Volume-6, Issue-1, January - 2017 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160 IF : 3.62 | IC Value 80.26

Original Research Paper Commerce

EFFICIENT HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES - A STUDY ON THE SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF GOLDSMITHS IN INDIA

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KEYWORDS : Human Resources – Management Practices – Economic Conditions – Improvement measures.

INTRODUCTION

A goldsmith is a metalworker who specializes in working with gold and other precious metals. Historically, goldsmiths also have made silverware, platters, goblets, decorative and serviceable utensils, ceremonial or religious items, and rarely using Kintsugi, but the rising prices of precious metals have curtailed the making of such items to a large degree. Goldsmiths must be skilled in forming metal through filing, soldering, sawing, forging, casting, and polishing metal. The trade has very often included jewellery-making skills, as well as the very similar skills of the silversmith. Traditionally, these skills had been passed along through apprenticeships, however, more recently jewellery arts schools specializing solely in teaching goldsmithing and a multitude of skills falling under the jewellery arts umbrella are available. Many universities and junior colleges also offer goldsmithing, silversmithing, and metal arts fabrication as a part of their fine arts curriculum. At least in Europe, goldsmiths increasingly performed many of the functions we now regard as part of banking, especially providing custody of valuable items and currency exchange, though they were usually restrained from lending at interest, which was regarded as usury. Compared to other metals, gold is malleable, ductile, rare, and it is the only solid metallic element with a yellow color. It may easily be melted, fused, and cast without the problems of oxides and gas that are problematic with other metals such as bronzes, for example. It is fairly easy to "pressure weld", wherein similarly to clay two small pieces may be pounded together to make one larger piece. Gold is classified as a noble metal—because it does not react with most elements. It usually is found in its native form, lasting indefinitely without oxidization and tarnishing.

IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF HRM ON GOLDSMITH IN INDIA

Gold has been worked by humans in all cultures where the metal is available, either indigenously or imported, and the history of these activities is extensive. Superbly made objects from the ancient cultures of Africa, Asia, Europe, India, North America, Mesoamerica, and South America grace museums and collections throughout the world. Some pieces date back thousands of years and were made using many techniques that still are used by modern goldsmiths. Techniques developed by some of those goldsmiths achieved a skill level that was lost and remained beyond the skills of those who followed, even to modern times. Researchers attempting to uncover the chemical techniques used by ancient artisans have remarked that their findings confirm that "the high level of competence reached by the artists and craftsmen of these ancient periods who produced objects of an artistic quality that could not be bettered in ancient times and has not yet been reached in modern ones."

In medieval Europe goldsmiths were organized into guilds and usually were one of the most important and wealthiest of the guilds in a city. The guild kept records of members and the marks they used on their products. These records, when they survive, are very useful to historians. Goldsmiths often acted as bankers, since they dealt in gold and had sufficient security for the safe storage of valuable items. In the Middle Ages, goldsmithing normally included silversmithing as well, but the brass workers and workers in other base metals normally were members of a separate guild, since the trades were not allowed to overlap. Many jewelers also were goldsmiths.

CONTEMPORARY GOLDSMITHING

A goldsmith might have a wide array of skills and knowledge at their disposal. Gold, being the most malleable metal of all, offers unique opportunities for the worker. In today's world a wide variety of other metals, especially platinum alloys, also may be used frequently. 24 Carat is pure gold and historically, was known as fine gold.

Because it is so soft, however, 24 Carat gold is rarely used. It usually is alloyed to make it stronger and to create different colors; goldsmiths may have some skill in that process. The gold may be cast into some item then, usually with the lost wax casting process, or it may be used to fabricate the work directly in metal.

In the latter case, the goldsmith will use a variety of tools and machinery, including the rolling mill, the drawplate, and perhaps, swage blocks and other forming tools to make the metal into shapes needed to build the intended piece. Then parts are fabricated through a wide variety of processes and assembled by soldering. It is a testament to the history and evolution of the trade that those skills have reached an extremely high level of attainment and skill over time. A fine goldsmith can and will work to a tolerance approaching that of precision machinery, but largely using only his eyes and hand tools. Quite often the goldsmith's job involves the making of mountings for gemstones, in which case they often are referred to as jewelers.

