

Innovation as a Process for Success: the Case of a Creative Potter

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In a context where little or no innovation is believed to manifest, one unique case of a potter was identified in a village in the district of Puttalam. Personal disagreement on the common belief that 'traditional potters are not creative innovators, but are mere craftsmen' compelled observations among traditional potter communities for such breakthroughs. The aforesaid potter has explored the process of pottery-making in depth and has understood the need for problem solving in order to be innovative. Many design studies find innovation as a key benefactor that provides greater opportunity for success in the market. In these circumstances, this study sets out to understand the process of innovation manifested within a traditional environment. The aim is to identify the constraints, limitations as well as possibilities faced by the potters in the process.

The findings revealed that success factors of innovation in pottery largely depend on personal experiences in understanding the possibilities, limitations and constraints of the raw-material. Sadly, due to lack of facilities and knowledge to improve the technical know-how, majority of traditional potters merely adjust the product to suit the raw material instead of exploring it to create new products. This is a hindrance for innovation. Observations revealed that the selected interviewee was aware of the initial material manipulation as the most important phase for innovation in pottery. However, his involvement in material manipulation too was rather restricted due to lack of facilities and knowledge. Results further show that although innovation of new products is rare in the traditional practice, value additions to products occur more often. The need for value addition arises from adapting an object for a particular use. Use of products by the family members and the neighbouring society promote problem solving which act as sources for value addition. Environmental factors such as social interactions, raw material supply, market, etc., too support innovation indirectly.

Key words: *Innovation, Pottery, Problem solving, Traditional practices, Value addition.*