

A Study of Heritage of Stone Carving in Susunia in Bankura District of West Bengal from the View Point of Cultural Resource Management

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Abstract: *Susunia in Bankura District of West Bengal is famous for several reasons like its scenic beauty, prehistoric cultural remains and also for the development of different indigenous crafts. At present, focus has been given on the craft of stone carving. Susunia is very rich in stone quarry. The type of stone dominated in the area is reddish and sandy in texture, geologically known as sillimanite. Due to availability of raw material needed for stone carving artisans from nearby villages are practicing stone carving. They are mostly Karmakars by caste. They carve out different types of idols of Gods and Goddesses, utensils, decorator items and token of gifts. These products have demand in local areas as well as to the tourists. Thus, a huge amount of stone mining was done by the local stone suppliers. Recently a legal prohibition was enacted by the State Government to prevent this illegal quarry and to protect the Susunia hill itself. Due to scarcity of raw materials, they also import different types of stone from different parts of the country. The artisans who are mostly depended on Susunia stones shifted to the other occupations. In spite of these problems the artisans are traditionally inherits the skill and knowledge of stone carving through generations. They preserve both tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage. Present paper is an attempt to study the technology of stone carving and related artisans associated with the craft from the view point of cultural resource management.*

Keywords: *Heritage, Tangible Culture, Intangible Culture, Culture Resource Management*

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Introduction

Cultural Resource Management study can be conducted on the both the tangible and intangible cultural objects. However, the both sectors can also be study through preservation and conservational state.

In Cultural Resource Management studying of the tangible culture is mainly associated with raw materials and the final products. Whereas, the Intangible Cultural Heritage can be study only with the systematic documentation of idea and creativity of the workers. The concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage as the main purpose of conservational study was adopted by UNESCO in 2003. It was later in 2005, India also joined the convention and adopted the concept in a global way. However, earlier no such legislation was there to protect the Intangible Cultural Heritage but after adopting the idea the study was taken place with the both preservation and conservational context was associated with the Cultural Resource Management study. Craftsmanship on stone is very much associated with the genus homo from his evolutionary prospects. From the very beginning of the Palaeolithic period, past humans were relied on the various stone materials for the production of their artifacts for the survival strategies. They not even only use the stone materials for the economic purposes, also they used it to fulfil their aesthetic intension. There are many evidences on the stone objects available from the various parts of the world which are generally reflects the aesthetic and religious views of the past people. The carvers are ascribing their idea and thoughts on the tangible materials. Thus, the stone carving industry may be well defined as the conjugation of the intangible cultural component with the tangible one. The tradition is being continued in contemporary lifestyle. The use of stone objects is now widespread with the addition of various types of artistic skills and values which are generally passing through the generations after among the stone carver communities.

In West Bengal the craftsmanship on stone carving may be dated back from the ancient Maurya dynasty (321 BCE). The epicentre may be traced from the Bankura district particularly from the Susunia village area adjoined to the Susunia hill in Chatna Gram Panchayatis culturally known as the stone carving hub in West Bengal. The carvers are generally known as the *Karmakar* community who are traditionally associated with the stone carvings. The carvers from the Susunia area poses a different set of artistic mode generally varies from their individual family tradition. Generally, they acquire the raw materials from the Susunia hill or else they import the other type of stone materials from the other states of the country.

Objectives

The primary objective of the present study is to understand and to preserve the intangible cultural heritage associated with the stone carving as well as to find out the problems related with this industry. Also, alternate remedies are to be suggested for the protection of the both natural and cultural resources of the Susunia area.

Research Methodology

The area was purposively selected to understand the problems and prospects associated with the stone carving industry in the Susunia area. The methodology for this study is primarily based on ethnographic account. Non-participant observation was done on the people who are associated with the stone carving and they are also randomly interviewed. The local market was also surveyed and recorded the public opinion on the problems.

Studied Area

Susunia is the famous tourist spot in the Bankura district, particularly known for its natural exhibits. Susunia hill area is very much adjoining to the Chatna village Panchayat of Bankura district of southern

part of the State West Bengal, which is also lies on the Chotanagpur Plateau region. Approximately the maximum of the area (89%) is comprising as rural and the rest of the portion is set up as urban area. The area is a well-known archaeological site which preserves the evidences from prehistoric time to early historical period. Susunia hill preserves the oldest rock inscription of West Bengal, which is connected to the King Chandrabarmana, son of King Singhabarmana, the ancient ruler of the area. The inscriptions are inscribed in *Sankhalipi* (the conch shell shaped script) dated back to 4th century. From the inscriptions it can be assumed that the Susunia was earlier known as *Pushkarana*, the capital set up by the King Chandrabarmana. Also, the Susunia area itself preserves a number of prehistoric sites along the nearby river Gandheswari.

