



Research Paper

Changing Paradigm of Life: An Empirical Study among the Dokra Brasscasters in West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT

Dokra (also known as Dhokra) art is an ancient as well as a modern method of making metal artifacts and is popular due to its primitive simplicity, unique color, oldness, huge variety of models and folk characters. It describes usually the semi-nomadic groups of artisans of Bankura, Bardhaman, Medinipur districts of West Bengal, Odisha, Chhatisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and many other regions in India. This is a community based metallic abstract form of art and has found a position among the handicrafts due to its worldwide fame as a brassware handicraft with a touch of folk. This paper deals with two dokra artisan communities (one is 'Shilpidanga', in Bikna village of Bankura district and another is 'Shadhurbagan - dokra para' in Dariyapur village of Bardhaman district) of West Bengal. The paper also studies their history and the route of migration of dokra artisans and their present socio-economic condition highlighted through this craft. The present study is explorative and qualitative research work and is purely based on empirical knowledge involving in-depth semi-structured interview, Focused Group Discussion, Oral history and voice recording. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. The empirical data have been collected through purposive sampling and analyzed through narrative analysis. Dokra artisans belong to Malhar community bearing the surname of 'Karmakar', a 'sanskritised' caste designation now. Their route of migration trajectories has always followed the mineral-rich tribal belt regions. From the point of view of business they are still marginalized.

KEY WORDS: Dokra, Cire Perdue, Malhar, Karmakar, Oral history, Folk.

Received 23 Jan, 2021; Revised: 04 Feb, 2021; Accepted 07 Feb, 2021 © The author(s) 2021.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the evolution of aesthetic development in the cultural history of mankind, art and artistic objects and their influence have always played a very significant role. Dokra is such an artistic object in the cultural evolution of human beings through many civilizations. It is a metallurgical brassware handicraft and is the oldest art form in India. It is basically a non-ferrous metal which is used to make different types art objects through the lost-wax casting method called *Cireperdue* in French (Agrawal, 1971). Dokra crafts are produced by two special techniques like solid and hollow casting methods. It occupies a very prominent place in the art and craft gallery.

Dokra or Dhokra is a community specific ethnic art and is based on sculpture. The term Dokra depicts a group of semi-nomadic artisans who belong to Malhar community famous for making well decorated brass ware products. Dokra reflects an amalgamation of ancient and modern method of making metal artifacts and has become popular due to its primitive simplicity, unique colour, huge variety of models and folk characters. The dokra makers are predominantly noticeable in the eastern part of India like Odisha, West Bengal, Chhatisgarh and Madhya Pradesh (Kochhar, 2011). The artisans are scattered in different parts of Bankura, Bardhaman, Medinipur districts of West Bengal. Dokra is identified by its unique shaped mythical abstract form of art which is actually a metal based craft. Their route of migration has always followed mineral-rich tribal belt regions in India (Kochhar, 2011). This craft work is a matter of pride, a source of livelihood of the artisans and has

provided them with their cultural identity. Motifs and styles of dokra have mostly been inspired from tales of folk art and rural culture, combined with the aesthetic sense of the artist.

The first art work on metals started during the Indus Valley civilization in Mohenjo- Daro around 5000 BC in India. The famous bronze 'dancing girl' of Mohenjo-Daro in Indus valley found from archaeological excavations was the first evidence of non-ferrous metal art in India. Similarly, toy carts, bull and handful of other metallic art objects found from the excavations of various Harappan sites in India portrays that the Harappan people had sufficient knowledge of lost-wax technique or *Cireperdue* Casting. The brass ware has now become very popular in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The central and eastern regions of India primarily follow the lost-wax technique mainly renowned as 'Dokra' or 'Dhokra'. Those figures display the highly developed aesthetic sense and creativity of *Cireperdue* work. The metallurgical work has now been identified with copper melting art forms in the name of Dhokra (Sinha et.al, 2015; Agarwal, 1971). Numerous research works have highlighted the process of *Cireperdue* casting. Various references in ancient Indian literature and folk tales through generations provide several evidences of studying the historical aspects of dokra and the artisans. Krishnan (1976) and Pal (1978) cited classical Sanskrit sources, such as *Silparatna*, *Manasara*, and *Somesvara*, which gave detailed descriptions about the technical aspects of the craft.

History has shown that art and art objects have always transcended geographical boundaries. Dokra metal casting or metal art created unparalleled influences in the lands of ancient Egypt, China, Greece and Mesopotamia. The manufacturing technique spread through the hands of the Aztecs in Mexico between 14th-16th centuries AD and in the Benin kingdom in south-central Nigeria during 14th-19th centuries AD (Kochhar, 2011). The lost-wax process was not only a popular technique in India but also was extremely popular in some of the great early civilizations of the globe like those of the Incas, the Aztecs and the Mayas, and also the civilizations which flourished in South and Middle America. A brief account of the Spanish writer Releigh referred to the prevalence of metallic casting by the Aztecs (Krishnan, 1976).

In India, handicrafts play a very prominent role in the basic livelihood of craftsman. *Cireperdue* casting work has traditionally survived among a few families of craftsmen. Around hundred years back, the Dokra makers of central and eastern regions spread out to the south and the western parts of India. The important regions for dokra are the mountain ranges of Vindhya in Madhya Pradesh, Bastar in Chattisgarh, Ushegaon and Chittabari in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh, Puri, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Khurda of Orissa, Bankura, Bardhaman, Medinipur, Purulia of West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand (Dhar, 2018).

According to a local dokra makers of Bikna village, there are some people like the farmers of Kadamdiha village, Bharagora block, East Singbhum are engaged in crafting dokra items for their extra earnings at the lean season of agriculture. Artisans manufacture dokra items in Bistupur, Jamshepur and some tribals of Odisha practice this craft. Some Muslim people also traditionally practice this craft. The tribal families of Sadeibareni, a village near the district of Dhenkanal of Jabardah in the district of Dumka in Jharkhand also produce this craft for their extra income. A group of dokra artisans, who chiefly produce ornaments, lives in the state of Odisha. They are traditional metal smiths of Odisha. The *Jadupatias* of Jharkhand are engaged in the dokra jewelry making. Some artisans in the villages of Keshiakole and Patrasayar near Bikna also manufacture dokra items.

The first detailed study on *Cireperdue* technique of dokra metal casting in the Bankura District was observed by Ruth Reeves in the 1960s. Dokra artisans are a sub-caste of Kamars or blacksmiths in the western parts of West Bengal who are famous for making brass idols or Dokra (Risley, 1891).

