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'PAST' AND 'PRESENT' OF KNOWLEDGE : HOW IT BECOMES OUTDATED

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INTRODUCTION

We have glimpses of historical knowledge from lithic ages onwards yet, minimal information is there about crafts of Kerala during these periods upon the knowledge system of the same field this research work is footed upon. Since then artisans and craftsmen had journeyed through differing stages of specialization. Initially, handicrafts were originated and grown-up as facilitating agencies of production process. With the passage of time incremented human wants multiplied the ratio of handicrafts. With the extension of trade artisanal products became commodities in exchange for money. Intensive specialization and technological orientation led to increase in the quantity produced. Profit motive and the resultant market competition along with monopolization of production and distribution became the guiding principles of economy during industrial phase. This necessitated the knowledge system of traditional artisans to be modified, restructured and modernized frequently. Above mentioned trend was once more strengthened in service oriented digital society of contemporary Kerala. Reluctance in synonymous undertakings due to variegated reasons are major reasons behind the perils faced by those classes contemporarily. Here, an endeavour is made to unravel the situational nature of artisanal knowledge pattern defined according to the functionality of space with which these categories occupy with in various and forthcoming occasions which reemphasizes the need of periodic revisions of their workability to maintain sustainability of occupation.

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TRACING ARTISANS AND CRAFTSMEN IN HISTORY

Artisanal history of Kerala might have its depth up to the willful effort that man made for his existence, i. e. from the time of demarcation made between 'humanized space' and 'space of nature'[1]. We have very little information about stone implements of Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic ages. Chief medium of livelihood during these phases was hunting, so, choppers were adopted as tools suitable for dealing wild animals. They were made out of flakes of stones carved out with the support of another stone. Pre-historic rock arts are also significant substantiations proving craftsmanship which are in formats of engravings, paintings and hit marks. A few among them depict pictures while others compose of symbols. Besides, there are graffiti marks (pictures or writing in the walls erected at public places) and hand prints on the walls of caves. Comparatively small stone apparatuses with sharpened edges known as 'microliths' came into application in Neolithic stage like small blades and points. This exhibited a transformation from somewhat crude to polished and pointed lithic implements. Microliths were reported from hill slops and plains of Kerala and might increasingly aided fishing, hunting, food gathering, small scale cattle rearing and primitive form of farming. Stone made hand axes were the major implements of the period which were smooth surfaced, sharp edged and technically having high standard. The art works of the same phase comprised of rock carvings and paintings portraying numerous geometrical shapes and scenes. Those lines carved were deep and shallow giving clues about the application of honed devices. The concept of agricultural production commenced in Kerala exactly during Neolithic period, so lithic tools from then onwards were primarily destined for activities like piercing, chopping etc.

After 1000 BC iron came to be in wide use for making implements. Occasional wars also made the know-how in weapon making a necessity. Remains of swords, daggers, knives, arrowheads, hooks and points justify the presence of hunting communities, cultivators and primitive soldiers. Successively, certain other farming instruments like sickles and ploughshares were reported from regions like Wayanadu. Ornaments made of gold, silver and copper were other items gathered as remains. Therefore, artisanal work for the first time bifurcated to include the extra-productive sector i. e. ornament making. Archaeologists and historians claim that washing of gold and iron,

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copper and silver smelting were practiced in contemporary Kerala itself. Use of metals facilitated more edging and reduced chances of tools being fractured which lightened the workload and multiplied production. Erection of megalithic monuments, which were memorial stones, was another feature typifying artistry. Megalithic monuments have many lay outs including that of rock-cut chambers, thoppikkallu (hat stone), kutakkallu (umbrella stone), urn burials, menhirs (memorial stones) etc. Metal objects, objects made of semi-precious stones and earthen wares in various shapes and sizes were unearthed from these sites. Stone furniture like benches and cots can also be found inside rock chambers. Megalithic potteries were painted in black and red colour and have many decorative designs painted upon them. There were wheel made and hand made urns, a few of those were big enough to contain burial deposits.