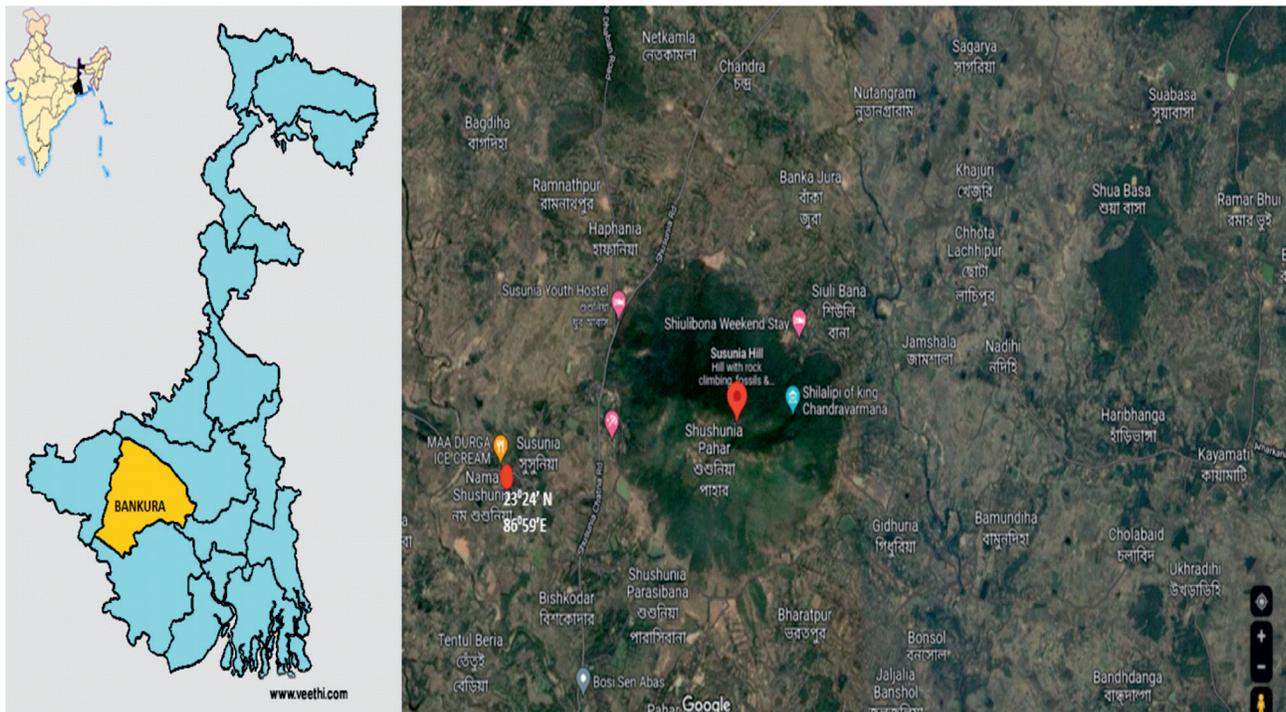


Figure 1: Site map of Bankura District locating Susunia and Namo-Susunia (Source:Google maps)

Geology

Susunia hill is the part of the Chotanagpur plateau with an elevation of 439.5m above mean sea level. The area represents the ancient Gondwana landform with an undulated ferruginous soil and hard beds of laterite. Alluvial soil is succeeded on the top. The area exhibits a good sources of stone materials including quartz, quartzite, sillimanite, kyanite, dumortierite and other types of cryptocrystalline silica. River Gandheswari is the primary water source in the area. Also, the holy spring from the Susunia hill is another supply of water for the local people.

Stone Carving of Susunia

The village Susunia and its adjoined area Namo Susunia are the primary inhabitant of the stone carvers. It is believed to be the village was set up by the Barmana Kings and the artists known as the *Karmakar* community, were bringing from the other parts of ancient Bengal. Earlier the *Karmakar* community



Figure 2: View of Susunia Hill

was associated with the making of brass items including utensils. But later on, they shifted to the stone artistry due to lack of the raw materials for extracting brass out of it. The plenty sources of stone materials from Susunia hill area indulged the stone carvers.