'Jeweller', however, is a term mostly reserved for a person who deals in jewellery (buys and sells) and not to be confused with a goldsmith, silversmith, gemologist, diamond cutter, and diamond setters. A 'jobbing jeweller' is the term for a jeweller who undertakes a small basic amount of jewellery repair and alteration.

EFFICIENT HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON GOLDSMITHS

Goldsmithing is the applied art of metalworking in gold. A goldsmith is essentially a metalworker whose specialty is working with precious metals like gold, silver, electrum, platinum, alloys like bronze and copper, as well as gemstones. (See also Crafts: History and Types.) Ever since the earliest civilization, goldsmiths have cast and hand-crafted gold artifacts, personal jewellery, platters, goblets, weaponry, equestrian items, as well as precious objects for ceremonial and religious purposes. Goldsmithing proved especially useful during medieval times, when goldsmiths were commissioned to adorn illuminated manuscripts with gold leaf, create gold

reliquaries for holy relics and fashion numerous ecclesiastical objects out of precious metals. In addition, most countries have experienced their own "golden age" of precious metalwork, as exemplified by the wonderful Fabergé Easter Eggs made by the Russian master goldsmiths Gustav Fabergé (1814-1893) and Peter Carl Fabergé (1846-1920), during the 19th century. Other types of metalwork involves silversmiths or brightsmiths (who specialize in working with silver), coppersmiths (copper), blacksmiths (iron) and whitesmiths (so-called white metals like pewter and tin).

SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF GOLDSMITHS IN INDIA SOME EVIDENCES

Jewellery that finds a market across the country and is exported to other parts of the world is often crafted in these workplaces that hardly meet minimum requirements of space, ventilation or comfort. However, export figures mean nothing to Bose. He works to earn enough to make ends meet. His salary is determined by the number of pieces he crafts. His monthly earnings could be anywhere between Rs.3,000 and Rs.5,000. After settling food bills, which amount to approximately Rs.1,500, he sends the remaining money home. At 23, Bose is probably the oldest karigar; most craftsmen are in the 14 to 20 age group.

The younger ones generally stoke fires and assist in polishing the ornaments, which means their hands are exposed to hazardous chemicals. Almost all the karigars are from West Bengal's Howrah, Hoogly and Medinipur districts, best known for their fine craftsmen. The younger they are, the more nimble their fingers. This makes it easier to train them, Das says. The means of livelihood of several thousands of people depend on these karigars. "If we are displaced from this area, most of our earnings will go towards paying rent," says Bose.

Despite its contribution to the city's economy, the unorganised workforce of Zaveri Bazaar has been driven by extreme poverty to work under harsh conditions. Labour is cheap in Mumbai. The karigars will not speak out about their working conditions because the "Seth" can easily find replacements for them. The Bengali Association and a few smaller organisations are the only welfare groups present in the vicinity. Only workshop owners are their members.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) headquarters is less than a kilometre from Zaveri Bazaar but it had apparently ignored the existence of these sweatshops. C.D. Chore, the BMC's 'C' ward officer in charge of the area, told Frontline that since 1991, goldsmiths did not require permission to run workshops. In fact a goldsmith was allowed to convert a portion of his residence into a workplace, he said.

Unfortunately, according to him, in Bhuleshwar goldsmiths abuse the law by packing as many people as they can into a room. Official figures are not available, but the ward officer estimates that there are about 1,500 units operating in the area. In the past two years, the Bhuleshwar Residents Association have been complaining about toxic fumes being emitted during the polishing, refining and melting processes at the workshops. Moreover, the heavy machinery used for compressing gold is said to cause vibrations in the dilapidated buildings.

Workshop owners, however, say that the use of acid to polish and refine gold is minimal. "Hardly two or three drops are used in a small tub of water," says Das. The machinery is only as heavy as a refrigerator, he points out. Explaining the process of gold jewellery-making, Das says that jewellers first give new nuggets or old ornaments to the karigars, who melt them in a small earthen pot using burning coal.

