CHAPTER - 1
INTRODUCTION

The term pottery is defined as a container or vessel made of clay baked to a certain temperature; the artisan who engaged in making the pottery is known as the potter. Pottery resulted from the necessity for articles of domestic use when humankind emerged from savagery to barbarism and communal life was instituted. Pottery as a part of the material culture is a very old craft of humankind. It is one of the tangible creation of mankind and has therefore become an integral and inseparable part of his culture. Pottery making culture is universal. No society can live without a cultural adjustment to its environment; therefore even the undeveloped society must possess a technology.

Pottery is an essential element of the form of a civilisation. It throws a light on the food habits of the people, their religious and social customs, the technological advancement attained by them and even their economic condition. Hence, the study of pottery without reference to its sociological context remains unrealistic or sterile.
Pottery is a very old art of mankind. With its discovery, human could start boiling and cooking his food and also store the foodstuff. Thus it brought a lot of changes to human life. Throughout the phases of human civilisations, pottery became one of the most essential aspects of the livelihood of the people. Pottery was one of the most important household items for storing, cooking, cooling or other purposes. The changing of pottery design to a certain extent indicates the cultural change of a particular community.

Pottery is also considered as the alphabet of Archaeology. In fact, when no other notable evidences like coins etc. are found, archaeologists have to depend on pottery for chronological analysis. In this, although chronologies are counted as temporal sequence of types, they reflect the cultural historical relationships through time. These are based on the similarities and differences in types, styles or attributes which are relatively contagious in time and space. Scholars express divergent views in regards to the history of the genesis of pottery. Singh very aptly pointed out that pottery was undoubtedly invented and developed independently perhaps several thousand years ago in different parts of the world out of soft clay by hand (Singh, 1979:13).
It is believed that sedentary life of humans has traditionally been associated with pottery making. Morgan divided all history into three main stages viz (a) Savagery (b) Barbarism and (c) Civilization. According to him, savagery was the period before pottery, it was the use of fire. Morgan used the presence of pottery making as a criteria for lower Barbarism, one of human stages of cultural evolution. He also claimed that pottery making pre-supposes village life. Besides, it is believed that after the use of fire, human apparently learned that heat would tend to make them stable in water. However, Singh revealed that it was accidental fire that produced the knowledge that clay pots hardened on baking and their shapes could retain for all times (Singh, 1979:13).

The morphology is basically a variable cultural component in terms of material cultural products, and it varies from place to place and country to country. Hence, it is difficult to draw a general conception about this. Besides, it is a highly dependable criterion for study. However, it is still not clear when and how the concept of shaped and size of pottery came into being. In this regard, Childe believes that the idea of shape and size of pottery depends upon the fruits. He opined that imitating shape and size of fruits might have been a recurrent practice of pottery manufacturing (Childe, 1956:13).
Several scholars suggest that the idea of pottery making was originated from the imitation of baskets, gourds and other natural objects. In support of the above, it is worth quoting Herskovits. He opined that before baskets and pots were devised, human had to recourse to natural objects such as skins, gourds and shells to store his belongings (Herskovits 1974: 137). However, Scott revealed that basketry might have preceded pottery, as there exist some closeness between the methods of manufacture of pottery by coil-building and basketry.

At the beginning, pottery was made by hand. Later on, the potter’s wheel was developed. The use of the first wheel for shaping pottery was known in Mesopotamia (Singh, 1979: 14). Regarding the introduction of potter’s wheel, Herskovits opined that the potter’s wheel, however, was not found outside the literate cultures of Europe and Asia; it was discovered during the Neolithic age, probably in connection with transport (Herskovits, 1974: 140-141).

The indigenous potters of Oinam Mao (Poumai) and Nungbi (Longpi) Tangkhul villages of Manipur still adopt the handmade technique of pottery. It does not require any metal tools; the fingers of the potters are
sufficient to fashion it. Pottery is considered to be a true mirror of a society. It reflects a way of life and culture of the people. The study of potters and pottery of the above mentioned villages of Manipur will indicate the socio-cultural perspective of their society.