Dokras are neither, originally, Hindu craft nor of the Muslims. It was rather influenced by the primitive stock of the tribal people of Chotanagpur Division. With their specialized metal craftsmanship they separated from their original stock and the trajectories of the craft's demand shaped up their nomadic character. The impact of their socio-religious tracts can be traced in some of their cultural traits (Ghosh, 1981). The main pillars of dokra were erected on a historic ground along with their primitive, prehistoric and traditional art. Dokra art is a cultural heritage of Bengal and India. The traditional themes of dokra sculptures consist of owl, horse, elephants, gods and goddesses, anthropomorphic figures, zoo-morph, plant remains, utilitarian objects, bowls, figures of deities riding elephants, musicians, rider figures, cattle, birds and so on (Kochhar, 2011).

Dokra artisans show great interest in preserving their dokra cultural heritage. Sharing of skill in the manufacture of dokra items has been a continuous process from one generation to another. It is not only their occupation but also has become a part of their cultural heritage.

II. OBJECTIVES

The central point of this study is to focus on the history and the route of migration dokra artisans in West Bengal. This is an attempt to highlight their present socio-demographic condition through the lens of Dokra craft.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This qualitative research work is purely based on empirical knowledge. For this study, an intensive fieldwork has been conducted on two areas namely ‘*Shilpidanga*’ in Bikna village of Bankura district and another ‘*Shadhurbagan-dokrapara*’ in Dariyapur village of Burdwan district in West Bengal. To accomplish this study, both the primary and secondary sources of data were used. Primary Socio-demographic data were collected from the above mentioned two villages. Informal discussions and observations were held to get information on the opinion of the artisans, their experiences and the present situations. The historical journey of the community as well as an individual’s story and their living experiences were assembled with the help of in-depth and semi-structured Interview, Focused Group Discussions, Oral history and some secondary sources. The empirical data have been collected through purposive sampling and analyzed through narrative analysis.

III. AREA OF THE STUDY

The present study is focused on two rural areas of West Bengal (Bikna village of Bankura district and Dariyapur village of Bardhaman district) situated in the eastern part of India. Geographical boundaries play a vital role for emergence, evolution and diffusion of the dokra craft. Ecology of different geophysical setting also has an effect on indigenous technology. These two clusters represent the socio-demographic profile and heritage of the artisans. The present study mainly emphasized on two clusters i.e., ‘*Shilpidanga*’ in Bikna village of Bankura district and ‘*Sadhurbagan-dokrapara*’ in Dariyapur village of Bardhaman district of West Bengal. Bikna is the name of a large village and ‘*Shilpidanga*’ cluster is renowned for Dokra works. It covers latitude of: 25°5’35.484”N and longitude: 82°31’38.892”E. In this area, the artisan group has inhabited for an era. Similarly, Dariyapur village is located close to Guskara town in East Burdwan district in West Bengal. Its Latitude is: 23°27’51.10”N and Longitude: 87°42’1.55”E. This is the hub of Dokra artisans who migrated from Odisha and settled here about 120-125 years back. In this village there is a separate area for Dokra artists which are known as Dokra-Para. Glimpses of the administrative location of these two villages are given below:

Name of cluster	Shilpidanga	Sadhurbagan-dokra para
Village Name	Bikna	Dariyapur
Post Office	Keshiakole	GonnaDariaypur
Gram Panchayat	Bikna	Dignagar-II
Block	Bankura II	Aaushgram – I
Police Station	Bankura	Aaushgram
Sub Division	BankuraSadar	BurdwanSadar North
District	Bankura	East (<i>Purba</i>) Bardhaman
Pin code	722155	713156

IV. THE PRESENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE DOKRA ARTISAN GROUP IN WEST BENGAL

120 families and 119 households of two villages of West Bengal have taken into consideration for collection of socio-demographic data (Samanta, 2015). The dokra communities of Bikna and Dariyapur had undergone a developmental examination of an action research project which was initiated and organized by the National Institute for Science, Technology and development studies NISTADS within the Indian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) (Kundu, 2016).

Table 1: Distribution of sex on the basis of population size

Bikna		Dariyapur	
Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
143 (51.43)	135 (48.37)	133 (48.71)	140 (51.28)

The total populations of these two villages are 278 in Bikna and 273 in Dariyapur. The number of males is quite higher in comparison to females in Bikna i.e., 51.43% male and 48.37% females. Contrastingly, 51.28% of females are noticeable among 48.71% males of Dariyapur village.

Table 2: Distribution of male and female population by age groups:

Age groups (in years)	Bikna			Dariyapur		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
0-4	12 (4.31)	8 (2.87)	20 (7.19)	14(5.12)	12(4.39)	26 (9.52)
5-9	14 (5.03)	17 (6.11)	31 (11.15)	26(9.52)	13(4.76)	39 (14.28)
10-14	15 (5.39)	19 (6.83)	34 (12.23)	23(8.42)	19(6.95)	42 (15.38)
15-19	20 (7.19)	9 (3.23)	29 (10.43)	14(5.12)	17(6.22)	31 (11.35)

20-24	13 (4.67)	10 (3.59)	23 (8.278)	9(3.29)	18(6.59)	27 (9.89)
25-29	9 (3.23)	19 (6.83)	28 (10.07)	9(3.29)	11(4.02)	20 (7.32)
30-34	6 (2.15)	6 (2.15)	12 (4.31)	7(2.56)	8(2.93)	15 (5.49)
35-39	18 (6.47)	16 (5.75)	34 (12.23)	11(4.02)	11(4.02)	22 (8.05)
40-44	8 (2.87)	5 (1.79)	13 (4.67)	6(2.19)	6(2.19)	12 (4.39)
45-49	7 (2.51)	11 (3.95)	18 (6.47)	4(1.46)	4(1.46)	08 (2.93)
50-54	5 (1.79)	2 (0.72)	7 (2.51)	4(1.46)	4(1.46)	08 (2.93)
55-59	5 (1.79)	6 (2.15)	11 (3.95)	3(1.09)	5(1.83)	08 (2.93)
60-64	6 (2.15)	3 (1.07)	09 (3.23)	3(1.09)	5(1.83)	08 (2.93)
65-69	3 (1.07)	0 (0.00)	3 (1.07)	0(0.00)	7(2.56)	07 (2.56)
70+	2 (0.72)	4 (1.43)	6 (2.15)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
Total population	143 (51.43)	135 (48.57)	278 (100.00)	133 (48.71)	140 (51.28)	273 (100.00)

