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SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF POTTERY BUSINESS TO THE PEOPLE OF ISAN EKITI FROM 1960-2000

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the socio-economic impacts of pottery business to the people of Isan Ekiti, how it has impacted their life in diverse ways economically, socially and religiously. It then makes recommendations for further improvements. It uses a simple historical methodology involving the use of oral interviews and secondary sources. The paper revealed the socio-economic impacts as well as religious relevance of pottery business to people of Isan Ekiti between 1960 to 2000. It concluded that pottery in the town were not only functionally and technically competent but aesthetically pleasing which enhance Entrepreneurial Development especially among the women folks.

Keywords: Socio-economic impacts, pottery business, Isan Ekiti people.

Introduction

Pottery is the ceramic act of making pots earthenware, stone ware and porcelain. The place where such wares are made is also called a pottery. Pottery also refers to the art or craft of a potter or the manufacture of pot. Cooper Emmanuel defines pottery as a work of art in which changes in styles and types is in response to social, economic and technical demand which is closely integrated with the development of several different civilizations from the earliest times up to present day.

George Ritzer's work on pottery viewed it as an art for maintenance of traditions and cultural sustenance. He goes on to say that it is linked to a specific historical and cultural lineage. Pottery is one of the craft of the ancient Nigerian being practiced in most parts of the country. It is Nigeria's most cultural material that has caught the attention and interest of the early British archaeologist in Nigeria like Professor Thurstan-shaw, whose work of excavation of these precious baked-clay objects has been outstanding. Pottery has been described as one of the cheapest arts being practiced in Nigeria and heavily dominated by women (Shaw, 1978).

The work of Fatunsin in her research work funded by the Ford Foundation in Allsworth Jones titled, continuity and change in Yoruba pottery, viewed pottery as not just art objects but as basic components of the entire economic, social and religious life of the people (Fatunsin, 1991). Furthermore, Aiyedun account on; Pottery making in Igbaja, Igbomina Area, Kwara State viewed pottery as important in archaeological excavations because of its usefulness in establishing cultural sequences, defining regional groupings and throwing light on commercial production, trade and past ways of life (Aiyedun, 1986). From the various views of pottery by different scholars or writers, pottery could be regarded as not just an art which

individual can venture into without understanding the rules or fundamental principles guiding it. In Isan Ekiti i.e my area of study, pottery is more than mere forming of clay into an object of desire. It followed some guided principles and was a form of family or lineage. To some in that town (Isan Ekiti), pottery is an avenue to showcase the rich cultural value of the town; some see pottery as a trade or means of livelihood while some attached a high degree of tradition to it that must be transmitted from one generation to another. Mainly it was a great source of revenue to women with high utilitarian value

The Origin of Pottery Business in Ekiti State

The growth and development of pottery in Ekiti State was far older than the creation of Ekiti State, even before the attainment of Nigeria independence in 1960. The pottery business has been in existence in Isan Ekiti since around 16AD when the town was founded. In those days, especially during the pre-colonial and colonial era when aluminium pots or fridges were yet to be invented, clay pots are used and many people come to patronize our women (www.sunnewsonline.com/home-of-pottery/ 2019). However, available records indicate that revolutionary pot-making culture began in Nigeria with Michael Cardew, an English studio porter, who was appointed in 1951 as a pottery officer in the department of commerce and industry of the colonial Administration. During that period, Cardew reportedly built and developed a successful pottery training centre at Suleja in Northern Nigeria. In 1956, Cardew along with other British pottery officers were involved in setting up pottery Centre's at Okigwe and Ado Ekiti to further stimulates the people's interest in pottery as a veritable means of livelihood.

It must be noted that Ekiti State was carved out of the old Ondo State 1st October 1996 during late General Sanni Abacha Military Administration. Pottery as an art as well as occupation among women folk in Isan Ekiti and Ilafon ekiti in Oye local government area, Ara in Ijero local government area, Ado in Ado local government area of Ekiti state in south western Nigeria developed as a result of their contact with Ile-Ife. According to Garlake as well as Thurstan Shaw, the growth and development of pottery in Yoruba land is reinforced by Ile - Ife, widely reputed to be the "spiritual capital" of the Yoruba people. Pottery development in Ekiti could not have been exceptional since they are part of Yoruba land and Ile - Ife was regarded as cradle of Yoruba. It suffices to say that the growth and development of pottery in Ado Ekiti, Isan Ekiti, Ilafon Ekiti, Ara Ekiti were the result of their contact with Ile -Ife.

