

C H A P T E R V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Basketry as an aspect of contemporary technology of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, has been covered in the present study keeping in view its relative position in the total environment. Major portion of the study has been devoted to the technotypological aspect, since the main contention of this dissertation is to document scientifically the traditional craft which is gradually on the wane. Attention has, however, been given to various other forces and factors that play important role for mobilization of this traditional industry. We have tried to show how topographical, climatic and ecological conditions coalesce with technology. Aesthetics and socio-religious significances of basketry have been given their due importance. The functional aspect has been covered as corollary to the typological factor. Although its relationship with topography, ecology, climatic condition and technology has fully been taken into consideration,

we now propose to summarize our findings under :

- 1) Habitat and ecology
- 2) Technique and adaptation
- 3) Virtuosity and aesthetics
- 4) Function and typology
- 5) Socio-religious significance

1. Consideration of habitat in the study of a particular aspect of technology of a given primitive people comes first; since "the natural environment of a culture not only sets the cultural stage but determines the action that takes place on this stage"(Herskovits, 1955 : 94). The natural setting, in case of our 'cultural stage' i.e., present area of study, has influenced the material cultural aspect so deeply that it left a conspicuous impression on every other aspect from simple technique of food-gathering to building houses and bridges.

The hilly topography of Arunachal Pradesh, as has already been seen, is held responsible for development of the indigenous technology. which is

essentially required **to be adapted** to the surroundings which are hostile to every human movement. Here, of course we do not want to emphasize that it is the environment which determines every human action. Forde has rightly pointed out that - "Despite the intimate relation between human activities and the conditions and resources of the physical world, there are clear limits to this explanation, for in regions closely similar in relief, climate and vegetation sharply contrasted types of human life are to be found" (Forde, 1934 : 3). We have noticed that the technology of the Monpas, and Sherdukpens differs entirely from the Tagins of Taksing area though they live in an almost identical physical environment.

However, our emphasis on habitat here is as a part of the whole process. We know that the technology of the Arunachal people is based on the raw material provided by the mountain ecology. It has already been seen that the material culture of the present area of study is intricately connected with various species of bamboo and cane which grow wild.

The majority of the people of this area live in bamboo pile-dwellings and most of their household articles and implements are made of bamboo. Even for their various means of transport and conveyances the people here depend upon the local species of cane and bamboo. Adis of lower Siang use bamboo raft to transport man and material (Roy, 1960 : 23). Most of the rivers big and small are spanned by a species of stout cane. Carrying baskets and various other appliances, devised indigenously from cane and bamboo strands, are important means for transportation of essential commodities.

On the other hand various other raw materials such as clay, metal and even wood though used, are negligible in comparison with the cane and bamboo. Pottery are rare, metallic utensils and implements are imported (Elwin, 1959 : 26). Wood is used only in two pockets of Kameng and Tirap for making mostly fanciful objects⁷. The main handicap in development

7. The tradition of wood-carving among the Monpas has been infused from Tibet. Among the Wanchos it was brought by their migrating ancestors from South East Asia.

of these crafts lies in the non-availability of suitable raw materials, such as clay, iron etc. We however notice that the textile industry has flourished well among certain selected groups. Here also one cannot deny that the nature has provided the necessary raw materials i.e., cotton, fibre etc. for survival and growth of this industry.

From these facts the importance of cane and bamboo in the mobilization of traditional technology of Arunachal Pradesh can easily be assessed. On the basis of these data one can postulate that the basketry is nothing but a bi-product of the ecology or in a broader sense of the habitat with certain reservations. While arriving at such a conclusion one must not overlook the negative conditions of a particular environment. Forde has observed that - "It is necessary to distinguish negative conditions that are limiting factors at all stages of culture, and which demand special efforts and unusual costs if they are to be overcome (such are, for instance, difficulties of terrain, climatic restrictions on

particular plants and animals), from those which acquire positive significance only in connexion with specific cultural achievements. This distinction may be expressed by saying that physical conditions have both restrictive and permissive relations to human activities"(Forde, 1934 : 463).

We have observed that the physical conditions of the present area of study offer limited "permissive relations" to human activities. The negative conditions appear to be more powerful in comparison with the positive ones. But both the positive and negative conditions of the physical environment have contributed equally for development of basketry unlike many other crafts in Arunachal Pradesh.

The difficult mountain topography has somewhat restricted human movement for a long period. The internecine war and feuds in early time among various groups made the conditions worse (Elwin, 1955, XVI). Besides religious restrictions and taboos have restricted the movement from one village to another during certain ritual observances and rites. The

climatic conditions offer a formidable negative condition during summer. Therefore, people of Arunachal Pradesh had less contact with the more advanced people of the plains in the past. Even the people of one district had little intercourse with people of another district except among those who live within the district boundary. In such a state of affairs there was no way out for various groups of people but to live in a semi-isolated condition till the advent of the Administration (ibid). Due to this state of isolation the people here had to depend upon their own natural resources and utilize their own technologies to harness them for their own benefit. Import of raw materials, finished products and consumer goods from neighbouring areas of Assam and Tibet was a difficult and costly task in those days (Mackenzie, 1884 : 150).

Our contention here is to show that such a negative physical condition has made the people self-reliant to some extent. As a result, basketry techniques become more and more developed and utilized for multi-purpose uses. Therefore, we can assume that for the present area of study the negative conditions of the physical environment have contributed fully for the

development of basketry techniques instead of restricting the human activity.

Forde's observation regarding the adaptation of culture to habitat has a definite significance, specially for the purpose of our study. Culture here is referred to that aspect of human activity ~~which~~ includes material objects of human manufacture and techniques. Technique is obviously more important for adaptation to particular habitat. Herskovits seems to be justified when he emphasized that - "Man cannot exist unless he meets the challenge of his habitats" (Herskovits, 1955 : 95). To meet the challenge man must take recourse to technology. There is however, no question whether the technology of a particular group of people is simple or complex - they are equally effective in so far as the adaptation is concerned.