In Sangam literature (composed approximately between 3rd century B. C. and 3rd century C. E.) there is references about hunting, food gathering, cattle rearing, shifting cultivation, craft production etc. Metal smelting, glass making, weaving, pottery making and stone cutting were technically advanced and which found place in contemporary literature. It is presumed that a group of full time craftsmen might have lived in the headquarters of chieftains. Besides, work specialization based on geographical zones of inhabitation (tinai) came into existence. People started wearing cotton and silk dresses and ornaments made out of seashells. This denotes the diversification which took place in crafts with intensification of production of daily necessities and luxury goods. There were hints about 'Kuravar', 'Kusavar' and 'Asaris' in Sangam literature who might be artisans. With the increment in production a collective of people known as 'Vanikar' (Traders) initiated their transaction in excess products.

After 5th century C. E. agriculture became more systematic and seasonal which was then the largest medium of subsistence. Spiritualization of production and distribution commenced at that time through donation of cultivable plots to Brahmins, Buddhists and Jains. Artisans and craftsmen had their major responsibility of aiding farmers in the production process. Emerging classes like 'Vannans' (Washermen) and 'Thachans' (Carpenters) gradually gained significance in society. When a plot was

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granted it was a custom to hand over to recipients' craftsmen inhabited there along with. Cultivation progressed from more fertile and marshy riverine tracts to the hinterlands which might demanded more improved tools for clearing thick forests and making the soil ready for farming. Therefore, when the notion of space forwarded from food gathering tribal zones to food producing agrarian zones the knowledge wanted for manufacturing suitable instruments also elaborately modified. With the beginning of settled life space became bounded in contrary to the open space of tribal period which led to the allocation of defined locales to each and every knowledge systems to flourish. Citations are available about irrigational facilities like ponds and tanks from 11th century C. E. onwards. Agriculture became a cluster of tasks like ploughing, sowing, weeding, harvesting etc. which again widened the scope of activities of artisans. So, hereditary and obligatory nature of artisanal work commenced during that time.

Construction of structural temples made additional heterogeneity in the realm of handicrafts. Manufacturing of sanctum sanctorum, mandapas (pavilion in a temple built for artistic performances) and gateways combined with sculptural activities provided ample opportunities to express artistic abilities. Word Kammala, a synonym of craftsman in Malayalam, might have derived from word Kannala in Tamil which means 'one who gives the eyes'. This word points towards the idol maker or painter coming forward at the time of consecration and paints the idol's eyes.[2] In Ceylon this act is known as 'Nethramangalya' through which the idol is vested with divine powers before which it is only a lump of metal or clay.[3] This signals to the fact of priority of craftsmen in the then society which is religiously oriented. Kammalas (Craftsmen) including 'Asari' (Carpenters), 'Musari' (Stone masons), 'Kollan' (Blacksmiths), 'Chaliyar' (Weavers) and 'Thattan' (Goldsmiths) were subsisted with great esteem. Communities of artisans working for the temple began to settle down near those shrines itself causing the origination of more and more definiteness and locked spaces. Added to temples there were mansion of local chieftains as the testimonies of constructional capability of contemporary people. These abodes had wooden and metal works along with many other efforts of beautification. Manufacturing of 'nalukettu'[4], 'ettukettu'[5] and multi-storied houses announces magnificence of workmanship.