Figure 3: A stone carver is carving Lakshmi-Narayan idol on Susunia hill stone

The *Karmakar* community adopted the stone carving occupation, which was traditionally carried out from generation to generation. The carvers are generally depending on the raw materials from the Susunia hill. Primarily, sillimanite which is white in colour with a slight reddish tone and sandy in texture are acquired by the local people. Earlier it was quarried by the carvers themselves. Also, the local people get involved in the mining and selling to the carvers at a nominal cost. Also, the carvers

import the other raw materials generally from Odisha and Rajasthan which are mainly comprises the various types of marbles, granite.



Figure 4: Different types of chisels used for stone carving

Carvers adopted the indigenous techniques to carried out the idols and the decorative pieces from the raw materials. They used to acquire stone blocks by themselves or may be buy from the stone dealers. They then size the block as their preferable shape with the using of iron chisel and hammers. They use a different set of chisels of different shapes and sizes for different carving purposes. The carvers are generally adopting the mythological events from the epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata and depicts on the stone blocks. Also, they follow the traditional art designs adopted by their forefathers.

Present Context of the Stone Carving Industry of Susunia

At present the stone carvers of Susunia are facing a lot of challenges which are basically connected with the ethical and economical ground. The stone carved items from Susunia are very much popular in West Bengal as well as in Eastern India, which causes a huge demand of the cultural objects. Thus, the carvers and the stone dealers have to procure the raw material at a high pick. Also, the illegal mining and quarrying are conducted by the malversated stone dealers of the area which is now leading to an extreme level of exploitation of natural resources. So, the State Government has completely banned the mining and quarrying on and around the Susunia hill to prohibited the stone vandalism. This ban has directly affected the stone carving industry of Susunia.

The carvers are now depending on the earlier stock which they have collected from the stone dealers. Some who hasn't the stock they are using the other imported stone materials. For these reasons the manufacturing cost are getting high. So, the local market of Susunia is rarely available with the stone carved items. The market is now adopted with the fancy items including the stone dusted objects which are generally cheap in price with flimsy durability. In this condition the '*Susunia Karmakar*



Figure 5: A stone carver is carving Mahabharata scene on stone made conch

Samiti', the registered organization of the stone carvers of Susunia has appealed to the Government to lax the restriction on the ban and help them to extend their business. But according to the '*Susunia Karmakar Samiti*' they didn't receive any positive feedback in return. As the result many of the carvers are now shifting to the different type of job other than stone carving.



Figure 6: Office building of 'Susunia Karmakar Samiti'

Suggestive Remedies

This present approach focuses on the protection of the both natural and cultural stands. Here it is very much true that the illegal mining and quarrying of stone material is gradually destructing the Susunia hill which has an ecological as well as natural importance in the State. Also, the stone carving industry is itself a cultural identity of the area as well as of the State West Bengal. Now both should be conserved and preserved with a proper design of the management of the cultural heritages. Here are some alternative ways suggested to sustain both of our natural and cultural heritages.

- The stone supply should be controlled by the Government itself with a fixed rate.
- The stone carver should be provided by proper registration or a license.
- The local market should be jointly controlled by the both Government and the legal registered organisation of the stone carvers.
- Stone carvers should be encouraged to avoid the local raw material and to shifted on the imported raw material.
- The Government should provide the facilities to enhance their business with financial support.

Conclusion

Susunia is a very famous tourist spot as well as archaeological site in West Bengal. The main attraction of Susunia is the Susunia hill and the holy spring. Also, the stone carving industry is much popular. The stone carvers are belonged to the local Karmakar community who were earlier associated with the making of Brass utensils. The carvers are generally used the raw material quarried from the Susunia hill. But an extreme level of acquisition of stone materials lead to Susunia hill in a partial destruction. So, recently the State Government has banned the illegal mining and quarrying of the stone material. Scarcity of the raw material has been experienced by the carvers. So, they are facing a lot of challenges to survive. As well as the cultural identity of the area are getting faded. In this present context the Local and State Government should take the necessary steps to sustain both the Natural and Cultural heritages of Susunia as well as of West Bengal. The procurement of the raw material from Susunia hill can be limited and controlled by the State Government itself with a proper price list. To identify the stone carvers a legal license can be provided. Carvers may aware about the destruction of the natural heritages due to an extreme level of exploitation. More on more an advisory committee can be set up with the experts from various fields for the further discussion on the management of the cultural heritage of Susunia area.

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