

Socio-economic status of bamboo artisans: A case study of bahriach and Gorakhpur districts, Uttar Pradesh, India

Richa Singh¹, K Rathna^{2*}

¹ Research Associate, Centre for Indian Bamboo Resource and Technology, New Delhi, India

² Chief Operating Officer, Centre for Indian Bamboo Resource and Technology, New Delhi, India

Abstract

Bamboo is an important material in the life of rural livelihoods. An exploratory survey was carried out in two districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh using questionnaires and discussions to assess the socio-economic condition, marketing situation, various problems associating with them and an attempt regarding solution of problems has been suggested. To improvise the socio-economic status of bamboo artisans, governments are looking for information on resource availability and artisans skills so that necessary amendments can be done in government policies to develop this sector as an important tool for rural development. This paper also discusses major bottlenecks in marketing along with potential interventions which could be used to generate alternate livelihood options for the poor rural community in the region.

Keywords: bamboo, socio-economic, rural livelihoods

1. Introduction

Artisans constitute an organic element of Indian society and had extremely important role in its transition. Even in these days of globalization and open market their relevance to the south Asian economy could hardly be denied. For centuries

bamboo has been a central part of many rural societies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It has provided communities with wide range of opportunities, i.e. housing, utensils, food and agricultural products, thus plays an important role in the socio-economic status of people.



Fig 1: Living conditions of bans fod community in Gorakhpur district

The village community of craftsman has always been the centre of the traditional crafts of India. As the material and products of bamboo artisans maintained poor status so they are considered producing cheap and low quality. There is a need to develop alternate livelihood options through bamboo by improving the quality of products and by producing market driven products which will target high value markets. There is a need to educate artisans and enhancing their skills in crafts and other utility products in order to improve their living conditions and generating better income.

This sector has a vast potential to generate self-employment, which is not known widely and quantified. Besides it will also strengthen the force of self-reliance. The poor women who are remaining at home and unemployed people could be trained on this field so their economic standard is strengthened.

Bamboo products like baskets, sieves and craft items are traditionally the main source of livelihood for Dokra communities of Bahraich district. Artisans are involved in same kind of activities of traditional artisanship. The design and range of products they are making are traditional due to which productivity and quality of products is low because of limited knowledge, basic tools etc. quality is generally due to lack of knowledge of preservation and treatment techniques, lack of knowledge on tools, jigs, lack of finishing and market demand and awareness is completely lacking. The pictures of old traditional tools and new improvised tools shown in the Annexure I

1.1 Study area

The study was conducted with bamboo artisans scattered in 9 villages of Bahraich and 10 villages of Gorakhpur district. The major target groups were artisans working with bamboo

since ages. Bahraich district borders Nepal district Bardiya to the northwest and Banke to the northeast. The rest of Bahraich is surrounded by other districts of Uttar Pradesh. Lakhimpur and Sitapur on the west, Hardoi to the southwest, Gonda to the southeast and Shravasti to the east. Bahraich is a district where more than 200 artisans and 15 SHG groups forming the strong force working on textile handloom, hand embroidery, pottery and clay work other than this bans fod community (Dokra community) also exist in the district. They make use of bamboo for making baskets, tokris, toys, soops and other small products to meet their livelihood.

Many times organization had the opportunity to visit the artisans concentrated areas and had a deep conversation with them to know about the present overall situation of these artisans. It was found that the condition of bamboo artisans was feeble. They are left out of development trajectory and struggling for their subsistence and to improve their living standard.

1.2 Objective of the study

The study intends to obtain reliable information about their status, socio-economic significance, production, range of products and marketing. Based on the results some policy measures will be recommended for the development of the sector. The study also envisages scope of bamboo to generate alternate livelihood opportunity for these artisans.

2. Methodology

The study is based on the detailed field survey of two districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh. Primary data was collected from 17 villages of Bahraich and Gorakhpur districts by applying tools like responses to interview schedule, focus group discussions and observations in the respective villages. During the study 76 and 81 artisans of Bahraich and Gorakhpur district respectively were interviewed. Overall more than 175 artisans were interviewed and data for 157 artisans is presented and considered for analysis.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Family members involved in bamboo work

During the survey 76 people responded to our questionnaire in Bahraich district spread in 9 villages. In 76 families, total 92 male members, 88 female members and 59 children (in 41 families) are involved in bamboo work. On an average 2-3 members (1 male, 1 female) in each family, working in making bamboo products. As bamboo artisans do not have any other livelihood source so both male and female member of the family and sometimes children also involved in bamboo works.

3.2 Working condition and socio-economic concern

Place of work

Artisans can be generally classified as home based worker and centre based worker.

Home based worker: artisans work from their home, whenever they have free time in hand.

