

THE INFLUENCE OF MODERNIZATION ON POTTERY PRACTICES

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Abstract

The pottery on their own through imitation and innovation have started integrating traditional forms with modern ones, a step that assisted them to survive till today. There is need to introduce them to a modern technique of production, which will make their work easier and less-tedious.

1.0. Introduction

In the area of continuity and change since pottery colours can be locally produced, with our indigenous raw materials, then the importation of foreign pottery colours to our pottery industries should be discouraged and potters should be encouraged to prepare/formulate their pottery colourants.

The technology should be sold to interested entrepreneurs for subsequent mass productions for the general market thereby generating funds. The government should establish industries in some states of the federation and employ personnel to research into the production of pottery stains/pigments for the Nigeria ceramics/pottery industries in order to aid in the production of ceramics/pottery wares, thereby reducing the rates of importation of the products into the country by establishing pottery industries in charge of pottery/ceramics colours and other pottery/ceramics materials in different states of the federation, the government will also create job opportunities for young school leavers. They can be sent on training to study how these colours are made and gain employment in these industries. The traditional pottery activities that are near extinction in our local areas should be revived by the government, by supporting the local potters financially and with social amenities that will make their work less cumbersome etc. such as follows;

1.1. Possible Means of Sustainability

With all these factors threatening the existence of traditional pottery making, such like improved financial conditions from the cities jobs. Competition from the

imported wares, scientific pottery wares from PRODA Ekulu pottery Centre, Okigwi, IshiaguInyi and Umuahia Ceramics Industry. The life span of traditional pottery seems very short. Young girls are no more interested in the trade and they are exposed to the cleaner finger jobs in the office at the cities, which is less stressful. It is clear that traditional pottery is heading towards total extinction as a result of negative impacts of forces of modernity. In EkpeneUkim, Ishiagu and Afikpo, it has been noted that traditional pottery making is on the decline or deteriorating to the point that only elderly women are only engaged in it. The condition adversely affected the economy, social and cultural life of the people, a situation which shows that the trade/craft is left in the hands of few elderly women in the society means that, it will soon come to an end. The traditional pottery, the rich traditional heritage/tradition of the people, is significant for us because it has something, which is lacking in contemporary ceramics and something has to be done to ensure its survival in the face of all adversities. This trade has always been from time immemorial an importance source for the provision of basic utensils in most homes. With the change in social and cultural life of the people, there is still an element of pride, in using some local pots. What used to serve as ritual or ceremonial pots now serve perfectly in homes as decorative or ornamental pieces.

1.2 Suggested Means of Sustainability

The feature and characteristic qualities are clear indication that the demand for traditional pottery will continue, but how this noble profession can be sustained has been a source of serious concern to researchers in traditional pottery.

1.3 Modernization

There is justification in seeing that the pottery tradition survives. There are many ways this can be done. First, is through the integration of the traditional techniques with

that of modern techniques. Though pottery on their own through imitation and innovation have started integrating traditional forms with modern ones, a step that assisted them to survive till today. There is need to introduce them to a modern technique of production, which will make their work easier and less-tedious. Tediousness of the production process has been identified as the primary factors militating against the craft/trade, occasioned by the absence of apprentices due to increased quest for western education. However, like the traditional potters, who through the weapon of thoughtful synthesis of traditional and modern forms ensured that their unique identity is sustained, we must ensure that the integration of the two techniques does not rub the pottery tradition its distinguishable features and rich artistic appeals. Besides, traditional pottery as a cultural resource has to be preserved for posterity. An attempt to avoid the cultural vicissitude or total extinction of traditional pottery making through the integration of the traditional techniques with that of modern techniques has already been suggested by scholars. The posting of modern potters to the rural areas to help educate the local potters on modern techniques of pottery making which involves the use of throwing wheels and the construction of wood kilns with bricks. The person should be technically competent in the field and prepaid to work on the same level with the local potters and should not make the mistake of teaching only the modern aspect, but should be able to marry the old and the new techniques. The essence is to see how modern technology can be utilized in the production of local wares that would compete favourably with modern ones. It is believed that with the level of experience already attained by the local potters, they should be able to produced ordinary red bricks to be utilized in the construction of such kiln. Also with little technical assistance, they should be able to operate it and as well manipulate a simple-kick wheel. Unfortunately, experience has shown that even though the local potters have adopted innovative approach to their designs and decoration, they seem not to be ready for a change in their basic technology, government in its current drive to encourage local industries, has taken a number of measures to introduce modern technology at the local level” in some parts of the country, but all to no avail. A case in point is what happened in 1990 at Abeokuta in Nigeria during a three-day workshop organized by the