The technology connected with basketry, as has already been seen, is definitely a simple one. Tools and implements required for basket making are few and simple. Technical know-how required for it is

not a complicated one. Only little knowledge of simple mathematical calculation is necessary for ornamentation. Rigorous training under a master craftsman is not required unlike many other crafts such as painting and wood carving. It is learnt instinctively with one's own audio-visual capacity. Nothing is unusual about it.

The most significant point here lies in the fact that when compared with the tremendous negative conditions of the physical environment the simple technique of basketry appears to be a powerful weapon in so far as the effectiveness of the adaptation is concerned. As for example - with different techniques of interlacement, by evolving various shapes and forms the baskets and various other objects of basketry are made scientifically to overcome the hazards offered by the peculiar climatic and topographical conditions of Arunachal Pradesh. The conical shape of the carrying baskets and the twill weaving, as has already been seen, have definitely enhanced the effectiveness for transportation of heavy goods in the steep mountain

slopes. No other modern means will be so effective as the indigenous basket in such a topography. The effectiveness of the cane haversacks of flat shape, the small seed carrying baskets with constricted mouth, the two piece rain shields of the Apatani, the double lined war helmets of the Adis and Mishmis and various specially devised water proof storing baskets depend entirely upon the technique in so far as the adaptation is concerned.

We are now fully aware that the basketry technique and habitat are directly interlinked. Therefore the techno-typological study of basketry becomes meaningless if the nature of the topography, the climate and the ecology is not taken into account. The technique of interlacement, shapes and forms and the materials have a definite topographical orientation in so far as the present study is concerned. We observe a technological balance in between the mountain topography, the shifting and terrace cultivation and a bamboo and cane based material culture.

We have noticed that the key to the adaptation of culture to a particular habitat is the

techniques and ideas evolved by man. But all through the long history of homo sapien it has been observed that man never remained content merely achieving a successful adaptation for their survival. He always endeavours to improve his technique and extend his sphere of activities. As a result people develop virtuosity in particular techniques and crafts. The virtuosity becomes the motivating factor of artistic activity in certain primitive industries. Boas has observed that - "The close relation between technical virtuosity and fullness of artistic development may easily be demonstrated by an examination of the art with one sided industries" (Boas, 1927 : 17). Boas cited his examples from the California Indians whose chief industry happens to be basketry. He noticed that almost all their household articles are made of basketry technique without any exception. He had found that a great deal of time was spent in basket work. As a result the California Indians developed an unusual virtuosity in this particular craft. The Californian baskets therefore, are noted for the beauty of form, the evenness of texture and colourful geometrical patterns.

Christensen also seems to hold such a view in his study of basketry as a form of primitive art (Christensen, 1955 : 128). Our findings in the present study reveal a similar trend. Although we do not want to deny outright that a quest for aesthetics is totally absent in those industries in which virtuosity is not obtained.

We have attempted to show with whatever materials we have at our disposal from such tribes as the Apatanis, Adis and Mishmis, that virtuosity in a particular craft not only results in beauty of form, evenness of texture and embellishment of pattern but it also enhances the sphere of artistic activity in other media. It has been tried to establish the fact hypothetically that the basketry patterns are actually transferred to textile among the Mishmis, Apatanis and Adis. Here of course the virtuosity is not directly involved. The artistic embellishment of pattern in basketry becomes the source of inspiration for such transfer of ideas. Our emphasis here is on the fact that the virtuosity attained in a particular craft indirectly motivates similar ideas in other

cognate industries.

In the final analysis, it has been noticed that the functional aspect of basketry is a coined expression. The functions coalesce on one side with techno-typological factors and on the other hand with socio-religious motivations.

It has been pointed out that the function is not a variable factor. It remains constant through space and time. The topographical, ecological and technological aspects vary with the change of time and space. But these variable factors coalesce with function. In case of basketry technique it is so deep that a thorough study of functional aspect unveils a detailed picture of the total environment.

On the basis of these findings an attempt has been made in the present study to establish a definite typology of basketry in respect of Arunachal Pradesh on the basis of function, keeping in view its universal applicability as far as possible. Due importance to the technique and the form has, however, been given in the

typological consideration.

The other aspect of functional study of basketry has been directed to project more light on the fact that the culture is not a vague conception composed of some disparate organs but a unified whole. With the data at our disposal, we have, to some extent, been able to show that the non-material aspects of culture is indirectly linked with the material aspects. The linking factor here is the function.

Basketry, as an aspect of traditional industry, have definite bearing on the economy. But we know that the socio-political condition of a particular group of people is reflected on the economic life. Hence, the functional study of basketry is bound to reflect the social, political and economic life of the group. With the data at our disposal we have tried to show that many social phenomena such as division of labour on craft basis, ceremonial weaving of mattings as the basis of tribal solidarity, material objects like basket as the form of tribute and political authority are dynamically interrelated with the functional aspect of basketry of Arunachal Pradesh. Besides the

symbolic value attached to certain baskets (such as basket used in mopin festival of the Adis and ozealle dances of the Wanchos) and other cognate objects have a definite functional orientation (Sarkar, 1974 : 19, 24,25).

The functional position of the basketry in the cultural environment of Arunachal Pradesh is very critical. We have seen that it is the only constant factor which links the physical environment with the technological and social aspects of a particular culture. From these broad discussions we are now in a position to say that to understand the culture of a given people of a given environment one must find out how much a given technology figures and functions dynamically in the total functioning of the unit concerned.