Review of relevant works

Manipur is well known for its rich cultural heritage. The discoveries of archaeological ruins and relics from different parts of Manipur have substantiated its rich past cultural heritage and prosperity. Unfortunately, the culture and civilization of this State has been least known to the rest of the world. Very little has so far been systematically and properly recorded and studied.

Pottery has been playing an important role in the social, economic, cultural and religious life of the people since time immemorial. The study of ceramics of this region is a long felt need in the context of Manipur, but a systematic research on this craft is still in its infancy. Moreover, no detailed account of the two indigenous potter’s communities of Manipur, Oinam (Poumai) and Nungbi (Longpi) have been found till today.
Oinam is famous for the grey-ware pottery that is also termed as corded pottery because of the cord marks on the body of the pots. The black-ware pottery is from Nungbi (Longpi) and it has a smooth surface. They continue the tradition in their own style. Among the Nungbi (Longpi) Tangkhul the potters are traditionally men, whereas in the Oinam village, the potters are women.

The study further reveals that there is a wide assortment of occupations among these two potter villages. This is because of the improvement of their education on one hand and the non-involvement of males among Oinam in the ceramic production on the other. Most of them are interested working in white-collar jobs. The uneducated commoners, too, look for the blue-collar jobs.

Kramer (1979:12) rightly pointed out that the archaeologists doing ethnographic fieldwork could utilise a comparative framework in order to elucidate some of the process and material correlates of cultural change. In view of their over riding interest in the process of change, archaeologists can apply the time-honoured methods of controlled comparison to the study
of contemporary societies at different level of socio-cultural complexity, as well as to the selection for investigation of societies in transition.

It is a matter of great regret that Oinam and Nungbi (Longpi) potters now do away with their age old traditional craft and select some other occupation for many reasons. As a result, some very important aspects of culture and technology will soon vanish. Mention has already been made that some study of ceramics with particular reference to the prehistoric and medieval periods have been made by a few scholars, but these studies are not done exclusively on Oinam and Nungbi (Longpi), it was done on Manipur as a whole. As such, their study is confined to some scrappy descriptive account of the pottery in Manipur O.K. Singh and Ranjit Singh, (1996:27) mention that in Manipur pottery is made by hand. These potters do not adopt the technique of using the wheel in making pottery.

It is observed that this age-old traditional craft is eroding so quickly along with their skills and technologies, and unless it is recorded properly, nothing will be left for study in due course.
Aims and Objectives

The present study is aimed primarily for better understanding of the reasons for which the pottery crafts in its very primitive technology still survives among the Oinam and Nungbi (Longpi) potters. Its other objective is to verify the following hypothesis:

1. Handmade pottery is confined to the women potters only as stated by Herskovits.

2. Continuity of the specialisation in pottery craft is socio-culturally determined.

3. Variation within a single pottery type does not show functional differences, but it is of individual potter’s test.

Statement of the Present Study

The making of pottery is one of the traditions that survived through the centuries. Potsherds are often the evidence of the past civilization and they help in establishing the cultural sequence of an ancient site. Cultural contact between different groups of people can also be determined by pottery Herskovits, (1974:119) states, “The study of technology is essential to an understanding of culture, just as the comprehension of the material basis
of social life is indispensable to an understanding of human group behaviour. More than this, we have seen that the technological equipment of a people figures more than any other aspects of their culture when judgements or retardation are drawn. This is due to the fact that technology is the only aspect of cultural susceptible of objective evaluation”. Technology is the combination of techniques common to a group devised by human for his existence on this planet earth. By technology, one means manifestation of the method of doing things which are known as intellectual interest.

It is being observed that this age-old traditional crafts is eroding so quickly along with their skills and technologies that unless it is recorded properly, nothing will be left for study in due course. The present study will also clear up some important aspects so far as the relationship between pottery and society is concerned. Because, the study of potter’s and pottery will not only throw a light on the techno-cultural advancement but also many other socio-cultural aspects of man and society at large. Therefore, one has to work in record with this antiquated craft and heritage, which has enriched the cultural horizons of this country. This work will visualise the different aspects of the structure of pottery craft, its typo-technological development and its relationship with other culture and society as whole.
This work proposes to study the potters and pottery of Oinam Mao (Poumái) and Nungbi (Longpi) Tangkhul villages in Senapati and Ukhrul District of Manipur respectively with respect to their socio-cultural aspects. For convenience, the present study will be presented under nine chapters.

