

## THE THANJAVUR ART PLATE - A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Dr. C. KALARANI

*Research Department of History, N.M.S.S.Vellaichamy Nadar College, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India*

### Abstract

The Thanjavur Art Plate also known as *Ganga Jamuna plate* was the outcome of the impetus given to the liral Kammala community to inciate the artistic beauty and superb workmanship of the Pidari plate. The Thanjavur Art Plates were sent to Khadi Grammodyog Bhavan centres, Central cottage Industries in Calcutta, Kaveri in Bangalore, Kairali in Thiruvandrum, Lepakrchi in Hyderabad etc. The Poompuhar Art Metal Training centre, a Tamilnadu handicrafts development corporation in Thanjavur is the manufacturing unit. The Poompuhar Art Metal Training centre, a Tamilnadu handicrafts development corporation in Thanjavur is the manufacturing unit. Every year 25 trainees are entertained and each trainee is given a stiend of Rs 100/- per month. Respective of caste disparities opportunities are provided to all in the training centres. The various promotional and developmental measures introduced by the central and state governments have improved the economic states of the artisans. The art of making is not taught to all and it has become an object of popular merit and interest. Above all it manintains its intrinsic value because only a few process in the production cycle are mechanized and the rest under the manual of the master craftsman.

Artistic elegance, admirable beauty, excellent craftsmanship, exuberant design, simple form are the notable features of Indian handicrafts. So numerous handicrafts have attained international fame and reputation, like wood and ivory carvings, the metal work due to the special skills and techniques of making too warranted an attention. Like the brass and bell metal wares of Nachchiyar koil, the Thanjavur Art plate, developed under the patronage of Tanjore Marathas attained the appreciation of all. While Sarojini (1712 – 1728 A.D.) introduced the metal art in Thanjavur, his successors in the subsequent period gradually developed the making of Thanjavur Art Plate.<sup>1</sup>

The Thanjavur Art Plate also known as *Ganga Jamuna plate* was the outcome of the impetus given to the liral Kammala community to inciate the artistic beauty and superb workmanship of the Pidari plate<sup>2</sup>. While the reliefs were on the same level as the surface of the plate in Pidari plate the Thanjavur plate the reliefs were encrusted on the base of three dimensional figures there by enlarging the scope of the work<sup>3</sup>. During the British rule the Indian handicraft had lost not only the foreign market but also had its attack over the production in the local areas. This was applicable to Thanjavur Art Plate. Any how the foreign soldiers, who were stationed at Vallam near Thanjavur and Trichy, were captivated by the decorative and attractive arts plates of Thanjavur. The demand for the plates also increased at the last stage of the colonial period<sup>4</sup>.

After Indian independence on the basis of Gandian ideologies stages were taken to promote art industries, cottage industries and handicrafts<sup>5</sup>. The newly founded All India Handicraft Board, Khadi and Village Industries Board, the Art and small industries board also assisted the people to know the value of Thanjavur Art Plates. Along with this between 1952 and 1959 the collector of Thanjavur called T.K.Palaniappan took efforts and contributed to the development of this art work<sup>6</sup>.

The Thanjavur Art Plates were sent to Khadi Grammodityog Bhavan centres, Central cottage Industries in Calcutta, Kaveri in Bangalore, Kairali in Thiruvandrum, Lepakrchi in Hyderabad etc. The visitors and foreigners were attracted and that was a boon to the industry. The establishment of "The Thanjavur Art Plate workers co-operative cottage industries society ltd." On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1957 also assisted the growth of the Thanjavur Art Plates. The following were the causes for the importance of the society.

More number of artisans came forward to ensure themselves as members of the society. The Art Plate industry of Thanjavur began to tread on the path of progress. Through this society, the artisans were able to enhance their economic standard. T.K.Palaniyappan, who was the Director of Industries and Commerce, executed many activities for the growth and development of the industry as well as the artisans. The earlier service of T.K.Palaniyappan was beneficial for him to friction in positive ways.

In 1957 the society emerged with 29 persons. But within a short span of three years i.e. in 1960 there were 59 members. Out of them 22 were art plate workers and others were members belonged to the Viswakarma community<sup>8</sup>. At the initial stage the government of Madras granted a loan of Rs.4000/- to the artisans who required to purchase shares in the society. By getting the materials from the members the elders placed to the society were cleared. They even distributed the commodities through the various government schemes throughout the country<sup>9</sup>.

A Co-operative sub Register was appointed to serve as the secretary of the society. For every year it was estimated to produce art plates of Rs.36,000/-. In 1963 the society's activities were enlarged largely<sup>10</sup>. The society procured base plates from specialized the Heavy Metal workers and sold them to art plate makers. They were supplied with traditional designs. The union government on its own turn took efforts to sell them at the international market. So the art plates gained international reputation and it became a political source of foreign exchange for India. Art plates not only assisted the economy of India but also earned a good name and reputation for them in the foreign countries. The cultural superiority and workmanship of the artisans are highlighted the Thanjavur art plates. When compared with other handicraft industries Thanjavur Art Plates stood in the fore front. Like the Indian metal wares they too obtained an applicable place<sup>13</sup>.

