



Organisation of Metal Icon Production in Swamimalai.

KEYWORDS

INSTITUTIONS, PRODUCTION, SILPASASTRAS.

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ABSTRACT *The religious images in temples were initially made of stone or mortar only. These images were located in the sanctum where the devotees offer their prayers. It was only with the rise and spread of the Bhakthi movement, temple building and icon making became widespread.*

INTRODUCTION:

The history of metal working is quite old in India and goes back in the north of the country to Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Valley Civilization, ca 2500 to 2000 bc. The art of traditional icon production was guarded by the Vishwakarma sthaphathis (craftsmen/artisan) until shortly after India's independence when so many traditional aspects of caste and class underwent change.

HISTORY OF ICON MAKING:

In December 1958, the Swamimalai Icon Manufacturers Co-operative Cottage Industrial Society Limited was established as the 285th cooperative in the country as a credit and marketing society. The products continue to be sold today throughout the country through the All India Handicrafts Board. The establishment of the co-operative provided an organization not only to help market icons, but also insure standard for artistic quality by having a sthaphathi master craftsmen on the board. In the 1950's, the department of industries and commerce at Swamimalai established a training institute called Poompuhar, to train both Sthaphathi and non sthaphathi boys in the traditional of icon production described in the Silpasastras. Thus, following India's independence to help and develop the village economy of swamimalai, the traditional social organization of icon craft specialization changed radically by taking icon manufacturers mostly with the aim of reaching the handicrafts markets.

TYPOLOGIES: The typologies of organization may be six generic types of icon production.

1. Hereditary family owned manufactory.
2. Hereditary family workshop.
3. Individual hereditary skilled craftsmen.
4. Entrepreneur owned manufactory.
5. family/entrepreneur workshop.
6. Individual skilled craftsmen.

PRODUCTION OF ICON:

The four main stages in the production of icons are very common for the any type of organization. They are

1. Wax model making.
2. Preparing a clay mold for the wax model.
3. Casting the metal icon in the clay mold (Copper 75%, Brass 20% and 5% lead)
4. Finishing the icon with engraving and polishing.

SILPASASTRAS: The process of casting the icons, technique that has used the details of preparing the wax model, covering it with clay coat, pouring molten metal, as also the different measurements, process and emblems suited to various manifestations are given in rural treaties (Agamas in Tamil

and also in (Silpasastras) sculptors manuals. The measurements of the icons are determined according to the birthstar of the individual or the name nakshtram of the respective area or where the place about the particular vigraham is to be congregated established. Some of the important traditional designs as well as the legends, myths and iconographic descriptions and measurements wherever these are possible have been well detailed in several literatures. This subject has been well dealt with depth in the tamil version of silpasastras written on palm leaves. Most of the sthaphathis follow the same methods and measurements as laid down in the art treaties such as Agamas and Silpasastras.

The basic unit of measurement is called the "tala", which literally means the palm of the hand which is equal to the measure of the length equal to that between the tip of the middle finger and the end of the palm near the wrist. The length is in all cases taken to be equal to the length of the face from the scalp to the chin.

MEASUREMENTS: There are about 30 different proportions in the silpasastra, they are grouped into 10 classes of three each namely Dasatala, Navatala, Ashtatala, Saptatala, Shat-tala, Panchatala, Chatustala, Tritala, Dwitala, Ekatala.

In each tala measures there are three subdivisions such as Uttama, Madhyama and Adama. These tala units of measurements prescribed for various images of gods and goddesses. Ex. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva come under uttama dasatala with 124 angulas. Parvathi, Saraswathi and Lakshmi with 120 angulas. Ganapathi, Vigneshwara under panchatala with 64 angulas.

These designed and techniques are very useful for the sthaphathis in Organisation to follow the strict adherence of the principles laid down in Agama and Silpasastras.

THE INSTITUTION CONNECTED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRAFT:

a) The swamimalai icon manufacturer's co-operative cottage industrial society limited:

The society was registered on 3.12.1958 and started functioning on 28.4.1959. More than 60% of total icon craftsmen of Swamimalai are members of this society. The society purchases icons from the members and sells to the customers and executives orders placed with them by public for home pooja's and temple icons. The society is running profitably. As per Government Order, icons sold at the society are exempted from sales tax.

b) Poompuhar Art metal center, Swamimalai:

It was set up by the Directorate of Industries and Commerce. Government of Tamil Nadu with two fold purposes namely

imparting training to the craftsmen for improving the process of casting, engraving and polishing and making available to the craftsmen services of improved tools and appliances which may be beyond the means of individual craftsmen to acquire. Presently the centre is under the control of Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Developments Corporation Ltd.,

c) Victoria Technical Institute:

The institute known all over the world as VTI is associated with the best that is found in the field of Indian Arts and Crafts. To impart training to the local people, the VTI set up training cum production centre in Swamimalai.

MARKETS AND DIVERSIFICATION:

Generally, icons are not mass produced. Even as the sthapa this starts on wax model he has a buyer at the other end waiting for his product. A few craftsmen receive order from various places of Tamil Nadu. Orders are received either directly or through middlemen. In some cases, the Co-operative society, the Poompuhar and the VTI places orders. Some

successful craftsmen use modern facilities like U.S.A, U.K, France, Germany, Australia, Singapore, Srilanka and Malaysia. The Export Promotion Council (EPC) in the office of the development commission, Government of India provides the benefit of duty drawback for copper based items is at the rate of Rs.43 per Kg.

In addition to the icon production most of the sthapatthis have been learnt other works of temples like making of gold/silver armour for stone icons in temples in local parlance as gold angi or kavasam and making brass urns that are installed on top of temple towers.

CONCLUSIONS:

As India's economy grows not only the increasing demand for customers goods but also traditional material culture used in pooja ceremonies in home and temple also increases. Craftsmen of Swamimalai have created new markets for their religious icons. This is one of the key factors that are fueling the growth of icon production in Swamimalai.

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