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Sanskrit word Kala means a divine attribute and Shilpa denotes a ceremonial act in Aswalayana Srautasuthra. Shilpa was a complex concept consisting of art, craft, labour, rite, ritual, ingenuity, form and creation. So Shilpi was more than a mere technical performer and became an agent of magical and divine powers.[6] Some of the early shrines were constructed out of timber and the social grading of carpenters went high corresponding to their unavoidability in works. Later, temples began to be manufactured with stone and thereby stone masons began to overshadow carpenters in the subject of social rank. This defends the conception of direct linkage between the self-esteem of an artisan and the importance of his craft. In many parts of India Vishwakarmas (artisans) self-dignified by addressing themselves as Vishwa Brahmanas. Similar to Brahmins they combined the majestic epithet of Acharya along with personal names.[7] This is a proof of 'symbolic landscaping' where a category upheaves its position and location in a graded society with the aid of rituals. Thus as stated by Kant spacing becomes a 'mental process'. Those who had power often tried to amass the work force around them and thereby during medieval period temples and local rulers had given sufficient patronage to them. In the opinion of Foucault medieval period displayed 'space of emplacement' which means 'a hierarchical ensemblance of places'[8] which in the context of Kerala connotes a pattern where the center of authority is encircled by hierarchies defined by holding of power positions. In such a categorization artisans were placed closest to those who had power. In other words, as the 'absolute space' of Newton places occupied by different categories of humans became solid grids.

With the coming of colonialism drastic changes took place in the fields of raw materials used, styles adopted, procedure of production etc. Many new artistic domains had their genesis like ship building. Construction of forts in multiple shapes and sizes by using a variety of materials was another need of the day. Introduction of cash crops in the late medieval Kerala aided artisans in some way. For instance, farming of coconut trees made coir making an active industry. Emergence of markets mostly nearest to religious centers where people could buy or sell products led to the commodification and marketization of their products and services. In 19th century Christian missionaries introduced some small-scale industries in various parts of Kerala, for example, Basel Mission promoted roof tile industry and weaving in

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Northern Kerala. Introduction of factories where specialist workers can sit together and work became a major shift in order to face excess market demands. Many factories and warehouses with peculiar architectural configurations were built. During the 'era of hardware' or 'heavy modernity' cumbersome and weighty machines were introduced for facilitating production.[9] Benjamin Franklin portrayed man as a tool making animal. Marketization was culminated in monopolization of production and distribution by some sections who could cope-up with those abrupt changes happening in society in every single moment. Industrialization with the aid of machinery led to the acceleration of time and 'annihilation of space by time.'[10] Dense filling of space in a lesser time was the peculiarity of modernism. Max Weber's 'instrumental rationality' points that time should be mastered and thereby the value return that is the space can be intensified. Einstein's relativity theory (1915) prompted scholars to consider space as extendable. Foucault opined that, the notion of 'open space' spread through mechanization in modern world provided a death blow to the medieval conception of 'bounded space'.[11] Workers who could not fill the extended space with their age-old modes of manufacturing gradually withered away from the scene and the same was the fate of traditional artisans too. Industries with the sole motive of profit maximization made the work condition hazardous and kept wages very low.

Globalization unlocked the doors of world market to all and further improvement in production became a need which the hand skill of traditional workers can hardest to achieve. With the launching of 'knowledge economy' dispensation of fresh knowledge begins to get prominence in craft works too. Gradually machines began to supplant the role of labourers and then onwards their status was deteriorated as managers of machines which seldom demands any artistic brilliance. Capital in craft works became weightless facilitating longer and faster conveyance and labour-capital bondage began to diminish due to mechanization of production, alienation of products from producers and extreme marketization. Disembodiment of labour is another visible trend of post-modern societies. In the opinion of Antonio Negri, people began to engage in 'immaterial labour'[12] which decreases the significance of traditional crafts. Globalization and progress in technologies made it possible the easy accession of services and goods as well as information and knowledge (Open Space)

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by people across the world. This trend in some way nullified the expertise of regional work force. Couclelis denoted that, a person's location will reveal the activity he is engaged with in the modern period, still, he continued that, there is a weakening of correlation between activities and places in technological societies. Same activity can be undertaken from different locations and a single place can host different activities. Couclelis termed this trend as 'fragmentation of activity'.[13] There happens a transition from 'space of places' to 'space of flows' having multi-national dimension in which the physical space is often replaced by virtual and symbolic communicative space.[14] Relph differentiated 'space' from 'place' and initiated the concept of 'placelessness' in the case of post-modern societies. Places are according to him, 'significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world.'15 Humans want to identify themselves with place, which he invariably related with the notion of 'existential insideness' – a situation of unconscious, deep immersion in place. He went on with the theory of placelessness which is 'the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes'. Thereby, Rattansi and Phoenix argued that postmodern identity is decentered, dynamic, multiple, fluid and fragmented.[16] Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler stated about 'breaking with the past' which means avoidance of spatio-temporal modalities resulting in the outdating of existing modals and adoption of fresh ones in tune with spatio-temporal modes of contemporary period.[17] None of the existing modals are considered as authentic and so there is a need for constant redefinition. This is described by Castells as the 'syndrome of impermanence'.