Centre based worker: artisans come to a specific place and do the bamboo work at a specific place and few of them work for a specific time period. The centre may be in the house of one of the artisans or it may be a separate unit

where all together sit and work independently. Some of the artisans in a group of 2-5 work at a specific place.

3.3 Working hours

Graph below indicates that 1% of artisans working 1-2 hours, 19% working 2-4 hours, 27% working 4-6 hours, 47% working 6-8 hours and only 1% working 8-10 hours per day out of 76 families in Bahraich district. However, 3% of artisans working 2-4 and 4-6 hours respectively, 50% of them working 6-8 hours and rest 44% working 8-10 hours per day in Gorakhpur. The working hours of artisans of Gorakhpur district are more efficient as comparison to artisans of Bahraich district.

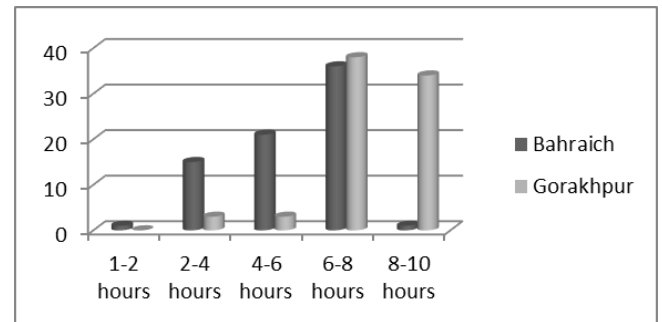


Fig 2: Working hours of artisans

3.4 Treatment techniques for bamboo

To enhance the natural durability and to protect it from insects, it is necessary to treat bamboo before use. Without any protective treatment, most bamboo species have an average natural durability of less than 2 years. Stored under cover, untreated condition it may last for 4-7 years. The variation in bamboo durability strongly depend on the species, the length of the culm, the thickness of the wall, and equally important on the time of harvesting.

Bamboo is being treated with non-chemical and chemical methods. Traditional soaking is a non-chemical method where bamboo poles are submerged in water for about 6 weeks; this method increases the durability by 10 years. Leaching is another non-chemical method which removes starch and also enhances permeability for future treatment by diffusion and pressure. This method is considered to be appropriate for treating any quantity of bamboo. It is recommended for craft and mat applications.

Smoking is another traditional method for treating bamboo; culms are stored over the fireplace. The moisture content in smoked culms is reduced so that biological degradation cannot take place. This method also reduces splitting.

During the survey. Question was raised on treatment of bamboo prior to craft work. Out of 76 artisans only 24 of them responded for the same. Out of 24 artisans, 17 are treating the bamboo by submerging in water for few days and 7 artisans are treating with other methods other than smoking, varnishing, coating and submerging. From the response we may conclude that only few artisans are aware that bamboo can be treated before it is used for making crafts and advantages of treating bamboo with various methods.

3.5 Migration and reasons

Migration of male from rural areas to the urban and to the rural areas within the district boundaries during a distinct time period is called an intra-district rural male out

migration. Rapid growth of population causes big family size which in turn results in high degree demography dependency, higher labour land ratio and decrease in farm size. This ultimately converts into high rate of rural poverty. Apart from this many areas in UP experiences low farm productivity. Due to limited farm opportunities many people are severely in the grip of the debt trap. In such conditions, it is very difficult for the person specially the male member of the family to remain inhabitant as he does not have any source of income to earn and feed his family. And it is very much pertinent that household heads and senior members have social and economical responsibilities of the family in India. In such conditions, people migrate to the nearest rural or urban districts where they can get a job.

The frequency of rural migration is decided by the level of development in the district itself. Higher the level of development and opportunities in the region, lesser will be the rate of migration outside the region. According to a study on "Regional pattern of Rural development and Outmigration from Uttar Pradesh: A district level analysis" it was stated that low level of intra district rural male outmigration is a characteristic features of the eastern Uttar Pradesh where more than 44 percent of the districts falls under this category which include Kaushambi, Faizabad, Ambedkar nagar, Bahraich, Shravasti, Balrampur, Gonda, Sant Kabir nagar, Kushinagar, and Ghazipur. Most of the districts belong to terrain belt and have fewer adequacies of resources. However, other districts comes medium intra level rural male outmigration rate are Pratapgarh, Sultanpur, Siddharthnagar, Basti, Gorakhpur, Deoria, Mau, Ballia, Jaunpur, Chandauli, Varanasi, Moradabad, Rampur, Jyotiba Phule Nagar, Mainpuri and Kanpur nagar.

As per our survey, none of the artisans have been migrated from Bahraich to other districts in search of employment or any other reasons. However, in Gorakhpur district out of 81 artisans only 6 of them migrated to other district for certain period time. The reasons for not migrating out of the districts from Bahraich and Gorakhpur district is may be the availability of sufficient livelihood opportunities and income by bamboo work.

