



# CRAFTING LIVELIHOODS: KUMHAR FOLK KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS AS DRIVERS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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**Abstract:** Indian Civilization is very much associated with the knowledge and wisdom. Indian folk knowledge is sustainable and strive for both environmental and social welfare in holistic manner. According to Jñāna yoga, knowledge has been called as cessation of all functions of mind. Potters, known as *Prajapati* or *Kumhar* in India, is considered as God of knowledge and creativity, they created the universe as per Indian myths. Folk knowledge is traditional practices, concepts, skills, superstitions, and way of life, which pass from ancestors to their next generation in the form of folklore. Pottery practice in form of artistic expression is one of the important folk types of knowledge, transmitted to the present generation as a family run small scale livelihood support, is being developed as one of the important skills in field of art and craft, for generating employment and business along with sustainability. But the community is lagging in their entrepreneurial approach because of multifaceted problems and challenges. This article will discuss the concept of pottery as a folk knowledge associated with skill development seeing the modern context of entrepreneurship in India. The study has been based on the primary data and observations collected from the Jharkhand, India. The secondary sources have also been incorporated in the study to make the article more informative.

**Keywords:** Indian Civilization, Folk Knowledge, Pottery, Entrepreneurship, Skill Development

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## Introduction

Indian civilization, one of the oldest civilizations has been very much associated with the sustainable development. It is no doubt that the current practices of humans are having continuous conflict with the nature in each and every aspect. The current models of growth and development is very much unsustainable. Therefore, the current generations need to understand the Indian way of living properly with the acceptance of natural phenomena which strives for welfare to all living beings and sustainability. Indian civilization was based on agricultural and trade practices, they gave the importance to water, weather, and agriculture very early. They had the knowledge of impacts of harming the natural happenings of the earth. The knowledge of everything which is very much life centric and reflective in character and has been passed down in form of folklore i.e., living traditions and oral cultures without any interruption through the generations is folk knowledge. One such knowledge is pottery practice which has been passed down to the present generation.

Most people in the world associate folklore with oral transmission of information through stories, tales, and songs, but now is the time to broaden the definition of folklore to include other types of culture such as traditions, food, crafts, attire, festivities, music, and traditional architecture. As per American Folklife Centre in 1976, 'folklife' in context of United States of America has been defined as,

*The traditional, expressive, shared culture of various groups in the United States: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, and regional. Expressive culture includes a wide range of creative and symbolic forms, such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, literature, art, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual, pageantry, and handicraft; these expressions are mainly learned orally, by imitation, or in performance, and are generally maintained or perpetuated without benefit of formal instructions or institutional direction.* (Bartis, 2016)

Folk knowledge about pottery expertise is mostly learnt via imitation and is passed down without the benefit of formal training or institutional supervision. The folk knowledge promotion through the institutional supervision can help in maintenance of the dynamicity of any civilization so that the knowledge transmission always continues with the time and newer aspects of development. This paper will discuss the concept of pottery as a folk knowledge associated with skill development in context of India.

## Background

Indian Mythological story about the Kumhar or Prajapati community is very much exciting. In the early times when there was no *Varna*, then only Prajapati was the sole owner of the whole earth. The world's oldest and most respected *Prajapati* or *Kumhar* caste is believed to be the children of Daksha Prajapati, the son of Lord Brahma. Prajapati is an obedient, meticulous, and self-respecting type of caste. Neither do they ever steal, nor do they ever snatch and eat from anyone. Very honest, devout, contented and having deep faith in God is a Hindu caste, therefore according to the Hindu beliefs established in ancient times, he is honored as Prajapati as well as Kumhar. Lord Dhanvantari, the father of Ayurveda, was born with nectar in an urn (Kumbh) at the time of churning of the ocean. A few drops of nectar were spilled from this Kumbh in Nasik, Ujjain, Prayagraj and Haridwar. Kumbh Mela is held at these holy places. The ones who make the Kumbh are called Kumbhakars (Prajapati). According to the Vedas, the gods' origins are largely linked to the fundamental forces of nature, like water, fire, land, and cosmos. According to the Atharvaveda, God was created from the non-existent. So, we have the Prajapati or Hiranyagarbha- the ruler of all creatures, Viswakaraman- the builders of all thing, Brahmanaspati- the lord of Supreme Power, and finally the cosmic man, Purusa, who is thought to be similar to the material cause of the cosmos. Because God Prajapati was the first to be born, he was given the name Sawayambhu and was the one who created the earth and heaven. He is referred to be the God of Gods. In Brahmana literature, the God Prajapati is considered as a separate God. Prajapati is referred to be the creator, supporter, or preserver of this planet and all beings throughout the Brahmana literature. Prajapati is supposed to be alone at first in the Satapatha Brahmana. According to Upanisadic literature, the ultimate truth of the Prajapati is that they are Brahman, who created the Universe (Sharma, 2007)