Historical and Geographical Background of Isan Ekiti

According to Samuel Johnson in his book titled, The History of the Yoruba, every Yoruba town or village, Ile - Ife is the origin. Hence, the founding of Isan Ekiti is not different from the phenomena behind the founding of most Yoruba towns and villages, since Yoruba people in general, are believed to be migrants (Johnson, S 1921) Isan Ekiti is a fairly large town in Oye local government area of Ekiti state with a population of about forty five thousand people, Isan was founded by a handful of hunters whose names are now forgotten. These founders under their leader called Gberubioya migrated from Ile – Ife, the cradle of most Yoruba towns and villages. They settled in various groups at Igboagbo which is about two miles away from Isan Ekiti present location. Each group had a head, subordinate to the head chief – Gberubioya. The tribal war of the14th century forced these separate group to come together under the Onisan of Isan the united groups was then called Isan.

Each of the group that came together to become Isan Ekiti retained its original name which now becomes the names of the quarters-Irefin meta (which was then one group that comprised Alewa, Iroyi, Ilale and Egenena), Ilale Isan group comprised of Ogilolo, Adisa and Ilusajumu agan; Iro group comprised of (Igbomoji , Okeisan , Ilafon , Abudo and Iwoye (Ogundele, J. A. 2011).

The people are dark in skin, with a peculiar dialect different from that of the neighbouring towns. It's bounded in the south by Iludun, in the east bounded by Ilemeso, in the west by Ipere and Ifaki Ekiti, and in the north by Ayede Ekiti. There are number of small hills called Isaoye, Asao, Egena, Adari, Ikola and Itaoke that surrounded Isan while there were small rivers and brooks between the hills called Igbago, Ayetoro, Afunni, Aosi, Oteruru, Asoyi, Adewe, Abu, Asinsin, Gbedibo, Omiogun, Afo, Omikoro, IsunIwoye, Omiobalegen, Omiaba, Adungbongbon, Omiasekun, Agidigbo, Aringbon, among others. All these features are there till today.

The people worshipped these hills and rivers. The hill god was headed by Adari titled "Oke Leyin Isan" i.e the hill behind Isan which was the highest. They offered sacrifices such as black cow, black male pig, bean cake (Akara) pap (Eko) and pigeon to Adari when there was shortage of rain or severe drought. Sacrifices were also made to Osun River especially during their festival for the fruit of the womb.

There are two types of vegetations - the tree savannah and the deciduous. In the tree savannah area are the clay fields while the deciduous is used for cultivation. The crops include cocoa, Plantain, Kola and food Crops; Yams, Cocoyam, Maize, Okra, Vegetable, Beans and Cassava.

Also, there are two main seasons – the dry and wet seasons. The dry season is during the month of October to march with a middle period of harmattan from December to February. The wet season is from April to September during when food crops are grown and most of the clay for pottery is collected.

Economic Impacts of Pottery Business to the People of Isan Ekiti

Pottery played an important role in the economic sustenance of the people of Isan Ekiti within the period under study even up to this present time. Economically, Isan Ekiti people were able to garner much from pottery due to varieties of pots produced. People from Idi-Aro in far Ibadan who were actively involved in tying and dyeing do come to Isan potters to buy the then biggest pots produced in Isan for the purpose of dyeing i.e Ikoko-Aro. This immensely contributed to the wellbeing and economic viability of the potters. It was also gathered that Egba people were coming to Isan for this same pot for dyeing and this led to frequent production of the Ikoko-Aro then. As a matter of fact, it led to a very strong trade relationship between Isan people and the dyers from Ibadan and Abeokuta.