Table shows the distribution of age irrespective of sex in both of the villages. In Bikna 4.31 % male and 2.87 % female fall under the age group up to 4 years after birth. In case of Dariyapur village 5.12 % males and 4.39 % females were found in the same age range. The age group of 5 to 9 years revealed 5.03% males and 6.11% females in Bikna and 9.52% males and 4.69% females in Dariyapur. Furthermore, in Bikna, male and female population is respectively 5.39% and 6.83% for 10-14 years age group; whereas, 8.42% males and 6.95% females are identified in Dariyapur. In the age group of 15-19 years, male and female frequency respectively is 7.19% and 3.23% in Bikna and 5.12% and 6.22% in Dariyapur. 20 to 24 years age group showed 4.67% males and 3.59% females in Bikna whereas 3.29% males and 6.59% females in Dariyapur. In the age range between 25 to 29 years, male and female frequency of Bikna respectively was 3.23% and 6.83% and the same in case of Dariyapur was 3.29% and 4.02%. In the age group of 30-34 years, in Bikna, males and females are equal in number i.e., 2.15% whereas in Dariyapur the distribution was 2.56% males and 2.93% females. Furthermore, age group of 35 to 39 years consists of 6.47% males and 5.75% females in Bikna and male and female distribution is same (4.02%) in Dariyapur. In the 40-44 age group, male and female frequency is 2.87% and 1.79% respectively in Bikna whereas 2.29% of both sexes in Dariyapur. In 45-49 age groups, females (3.95%) are higher than males (2.51%) in Bikna. On the other hand, 50-54 age groups reveal that 1.79% male and 0.72% female in Bikna. Moreover, in Dariyapur male and female distribution is same i.e., 1.46% for the two succeeding age groups of 45-49 years and 50-54 years. Then, in case of 55 to 59 years female frequency (2.15%) is higher than male (1.79%) in Bikna. In the 60-64 age groups, male (2.15%) frequency is higher than female (1.07%) in Bikna. On the other hand 1.09% males and 1.83% of females are there in the categories of 55-59 and 60-64 years in case of Dariyapur. In 65-69 years group, there are no females and the male frequency is 1.07% in Bikna; whereas female population is greater (1.83%) than male (1.09%) in Dariyapur. Finally, in the age group of above 70 years, females (1.43%) are higher than males (0.72%) in Bikna and none are found in Dariyapur.

Figure 1 – Distribution of sex of both of the villages

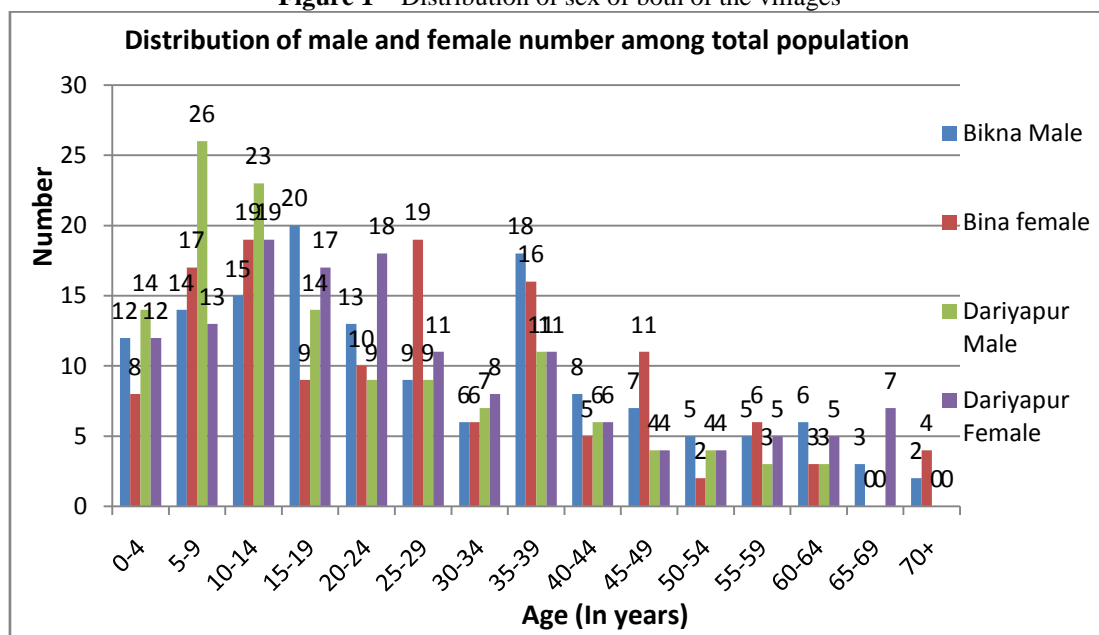


Table 3: Distribution of Marital status

3. A. Distribution of marital status of males

Married		Unmarried		Widower		Divorced	
Bikna	Dariyapur	Bikna	Dariyapur	Bikna	Dariyapur	Bikna	Dariyapur
72	53	70	80	01	00	00	00

3. B. Distribution of marital status of females

Married		Unmarried		Widow		Divorced	
Bikna	Dariyapur	Bikna	Dariyapur	Bikna	Dariyapur	Bikna	Dariyapur
72	53	51	61	12	24	00	02

As per marital status, the number of married person is quite higher in Bikna, i.e., 72 males and 72 females whereas, Dariyapur exhibits respectively 53 married men and 53 women. The number of unmarried males and females of Bikna and Dariyapur are respectively 70 males and 51 females in Bikna and 80 males and 61 females in Dariyapur. On the other hand, there are 12 widows and 1 widower in Bikna, whereas 24 widows and no widower noticed in Dariyapur. 2 divorcee women were identified in Dariyapur only.

Figure 2 – Contrasting marital status of both of the villages on the basis of sex

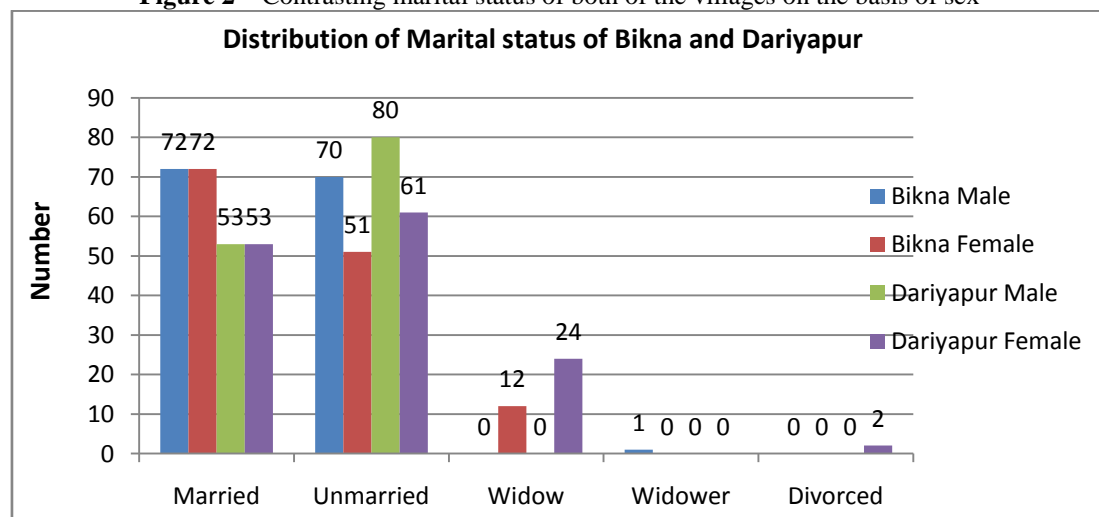


Table 4: Distribution of literacy level

Literacy level	Literate (%)	Illiterate (%)
Bikna Total Population (N= 258)	228 (88.37)	30 (11.63)
Dariyapur Total Population (N= 247)	103 (41.70)	144 (58.29)

Table displays the literacy level of the entire population of Bikna and Dariyapur village. This study ignored the persons who belong to the age group of 0 to 4 years. In Bikna, 88.37 % are literate whereas 11.63 % individuals are illiterate irrespective of sex. In this village, the literacy level is higher. But in Dariyapur, the scenario is completely different. 41.70 % individuals are literate whereas, 58.29 % are illiterate throughout the population. The literacy level is generally low due to their financial constraint and lack of awareness.