As per history, pottery is invented in association with the sedentary farmers. Childe (1936) in his book, "Man Makes Himself" was very much influential and advocated the link between pottery, agriculture, and sedentism, as well as the transmission of these advances over Europe as a "Neolithic package" from the Near East (Childe, 1936). In this perspective, pottery's links to other things, substances, and processes were intimately linked to the reasons and conditions that led to the change to farming and sedentary village life. Later on, it became clear that sedentary, farming and pottery has grown separately at different

time. The evidence of sedentary sites was found during Early Natufian period (15000-13000 cal BP), the possibility of cultivating wild crops was found to be existed in the first phase of Neolithic (11700 -10500 cal BP), domesticated plants and animals came into practice for better livelihood in second phase of Neolithic (10500-9000 cal BP). As per Philip E. L. Smith (1978), in second phase of Neolithic, the evidence of pottery practice has been found. Similarly, pottery, sedentism, and agriculture did not emerge at the same time across East Asia, and there was likely a great deal of regional variety (Gibbs, 2015).

Earlier, Pottery was a form of creative expression as well as a tool for cooking, serving, and storing food. Prehistoric potters used a range of techniques to shape and decorate their pots. Pottery evidence has been discovered in India throughout in the three phases. People from the Early Harrapan (3500 BC to 2500 BC) cultures have used the pottery products which was continued to Harrapan (2500 BC-2000 BC) culture, and Late Harrapan (2000 BC -1750 BC). Motifs having various designs and patterns were discovered on seals and ceramics from the Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Kalibangan, Chanhudaro, and Kot Diji digs. Such excavations uncovered evidence of India's ancient civilizations, with archaeologists and scholars discovering ceramic components. The inhabitants of Harappan cultures had acquired a great sense of aesthetics; they appear to have been art aficionados, able to evaluate with sense and sensitivity whatever was attractive in the form of sculptures and paintings on terracotta. As per study done by Sudha Satyawadi in in three regions: North Baluchistan, South Baluchistan and the Indus Valley, it has been found that North Baluchistan has sequence beginning with Pre-Ceramic Neolithic to Pre- Harappan Chalcolithic cultures and the pottery used during this are appeared to be handmade black on red. South Baluchistan has influence of North Baluchistan later than the North Baluchistan, it seems people from North have moved towards the south. Indus valley (Sind, Punjab, Trans-Indus, Indo-Gangetic and eastern desert fringes) was having similar roots that of Harappans (Satyawadi, 1994).

## Objective

1. The main objective of the study
2. To discuss the concept of pottery as an artistic expression of folk knowledge, and
3. To discuss the entrepreneurial perspective associated with this skill development seeing the modern context in India

## Research Methodology

This study has been based on the primary data that include observations, focus group discussion and interview collected from the Jharkhand, India. The secondary sources have also been incorporated in the study to make the article more informative.

## Folk Knowledge and Pottery

As per the Upanishads there are two forms of knowledge: *Vidya* and *Avidya*. *Vidya* or higher knowledge is the real knowledge associated with the concept of self or *Atman*. *Avidya* also called the lower knowledge is knowledge of ignorance mostly associated with practices, rituals, sacrifices, mandatory obligations etc. Both sorts of knowledge are significant because discipline comes from lesser knowledge, while the ability to practice comes from greater information (V, 2021). The knowledge of *Vidya* and *Avidya* together can be considered as folk knowledge or folk psychology. The texture of folk knowledge may be explained by contrasting the domain's cultural value (utility) with its ease of observation (conspicuousness, perceptual prominence). Folk knowledge of culturally significant and clearly visible groups is extensive. Almost all accounts of folk knowledge have focused on culturally significant and easily observable areas, giving the impression that all folk knowledge is extensive. Traditional people's scholars prefer to discuss themes that are important to them and on which they are experts. In general, traditional agriculture is based on complex networks of folk knowledge (Rodri'guez, 2001). In the same way pottery as the technique of shaping clay to the concepts that enter the human brain using a hand, wheel, wet clay, water, and other equipment also based on complex networks of folk knowledge.