3.6 Range of bamboo products

Diverse range of products can be prepared from bamboo. Traditionally, there are many indigenous communities in different parts of India who are dependent on bamboo for their livelihood. In the recent years there had seen a decline in the demand for the traditional products as the demand has declined sharply after the entry of plastic products in the market at a low cost. Availability and price of raw material is another concern for the artisans. Artisans are struggling to keep this art alive. Absence of market linkages and platform to showcase their products is another dilemma for the bamboo artisans.

Artisans in Bahraich and Gorakhpur district are efficient in making Daliya, basket, soops, cage, fencing and other items. Out of 76 artisans based in Bahraich district 60% of them are engaged in making daliya, 84% are making both baskets and daliya both, 96% are engaged in making soops along with baskets and daliya and very of them are making cages and fencing. However, 92 percent of artisans are preparing

daliya, 80 percent are making tokri, for chappatis, 86 percent involved in making soops and round soops. People are also making shoe racks, cages, windows for huts, small tools like knife and small household items. Artisan finds market of few products such as tokri, soops, baskets, racks, small toys and they prepared these items on regular basis.

3.7 Marketing concern

The Indian handicrafts industry is highly fragmented. It has been striving for growth for the last past few years now amidst significant challenges technology together with sufficient market information on export trends, opportunities and prices, scarcity of raw materials, lack of adequate finance and growing competition from factory made products. Creating any handicraft item takes double or triple of its time taken to manufacture any machine made products. Due to its slow making process, the design naturally evolves owing to the spirit of artisan's creativity, making every piece unique. It is fact that such work can hardly be duplicated or created through regimented technical processes.

There are few gaps in this sector due to which artisans are unable to find better opportunities. Lack of raw material, infrastructure and communication facilities for the artisans and unawareness about international requirements are few reasons for not getting better returns from their products. Lack of co-ordination between government bodies, private players and funding support from any other organizations, artisans based in Bahraich and Gorakhpur district are lacking with inadequate information on current market trends. Artisans are following age old practices and having lack of skilled labour, artisans are preparing products which do not have much market demand. Making of bamboo products is a time consuming activity and producing limited income from the sale of products. This is the reason of not opting bamboo handicraft occupation by the youth and they are being migrated to big towns and capital cities in search of job. However, artisans who are practicing bamboo work are settled in rural areas and small towns where they are lacking with market availability and exposure to exhibitions and trade fairs to showcase their products and promotion of their products.

As per our survey results, bamboo artisans based in Bahraich and Gorakhpur district are selling their products in local market and towns. The mode of marketing is viz. direct payments or through getting orders of their products. There are also other mode of marketing is through middle man but due to limited market for their products people are following this mode. Artisans are not being exposed to trade fairs, exhibitions, and local fairs so they have limited access to market.

3.8 Income of artisans

Bamboo artisans in Bahraich and Gorakhpur district belong to poor section of the society. The level of income is not satisfactory to meet their daily requirement. On an average, the monthly income of Bans Fod community is around Rs. 5800 in Bahraich and Rs. 6700 in Gorakhpur district and average family member is 4. Now it is very difficult to sustain with this money for entire month.

Table 5: Monthly income generation of bamboo artisans

Categories	Bahraich	Percentage	Gorakhpur	Percentage
Average Income (in INR)	5800		6700	
Range Rs. 4000-5000	15	21 %		
Range Rs. 6000-9000	27	35 %		
Below Rs. 5000	32	44 %		
Range Rs. 4000-6000			26	32 %
Range Rs. 6000-11000			29	29 %
Below Rs. 4000			26	32 %

Within Rs. 4000-5000 monthly income group, there are maximum concentration of families i.e. 15 which is 21 percent of the total families. Above Rs. 6000-9000, there are 27 families i.e. 35 percent of total families. Rest of them are earning below Rs. 5000 per month. However, 26 families

are earning income ranges from Rs. 4000-6000 i.e. 32 percent of total families. Out of 81 families, 24 of them are earning income ranges from Rs. 6000 - 11,000 i.e. 29 percent of total families.

