

A GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF FOLK ART PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH RURAL SOCIETY OF THE SOLAN DISTRICT, HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA

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Abstract

Folk art expresses cultural identity. Folk art constitutes over all forms of art made in the context of folk culture. Folk art practitioners have knowledge in traditional context. Folk art is fixed within the folk culture and expresses the folk cultural life of a rural society. Folk art associated with the expressive culture. It also includes objects that are traditionally crafted and used by a traditional society. Folk art is initially created according to the need of folks. Folk art are very simple, aesthetic and colorful. Once the folk art practices has been lost or forgotten there is chance of further transmission. These can be reinvigorated artistic traditions are formed by values and standards of excellence that are passed from generation to generation, most often within family and society, through expression, discussion and observation. Folk artists are skilled and know techniques that are passes through one generation to another generation. This paper includes the folk art, painting, handicraft and ritualistic art the Solan District of Himachal Pradesh.

Key Words: Folk Art, Folk Handicraft, Folk Painting, Ritualistic Art

INTRODUCTION

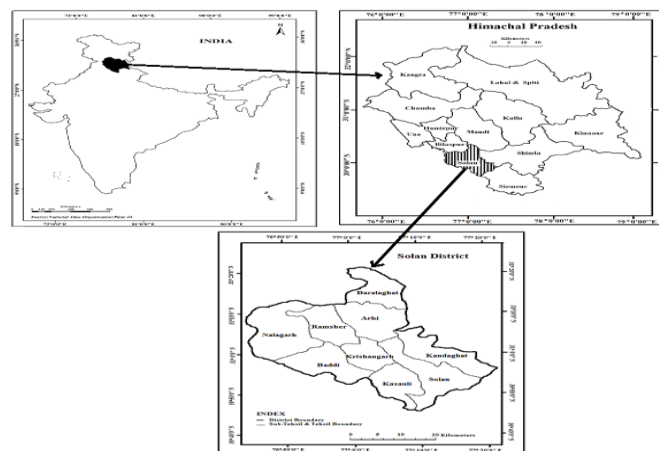
Folk art embodies a complete record of man's life, work and experience. Folk art depends on the character of a place as it expresses the physical and cultural environment as well as the distinctive mental perceptions of people. As manifestations of human experience and aspiration, folk art is woven from values and general patterns of life and culture of the people and as such, forms an aesthetic compage that portrays the interactive elements of regional character. Art is viewed as the autobiography of a culture expressing fully and profound the ideas, sentiments and faith of a region. Folk art emphasizes not an individual's expression, but that of a cultural group rooted into its pattern of living and conditioned by its experiential interpretation of the character of place. It represents a fussion of the environment and meta-physical realms. Thus, it portrays the regional personality and serves as a beacon light to its culture. It also records the cultural heritage, values and attitudes of the area. It expresses the personality of place (Nobel and Dutt, 1982: 165).

Miinsterberg identifies himself with Yanagi when he writes: “Folk art is not, as some authors have suggested, merely an unsophisticated reflection of the culture of the cities but an indigenous creation of the ordinary people of small towns and villages, especially, those who are cut off from the main stream of urban civilization. This does not mean that they are wholly isolated, for the dominant culture no doubt influences and modifies their work but folk art has a tradition which has remained unchanged over generations, sometimes even centuries, so that it is impossible to date it with accuracy” (Eder, 1958: 228).

Holger Cahill, acting director of the Museum of Modern Art in 1932, established a definition for folk art as an “expression of the common people, made by them and intended for their use and enjoyment.” The term folk art encompasses a wide variety of paintings, sculptures and environments created by individuals who did not study art formally. Folklore scholar **Henry Glassie** (1989) describes folk art as human creativity in social context. In Glassie’s view, folk art is communal and local, conservative and participatory, conceptual and multifunctional (Elizabeth, 1999: 23-24).

THE STUDY AREA

The administrative area of the Solan district is 1936 sq. km. The study area is located between the 76°42” and 77°20” east longitudes and 30°05” and 31°15” north latitudes. The district is bounded by Shimla district in the north, by Ropar district of Punjab and Ambala district of Haryana in the south, by Sirmour district in the east and Bilaspur district in the west of Himachal Pradesh. Mandi district touches the boundary of Solan district in the north-east. (Map 1)



Map 1: Location Map

METHODOLOGY

The study is totally based on the primary data. The study is focussed on the responses of the respondents. The study is purpose based and deals both with qualitative and quantitative approaches. Local people were interviewed from the sites selected to know about the folk art of the study area. For the historical point of view the information were gathered from the manuscripts like published books and gazettes.

