



NATURAL FIBRE MISSION AND THE CURRENT STATUS OF BAMBOO HANDICRAFTS INDUSTRY - A CASE STUDY OF JALPAIGURI DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

Dr. Kanchan Datta

Associate Professor and Head Department of Economics, University of North Bengal.

Abstract

Handicraft Industry uses conventional manual methods instead of advanced technology for making various items. It is an unorganized, decentralized, labour intensive cottage industry. Examples of various handicrafts items are wooden ware, bamboo, cane, metal ware, textile weaving & printing, marble & stone crafts, leather works, jewellery etc.

Indian handicrafts industry has a history of several centuries. The artisans in the earlier days were known worldwide for their skill and craftsmanship. With the advancement of technology and so the availability of various plastic products the livelihood pattern of our tradition handicraft artisans are at stake. Most of them are reluctant to bring their next generation in family business. In this context it becomes pertinent to investigate or highlight the actual situation of our handicraft products and condition of artisans.

Bamboo and its products are eco friendly in nature and it shields from hard pollution in different ways. The potential of bamboo handicrafts has not been properly tapped; for instance, export of some of these items to other countries and proper marketing within the country have not received adequate attention. Intermediaries still play an important role in the industry which often hinders its progress. Profitability in the manufacturing of handicraft products is very low. Technological progress is inadequate because of structural and financial constraints. The technical and financial capabilities of the new generation artisans to meet challenges in the industry in the context of globalization are less. Thus, the future of this industry depends on the resolution of several problems confronting it. This study is based on both secondary and primary data. The primary data is collected through structured questionnaire and my mobile camera. For the selection of bamboo handicraft clusters snowball sampling technique and for collecting data, artisans are selected randomly. To explore the government's initiatives the activities under Natural Fibre Mission is highlighted. This study is a modest attempt to examine the various socio-economic problems of bamboo handicraft industry in Jalpaiguri District.

This study finds that though there is sufficient supply of bamboos and number of bamboo artisans in Jalpaiguri district, but they need a continuous training so that they can use the new sophisticated tools which improve the quality of the product, and they can learn how the product can be diversified into various essential and decorative items. Finally market linkages are also an important criterion for the development of Bamboo handicrafts items in this district.

Key Words: *Bamboo Handicrafts, Artisans, Clusters, Jalpaiguri, Dics, Natural Fibre Mission, Development Commissioner.*

Introduction

Development Commissioner (Handicraft) in 1989 defines, "Handicrafts are items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools and generally artistic and/or traditional in nature. They include objects of utility and objects of decoration."

UNCTAD (1997) defines "Artisanal Products are those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools, or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. The special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant."

True to its name, the "Handicraft" (crafts made by hands) industry. Those people who have been preserving the talent and the traditions of making Indian handicraft goods called Indian artisans.

Handicrafts are classified in two main categories.

1. Articles that are generally used in day to day uses and
2. Decorative items.

Different Categories of West Bengal Handicrafts

The handicrafts of West Bengal portray the legacy of the state, which is renowned. The famous textiles of West Bengal have found a unique place in the world market with its Baluchari Sarees, Silk and Tasar Textile etc., which are produced in districts like Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Hoogly and Nadia in West Bengal. Moreover, handloom of these districts is



also popular. Other crafts like jute crafts, wood and cane crafts, conch-shell crafts, brasswares, Dokra art and folk dolls are also popular crafts of West Bengal. Every district of West Bengal practices a number of handicraft activities out of which they specialize in one or two. Some important handicrafts in west Bengal are shown in the figure below.

Figure-1 Some Handicrafts of West Bengal



Importance of the Study

The function and importance of Indian Handicraft Industries in India Economy is very vital and its contribution is increasing steadily day by day. Today, this industry comes under the unorganized sector of village economy of India and even considered as the second biggest employment-creating sector after agriculture with abundant artisans engaged in craft work on a part-time basis.

Bamboo handicraft sector is predominant in the Indian handicrafts and there are millions of people who depend on bamboo for part or all of their income. The whole plant part of bamboos can be utilized in many ways thus becoming the highest economically potential plant of the region .Bamboo and its products are eco friendly in nature and it shields from hard pollution in different ways. The potential of bamboo handicrafts has not been properly tapped; for instance, export of some of these items to other countries and proper marketing within the country have not received adequate attention. Intermediaries still play an important role in the industry which often hinders its progress. Profitability in the manufacturing of handicraft products is very low. Technological progress is inadequate because of structural and financial constraints. The technical and financial capabilities of the new generation artisans to meet challenges in the industry in the context of globalization are less. Thus, the future of this industry depends on the resolution of several problems confronting it. This study is a modest attempt to examine the various socio-economic problems of bamboo handicraft industry in Jalpaiguri District and to suggest strategies for its optimal and sustainable development. As per one estimate the composition of bamboo industry is given by the table below.