Farmers and housewives from Isan Ekiti were not left behind as they were also involved in the buying of the pots mainly the cooking pot popularly called Isasun. They buy in order to take to farm for cooking plantain, potato, yam and cassava i.e. the edible ones. During this period i.e. twentieth century, the use of foreign wares was not common for cooking as they mainly relied on pots, this made the availability of money inform of cowries or barter system possible and an average potter could easily make a living. Cooking pots gained serious

prominence among other types then because a large number of people were involved in the trading activities from Isan Ekiti to towns and villages such as Ayede Ekiti, Oye Ekiti Ijare in Ondo State, Ikere Ekiti, Ipoti Ekiti, Ikoro Ekiti, Ibadan, Idumota in Lagos, Ketu in Lagos among others. It led to economic relation among the towns and villages earlier mentioned. The economic impact of Isan pottery also showed in Garri processing industries because there was a particular pot which was, an arc-shaped, open mouthed and a small regular rim locally called "Agbagba Garri". It was this pots that brought a cordial trade relationship between the people of Isan Ekiti and the Ijebus. History has shown that Isan farmers went to serve labourers in their cocoa plantation and this led to intertribal marriages. The resultant effect was that Ijebu people do visit Isan Ekiti to buy pots for frying garri in large quantities. The farmers in Isan too who were involved in cassava growing encouraged their wives to buy the pot called "Agbagba" for further processing of the farm produce to garri for consumption and put the remaining for sale within and outside Isan Ekiti. The locust beans seller i.e "iru" and "Ogiri" depended on pots from Isan Ekiti for cooking of seed where the locust beans is obtained. People from Igogo Ekiti relied on Isan clay pots for cooking of their locust bean seed. It must be emphasized that the predominant trade in Igogo Ekiti then was locust beans production and they were not involved in pottery, so Isan Ekiti was to be looked up to, for their trade to thrive[5]. People from Igboho in Oyo State as well as Odo-Owa and Iloffa people who specialized in the production of locally made black soap "Ose duddu" were frequent visitors to Isan Ekiti for the purchase of big pots which they made use of, for the preparation of their soap. According to Madam Tawede "Odo-Owa and Iloffa people from Ekiti Kwara do come to Isan to sell "Aadun" i.e a flower-like substance obtained from fried, ground corn with cooked-dried beans, and on their return, they buy big pots produced in Isan for boiling of black soap for the purpose of production. Another name they called their black soap in their native dialects is "Aweda" i.e, soap that clean body without blemish or wrinkle during bathing.

Social Impacts of Pottery Business to the People of Isan Ekiti

Pottery in Isan Ekiti from 1960 to 2000 had a great impact on the social aspect of the people in that town. Apart from being an integral facet in the society, socially, it had contributed to civilization which would have found a challenging progression ahead of them. Changes in style and type of pottery occurred in response to social, economic and technical demand, and for this reason, pottery is closely integrated with development. The study of Isan pottery had made it possible to find array of information regarding the culture of the people in the area and how it had socially influenced their ways of life such as dancing with religious pots on their heads during Imole festival and greetings during pot making processes which is different from ordinary greetings. To a very large extent, reconstruction of Isan peoples past without recourse to pottery will be difficult thereby, it served as important evidence in reconstructing their past i.e their historical background could be traced to Ile-Ife due to resemblance in their pots, especially in the twentieth century. Pottery had been a major tool used as a chronological indicator because pottery shapes and decorations in Isan Ekiti changes over time. The association of these changes with other cultural phenomena allowed chronological framework of Isan culture to be easily assessed.

Socially, Isan pottery also provided important documentation for many aspects of the people life through painted scene especially "Agburu" in which they carried on their head by able-bodied men which must go along with drum made of pot and the opening covered with

animal skin as a commemoration of new yam festival. A large number of these scenes illustrate the myths and legends of Isan people through these; we find an ancient interpretation of the stories and a picture of how Isan people viewed their deities. Another major impact of Isan pottery to the people of the community was that, during the period of twentieth century, the only way of storing water for drinking or for any other usage was to be kept inside a very big pot called "Ikoko amu" or "Odu". This was done by keeping the pot at the back of the door so as to enable the water to be cold. According to Mrs. Olajide Aina, she explained that there was nothing like refrigerator. She equally maintained that water kept in these pots were always cold either dry or wet seasons. Cooking of food items such as yam, corn, cocoyam among others were made possible through the use of pots produced in Isan called Isasun in their local language. It was also gathered that different people or groups who came from far and near to trade in Isan clay pot had good interaction with the people of the community. This consequently led to culture learning and adaptation to cultural ethics of the people such as language of greeting "Inn okun o, inn ku se o, meaning greetings, well done. Apart from culture contact on the part of the visitors, Isan people also greatly benefited from the visitors which led to migration and trade learning and some others served as an apprentice for distance trading i.e trade in dyeing, weaving and black soap production.