As per Gould (2003) and Midgley (1994), Folk knowledge has been used as the interchangeable word with folk psychology in literature. According to them it has been mentioned that, while it is true that things are not always as they appear, they are sometimes exactly as they appear. Furthermore, seeing these things requires knowledge and training—efforts that result in eyes that see, ears that hear, fingers that feel, and so on. In reality, many ostensibly well-educated yet ineffective persons are likely lacking in this talent. They are unable to observe things exactly “as they seem.” Folk psychology or folk knowledge are terms used in the literature to describe this type of personal knowing. Folk knowledge has been under siege since the birth of science. It was thought that

reductive, abstract, completely objective ways of knowing would replace it, not supplement it. It was thought that as science progressed, traditional wisdom would become less useful and helpful. The people will be less likely to believe their sight and more likely to believe what they know or studied to be true. It is simple to understand how this might erode practitioners' confidence. Their intuition informed them that personal knowledge gained through years of experience should be believed, while their schooling taught them otherwise. They were warned that modern, well-educated physical educators do not practice what appears to be proper. Rather, people should fight many of their instincts and believe what they know to be correct scientifically (Kretchmar, 2008).

Motifs made on the pottery products have many purposes like decorative, religious, ritualistic, superstitions and personal. Decorative: Man has had a desire to order in accordance with the order and rhythm of nature from the beginning of time. He enjoys decorating himself, his surrounds, and the area where he resides. As a result, art becomes a part of everyday life. The earliest designs discovered on India's proto-historic pottery are mostly decorative in nature. They are basic, and while the idea came from nature, the way it's expressed is geometrical. The pottery from the Harappan sites has lovely floral and geometrical motifs that appear to be largely ornamental in nature.

Religious: Religious faith was expressed in art and craft, as evidenced by protohistoric seals. This category includes themes in this pattern and design that are connected with God, anthropomorphism, and adoration of natural elements such as trees and the sun. The underlying thought is typically regarded as religious in nature. The worship of the Sun is based on the natural phenomenon's role as a source of light, warmth, and fertility.

Ritualistic: Ceremonies and rites are related with such ideas. The painting and motifs on the ceramics are not only ornamental, but also represent common belief of times regarding the fate of the deceased and the requirements of the dead on their journey to their last resting place. The ideas were vividly depicted in graphic depictions that featured animal and plant elements.

Superstition: Animism is a ubiquitous characteristic of primitive communities. Animals, plants, trees, ponds, rivers, stones, and hills are all celestial abodes with their own spheres of influence. As a result, some of these are also portrayed in motifs. Fish, for example, are considered auspicious and are used to fend off evil from the home or hamlet. Personal: A motif's aim might

also be merely personal, expressing the artist's feelings. This is portrayed in a design that combines themes for no reason other than the artist's pleasure. Though there is a small distinction, it has a lot in common with ornamental purposes. The ornamental purpose emphasizes a period's "acceptable" designs, whereas the personal purpose emphasizes an artist's "individualistic" decision (Satyawadi, 1994).

The potters through the various motifs have shown their folk knowledge. They were much more knowledgeable in context of natural phenomena. They never compromised and disconnected themselves from the nature and worshipped in form of God. They had practiced their *Vidya* in the form of *Avidya*. Their root of having folk knowledge can be better imagined through the symbols mentioned in the seals and pottery goods made by them. Such knowledge is continued to the present generation. This is the ancient wisdom which can be considered as the folk knowledge of people belonging to Kumhar community in India.