Figure 3– Literacy level of both of the villages

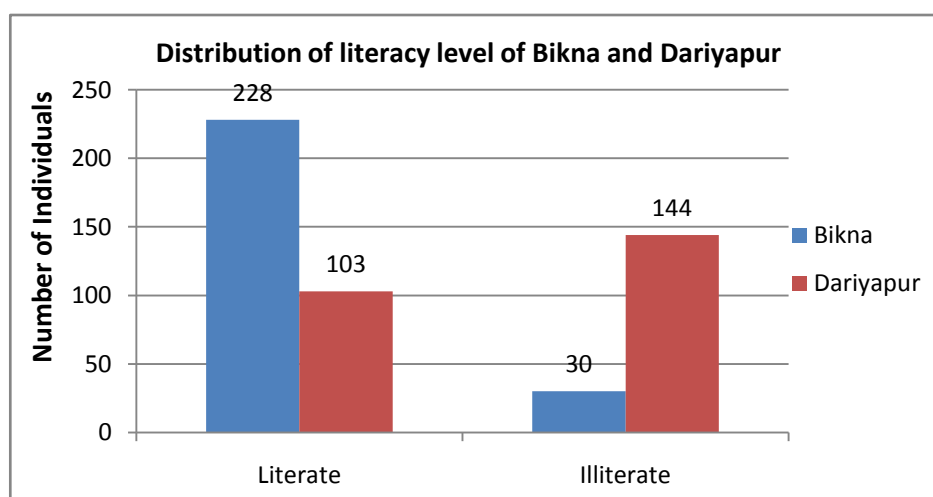


Table 5: Distribution of educational status of male and female:

Educational status	Bikna		Dariyapur	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Class I-IV	67 (51.14)	73 (57.48)	47 (39.49)	26 (20.31)
Class V-X	50 (38.16)	34 (26.77)	20 (16.80)	09 (7.03)
Class XI-XII	02 (1.52)	00 (0.00)	01 (0.84)	00 (0.00)
Graduate	02 (1.52)	00 (0.00)	00 (0.00)	00(0.00)
Illiterate	10 (7.63)	20 (15.74)	51 (42.85)	93 (72.65)
Total Population	131(100.00)	127 (100.00)	119 (100.00)	128 (100.00)

The educational status of male and female population of both of the villages excluded the children with less than 4 years of age at the time of data collection. Village Bikna shows that majority of the people belong to the category of Class I-IV in which 67 are males and 73 are females. On the other hand, in class V-X, males (50) are higher than females (34). Class XI-XII and Graduate category consist of 02 males equally and there is no female in both these two groups. Only 10 men and 20 women are illiterate in 'Shilpidanga' cluster of Bikna. There are some schools like Bikna KPS Vidyapith and many others in Bikna.

Village Dariyapur shows that majority of the population belongs to the category of illiterate in which 51 are males and 93 are females. 47 males and 26 females belong to the category of Class I-IV. 20 males and 9 females are from Class V-X but only 1 male represent the Class XI-XII group. The school goers in the category of class I-IV are comparatively higher than that of other classes because many of the villagers get primary education but they join their occupation at the early age for livelihood. On the other side, female illiteracy is much higher due to the fact that they get married at an early age. No graduate was found among entire population. Basically, for both villages, females do not get sufficient chance for education like the males. Poor family condition, lack of schools in rural areas, early marriage of a girl, and lack of interest in education play vital roles in high rate of female illiteracy in the areas.

Figure 4– Contrasting educational status of both of the villages on the basis of sex

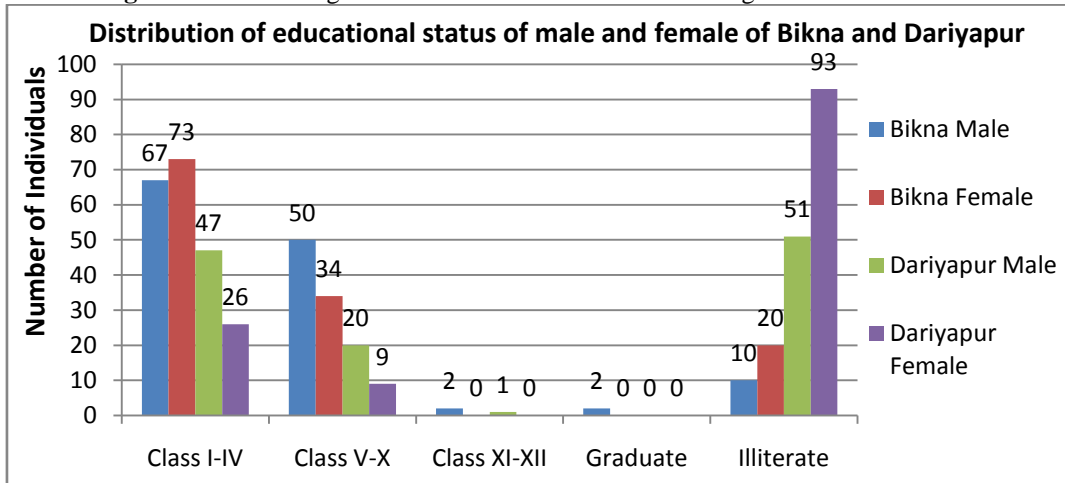


Table 6: Distribution of training status

Training status	Trained (%)	Untrained (%)
Bikna Total Population (N= 193)	52 (26.95)	141 (73.05)
Dariyapur Total Population (N=166)	47 (28.31)	119 (71.69)

The distribution of training status of both males and females of the two villages has been studied. The section of the population less than 14 years of age has been excluded in this table. According to the artisans, young artisans are not eligible to get the training before 14 years. It shows that 26.95 % of the population of Bikna got training and 73.05 % belong to the category of non-trained; whereas the data for the village Dariyapur showed 28.31 % got training and 71.69 % belonged to the category of non-trained till now.

