds of work they are involved in and the overt as well as covert patriarchal nature of the occupation, by understanding the unsaid gender division of work. Clay-based work and the kinds of work that can be clubbed under this are:

- Pot making
- Bhar (small food containers) making
- Decorative item making
- Model making
- Idol making

In this study we shall describe in detail two communities of potters working for a major religious institution, and to reconnoiter the understanding of the potter's work. In Puri, the religious centre that is in context is the Jagannatha temple, which has become a destination of national importance over the years and in Kolkata the religious institution is primarily Durga Puja alongwith the other pujas taken place all throughout the year. In Kolkata, I have taken Kumartuli as my sample area of study.

The entire project has highlighted how the pottery and clay modeling industry has been surviving over the years and how the women have played a major role as unpaid labourers to support their male counterparts, business and their families to survive even under extensive financial and other adverse situations.