Handicrafts of West Bengal

West Bengal is home to large varieties of handicraft items, which are scattered mostly in the rural areas of different districts of West Bengal. These crafts are Terracotta, Dhokra, Brass & Bell-metal, Conch & sea shell work, Wood carving, Horn crafts, Sholapith, Lac products, Cane & Bamboo crafts, zari work, mask, artistic leather, jute –handicrafts, mat, embroidery, kantha stitch, hand batik, fabric painting, pata-chitra among other things:

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and assess the problems of bamboo handicraft industry in Jalpaiguri Sadar Block,
2. To sketch the socioeconomic profile of the artisans,
3. To suggest strategies to improve the condition of the industry.



Methodology of the Study

It is a product based empirical research conducted in Jalpaiguri district. This study will be based on both secondary and primary data. The primary data will be collected through structured questionnaire and my mobile camera. Some photograph's may be given to show the products, living conditions of the artisans and the data can be depicted by charts , some simple statistical diagrams etc. for investigating the present status of bamboo market the sellers will be selected randomly and interviewed through structured questionnaire and for bamboo handicrafts clusters snowball sampling technique is used. For secondary data or informations relevant articles, reports and documents are used.

Area of the Study

The name Jalpaiguri came from the word "jalpai" means "olive" which grew in the town and were seen even in 1900. The suffix "guri" means a place. The name as well be associated with Jalpesh, the presiding deity (Shiva) of the entire region. The district of Jalpaiguri occupies a prime position in the domain of North Bengal. It stretches over an area of 6227 sq. kms (Census, 1991) and has its headquarters in Jalpaiguri. The economy is chiefly agrarian although the industrial belt is gradually attempting to expand its periphery. The district situated in the northern part of West Bengal has international borders with Bhutan and Bangladesh in the North and South respectively and borders with Assam and Darjeeling hills in the East, West and Northwest. The district is primarily rural with more than 80% of rural population. It has also high percentage of SC/ST population. Relatively sizeable population resides in Tea Gardens and Forest villages which are isolated and mostly inaccessible. The district is the gateway to the entire North-Eastern States and Bhutan. Having high percentage of migrated population different cultural groups (Ranjbanishi, Ravas, Totos, Metch, Santhals, Madasia and Oraons) have created a unique cultural harmony which is rarely seen in other districts of West Bengal. (Source: official website of Jalpaiguri District).

Figure-2 The Study Area and the Sample Collection Zone for the Present Study

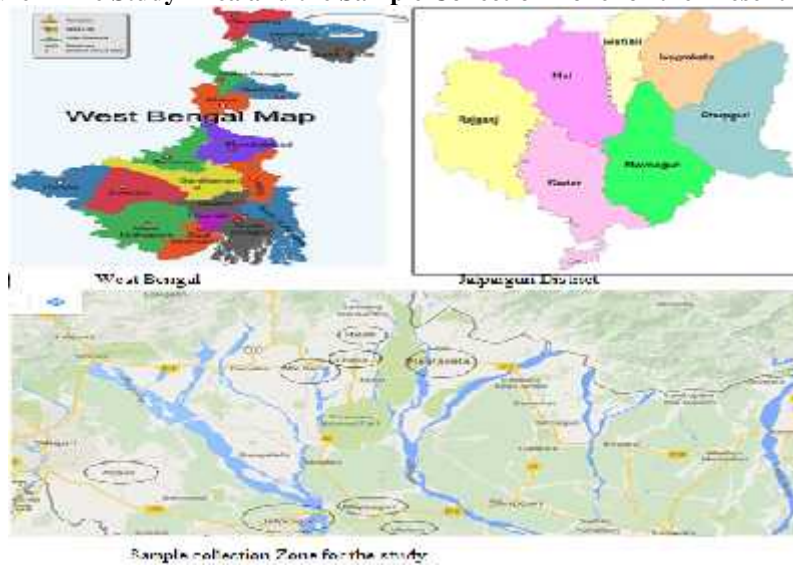


Figure-3 Some available Bamboos in Jalpaiguri District





Bamboo products are classified under two headings Cane and Bamboo Products and Bamboo articles or products. As per the data up to March 2014, there are 151 individual enterprises producing or selling bamboo products in the district of Jalpaiguri. There is no information about the clusters. Out of 151 enterprises 22.52% goes to Jalpaiguri district and the remaining 77.48% to the Alipurduar District. (source DIC Jal). Samples are taken from Jalpaiguri Sadar Block- Panpara harisabha, Gouri hat near Mohit nagar, Pahar pur, Engineering college para, Bairagi para, Pabitra nagar colony Mainaguri block- Amguri, Bhuskadanga near Jalpesh, Petkati Mal block- Lataguri, Chalsa Matiali- Batabari-1, Batabari-IINagrakata Block- Sulkapara Rajganj Block- Mogradangi.