The study revealed that during the training they learnt the new techniques of making the art products by the use of advanced furnace and some new special designs of the items. But the number of untrained persons was quite high because many of the art producers showed little interest in the training. They expressed sufficient self-confidence in their own traditional legacy. Another reason is that, the quality of training was very low. In the past, various training institutes frequently visited these villages and called the artisans for training. But now training institutes rarely provide training and the number of institutes visiting the villages has also decreased. The time span of training varied from 07 to 30 days. Basic criterion for enrolment in getting training was that the person should have the artisan card, must have registered his name and phone number at the District Industry Center (DIC office) of that district and should attend the annual fair.

Figure 5– Contrasting training status of Bikna and Dariyapur

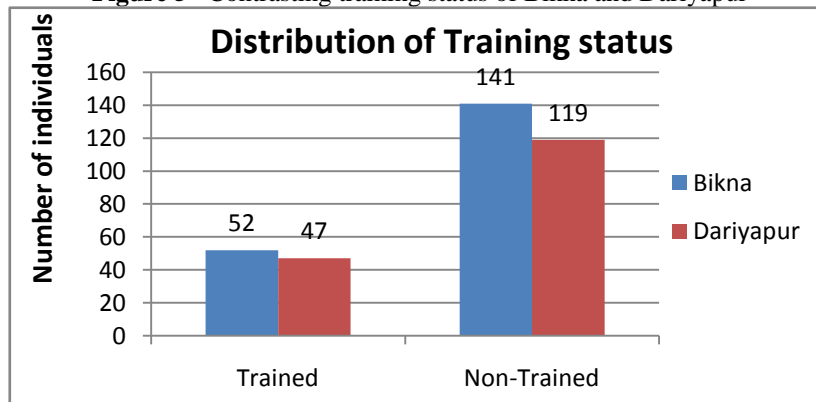


Table 7: Distribution of monthly income among the families:

Monthly income (in Rs. Approx.)	Number of family (%) of Bikna	Number of family (%) of Dariyapur
Up to 5000	7 (10.60)	15 (27.78)
5001 to 10000	40 (60.60)	25 (46.29)
10001 to 15000	14 (21.21)	10 (18.51)
15001 to 20000	4 (6.06)	3 (5.55)
Above 20000	1 (1.51)	1 (1.85)

Total family	66 (100.00)	54 (100.00)
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Table shows that average income of these clusters are found to be between Rs. 5001 to 10000/- in Bikna (60.60%) and Dariyapur (46.29%). The number of people with income between (Rs. 15001 to 20000/-) in Bikna are 14 and in Dariyapur the number is 10 i.e. 6.06% and 5.55%. respectively. Only one family (1.51%) of both villages has earned above Rs. 20000/-. On the other hand, 7 families (10.60%) of Bikna and 15 families (27.78%) of Dariyapur earn below Rs. 5000/-. The rest 21.21% and 18.51% of Bikna and Dariyapur respectively are recognized as medium income group earners i.e., they earn between Rs. 10001 to 15000/-. Higher income status truly depended on their high selling of crafts with good strategy, individual participations in craft fairs frequently, from home selling and livestock.

Figure 6 – Status of monthly income of the villages

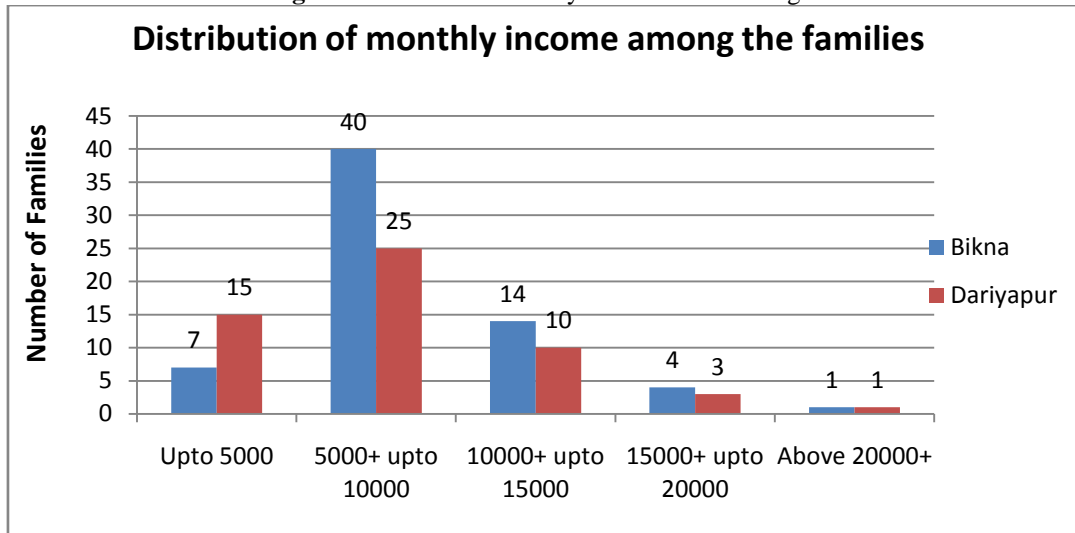


Table 8: Families receive loans from different agencies:

Loan issue	Loan receiver (%)	Loan non-receiver (%)
Bikna Total Family (N=66)	48(72.73)	18(27.27)
Dariyapur Total Family (N=54)	35(64.82)	19(35.18)

Table shows that the number of beneficiaries taking loan from different banks or agencies (like Bandhan Bank, Axis Bank etc.). The number of families who never received such kind of loans in Bikna is 18 (27.27%) in Bikna 19 in Dariyapur. 48 families (72.73%) in Bikna and 35 families (64.82%) of Dariyapur have received loans. According to the artisans there is no specific money lender (*Mahajons*) who provide them with loan for craft; they draw loans only from Banks. To draw a loan, such Banks require some basic documents of identity as an Indian citizen and in return they get the artisan card.