With the support of the government of India developmental activities of distinctive nature were undertaken. Where even art exhibitions were conducted the Tanjore art plates were displayed and sold. Through the training centre the production was increased. Such measures enabled the public to know the artistic value of these plates. They are treated as decorative and gift articles.

The Poompuhar Art Metal Training centre, a Tamilnadu handicrafts development corporation in Thanjavur is the manufacturing unit<sup>14</sup>. Only very limited families of Thanjavur are engaged in this household industry. They produce these plates in the production unit called pattarai. No women are given any opportunity in the manufacture of art plates, which is a weakness among the artisans. They carry out their activities behind the scenes and refuse demonstrate their workmanship in the presence of outsiders.

From 1981-82 onwards to offer training in this art practice, the government of India has established a training centre. Every year 25 trainees are entertained and each trainee is given a stipend of Rs 100/- per month. Respective of caste disparities opportunities are provided to all in the training centres. After training financial assistances are given in the form. The successful trainees enjoy this benefit through the State Bank of India. The trainees are able to win their bread without any competition after completing their training. As this art practice is based on individual calibre they assist the individual personalities. The youth are given preference and absorbed as trainees to keep them among from the horrods of unemployment issues.

As the period of training was fixed as one year it was impossible to have a full fledged training within the stipulated period. So the training centre lost its value and now it is functioning as a production centre totally. It comprises of skilled artisans, semiskilled and unskilled workers. Thus it helps people to be self centred. At present only limited number are engaged in the manufacture of Tanjore Art Plates. During the initial periods as a means for promoting the industry the manufactures were honoured effectively by prayers by the government of Tamilnadu. As the sale of these plates are limited the production of affected. The lesser production two causes economic problems. When the manufactures take their produces to the sales section they demand it on credit basis for two or three months. This too adds up the economic difficulties of the producers. Future as it is treated as a luxury item there is no much of demand for it. Though the nationalized banks and other banks are extending loan facilities they are not utilized properly by the artisans. That has its own echo over the manufacture. The state handicrafts development corporation was not utilized appropriately.

It was felt that unless importance is given to training, the quality of the product would never be a standard one. The availability of sufficient saw material is yet another problem. It is obvious that the restricted minimum production will affect the sale rate of a piece. The production of different sizes of plates also tells upon the cost value. Unless such problems are removed the popularity of the art plate will be minimized. There hurdles allowed the availability of the plates a rare one<sup>15</sup>.

The various promotional and developmental measures introduced by the central and state governments have improved the economic states of the artisans. But due to the competition and reduction in market the manufactures hesitate to produce. The larger production means the increase in the cost price of the commodity. Even how the conditions of the manufactures are not economically sound. In a family which has more number of members the production will never shoot up and that will tell up on the economic condition of the family. The increased rate of raw materials also affect the manufacture and sale. The increased rate of silver and copper to affects the production. The absence of mechanization in production minimizes the quantity of production as well as cost of production. Since the foreigners and rich people alone are offered to purchase this luxury item these arises stagnation in the sale<sup>16</sup>.

The price of art plates have become abnormal now. But the ascending price level never. Allowed anybody to think of the wages paid to the artisans. without any favourable change in their wages they produce for the others who gain much by enhancing the price. The artisan producer gets only a wage and a minimum project but the member who markets it is a beneficiary. So the economic condition of the craftsman and artisans are always in the burch. Their deportable economic conditions have restricted their comforts in life. Mostly the live in debt because of the insufficient income. Thus the economic implications are reflected in the life of the artisans.

The art plate work also is much an easy one. The purchase of raw materials like copper, silver, brass is difficult due to their availability and rate. The capital investment for whole sale production is not an easy task. If Co-operative measures are undertaken there will be possibilities for minimum expenses. Without proper sales proceeds the bulk production will also endanger the economy. Such facts have affected the production used the handicraft industry. The non availability of any rules with regard to the wages of the craftsmen has its own consequences, the part played by middle man at levels such as purchase of raw materials and sale of finished products is yet another problem for the Thanjavur art plate industry, The problems of the process of casting some of the metals like copper or bronze is another difficulty. The inlaying of one metal over another, mostly brass and silver is yet another cumbersome process. In spite of all problems the knowledge of metallurgy of the artisans are perfect.

The Thanjavur are plates have attained international reputation due to the display of superb craftsmanship combining utility with other qualities. The Thanjavur art plates were produced in an urban atmosphere and its decorative nature will explicate it. Anyhow they satisfy both urban and rural societies. The art plate is also popular for its ritualistic and art trade systems. The act plate possesses the element of cultural art and universal sense of earthetics. Through their designs vary they preserve the rastraic principles. In addition to heavy investment it is a patience and time involved one. This craftware is confined only to the people of Thanjavur. The art of making is not taught to all and it has become an object of popular merit and interest. Above all it manintains its intrinsic value because only a few process in the production cycle are mechanized and the rest under the manual of the master craftsman.

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