Social Welfare Department of the Federal Ministry of Culture and Social Development on the use of potters’ wheel for traditional pottery. The idea that proposes that the transformation of local pottery by the introduction of potter’s wheels, kilns and glazes to the local potters can be achieved in a comparatively short time is an assumption and that is largely incorrect. In Gold Coast where he made kiln-fired water-coolers and glazed wares for several years. He observed to his greatest surprise that despite the fact that over hundred percent of the population were potters, none of the women came to learn the new technique. To him, the reasons “may be partly because they have had ample opportunities of observing the much greater difficulties and expenses of the new methods” or “that the women are not on the whole prepared to abandon their old techniques for the new.” It is obvious that the new methods will bring about increased productivity and improved technical quality, but the attendant increase in production and the required technical knowledge are the possible causes of the potters insensitivity. The new methods required the use of costly equipment and materials which the potters are not likely to afford on their own unless they are given assistance in form of loan and provided with certain essential amenities that will create the required enabling environment for the craft to strive. It should be noted that the information of the potter’s wheel is not an important aspect of the transformations needed for the survival of local pottery because of its limitation in the production of certain forms. An important aspect that needs to be stressed is the introduction of wood kilns which is the most obvious way of reducing stresses involved in the use of open firing method. The potters are likely to accept any firing technique that will expose them to operate since they are already familiar with the type of fuel used. Besides, with the low firing temperature for which traditional pottery is fired, usually not more than 650°C, its construction will require the use of less expensive materials (ordinary red bricks) procured within the environment. Kiln furniture may not be required, wares can be stocked inside the kiln upon one another making sure there is room for efficient heat circulation. For this dream to be realized, there is need for government assistance by way of loan and provision of resource persons who possess the required competence to teach the potters the basic techniques for operating

such kilns. As a way to encourage local production of pots, government can give loan to the potters to undertake or build such kilns for them in each pottery locality.

1.4. Establishment of Modern Pottery Centres

Another means of encouraging the traditional industry is through the establishment of pottery centres in each of the pottery communities. Government should revive those that are moribund and establish new ones, where there had been no such industry.

In Afikpo, Ishiagu, and Ekpene/Okim there is need for pottery centres that will help to harness the rich potter's resources for the benefit of the dwellers. Government should also revive pottery centres at Inyi and Okigwe etc. Let them serve as centres for promotion of indigenous pottery technology, the government can achieve this by reviving the programme of better life for rural women, aiming at improving the lot of the rural dwellers by raising their standard of living through encouraging the development of art and craft and the establishment of cottage Industries. For example, it was this programme that gave birth to the abandoned pottery center in Inyi, in Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State. In Ondo state the Better Life Programme assisted the potters to construct modern kilns to ease the tediousness of firing. The pottery centers should improve upon some aspects of the local techniques, thereby bringing about the much desired intergration of the old and new. They should avoid stereotyped production of imported moulds and machines and still aim at modernization without destroying indigenous designs, forms and techniques. The overall aim should be "geared towards technical and material integration of both local and modern methods; tapping the rich aesthetic local resources and not dumping them. The varied shapes and designs used by the local potters should be borrowed by the centre" and some of the experienced potters should be invited to the centre as resource persons to demonstrate their techniques, before the workers, who should make effort to imbibe them. Most importantly, the wood kilns discussed earlier, should be built in these centres and the potters given the opportunity to go there to fire their wares themselves or pay a token sum of money to have their pots fired. Even the electric kilns acquired by the centers can be used for this purpose. In

doing this, care must be taken to avoid firing the pots beyond the intended temperature in order not to destroy the technical quality for which local pottery is known. In order to ensure efficiency in the discharge of this function, the decree establishing the centres should make provision for this service even without any cost to the local potter. If the system is properly organized, "there is no doubt that the potters would prefer" to pay to "have their pots fired for them than take all the trouble of open firing. This aspect of the centre's function can constitute an important source of income that can help to sustain the centres.

1.5 Provision of Enabling Environment

Another aspect of the Better Life Programme is enabling environment for the local pottery to thrive in the communities; here emphasis is on the provision of essential amenities that will promote production and distribution of pots. Clay resources are disappearing in most pottery communities through construction activities, and is becoming a source of serious concern to the potters and scholars interested in the sustainability of the local pottery Industries. The government should enact a decree that covers, the sustainable development of clay and other pottery resources, so that potters are not stressed of travelling far in search of finding clay materials. Most roads in the rural areas have become death traps for motorists and their goods, especially the breakables, such as clay products, glasses and the like. The provision of steady supply of water through the construction of pipe borne water or boreholes, for processing of clay and other processes is also essential for promoting of local pottery industries in our societies. The contemporary artist/potters are highly being influenced by traditional forms, which in most cases differ from the contemporary ceramics by the application of glaze. It has been a growing interest among the contemporary potters in ensuring that this cultural heritage resource of Africa survives the ravaging effect of Modernity. Integration of traditional and Modern techniques, materials, forms and decoration are being used as an avenue through which this can be done.

1.6 Conclusion

This research/study endeavor has been able to throw some lights on the current state of traditional pottery in

EkpeneUkim, Afikpo and Ishiagu. Even though; with modernity on traditional pottery, it has continued to survive in these areas till the present date. Pottery colours derived from nature, such as roots, leaves, coloured stones, tree bark etc. Can now be processed scientifically and used by the contemporary potters without going through the rigorous local processes of applying them raw on the pottery wares. The influences on traditional pottery practices are numerous and very devastating, which include the introduction of modern containers, Christian missionaries activities, urbanization, African indigenous cultural practices and many others. However, because of these factors, its cultural, social and economic relevance have dropped to certain level which has resulted in low participation and the trade is predominated by elderly women. The death of apprenticeship system occasional by the introduction of Western education; has increased the tediousness of the craft making, it rather difficult for one person to cope with. The craft is no longer able to sustain family's income because of unhealthy competition between it and the modern pottery products, enamel wares, and plastic containers. Nevertheless, being able to continue to survive in the face of uncontrollable forces of modernity, and its significance in the culture and economic wellbeing of the people matters a lot and it is encouraging.

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