Figure 7– Loan receivers of both of the villages

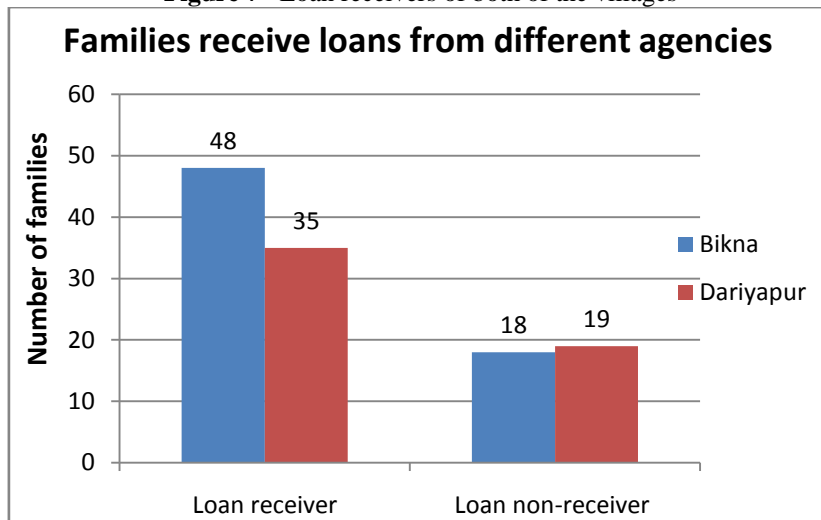
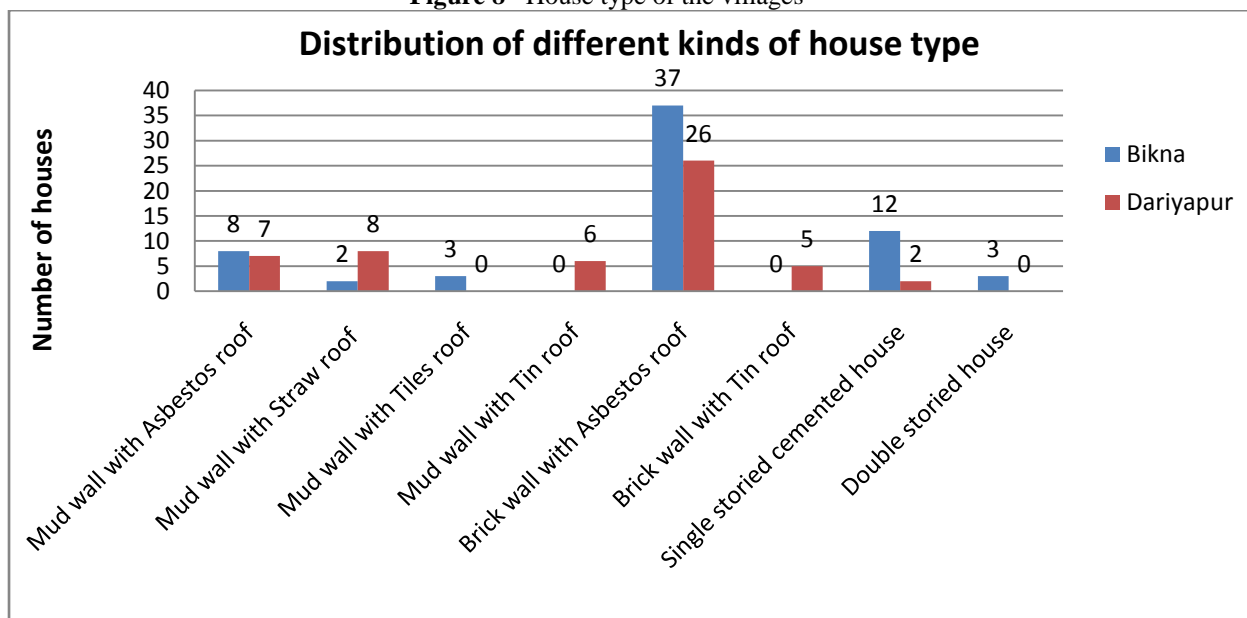


Table 9: Distribution of different kinds of house type:

House types	Number of families (%) of Bikna	Number of families (%) of Dariyapur
Mud wall with Asbestos roof	8 (12.30)	7 (12.96)
Mud wall with Straw roof	2 (3.07)	8 (14.82)
Mud wall with Tiles roof	3 (4.61)	00 (0.0)
Mud wall with Tin roof	00 (0.0)	6 (11.11)
Brick wall with Asbestos roof	37 (56.92)	26 (48.15)
Brick wall with Tin roof	00 (0.0)	5 (9.25)
Single storied cemented house	12 (18.47)	2 (3.70)
Double storied house	3 (4.61)	00 (0.0)
Total households	65	54

There are total 65 dokra artisan households in ‘Shilpidanga’ cluster in Bikna and 54 households’ in ‘Shadhurbagan-dokra para’ in Dariyapur village. Out of them the most common type of households contain brick wall with asbestos roof i.e., 56.92% in Bikna and 48.15% in Dariyapur respectively. Only 3 double storied houses are noticed in Bikna. In case of Bikna, out of 65 households 62 houses are single storied and there are 18.47% single storied cemented houses, whereas 3.70% of the same type is found in Dariyapur. Apart from these, there are some households with mud wall and asbestos roof in Bikna (12.30%) and Dariyapur (12.96%). Mud wall with tiled roof are 3 in number in Bikna and none in Dariyapur. The lowest number of households of Bikna with mud wall and straw roof is 3.07%, whereas, the same is 14.82% in Dariyapur. On the other hand 11.11% with mud wall and tin roof and 9.25% with brick wall and tin roof are found in Dariyapur and none of these types in Bikna.

Figure 8– House type of the villages



V. THE ARTISAN AND THEIR IDENTITY

In this present study, the artisans of the studied villages claim themselves to be identified as ‘DokraKamars’. The artisans of these villages reckon themselves as Kamars or blacksmiths and experts in lost-wax process of brass casting. They are famous by various surnames like Malhar, Mal, Sekra etc. They are scattered in many parts of West Bengal in the districts like Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, Purulia and West Medinipur. They are broadly separated into two groups Malhar and Non-Malhar. The artisans who live in Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum and Medinipur are known as Malhar whereas artisans who stay in Purulia are known as non-Malhars. Their identity is deeply related with their crafting and ‘dokrakamar’ title is collected from there (Chakrabarty, 2009).

The Malhar-dokra community is an endogamous group and the clan shows exogamy and is totemic in nature. The group of people are mainly divided into clans like *Nag* (snake), *Bagh* (tiger), *Kerketta* (crab), *Kacchap* (tortoise), *Bashpota*, *Bantha*, *Domar*, *Barha*, *Baansa*, *Toppo*, and *Kujur*. It is also mentioned that their clans are segmented into some lineage groups (*gusti /bangso*) known as *Rajmaral*, *Kuliar*, *Chowdhuri*, *Charmundi*, *Tokoyar*, *Nagpuria*, and *Nagrishi*. The members of a particular clan project themselves as descendants of that common ancestor. In both the studied villages, some the above mentioned clan groups were

found. The highest percentage of artisans belonged to the Nag clan group. However, lineage groups were also identified in both villages. In their dokra art form the artisans depict some of their ancestors and their clan motif and totemic belief were evident from their art forms.

Dokra artisans live in a separate cluster which is detached from the main village and their socio-cultural position is not similar to other caste groups in the area. They are designated as lower castes. Other caste groups of those particular villages maintained some distance from the dokra community in the past. But nowadays such kind of social isolation due to caste rigidity has been abolished. The situation is similar in both the villages.

