



Natural non-stick earthen utensil

Jentibhai Nayak, Desingbhai Dhanak, Raghubhai Bhil

Dhanuka, Nayak and Bhil Community, Parts of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh

The use of non-stick cooking ware is traditionally considered as an urban prerogative. Who would imagine that rural communities in our backyard would be using non-stick coating on their earthen ware and doing it naturally. Strange but true! Members of Dhanuka, Nayak and Bhil community from Chota Udaipur region of Gujarat and nearby areas in Madhya Pradesh have been traditionally using lac to coat their earthen utensils.

Ambala, in Chota Udaipur, is among the few villages known for lac coating of earthenware making them suitable for making chappatis and better cooking of other food. Other villages of Gujarat where this tradition of lac coating can still be found are Devhaant, Kharkhad, Teemla, Bodgaon, Rangpur and Kanalwa and in Madhya Pradesh mainly in Chandpur and Khandala villages. Lac is used so that oil does not get absorbed in the earthenware. This way it uses less oil and ensures that the surface of the pot or the pan stays hot. It also prevents the surface from being scratched

or damaged while scraping the food. Lac is obtained from the secretion of an insect *Laccifer lacca*, inhabiting the Pohim tree. The lac obtained from this tree is shiny and long lasting. Lac generally contains resins (70-80%), sugars, proteins and soluble salts (2-4%), wax (4-6%) and other extraneous matter (9-14 %). Scientific evidence proves that it is non-toxic. NIF also got the toxicity tests done, which prove it is non-toxic.

To make these utensils, only a particular kind of clay is used and only four or five types of earthen utensils are made like *tava*, *kadhahi* etc. The process of coating is quite simple. The raw lac is added to water and brought to boiling twice. This makes the solution homogenous enabling lac to be spread uniformly on the pan, which is heated before application. Upon cooling the lac sticks to the surface of vessel, which can then be used for cooking. To make pots and pans, the people interestingly use moulds i.e. existing clay pots and pans. They do not make their earthen ware on a potter's

wheel. In fact, the clay is spread inside an existing pot and allowed to take the shape of the pot.

There are about twenty households in the village Ambala who practice this art. Every household sells around 10-15 pots every month earning about INR 1000 per month. The women normally make the earthenware while the men try to sell them in town markets or in other villages. The sand is brought from the nearby Orsang river. The sand from the river bed is very fine and gets exported to other countries too. The lac is purchased at INR 1000 per kg from places like Chhota Udaipur (Gujarat), Zoz (Gujarat), Kathiwada (MP), Alirajpur (MP). They need about 10 g of lac for medium sized pans and pots. For the large pan they require about 40g of lac costing 40 rupees. If purchased from the maker's house, the large pan is priced at 100 rupees while the smaller pan and the pot are both priced at 60 rupees. However, the price is more when the men go for door-to-door selling since transport costs and the drudgery involved in taking the fragile pots to faraway places have to be accounted for.

The economic condition of the villagers is not very good. Apart from the lac coated earthenware, they have very small farms holdings and meagre income. The diffusion of these pots can raise the living standards of these villagers enormously.