Figure-4 Some available Bamboos in Jalpaiguri District



Findings

- Mostly traditional work.
- The majority of artisans belongs to Hindu community though Muslims and Christians are also found specially in Duars. They are mainly SC and ST categories.
- They work through out the day, even in the evening they do work.
- Less than 5% artisans have the knowledge about DIC or EM-2 or the benefits after having registration with DIC, ACC, NFM, I-card etc.
- The range of age of the artisans are 17 to 81.
- Only 3% of artisans have training, the remaining portions don't have any training; everything is learnt by family tradition.
- Maximum Education of the male artisans on average is up to class v, but female artisans are mostly illiterate.
- They are reluctant to take loan because of paper work, official hazards and past experience of taking loan.
- With the introduction of various substitute plastic product, the demand of the essential bamboo products has been decreased.
- Though the cost of bamboo has increased as a result production cost but the mentality of the customer is still traditional. They don't want to pay higher price for the bamboo p since the clusters in rural areas in sadar block are too far from Bamboo Market (Bowbazar, Pandapara). So it is not possible for artisans to bring bamboo from market, because they don't need huge quantity of bamboo. Only for one or two pieces they purchase from their own areas. Here 2 or 3 persons are individually supply bamboo. Hence the supply of bamboo depends on the performance of these 2 or 3 persons. the supply of raw materials (bamboo) sometimes hampers.
- They produce product according to their experience and then middlemen took their products. In the rainy season they do not pay the whole amount because of low sale but before puja (Durga, Chhat) they repay the previous outstanding balance to the artisans.
- Lack of capital is one of the important problems. Because they feel if they had money, they could purchase many bamboo at a time , it would reduce the uncertainty of bamboo supply and also reduce the cost of bamboo.
- Besides middlemen, artisans sale their products in different rural haats eg Talmahut(Friday and Monday), Rajganj Haat (Sunday), Shobar Haat (Sunday, Thursday), Gouri Haat (Tuesday), Danguajhar's Haat(Friday), Shikarpur haat, Bolbari Haat etc.
- Due to uncertainty and time needed for selling their products in HAAT, they like to sale to the intermediaries which provide them much less return compared to HAAT had it been sold.



- Artisans can able to prepare many items eg, female ornaments, face of various personalities but it takes time and there is no such market for these type of products, hence they generally produce traditional household utility items.
- Demand for the bamboo products is sufficient in national and international market but due to shortage of capital, skilled labour space it would not possible to fulfill the demand of the middleman.
- The information regarding the training programme arranged by DIC is not known correctly in most of the time. Hence there may have some problem in selecting the artisans for training. Semi skilled artisans are most of the time taking the part of master craftsman which hampers in the generation of skilled artisans.

Figure-5 Various Bamboo Handicrafts and its Price

Product Picture	Local Name	Time needed for unit: production time	Unit Cost of Production	Wholesale price
	taslo	1 hour	Rs.20	Rs.25
	chalen(Disi)	1.5 hour	Rs.24	Rs.30
	Phoran(pojal/ Marriage)	40 minutes	Rs.15	Rs.20
	Jauri(Dha)	2.5 hour	Rs.48	Rs.60
	Tauri (Chete)	50 minutes	Rs.10	Rs.15
	Madip: Satal	30 minutes	Rs.20	Rs.30
	Daga, Used in Chhatra Puja)	1.5 hour	Rs.40	Rs.60
	Kunia	1.5 hour	Rs.45	Rs.60

In every time period we have to add one day because to extract the materials from bamboo it takes one day for one bamboo.

Natural Fibre Mission

- Natural Fibre Mission (NFM) project, approved by Planning Commission Government of India, is being implemented in West Bengal in the 11 backward districts, e.g. Jalpaiguri, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Purulia, Paschim Medinipur, Purba Medinipur and South 24 Parganas since 2012-13.
- The project aims at generation and improvement of livelihood of artisans and weavers working with natural fibres like, jute, bamboo, cotton, silk, sabai, sisal, coir and mat. The major thrust areas of interventions have been skill development, capacity building, use of improved tools, product diversification, design development, market linkage and infrastructure development.



- Directorate of MSME, Directorate of Textiles (sericulture), Directorate of Textiles (Handloom) and WestBengal Khadi and Village Industries Board (WBK&VIB) under the Department of MSME & T, Government of West Bengal are implementing the various sc schemes under NFM.
- To provide marketing support in rural setup and for forward linkage, ‘Karma Tirtha’ are being set up in 11 BRGF districts of the state where artisans and weavers would be able to sell their roducts directly to the buyers, traders, exporters etc. Moreover, these marketing hubs (“Karma Tirtha”) will provide auxiliary supports like packaging, finishing and training to the covered artisans.
- According to Progress report with the NFM project the livelihood of around 9000 artisans and weavers have been improved directly and employment opportunities have also increased. Among the beneficiaries more than 50% belong to women and on an average 30% of artisans are SC,ST and Minority community. Better design support, skill up-gradation and distribution of improved tools help the artisans and weavers to increase their income.