### **Skill Development and Pottery**

Pottery practice, one of the important *Avidya*, folk types of knowledge, transmitted to the present generation as a family run small scale livelihood support. At present, this is being developed as one of the important skills in field of art and craft, for generating employment and business along with sustainability. Their knowledge and skills of creativity in crafting the clay has not been given much more importance in documentation in organized, structured form, but it has been constituted, stored, and maintained in the framework of the living traditions and oral cultures. Humans today live in more consistent conditions than their forefathers did hundreds of thousands of years ago in other regions of the earth. At the same time, present living situations (interpersonal relationships, social groupings, occupational groups, etc.) generate new needs and give rise to new features (Rodri'guez, 2001). Therefore, there is need of interventions to have update according to the present world so that competence level be maintained.

The modern pottery practice in India is gaining the momentum as they are being trained with the proper interventions of developmental organisations. The pottery is being recognized as the profession having greater opportunities in future for more sustainability in every aspect from the economic, social, environmental to organizational. Pottery promotion is carried out through

the government of India's skill development programs and policies, which aims at recognizing the youth's abilities and provide them with the necessary guidance, infrastructure, opportunities, and inspiration to help them realize their goals with having ethical responsibility towards the nature and society. The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises of government of India, has executed the Kumhar Sashaktikaran Yojana of Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), which was initiated in 2018, to strengthen and enhance the living conditions of potters (Kumhar) throughout the nation by enabling them self-sufficient. The major objectives of the skill development in pottery as per '*Kumbhar Sashaktikaran Programme*,' are as follows (MSME, 2018):

1. To help pottery good makers earn more money by providing skill development training and sophisticated, automated equipment,
2. To give pottery-artisan SHGs with skill-development training on specific items such as garden pots, cooking ware, khulhad, water bottles, decorator products, murals, and so forth,
3. To build concentrated product pilot initiatives in different regions,
4. To increase production, technical know-how of pottery craftsmen, and lower production costs, potter efficiency improves energy kilns to lower production costs,
5. To entice a successful potter to open his own business,
6. To create the essential market connections by partnering with exporters and major buying houses,
7. To develop a variety of innovative products and raw materials in order to produce international-level pottery in the country,
8. To exhibit and instruct individuals in worldwide approaches and methodologies,
9. To establish worldwide design competency in the pottery industry by connecting them with relevant design firms and establishing a COE with CSIR labs/IIT, etc.,
10. Create new motorized potter wheels run by electricity for little pots,
11. Set up 10 clusters to take the industry on a journey from pottery to crockery/tiles manufacture.

Another latest scheme named "Vishwakarma" has been launched on 17th September, 2023 by the Prime Minister. This scheme will be managed

and implemented by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MoMSME), the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance (MoF), Government of India. These traditional artisans and craftspeople are referred to as 'Vishwakarmas' and are engaged in occupations like Blacksmiths, Goldsmiths, Potters, Carpenters, Sculptors, etc. These skills or occupations are passed from generation-to-generation following a *guru-shishya model* of traditional training, both within the families and other informal groups of artisans and craftspeople.

The objectives of the Scheme are:

1. To enable the recognition of artisans and craftspeople as Vishwakarma, making them eligible to avail all the benefits under the Scheme.
2. To provide skill upgradation to hone their skills and make relevant and suitable training opportunities available to them.
3. To provide support for better and modern tools to enhance their capability, productivity, and quality of products and services.
4. To provide the beneficiaries an easy access to collateral free credit and reduce the cost of credit by providing interest subvention.
5. To provide incentives for digital transactions to encourage digital empowerment of Vishwakarmas.
6. To provide a platform for brand promotion and market linkages to help them access new opportunities for growth.

### **Entrepreneurial Perspectives of Kumhars**

As per the prime data from the field, it has been found that there has been many challenges and issues for *Kumhars* in Jharkhand. The major problems as per the data collected from the six districts namely Saraikela Kharsawan, Dumka, Gumla, Palamu, Ranchi, Ramgarh of Jharkhand has been found as follows:

1. **Lack of having new ideas of skill in crafting:** People from this community have not learnt any new skill, older and ancient practices are making them help economically to survive in the modern India. To compete with the modern market of metal and plastics they need to have better skill training, education, machineries, government support.