In most rooms the pot is kept near a window or a ventilator. Once in a malleable state, the gold is poured into a mould. The mould produces a piece of jewellery, which is further crafted by the artisan using a blow pipe. The completed piece is then dipped into sulphuric acid in order to polish it. It could take anywhere between 20 days and a month to make one ornament. Clearly, if anyone is at risk, it is the worker himself, for the acid can burn his skin.

Some 15,000 artisans, mostly from West Bengal, live and work in such sweatshops. Chore says that after the cylinder blast and another spate of complaints, the BMC decided to take stringent action against the workshops. Armed with the provisions of Section 347 B of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation Act which allows notices to be served on people who have converted residences into commercial establishments, Corporation officials raided several workshops.

The Bengali Association, established in 1947 when Mumbai began trading in bullion, retaliated by taking the BMC to court. Arun Sinharoy, secretary of the association, told Frontline that the BMC should have served notices before the raid. "They came in as though we were some underworld people and took away our equipment and materials. We have lost lakhs of rupees." M.C. Dutta, a member of the association, says he was accused of illegal refining. His workshop does not do any refining work. "They are harassing us," he said. "We are not going to let them intimidate us.

All our members have licences under the Shops and Commercial Establishments Act, 1961. Besides, we have been around for very long. Why should we go?" Sinharoy asks, adding that Bengalis are being persecuted in Mumbai. "The other communities cannot stand to see us doing so well and that our craftsmen are the best in this field. That is the reason they are targeting us." The association has got West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to write to his Maharashtra counterpart Vilasrao Deshmukh requesting him to look into the issue.

Sinharoy and other members of the association insist that the cylinder accident occurred because of a fault in the cylinder and not because of the poor condition of the workshop. The association denies that the workers live and work in wretched conditions. Sinharoy, in fact, points out that the association was established for the welfare of the karigars. "We do whatever we can for them." He says that many of them are offered positions in jewellery-making units in the Santa Cruz Electronic Export Processing Zone (SEEPZ) or in a corporate sector jewellery-making factory in Bangalore. "If they get better jobs, we encourage them to take them up."

Niello

First used by the Egyptians, this decorative technique involves the application of Niello - a black-coloured powder, made by fusing together copper, silver, lead and sulphur - onto designs engraved on small-scale metal objects, usually made of silver. Once the engraved metal surface is coated with the Niello, heat is applied which causes the Niello to melt and run into the engraved channels. Kievan Rus craftsmen were noted for their nielli during the 10th to 13th century, some of which is preserved in the Ukrainian Museum of Historic Treasures, in Kiev. See also: Christian Art (Byzantine Era) (c.400-1200) and Russian Medieval Painting (c.950-1100). Another great exponent of Niello was the Florentine goldsmith Maso Finiguerra (1426-64). Other noteworthy nielli include Anglo-Saxon gold belt buckles and other items from the Sutton Hoo hoards; and the Minden Crucifix (1070-1120, Minden cathedral, Germany).

Embossing

This traditional metalworking technique is employed to create a raised or sunken design in a sheet of gold or other metal. A popular form of embossing is known as Repoussé - which involves the hammering of the reverse side of a metal sheet to create a design in low relief. Another method of embossing is known as Chasing. This works in the opposite way to repoussé: instead of hammering on the reverse side of the metal sheet to create a raised pattern on the front, chasing involves working on the front surface of the sheet to create a sunken design in the metal. Two exquisite examples of repoussé work are the Iron Age Petrie Crown (National Museum of Ireland),

and the silver masterpiece known as the Gundestrup Cauldron (1st or 2nd century BCE, National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen).

CONCLUSION

During the process of enamelling, a glass-like glaze is applied to a metal surface (or object) and then subjected to intense heat, which fuses the glaze, turning it into a beautifully coloured decorative coating. The glassy coating (known as vitreous enamel) can be made partly or wholly transparent, or completely opaque; furthermore, its colour can be controlled by mixing the smelted glass with various metal oxides such as cobalt, iron, praseodymium and others. (See also: Stained Glass Art: Materials & Methods.) Enamelling has affinities with mosaics and painting, and attained its first peak in early Byzantine culture. It also flourished during medieval times, notably in Limoges (c.1200) during the era of Gothic art, and during the Italian Renaissance.

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