According to the word of George Ritzer in his book "The Globalization of nothing; he posited that local pottery had advantage such as maintenance of traditions, sustaining culture and local craft. This assertion manifested in pottery making in Isan Ekiti in the twentieth century as it projected the rich cultural value of the town to the visitors even during the incursion of the European. Ritzer goes on to say that local pottery has a rich historical connection and cultural lineage. Although, during this period, industrial revolution had taken place in Europe but Isan people were actively involved in the art of pot making which had socially brought them as a front liner among the pots producers within Nigeria. Accordingly, a pot shaped by Isan potter was not only for functional or utilitarian purposes (e.g for steaming, boiling, storage etc) but also for social and non-utilitarian or symbolic values (e.g self-expression and identity marks) which can be a good source of tourism industry. For instance, Madam Aina Olajide presented an array of pots with different decorations prepared by her grandmother and herself in the twentieth century which were enough to serve as tourist attraction.

Pottery Business and Its Religious Relevance to Isan Ekiti People

The relevance of pottery to the religion of Isan people was of no small measure as Isan pots were greatly made use of in virtually every religious festival in the town. The religious pots (Otu) were used for religious ceremonies held for the gods and goddesses of clay, (river and iron) - (The Abadari, Osun and Ogun). Most important among these was "Osun" the goddess of the river who was believed to be the source of rain and water. Every stage of the potters works except the firing, need water, therefore, special regard and respect was given to the goddess that supplied the water.

The "Osun" i.e river goddess was also believed to be the one checking flood on clay fields if properly appeased, therefore "Osun" was worshipped yearly during the raining season, usually between the month of August and September. There were, of course individual potter's sacrifice at any time of the year. At the time of general yearly worship, pigeon, white fowl, white goat, white Kola nut, bean cakes and sugar cane were offered to the river goddess. All the materials were white except the bean cakes because they thought of the goddess as

being pure and immaculate. So her symbol of worship was white. The priestess normally put on white cloth, white beads with red strip over the cloth and feather painted with Osun (-red colour produced from the camwood), and of course the religion pot-"Otu" were also painted red or white or even left unpainted depending on wishes of the priestess

The food materials that were cooked with the aid of cooking pots produced there in Isan Ekiti were partly put in the shrine and the rest eaten by the people. White fowl would then be offered to the goddess alive. The fowl would then be let loose and thrown into the clay field. The priestess was the head of women who was involved in the art of pottery in the town. She was regarded as the "Yeye imole" (mother of the goddess). She does not carry any load on her head except the religious pot on the religious ceremony day. She carried the pot only once in a year and just for the first day of the ceremony which lasted for seven days. These seven days were full of dancing, singing and merry-making. It was made compulsory for all the potters and those who get involved in the buying of pots for trading in Isan Ekiti to partake in the ceremony.

It was in this festival that the popularity of pottery was shown in Isan Ekiti. The festival serves as an avenue for art show of various types of pots at the shrine. Outsiders or visitors were not forbidden that day to see the varieties of Isan clay pot and artistic design made on these pots. The pots were left at the shrine for that period of seven days. It was believed that the goddess would descend heavily on any one who secretly goes there to steal any of the pots. The god of knowledge and understanding: Imole Eefin" was the male sex of the goddess: Osun". It is worshipped the same way like the Osun with chief "Odofin" as its priest. Its time of worship was different from that of Osun. It is worshipped during the dry season to appease it to check excessive drought in order to allow the potter to be able to have access to the clay.