OBJECTIVES

- To know the folk art in Solan district.
- To demarcate the regions associated with the different folk arts.
- Perception of the people about the folk art associated with their life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

FOLK PAINTING IN THE FORTS

In the Arki tehsil, *Arki town* embraces *Arki Kalam Painting* which was the old style of painting. The ruler of *Baghal* who were decendants of the chandelas of *Bundelkhand* played a great role in patronizing the art of painting and the *Basholi School* of painting. Soon, *Kangra style* was adopted. The paintings have been done on the walls of the ancestral home of the *Kings* of Arki. '*King Kisan Chand*' is believed to have joined the Britishers during the revolt of A.D.1851. It is therefore likely that the paintings were made after the revolt during which he came in close contact with the Britishers and can hence, be dated to approximately between A.D.1870-1876. It is evident from a number of scenes represented by the artists. The painters show the time of hunting. Colours have been used extensively symbolically, red for love, yellow for spring and blue for the fertile lands, rains or clouds are used. The paintings at *Arki* deal with *Krishna Legend*, *Shiva-Parbati* scripts and *Nayak* and *Nayika* of *Rasikpriya*. British civilian and military groups interspersed with other themes. It is believed that most of the paintings are copied. According to one of the sources an artist by the name of *Hastu*, was responsible for them. There is no evidence to support this, because *Hastu* merely means one who works with his hands. The artists were of local origin. *Arki* lies on the main route from Shimla to Kangra and had an important cultural relation with the hill states of the Kangra district. It is not therefore, unlikely that the artists of Arki may have belonged to Kangra. All the paintings in

the Arki Palace are found in the '*Diwan Khana*'. The whole hall divided into eighteen different compartments, each containing two or three panels of paintings (Figure 1).

Famous episodes from Bhagavata Gita and the Mahabharata and scenes depicting Shiv and Parvati with Ganesha and the Siddha are found painted here. The paintings capture the excitements of groups of people of all ages, waiting at a rural circus, particularly the antics or tricks of shepherds engaged in wrestling, deers and lady, combat, hunting and riding horses (Figure 2).

Wall Paintings in Arki Fort



Figure 1: Diwan Khana



Figure 2: Deer and Lady

The main purpose of wall painting was to decorate the houses or forts in hilly areas because of the lack of furniture and sculpture.

As in Arki fort and in Kuthar fort also the main door is painted with floral designs. This fort is a magnanimous historical monument (Figure 3). The beautiful picture of Lord Krishna with his *Murli* is beautifully painted here (Figure 4).

Wall paintings in Kuthar (Krishangarh) Fort.



Figure 3: Floral designs (Entrance of Kuthar Fort)



Figure 4: Krishna

In Nalagarh Fort the designs are carved and painted on the walls. It shows the art from the region of *Mughals*. The walls are simply coloured with small geometrical designs (Figure 5). Images of folk dance *Thoda* carved on the mall road of Solan Town shows the cultural identity of the region. Wall paintings are famous in the study area. Not only the Arki palace shows the images of folk paintings but many temples and houses in this region such as the *Jakholi* Goddess temple also have such images. Ladies show a keen interest in wall paintings mostly done during marriage occasions. It is a ritualistic art called *Kandeo* (Figure 6.).



Figure 5: Nalagarh Fort



Figure 6: Wall Paintings : Kandeo

FOLK HANDICRAFT

Folk handicraft is the collective aspiration and expression of people who generally live in rural areas. This tradition and culture are perfectly mirrored through beauty, shape and colour of things used in its daily life. The handicrafts are the part of recreation and for daily use. The handicrafts have great significance in the lives of the rural people. Spinning, weaving, tailoring and making ornaments, making tools and utensils are the folk handicrafts. The professional artists are the black smith, goldsmith, carpenter and mason. In the study area the people make *shawl* and blankets. The *charka* is used for the spinning of the thread). They use waste wool to weave the *kambal*. There are no weaver castes in the village.

Almost every household does these works. But now a day's mill made clothes like cotton and wollen are more in fashion. *Knitting, embroidery, weaving and tailoring* are more famous among women. Weaving of *pato, kambal and shawl*

(Figure 7) are in 5 villages of Arki tehsil, 3 of Darla sub-tehsil, 3 villages of Ramsher sub-tehsil, 6 villages of Solan, 4 villages of Kandaghat tehsil, 5 villages of Krishangarh and 1 village of Kasauli tehsil.



Figure 7: Khhaddi: Woman making *Patoo*, *Shawl* and *Kambal*

The rural women also make *khintoo* (*gudari*) from the waste rags of clothes without wasting them. It is used as *gadda*. Rags are also used in making *takkiyas* (pillow). These are mainly used during marriages or on special occasions when there is maximum gathering. Some rags are used to make '*baithkus*' (a small mat to sit) for a single person. These are mostly used in the kitchens or when folks used to sit in the Sun. In Nalagarh tehsil, Sanerh, Karsoli and Ratyor villages of Nalagarh tehsil used to make pots. The pottery is mostly done by *Kumhar*. The *Kumhars* design the different types of mud pots. In many villages people use clay over the pots and paint it with different colours. *Shoe making* is practised in almost all the villages by the low caste people. Some of them are leaving for cities in search of better prospects. This leads to the decay of village crafts and services.