Figure-6 Training Organized by DIC in Various Places of Jalpaiguri District in Last Two Years, Picture of Bamboo Turing Lathe Machine and the Products after Training Produced by Artisans



From the above figure it is clear that three training programmes are done so far, one is in Alipurduar (it was with Jalpaiguri district at that time. Now no DIC has yet been set up. The DIC of Jalpaiguri is looking the Alipurduar district still now. Almost 30 artisans took training in which male is 19 and female is 11. Training on Bamboo turning lathe machine was given. After the completion of the training the types of bamboo products specially flower vass that was produced by each artisans is shown in the figure below. The training on basketry, seasoning and coloring is done in Sulka para in Nagrakata block and Batabari in Matiali block.

Figure-6 Various Bamboo Items Produced by Artisans in the Training Programme



He government of West Bengal already taken land in Satkhaia, near Mal Block of Jalpaiguri District for Karmatirtha that is rural HAAT that is the HAAt for artisanal products. Though the constructing activity has not started yet but another karmatirtha that is in Payachari, Magradangi in Rajganj Block is going to be finished within one year, the activities are going in full swing. Figure below shows the two karmatirtha.



Figure-7 Karmatirtha (Rural Haat) in Satkhaiya and Magradangi



Summary and Conclusion

Bamboo and cane handicrafts have a great potential for enterprise development in Jalpaiguri district. For generating sustainable livelihoods for bamboo artisans, the actions may be taken. Continuous training initiatives like Tripura should be taken. It may be one, six months and even one year training for skill development, design development, preservation of the product i.e. training on treatment and seasoning procedure of the bamboo should be undertaken seriously. Up gradation of tools and technology and production technique should be undertaken for quality enhancement and ensuring cost competitiveness of the products. Establish linkage with potential market segment. In this context more and more industrial sector should encourage handicrafts industry by providing handicraft items as a free gift with their machine made products. This may stimulate the handicrafts industry. Encourage the artisans for participation in various fairs, or buyers –sellers meet, by providing them more facilities. Some NGO are now coming to purchase their products, so that they can sale those products in big cities or in international market. But this is very few compared to need. Government officials should take the initiatives through door to door survey to educate them about the various government's schemes or facilities for the artisans. The state Govt. is trying to some extent by organizing handicrafts trade fair in various parts of the state, initiatives for rural, urban Haat, establishing online trading of their products etc. But without the registration with DIC the artisans cannot extracts the fruits of these initiatives.

The District of Jalpaiguri is abundance of skilled artisans, raw materials but the problem is lack of market linkage, more training, use of improved tools, training on treatment of Bamboos, Packaging etc needed continuously. In Tripura there is various types of trainings are available through- out the year, but in Jalpaiguri, the young generations are not so much devoted towards their family business. They are helping as part time labors in their family. Many Artisans can able to produce many delicate bamboo products like ear ring of the women, but it takes time and the market price and demand is too low to produce that products. Hence they look for essential utility items, which can produce very quickly and they can sale every day some quantity of those products through intermediaries.

Finally supporting K.C Borah's opinion I can also say the Bamboo industry has a very good prospects for development, through diversification of products and modernization process through providing adequate training facilities, modern tools, financial support, market information, and market linkages, input supply and other infrastructural facilities and another important thing encouraging the young generations because they are the future artisans of our handicrafts industry.

References

1. Bhattacharyya D, 'Handicrafts and Cottage Industries in the Lights of Ancient India, Prior to British Invasion: An Epitome', *International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)*, Volume-1, Issue III, April 2015, Page No. 43-47.
2. Jamir I. &Dr.Natarajan P. 'Marketing of Bamboo handicraft Products in Dimapur, Nagaland-Traders Perception' ,*Samzodhana- Journal of Management Research*, Vol 2, Issue 1, Page 271-288.
3. Jena P.K., 'Indian Handicrafts in Globalisation Times: An analysis of Global Dynamics' *Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems* 8(2), 119-137, 2010.
4. Ms. Shreya J., 'Indian Handicrafts: Growing or Depleting?' *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)* PP 07-13 Freelance Faculty & Trainer.
5. Report on Mapping of Non Financial Gaps in the Agartala Bamboo Cluster, *Submitted to: Small Industries Development Bank of India Submitted By: Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India.*
6. Suhail M.G., ' Indian Handicraft Industry: Problems and Strategies, *International Journal of Management Research and Review*, July 2012/ Volume 2/Issue 7/Article No-8/1183-1199 ISSN: 2249-7196.