The Abadari was regarded as the chief god of the clay. "Adari" was a hill in the clay field which was believed to be the supplier of the clay at its bottom. Adari worship was not on yearly basis like that of "Osun" and the materials of worship were the same except that it includes a black cow and black pig. It is also worshipped towards the end of the raining season. Its ceremony, like the others, lasted for seven days with chanting of these cognomen by the women (potters and traders of pots to other towns)
"Abadari, oke lehin Isan - Abadari, the hill behind Isan
Amikan Isan, Oke lila lehin Ipele - Isan protector, high hill behind Ipele
Kike jomo Isan I jiya - That disallow Isan indigene from suffering
Kike jomo Isan sina - That prevents Isan indigene from missing road
Sole un o sole un yeye ri a" - Protect this house and another grandmother.

This means that it is the protector and deliverer of Isan Ekit people from evil. They prayed to him to protect them and their mother the Osun.

In furtherance of the relevance of Isan pottery to the religious life of the people in that town, religious pots were normally carried by the women dancing while the drummer would be drumming.

The use of religious pots produced in Isan Ekiti to celebrate Ogun festival in the twentieth century was on quarterly basis. For instance, the celebration of: Omi yeye Irefin" festival

which was Irefin quarters where seventy percent of the whole potters resided took a distinct approach as the women maintained two lines with religious pots filled with water on their head dancing, using white wrapper and red cloth chanting ogun Irefin song as "Eye imole onikoko iyun olomi nadunadu, meaning mother of imole with beautiful pots full of water. In another quarter called Oke-Isan where Ogun Isan is celebrated, they carried the religious pots as well dancing round the town though only women while men acted as drummers. Equally "Ogun ibore" is being celebrated in Ilale quarters where they had twenty percent of the potters. It followed the same way like that of "Omi yeye Irefin".[27]

Other quarters such as Adisa celebrated "Ogun Eran" Olua Aba-eye, Omi eyewu" which they made use of religious pots to celebrate. Igbomoji quarters celebrated "Adeolu" who was regarded as "Agba imole" with religious pots and white pigeon on their hands. Ilu sajumu quarter celebrated "Osanyin igo" and "Yeye Oye" with religious pots on their head. Abudo quarter also celebrated Osanyin Ogburo and Oloke with the use of religious pots on their heads dancing. In short every Ogun festival across each quarter was celebrated with the use of religious pots on their heads with white and red wrappers. Both old and young women balanced the pots on their heads with the aid of woven cloth. The pots were filled with water and leave.

Conclusion

From the research carried out, it has been discovered that in Isan Ekiti, pottery has been a prominent art among the women folks and it has being their major economic mainstay since time immemorial .Obviously, there are many pottery centres in this town which had been in existence for more than four or five centuries according to the research .Pots of different types which served different purposes ranges from those for cooking, those for storing water, those for religious activities or festival, i.e. Oru or Otu , those for preparing local medicine i.e traditional herb, especially for new born babies, those for ritual or sacrifices to their gods or deities i.e Ebo, those for making dye i.e Ikoko aro among others. Abundance of clay in Isan Ekiti has been the major reason responsible for this art of pottery which had hitherto exposed the community to the wider world. It has brought the presence of scholars across the globe to visit the community and conducted researches in various disciplines for the purpose of showcasing the cultural heritage of the land and people of Isan Ekiti. The presence of Ulli Beier, a German scholar in the town in 1962 with recommendation by him made Isan clay pot to gain a wide publicity and popularity in exhibition of art and culture in University of Ibadan in 1985

The study has revealed the contact and migration from Ile –Ife as the origin of pottery business in Ekiti. It has showed the historical and geographical background of the town as well as various quarters in the community, the crops grown, the hills and rivers present in the town. It has also elaborately discussed the economic impact of pot making business to the people of Isan Ekiti by showcasing pots of different types and various towns and cities that were involved in the business of pot trading.

The rich cultural value of the people of Isan Ekiti has also been revealed through this study and reconstruction of their historical past has been made possible through pottery in which the research work has greatly shown. Religious aspect of the pottery was also showcased as the use of religious pots for traditional festivals of various types were revealed by this study.

It can be concluded that Isan Ekiti pottery is an avenue to showcase the rich cultural value of the town; some see it as a trade or means of livelihood while some attached a high degree of tradition to it that must be transmitted from one generation to another. Mainly it was a great source of revenue to women with high utilitarian value.

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