For daily use rural people make *broom* for cleaning the floor, *chattai* for be used as mat and *chaj* for winnowing purposes (Figure 8 (a)). All these are made up of locally available date palm leaves. The broom is made up of *bagado* a type of grass and also from the special long grass used to feed the cows because its top parts are soft. The *maswartoo* is made of *chil* leaves or *bagado* leaves. They are used to apply mud on *chulah* (hearth). Tokri or *tokru* (basket) making are also practiced in the study area (Table 1).

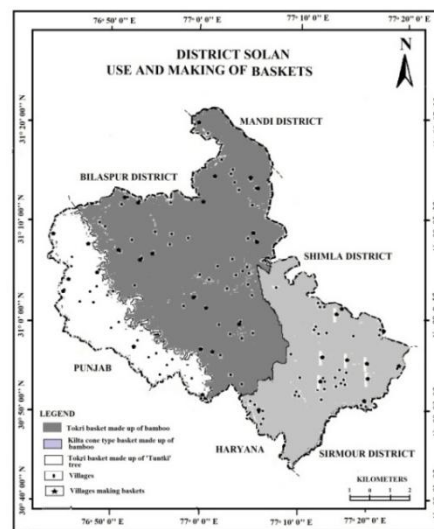
Table:1

S.No	Types of basket used in the study area	Number of villages using baskets	Number of villages making baskets
1	Basket made of bamboo	62	34
2	Baskets made of tuntki tree	28	7
3	Kilta made of bamboo	39	14

Source: Field Survey

The above table indicates that out of 127 villages 62 villages use the baskets made of bamboo, 28 use baskets made of *tuntki* tree and 39 villages use the *kilta* made of bamboo. Out of 127 villages 34 villages are engaged in basket makings (basket made of bamboo) for commercial or for own uses.

Basket made of tuntki tree is made in 6 villages of Nalagarh tehsil and Krishanpura of Baddi tehsil. Folks also made *kiltas* (a type of basket). It looks like cone. It is flat at the bottom. The circumference of the bottom is smaller than the circumference of the mouth of the *kilta*. *Kiltas* are common in the 6 villages of Kandaghat tehsil and 4 villages of Solan tehsil and 3 villages of Kasauli tehsil (Map 2). It is easy to carry them on back rather to carry basket over the head in higher altitudes



Map 2: Use and Making of Baskets

Baskets are commonly found in the areas of lower altitudes in most of the villages of Kandaghat and Solan tehsils. In Nalagarh tehsil and Baddi tehsil basket is made from *tuntki* tree which is popular for fodder. *Patals* are used as plates for the special occasions. The *patals* commonly found are made in the Arki tehsil,

Darla sub-tehsil, Ramsher tehsil, Kasauli tehsil, Krishangarh sub-tehsil and Solan tehsil.. *Chabdu* for keeping *chappatis* (bread prepared from wheat flour) or *Makki ki roti* (bread prepared from maize flour) is also locally made. It is made up of *bagado* grass and the *pochal* (cover of the maize). They are made up of *tauonur* leaves, obtained from plants called *Tuiru*. These leaves resemble like *Kachannar* but they are large in size. It's a type of thick climber, Small bowls known as *dunas* are also made from the same leaf. These are used in special occasions such as during birth, death, marriage and other ceremonies. *Tuiru* leaves are the broad leaves in the mostly found on the steep slopes.

The people use *tuiru* leaves for making of *patal*s. A *patal* is made by stitching three leaves together in round shape so it forms the shape of the plate. By joining three leaves together folks used these as plates. This is a tradition as in the past to arrange a huge quantity of metal plates were not possible during occasions such as marriages, *jatra*, birth and other functions where there was a maximum gathering. Baskets, broom, mats and winnower are made up of date leaves (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Folk Handicraft: Mat, basket, winnower and broom a made up of palm leaves

In the past these are the only source. These are specially made by the folks of 10 villages of Arki tehsil, 3 villages of Darla sub-tehsil, 9 villages of Ramsher tehsil, 1 village of Kasauli tehsil, 5 villages of Krishngarh sub-tehsil (Table 2).

Table 2

S.No	Folk Handicraft	Number of villages engaged in handicraft	Percentage of villages engaged in handicraft
1	Pattal	22	17.32
2	Mat	26	20.47
3	Broom	39	30.70
4	Chaj	8	6.30
5	Basketry	55	43.07

Source: Field Survey

The folk handicraft still prevails in the study area although folk used to make these handicrafts for their own use. In ancient days this was practiced by a special community called *Dumnas* as a profession. But now-a-days, most of the ladies in the rural areas used to make broom for their daily use.