Dokra artisans of both villages use their surname as 'Karmakar' on the basis of their profession as their metal based workers. 'Karmakar' is actually an occupational designation as well as surname and it is the synonym of Kamar. They are basically metal working caste groups and West Bengal and Bihar are their motherland. There is a mythological belief that this caste group was born out of an intrigue between a woman of Sudra caste and artificer Viswakarma. They come under the 'Nabasakh' group and are distributed into a number of classes like LoharKamar, PituliKamars, SarnaKamar, GhatraKamar, ChandKamar, Kansari, DhokraKamar and TamarKamar. On the other hand Kamars of Rarh Bengal are distributed into a number of classes like RanaKamar, KultiKamar, AstaloiKamar and BiraloiKamar (Chandra, 2015).

In the cases of changing of surnames of Malhars, it is now believed that they are Hindus by religion and are a part of Bengali community since they nurture all Bengali rituals and festivals. Their original mother tongue is *Maral* or *Ma-haral*. They migrated from Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. 'Karmakar' is not their original surname and the same are adopted surnames. It is believed that sometime in the past the grandparents of the grandparents of the Artisans wanted to place themselves higher in the ladder of caste hierarchy and adopted this title. Some of them have intermingled with general castes also. Originally they belonged to Scheduled Caste (SC) and used to hide their original surname. Basically after establishment of their community in those two studied village they changed their surname from Maral to Karmakar. Mainly, ancestors of the present artisans are responsible for their 'Karmakar' surname. Nowadays, they are OBC in caste category and after the 1960s their surname were changed. It is also mentioned that in both the villages most of the families are bearing Karmakar as their surname. However, in case of Dariyapur village, 52 families have use 'Karmakar' as their surname and two families use the surname of 'Turi'. On the other hand, in Bikna village, among the 66 families, 'Karmakar' surname is used by 62 families, two families use 'Singha' as their surname, one family use 'Jana' as its surname and one family bears 'Chetri' as its surname.

VI. ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE DOKRA ARTISAN COMMUNITY OF WEST BENGAL

At the time of present study, Dokra artisans of both the studied villages acknowledged themselves as the descendents of Malhar community. The Dokra communities have many similarities with the Malhar tribe. Numerically, Malhar or Malar is a minor community and they are scattered over the places of Dhenkanal, Keonjhar and Sambalpur districts of Odisha, Thane district of Maharashtra, Medinipur district of West Bengal. The Malhar is a semi-nomadic Kolharian tribe of Odisha. They also exist in Thane district of Maharashtra State as Schedule Tribe (ST). In the ST list of Odisha, they are documented with another community Koli at serial number 36 although Koli and Malhar are actually two distinct communities and they have no regional or ethnic affinity (Ota et. al, 2015).

Sir H. H. Risley (1891) in his documentation 'Tribes and Castes of Bengal', states that Malar is the subdivision of Ghasis and Mundas of Chhotanagpur region. Bankura and Bardhaman Dokra artisans were referred as 'Mal' or 'Malar'. Malar is the third person plural of Mal and Maler (Ota et. al, 2015). The name Malhar is derived from their deity 'Malharideo' or 'Panbhari' (carrier of water) is another local term to call the Malhars of Odisha. On the other hand, in Thane Gazetteer (P: 173), it is stated that the term 'Malhar' has been taken from 'Mala', a Dravidian term which means 'Hill'. Another name of Malhars in Odisha is 'JaraSabar' and sometimes people identify them as 'madhuwalla' or 'mallay' (Ota et. al, 2015).

On the origin of Malhars, Dalton stated that, 'According to their legend, in ancient age when human race was first created, seven brothers were created first who were food gatherers. They were vegetarians in their habit. The seventh brother was born sick and unable to travel distant places. When edible fruits and tubers in one place of their habitat became scarce, the seventh brother managed to gather food by killing animals which were then abundant in the locality. Due to this, the elder brothers out casted him and left him. The left out brother, after marrying a woman, established in an isolated hill area. From them many children were born. In due course of time, their number multiplied. During Aryan invasion of the area, they were divided into two groups of which one section moved towards Rajmahal hill and the other group sought the high lands as their place of refuge. They dwell also in West Bengal where they are referred to as dhokra or dokra. They are the artisan group and are engaged in making tinkering bells (ghungur) and measuring pots for grains such as paiandpua with brass metal. Many other dokra items such as deer, peacock and many other animals with Lakshmi and images of Gods and Goddesses' (Ota et. al, 2015).

Malhars lead life as hunter and food gather along with wage earning, seasonal forest collection, fishing and livestock rearing from subsistence. Habitations of Malhars are located in hilly regions surrounded by deep forest. Their settlements are homogeneous in nature and situated near foot hills or slopes. Due to their nomadic nature, they have no permanent settlement and they always prefer forest based product for their livelihood (Ota et. al, 2015).

Mother tongue of Malhars is a kind of non- literacy dialect which is interconnected with Proto-Munda group of languages. It belongs to the northern Munda family of Languages. These people are flexible with more than one language particularly *Odia* and *Sadri*, local languages of Odisha. They use *Odia* script for non-verbal communication (Ota et. al, 2015). Socially they have the characteristics as an endogamous community as Malhars. They are divided into two sub-groups such as *Baraghor* / *Badaghor* and *Chhotghori*. In social hierarchy, *Barghor* / *Badaghor* division are ranked higher than the *Chotghori* division. These four divisions such as *Ghantar*, *Khadar*, *Khudka* and *Dang*, are sub-groups of *Baraghor* and *Chhotghori* (Ota et. al, 2015).

Each of the four divisions are again separated into many clan (*gotra*) groups like *Nag*, *Kachhap*, *Barha*, *Bagh*, *Baansa*, *Kerketta*, *Toppo*, *Kujur* and *Tikur* etc. Under these clan groups there are many lineage groups or (*gusti*) like *Nagpuria*, *Chowdhuri*, *Rajmaral*, *Tokoyar*, *Kuliar*, *Charmundi* etc. These are exogamous totemic clans. The members of a particular clan regard themselves as descendants of a common ancestor. The members of each clan respect their totemic objects and follow taboos. In regard to marital affairs, they practice endogamy subject to the condition that the lineage and clan should have been exogamous. However, Malhars use *Dehuri*, *Pradhan*, *Malik*, *Laru*, *Bahera*, *Baru*, *Sabar*, *Naua* and *Patiar* as their surname (Ota et. al, 2015).