1. The first chapter deals with the introduction of the term pottery, review of literature, aims and objectives, statement of the present study, methods and technique used for this study, and fieldwork.

2. The second chapter deals with the geographical background of the two villages, migration, physical features, economic life, transport and communication, and festivals.

3. The third chapter is concerned with the demographic profile and economy of the potters of these two villages. For this the census of the villages is taken, the division of potters and non-potters are classified, primary and secondary potters are classified. Potters are classified sex wise and their income is taken into account. Along with this, the income of the potters and non-potters are studied.

4. The fourth chapter studied raw materials and the method of manufacture. Raw material is most essential for pot making although
most of the materials required are obtained free of cost. Still, transportation proofs to be a difficulty. The method of manufacture is very important, both villages use no metal implement, pottery is purely hand made. The potters had to spend lots of energy and strength in making pots. The potters go through a number of processes grinding, sifting the clay, adding tempering matter, wetting the tempered clay to a desired consistency, shaping the vessel, drying and firing it. Powdering the rocks, clay, mixing the materials in accurate proportion is important in pot making.

5. Typological classification and uses of pottery are dealt in the fifth chapter. Pots are classified into different categories according to its own types and purposes.

6. The sixth chapter studies on the socio-cultural aspects of pottery among Oinam and Nungbi (Longpi) potter villages. These are studied in connection with pottery. The rituals, rites performed by the potters. The performances of both villages are different and this is dealt with accordance to their work.

7. In this chapter a comparative study of the two villages is done to have a better understanding of the potters and to see the difference and similarities of these two potter villages.
8. The last two chapters deal with discussion, summary and conclusion of the study.

Methods and Technique of Study

To achieve aims and objectives of the present study, data are collected through census and random survey. This census survey helps in the classification of potters and non-potters, primary and secondary potters, their income and economic status. For this reason, census survey is taken. Observation method is used in the study of pottery making which includes preparation of clay, stone, mixing, shaping, drying and firing of pots. Direct interview method is used to know about the making of pots, their collection of raw materials, time spent, trading, the rituals performed while making pots and rituals related to pots. The data from primary sources are supplemented with the secondary sources like literature of the earlier researchers. The data thus collected is studied typologically on the basis of shape, function, size, texture, colour, surface treatment, and decoration of the pottery. A comparative study in type and technique of the pottery of the two villages is also made.
Field Work

Fieldwork was conducted primarily at Oinam and Nungbi (Longpi) villages of Senapati and Ukhrul District of Manipur respectively. The main purpose for the fieldwork was to collect firsthand data/information. Although the field survey begins at the beginning of 2000 the main fieldwork commenced in September 2000, and it was completed in March 2005. Moreover, the field area was visited later occasionally for collection of additional information and verification of data. The researcher had to stay in the field for collection of data and observation. Besides, camping in the villages was often necessary for intensive study. Utmost care has been taken to obtain correct data. Further, photographs at different stages of pottery production, such as collection of raw material, preparation of pot, firing and different type of pot, had been taken.

The people of both the villages were friendly and extended their cooperation in the entire fieldwork and also in the process of collecting data. Therefore, information could be collected without much difficulty and impediment. For the primary collection of data, interview technique was followed. In this, formal or structured, and informal interview techniques were both used. To get a clear picture in terms of technique of pottery
production, utility and its impact on Socio-cultural behaviour observation technique was also used. To get the information specially designed interview schedules were prepared.

Besides, participant observation involving the direct observation of life-style of Oinam and Nungbi (Longpi) villages and their potteries proved to be very useful. Various inter-related factors were looked into while making close observation of a single aspect. This technique was also applied in studying the utility of pottery in rites and rituals. In fact, every step of pottery making process was collected by intensive observation.

Persons from various age groups were selected as interviewees. The elderly persons of the village and head of the householders were one of the main sources of valuable information. Data collected by these means was carefully analysed.