The above mentioned folk art, *patal*, *dumna* and baskets are made from the locally available material. These can be easily degradable without any pollution.

Wood work is also an apart of handicraft. The doors and windows in the study area are carved beautifully in various designs (Figure 9 and 10). These types of art are found in Arki, Kandaghat and Krishangrah tehsils. Simple doors are made by nailing the thin slab on the flat slab of wood because the wood is locally available. There is no such art in Nalagarh and Baddi tehsils. Doors are of simple design here.



Figure 9: Wood Carving in Patta village Figure 10: Carved wooden window in Batal village

Communities still make agricultural implements such as plough, handle of an axe, spade and other implements made up of wood. They also make agriculture implements of metal especially of iron like axe, spade and plough. Usually all the

people who use traditional wooden agricultural implements make them by their own (Figure11).



Figure 11: Agricultural Implements: Meida (leveller) and Plough

The implements of iron are made by *Lohars*. Iron implements are made in 5 villages of Arki tehsil, 5 villages of Darla sub-tehsil, 4 of Ramsher sub-tehsil, 4 villages of Krishngarh sub-tehsil, 3 villages of Kasauli tehsil, 6 villages of Solan tehsil, 5 villages of Kandaghat tehsil, 5 villages of Krishngarh Sub-tehsil, 5 of Nalagarh tehsil and 2 villages of Baddi tehsil.

RITUALISTIC ART

Ritualistic art is mostly practiced in the religious sites associated with the popular traditions and mystical beliefs. In the study area the objects from nature such as stones are picked up and placed as object of worship as a local deity and called *Deo*, *Devta*, *Ishth* or *Kheshtarpa* in local language. The local artisans have made numerous idols out of local sandstones that are worshipped faithfully in various temples. In every village the idol of folk deity is kept at the highest place to pay respect such as *Sati idol* in Batal village. For instance *Bataleshwar Shiv*, Goddess *Baniya Devi*, *Dharawala Dev* and *Chandi Devi*. Many more stone images of many deities are quite common in different villages (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Carved Stone Idol of Dharawala

During *pooja* ceremony, *pandit* used to mark *Ganas* in the prayer places. The women used to paint '*Kandeo*' at the time of marriage on the wall at the place of *pooja* on special occasion especially on marriage ceremony. During every *puja* *Ganas* were painted on the wall by the priest (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Ganna

Ritualistic ceremonial paintings or *rangolis* are duly executed, during festival and seasonal cycles and during construction of '*Bedi*' in marriages. *Toran* is a special gate made of wood given by *Mamma* (uncle) of bride or bridegroom on the occasion of marriage. In local dialect *toran* word is derived from the word '*torna*' means to pass or to cross. This means people have to cross this gate before entering the *angan* or *bedi*. It is well decorated with different colours along with the frill of the mango leaves. This special ritual is the responsibility of *Mamma* on the occasion of marriage. In Ramsher, it is made up of bamboo having no colours, but in Arki tehsil it is made up of wood after piling it and colour it yellow, red and green. It is not popular in Nalagarh and Baddi region. *Toran* is a type of gate

having three sticks two of equal size and one is small. The two long sticks are erected vertically and one stick horizontally over the two vertically.

The god images such as Lord *Shiva* and Goddess *Parvati* are also made on the occasion of *Shivratri* and *Teej*.

Rangoli is made on *Diwali*. *Rangoli* for the *bedi* is used to be made by the *Pandits* themselves during *path* or *katha* (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Ritualistic Art Rangoli for Bedi

On the occasion of *Diwali* the *rangoli* is the main art form to be focused on focus in the study area. *Karuwa* a small pot made of clay is decorated with *chuna* (lime) or *kungu* (vermilion) or with different colours on the occasion of *Karuwa Chauth* celebrated all over the district.

CONCLUSION

The Solan district constitutes the many folk art practices. These folk art not only promote the cultural identity but also share its culture to the outer world. In the ritualistic arts the folk people symbolize the rock or stone as an image of the God such as in the caves of *Shiv Tandav Guffa* the limestone caves in Hatkot people believe that these are the abode of local deities. Even the things of daily needs such as *Tokria* and *Kilta* (basket) are made up of bamboo strips. Most of the folk plants are used for performing rituals on various occasions in the study area. The religious paintings that are placed during *puja* and during marriages show a great admiration for the nature for instance *Kandeo* is a wall painting drawn during marriages in worship place that includes the animal, bird and flower pictures. The art of house building depends on the ecological condition of area for example houses constitute a big horizontal way, with one storey and a big

courtyard in plain areas such as Baddi, Nalagarh, some parts of Arki, Darla and Solan region. It is concluded that in this modern era folks still engaged in traditional folk art practices.

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