



IIMC CASE RESEARCH CENTER (IIMCCRC)

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DOKRA ART – MARKETING A DYING ART AT THE BOP

The bronze cast dancing girl sculptor was a wonderful creation among popular pieces of art that was found as historical remnant from the Indus Valley civilization. It was one of the finest examples of metal art that was excavated from the ruins of Mohenjo-Daro. People hardly knew that this world famous figurine was the oldest example of a distinct metal casting tradition named Dokra.¹ This primitive form of art was a non-ferrous metal casting, known for its simplicity and fascinating design. Dokra was essentially handcrafted brass or bronze products created by lost wax method of metal casting that was admired all over the world for its rustic and antic finish. It showcased the lifestyle of people and their cultural connectivity. Some of the prominent figurines found in the Dokra art were the elephant, owl, horse and tortoise. These iconic symbols had their stories from Hindu mythology.² The other dominant themes of the Dokra artisans had been the model of deities.

Historically, the art was connected with India's tribal culture, being mostly prevalent in the metal-rich region of Central-East India and later, being dispersed to some particular regions through small groups of traditional artisans. Two such prominent groups of artisans were located in the nondescript villages of Dariapur (in Burdwan) and Bikna (in Bankura) of West Bengal, where several families were involved in taking forward the legacy of Dokra craft.

Although this inimitable art was well-known globally, its artisans had been struggling to keep this art form alive in the present conditions. They followed the same primitive process of manufacturing without having access to modern technologies. So even if they got large orders it took much time for them to complete due to the delay in production. According to an artisan from Bikna Village:

¹ <https://www.livehistoryindia.com/story/living-culture/dhokra-art>

² *ibid*

Prof. Ramendra Singh, Siuli Mondal of the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta and Siddhartha Paul, developed this case study as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate the effective or ineffective running of an organization.

“We cannot fulfill large orders in one month. It takes 2-3 months. Everything is done manually that includes welding, claying, finishing etc. We don’t use dice. If there is dice, we could have finished these in 1 month-15 days only. But since it’s handmade one month is not possible. It will definitely take 2-3 months”.

Additionally, the increasing price of raw materials was also forcing the artisans to raise prices of the end products, owing to which, they were losing out on buyers. Besides, the presence of ‘middlemen’ in the value chain reduced their profit margins significantly. Thus, these artisans struggled to make a living.

To further worsen their existing plight, the Covid-19 pandemic substantially disrupted their entire ecosystem, just like the world economy. The nationwide lockdowns owing to the pandemic completely pushed them along with their families deep into crisis, making their survival and sustenance almost impossible. Although there had been concerted efforts by various NGOs and the state government to promote Dokra art, both nationally and internationally, its artisans were probably facing the most wretched conditions even since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The case intends to find marketing strategies that could uplift the livelihood of the Dokra artisans. How to design strategies, such that they benefit these artisans ‘holistically’, including an enhancement of their socio-economic conditions at the BOP? How to market this dying art/these art forms at the BOP?