Malhars are animists and have deep faith on Hinduism. Their famous tribal deities are Dharmesh (the Sun God), Basumata (Goddess Earth), *Karmasain*, *Chadrabati* (the moon), *Banadurga*, *Banarai* or *Banaspati* (the forest deity) etc (Ota et. al, 2015) and the Hindu deities are *Manasa*, *Mahadev*, *Ganesh*, *Jagannath*, *Laxmi*, *Saraswati*, *Durga*, *Kali* and so on. They participate in Hindu festivals such as *Nagpanchami*, *Durga puja*, *Kali puja*, *Moulamas*, *Raja*, *Gamha*, *Diwali*, *Holi* and many others. Malhars have their own oral tradition of folk tales, songs, and dances such as *Golwari*(Ota et. al, 2015).

VII.MIGRATION

According to a folk story about the origin of Ghadwas, more or less three thousand years ago, Bhan Chand, the king of Bastar of Madhya Pradesh, now in Chattisgarh, had presented his wife a necklace of Dokra. Observing its beautiful craftsmanship, king honored the craftsmen with the title 'Ghadwa'. The term has been taken from the term '*Ghalna*', which means 'melting and working with wax'. 'Ghadwas' represent a small artisan group who produce brass or bell metal objects (Dhar, 2018). Another theory of the origin of their name comes from the term '*Gadhna*' which means 'to make' or precisely, the act of shaping and creating. This term was most probably given by the artisans, who are casting the art objects. In some regions, the craftsmen are recognized as Ghasia, Khaser, Mangan, and Vishwakarma (Banerjee et. al, 2017).The castes that are associated with Dokra have always been recognized as Sudras in the fourfold social division (Pal, 1978).The history of the dokra makers of West Bengal appears to be incomplete and the records are fragmentary in nature. No record of this artisan industry survives beyond the pre-colonial days.

The craft Dokra, an ancestral type of craft, are performed by the Chitraghasi and Ghasi tribes (Horne, 1987).Chronologically the migration trajectory of dokra started from the north-western Chhattisgarh to the parts of Jharkhand and distributed mainly towards the western part of West Bengal. These regions are actually ancient land mass (Mukherjee, 2000). At the end of the Stone Age, the dokra culture was introduced with copper and popularized as Neo-Chalcolithic culture (Jain, 2014).

The Paleolithic zone of West Bengal consists of the western portions of Bankura, Birbhum, Medinipur, Purulia and some parts of Bardhaman district. This zone provide a compact picture of succession of primary laterite preceded by bedrock, mottled clay, lateritic conglomerate and sandy deposit(Chakrabarti, 2006).Prehistoric data suggests that Bankura, Bardhaman, Medinipur belong to the river basin and alluvial tract areas of Damodor, Dharekeshwar and Tarafeni rivers. These zones are famous for Paleolithic and Chalcolithic culture zones. The present dhokra artifacts zone lies under these tracts and provides the proof of Chalcolithic figurine arts and crafts (Sinha et. al, 2015). The huge source of copper and most easy pathways of trading the items to market transformed their migratory character and helped them to settle in groups in different parts of West Bengal and other parts of India (Kundu, 2016).

Regarding the migratory route of Bikna artisans, it is revealed that the original or actual homeland of Dhokra artisans was Chotanagpur Plateau from where they migrated to Ranchi, then Chaibasa and other places of Singbhum about 200 years back. After that they settled in Gopalpur near Bishnupur and the Maharaja of Bishnupur gifted them a homestead and a plot of agricultural land 150 years ago. From there they travelled to Rampur and then to Bikna *Shipidanga* in Bankura district of West Bengal (Jana, 2013).

The artisans of dokra of Bankura and Bardhaman district are pursuing this craft based occupation for over 55 / 60 years based on their inherited skill and their in-born artistic nature. According to a local legend,

"We are all old artisans. Our early generations mostly lived in Baranagpur and Chotanagpur. Long back our ancestors were tribals. They migrated from Maharashtra and got settled in Bastar. Thereafter the artisans came from Bastar to Baranagpur and Chotanagpur through Odisha and scattered over different parts of West Bengal. In those days dokra artisans lived a nomadic life and this continued till 1960-1965. Later they settled in Shilpidanga of Bikna". One old artisan commented, "When we settled here our life also changed and changes come in our production also. After 1965, Parimal Das, a gentleman helped us to make a settled life in Bankura. He advised us for making modern forms of dokra. Mr. Das established a society (Samiti) here and assumed the role of marketing manager of the society. Slowly and slowly the society flourished and was registered by the government". Dariyapur artisans also settled in a similar fashion with the help one Prabhat Sen. The history of these Malhars of Bikna and Dariyapur are neither recorded nor written as texts. These stories go around the villages like folk tales.

'Jagibo', who are a group of nomadic people and expert in craftsmanship, migrated to Dariyapur in 1960. There are evidences that the residents of Dariyapur did not allow them to stay in the main village. The nomads settled at an adjacent land area known as 'Dariyapur Para'. In Burdwan, nomads are present in Aklaxmi, Balsi, etc (Thakore, 2010). Artisans of Dokra are actually a semi-nomadic group of wanderers who have been practicing the art of metal craft. In West Bengal the dokra artisans are found in the tribal zones of Bankura and Burdwan. Prior to the 1940s, most of these people lived in small groups outside the agricultural villages and moved from one place to another according to the market demand. They were known in surnames like Mal, Malar, Maral, Malhor or Mahuli. These artisans shared a common area of origin in the tribal areas of Chotanagpur plateau (Horne, 1987).

VIII. CONCLUSION

As a handicraft item, Dokra is a golden colored metallic abstract art object used for amusement and internal decoration. The paper studies the migration trajectories of the artisans along with their present socio-economic conditions through dokra craft. Dokra is extremely valuable to the artisans. All the artisans work for their livelihood and also for their aesthetic satisfaction. It can be stated that the adoption of 'sanskritised' caste designation of 'Karmakar' by the Bankura and Bardhaman Dokra artisan testifies their sense social mobility and progressive ideas. Nowadays they are appreciated as artists everywhere and earn respect from all. It is also heartening to note that women of both the villages are now not far behind the males. They are also keep themselves engaged in craftworks most of the times and extend their able helping hands in flourishing their family business. During the past 8 / 10 years some young artisans of GhatraKamar community (utensil maker) have adopted the skill of Dokra crafts and have engaged themselves in the production of Dokra items. As a result the traditional Dokra crafts of Bankura have flourished far beyond the Bikna village. The aesthetic senses of craftsmen and their skills have undergone lot of changes over the years. Most of the artists are non-tutored but they have inborn talent and creativity. Training within the family from an early age family training over the years, provide them with the inspiration to give shapes to their dreams and aspirations to become a pure artist.

The proliferations of other technologically advanced craft industries have pushed the Dokra artisans somewhat financially back. Some of them have been forced to become marginalized in terms of making profit.

However, in recent years, the products of Dokra artisans are in great demand in domestic as well as in foreign market. The artisans of these areas are trying their best to satisfy the tourists of these renowned tourist spots by producing and selling Dokra artifacts.

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