2. **Lack of good quality of soil:** In their areas good quality of soil is not available nearby, they have to buy the soil. They are also expecting that they will get the good quality of clay in future from other states too.
3. **Lack of own Lands:** As they do not have their own land, they have to ask from the land owners to get the soil for pottery practice and for that they have to pay.
4. **Lack of financial support:** During Diwali time pottery products specially Diya (lamp) are more demanded in Indian market, but for money they do not have the formal sources for getting loan so they have to take loan from informal sources on higher interest rate. During COVID-19 pandemic they had to face lot of problems even for the basic survivals.
5. **Lack of education:** The status of educational level of people from this community is very poor. The pottery practices do not make extra money so that they can teach their kids in better school. Their children instead of studying migrate to bigger cities in early age for the earnings.
6. **Lack of specific space or institutions for practicing and learning pottery:** As most pottery workers practices pottery at home, but at the time of firing pottery products, the neighbor start saying that please do not fire here as smoke makes them uncomfortable. To have space outside the village is another challenge for them as many families are landless. There are lack of formal institutions for learning and promoting pottery.
7. **Feeling of inferiority complex in newer generations:** Peoples from this community are leaving the pottery practices as they feel that this work is dirty and unclean. Being in wet clay for the whole day is not liked by their kids. This work is no more helping their children to get better education in good school due to lack of money. The motivation to work in this sector is the need of the hour and they are somehow trying hard to get over it.
8. **Lack of cheaper transport facilities:** The poorer sections of the community do not get the cheaper transport facilities so that they can sell their products in market and therefore they have to sell the mediator who gives very less money from the market or they have to use their own means of transport.

9. **Lack of Storage facilities:** The rainy season make them vulnerable as they do not have the storage space in their houses to store clay along with clay made unfired goods. They have to use their own house or bedroom as the storage room.
10. **Health Problems:** As potters work with the help of human power for many hours continuously by sitting, that makes them back pain. Their hands become rough and hard due to continuous use of their hand as tool. Sometime they got hurt when the leg or hand get touched by the running wheel.

What is the need of the hour is entrepreneurial mindset and approach among the people involved in pottery practice. This perspective encompasses various elements, including:

1. **Opportunity Recognition:** The ability to identify and evaluate business opportunities in the market. The people are liking the products cooked or served in pottery products. This can be one of the better opportunities for the new generation entrepreneurs.
2. **Innovation and Creativity:** A focus on developing new ideas, products, or services that can meet unmet needs or improve existing offerings which will ultimately helping the Kumhars and the other stakeholders associated with them.
3. **Risk-Taking:** A willingness to take calculated risks in pursuit of new ventures, understanding that failure is a possibility but also a potential learning experience. There is higher chances of getting success in the pottery production area.
4. **Proactive Mindset:** The tendency to take initiative and act rather than wait for opportunities to come to them. This includes being adaptable and resilient in the face of challenges. Kumhars must have to change their mindset in upcoming generation.
5. **Resource Management:** Effective use of available resources, including financial, human, and technological, to maximize the chances of success.
6. **Networking:** Building relationships and connections that can provide support, mentorship, and opportunities for collaboration.
7. **Vision:** A clear understanding of one's goals and the ability to communicate that vision to others, inspiring them to join in the entrepreneurial journey.

- 8. Customer Focus:** An emphasis on understanding customer needs and preferences to create value and ensure long-term success.

Adopting an entrepreneurial perspective can benefit individuals in various fields, not just in starting businesses, as it encourages innovative thinking, adaptability, and proactive problem-solving.

## Conclusion

Pottery is traditional set of activities which has been continued since thousands of years which is very much associated with the knowledge and creativity. The current social and environmental crisis has sent the message to all over the world to go back to analyze the activities of ancestors, which were very much sustainable. The skills and knowledges of ancient people needs to be recognized for the better world. The improvements in the skills and knowledges with the use of technology and innovation can be better helping the world to become more sustainable. The cultural connect of the folk knowledges needs to be researched in more depth by the current academicians, researchers, and professionals. The nature is very much complex to understand, so better is to recognize the ancient wisdoms and move with the natural processes. The science behind the folk knowledge might be different than it seems but it is only the folk knowledge which had made the science to be developed. Therefore, the folk knowledge must be integrated with the traditional knowledge among the entrepreneurs for the better and sustainable world. Kumhar's work can be one of the main eye openers for the Indian entrepreneurs, where they can get the highest opportunity to develop the business mechanism by developing skills.

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