Below description maps the life condition of traditional goldsmiths in modern Kerala

Gold ornament making was an active sphere of human involvement in ancient period itself. From the early past onwards the utility sphere, dimension and range of it has diverted greatly. Many sites of Kerala were reported to have gold deposits from classical times onwards. Customary goldsmiths were scattered communities which became an organized collective during middle ages. Their status became upgraded by designing ornaments for deities and elite and royal figures especially womenfolk in specific patterns and fashions. After industrialization excess money within the hold of individuals made the demand for gold more excessive especially for meeting bulky wedding needs and it's acquisition gradually became a status symbol. With the

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increment in want handling of gold became a significant sector in business and goldsmiths shifted their work place to backyards of jewelries. They became employees and wage labourers of shop keepers. Parallel to that, their artistic expertise which once earned them affluence and prestige then onwards became commodities and services concentrated in markets. After 1990s gold became an item of profound investment where the constant rise in price attracted investors widely. Therefore, the journey of gold is from an embellishment to a material asset and finally to an immaterial capital in the form of Gold Exchange-Traded Fund (ETF)[18] or Electronic Gold Receipt (EGR)[19]. Migration of Keralites to West Asia, European countries and America enhanced per-capita income and purchasing power further stimulated depositors. Gold switched it's status from a commodity of local interest to an asset under international sway. Today, there are certified goldsmiths and licensed gold dealers in Kerala. Job opportunities in gold industry stepped up tremendously in tune with the growth of investment. Individual compartments of gold business like stone cutting, designing, carat testing, soldering and polishing became areas in need of separate and specific specialization. Yet, very few contemporary goldsmiths design habitual ornaments of Kerala especially for meeting wedding needs. The prevalent art of ornament making in Kerala is very difficult to master in a short while and such adornments are primarily handicrafts, thereby, people engaged with those are reducing in numbers day by day. Modern varieties like lightweight ornaments attract today's population much because of the rising price of gold. When young goldsmiths of Kerala blindly imitate the styles of migrant workers a huge number of traditional goldsmiths keep themselves aloof from mechanization and emerging tendencies in the sphere. The reforming status of gold from an ornament to wear to an item of capital investment aiming mere profit is another hurdle in path ornament designers.

CONCLUSION

Artisanal knowledge as most other sectors of information is context specific in nature. 'Knowledge is a set of information that arises out of and guides people in a situation.'[20] Then, similarities in circumstances can lead to reemployment of existing pattern of knowledge. But, when modifications occurred in structure and orientation of society it requires a thorough rebuilding in existent cognitive realm. Therefore, knowledge acquisition is a highly valued ongoing process in which a person is in

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regular intellectual contact with reality.[21] Context is defined as a group of all knowledge that can be evoked by people facing a situation.[22] Each contexts may donate something to the intellectual heritage of existing society and it might not have any value when facing another situation. This matter may bring forth the fact of lose of traditional identity of professional classes like artisans and craftsmen or they may be encountering constraints in easy maintenance of their past prestige. The difficulty of conventional workforce to survive with existing mode or master modern technologies and reframed wisdom become one problem affecting their humble survival contemporarily. In other words, difficulties in dealing with the reconfigured spatial modalities is the hurdle in the way of labourers.

ENDNOTES

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18. E. T. F. is a type of mutual fund that tracks the price of physical gold and investors can buy and sell these funds in a stock exchange.
19. E. G. R. is a digital certificate representing ownership of physical gold stored securely in a vault.
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