



Insights Of Doll Makers At Vilachery In Madurai District

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Introduction

A country as diverse as India is symbolized by the plurality of its culture. India has one of the world's largest collections of songs, music, dance, theatre, folk traditions, performing arts, rites and rituals, paintings and writings that are known, as the 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' (ICH) of humanity. In this context folklore is the expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people. It encompasses the traditions common to that culture, subculture or group. These include oral traditions such as tales, proverbs and jokes. They include material culture, ranging from traditional building styles to handmade toys common to the group. Folklore also includes customary lore, the forms and rituals of celebrations, folk dances and initiation rites. Each one of these, either singly or in combination, is considered a folklore artifact. Just as essential as the form, folklore also encompasses the transmission of these artifacts from one region to another or from one generation to the next. Folklore is not something one can typically gain in a formal school curriculum. Instead, these traditions are passed along informally from one individual to another either through verbal instruction or demonstration.

In this research, folklore artisans of Vilachery in Madurai district who make dolls round the year are at focus. Every year, Vilachery artisans are busy ahead of festival season. Vilachery is located in the southern periphery of Madurai city where around 200 families of artisans reside and involve themselves in making clay and papier-mâché dolls since three decades. In the initial stage the artisans of Vilachery used to make only clay pots. Later, they broadened their horizon and started to make dolls. They mostly make dolls for "Navarathrigollu" arrangements ("Navarathri festival" is commonly a nine day ritual during which dolls are arranged (called Gollu) at home and temples. The displayed gollu depicts different characters from epics and deities of puranas), idols during "Vinayagar Chathurthi" and nativity sets during "Christmas". Besides this they also make dolls for other purposes.

Objectives

- To understand the status of doll makers.
- To identify the problems faced by the doll makers.

Methodology

The study was conducted at Vilachery in Madurai district. The research design employed in the study is descriptive. The artisans who are engaged in making dolls were the units of the study. 50 doll makers were selected using simple random sampling (lottery method). The samples of the study were both men and women workers. Primary data was collected from the above said respondents through narrative inquiry, which is a form of qualitative research

Results and Discussion

The 50 samples of the study were both male and female workers whose age varied between 20 and 80. All the artisans, who make handicraft goods, belong to Hinduism. Majority of them belong to Most Backward community. The women workers outnumber the men for certain reasons which include less physical power, daily wage basis, same locality, family enterprise and leisure time activity. Though the handicraft activity is run as a family enterprise, majority of the respondents live in nuclear family. As far as educational qualification is concerned, even degree and diploma holders are involved in this activity. Persons with high educational qualification do not feel that they are involved in unrelated job. Since doll making is mainly run as a family enterprise, majority of the respondents are the proprietor of the enterprise. The family members who help them mainly are spouses, parents and parents-in-law, grown up children, and their relatives. Only few are working as wage labourers.

Doll makers need experience to bring the perfect piece out. Experience provides the basic skills and techniques to shape up the clay into an elegant doll. Nearly half of the population had an experience of 10-30 years. This wide range of experience helps them to share the knowledge about the process of doll making with the co-workers. The doll makers use three types of materials to produce dolls. They are plaster of paris, clay and papier-mâché. The raw material 'clay' is collected from the Vilachery tank. The goods made by the doll makers are gollu set, Christmas set, pot, evil eye mask, kitchenware, flower pot etc. Not all the respondents do the same kind of goods. It depends upon the space, human power, financial support, knowledge and influence.

The general problems associated with the doll making work are financial restrictions, weather conditions, lack of raw materials, man power shortage, spatial inadequacy, business rivals, high paint rates and unsold goods. The health problem linked with the nature of work are back pain, knee pain, leg pain, allergy, throat infection, neck pain, weight gain, body heat, tiredness and head ache. Although, the above said problems seemed to be trivial in the initial stage, their consequences in the long run may ruin their health conditions. Majority of the respondents have availed the loan from either the bank or the money lender. Women borrow money with the help of Self Help Groups. As it is based on seasonal income, the workers face financial problem quite often.

Indian culture includes festivities and celebrations. The best season for them to sell their goods are Navarathri, Vinayagarchathruthi, Christmas, Karthigai and on other auspicious days. Doll makers take up both direct and indirect selling of their goods. On the eve of Vinayagarchathurthi, Navarathri and Christmas,

they put up stalls in the bazaars and on roadside. They also export the products with the help of agents as it attracts the people abroad. Many buyers also prefer to buy the goods by visiting their workplace. Some doll makers are also involved in online business (marketing) as it gives them more hope for better future career.

Conclusion

Culture plays a significant role in the development of any nation. It represents a set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices. Culture and creativity manifest themselves in almost all economic, social and other activities. No doubt it plays a vital role in the lifestyle of doll makers. Therefore it is important to conserve such artisans in order to keep the tradition and culture alive. They regret that only known customers visit their workplace to buy dolls directly from them. To resolve this and to support their livelihood they request the government to conduct exhibitions once or twice a year and uplift the life of doll makers. Technology has set its foot in every nook and corner of the society. To upgrade the doll making, technological support is very much needed. In addition to this doll makers may be provided training by institute of fine arts who are well versed in handicraft which would pave way for development.

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