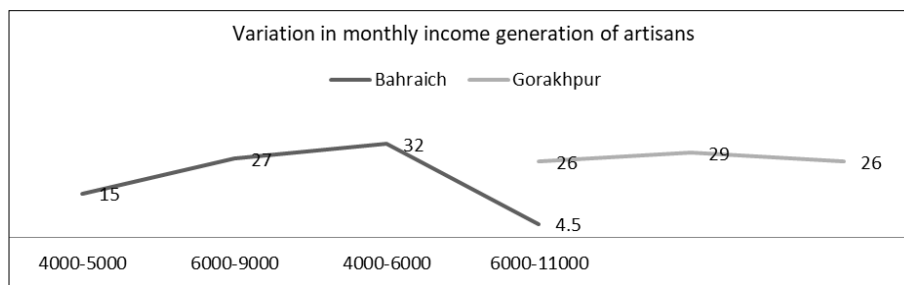


Fig 3: Monthly income generation of artisans

The main cause of low income production is lack of order and local market availability which results in unemployment throughout the year. Unwillingness to their job, lazy and alcoholic nature of work is also important existing reasons in the society. In most of the families total income equals to total expenditure, that mean there is no savings in their hand and the reasons indicates low income, increasing price rates and living expense. After maintaining all monthly expenses, there is very little savings in left in their hand though very few families are making little savings of Rs. 500-1000. The

monthly expense includes Food, clothes, education fees, medical, marriages ceremonies (as onetime expense) etc.

3.9 Drinking water facility and hygiene condition

Drinking water facilities is not satisfactory. 36 families i.e. 47 percent families in Bahraich and 61 families i.e. 75 percent of them say they don't have sufficient drinking water and sanitation facility. It is difficult of for women. For bowl clear most of the family access to open desiccation or go to community toilets.

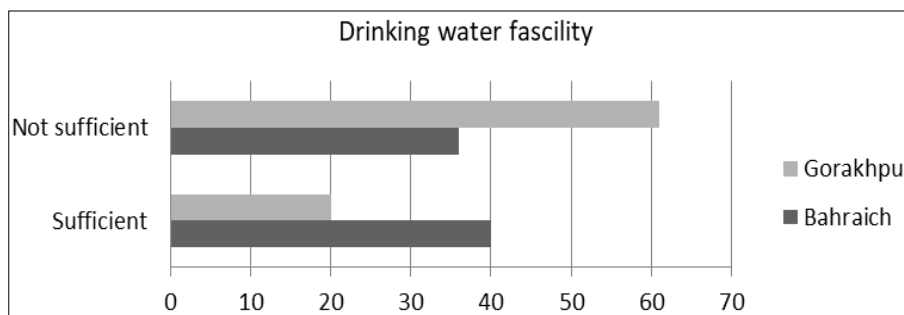


Fig 4: Drinking water facility

Drainage condition is also bad no proper drain to channelize water. In rainy season stagnation of water occurs near their houses. It also results in severe health diseases. For drinking water they all depend on community tube well or use pond water which is again unhygienic.

4. Conclusion and recommendation

- Majority of the bamboo artisans earning very low wages by making bamboo products due o limited market access and are deprived of various technical (such as modern tools, treatment techniques, skills and managerial support. Funding organization – state government State Urban Development Agency (SUDA), State Rural

Development Agency, State Skill Development Department, District Industries Centre, Development Commissioner Handicraft, other private agencies working for welfare of these artisans and private funding organization should focus on empowering the existing artisans skills with new market linkages, skill enhancement training programme with an integrated approach of livelihood creation and income generation. Artisans are encouraged and motivate to adopt the latest technologies from age old practices, government should provide modern tools kit which enable the artisan to cope with emerging demand and globalizing economy.

- Majority of the artisans belong to poor section of the

society with very low income and growth so it is essential to make provision of stipend during the training program and easy access to raw material and tools at low price to compensate with the loss of daily income from other works, which will help in reducing number of dropouts participants and will enhance their willingness to join the training program.

- Women artisans and youths are encouraged to participate in these training programs to reduce the problem of migration to various places in search of employment and better income. Skill building of women artisans by participation in these programs will increase the number of helping hands and aid in enhancing their income.
- Most of the artisans in India are not aware of the easy loans provided through Artisans Credit Card Scheme which shows that organization and other institution needs to sensitize the generation and make them aware about the government programme and information related to scheme. So that number artisans get benefited through it.
- Awareness can be created by arranging workshop and seminars to educate them on various government support schemes and other programs such as bank linkages, easy loaning, developing market and providing capacity building on productivity and marketing
- Artisans do not get exposure to trade fairs, current market which build them self-confidence and lots of learning. These exposure programs will educate them on the demands and requirements of the customer which will boot their income and savings as well. It will be better to encourage these artisans to participate in artisans fair. Organizations may organize expo fair at local level and inform to these artisans about the dates and motivate them to attend the program.
- Distribution of Certificate of participations in the training programme will help the artisans to get better job and wages in the changing market demands.
- It is equally important for sponsoring agencies working for the welfare of the artisanal society to improve live's of poor artisans by sensitizing them on their rights, providing backward and forward linkages, raising awareness on hygiene maintenance, education which will result in measurable impacts of the project activities.

5. References

1. Buckingham KC. Certification for Commodities harvested/ extracted by the Rural Poor. *Proceedings of the International CFC-ICB Certification Workshop*. Beijing, China: International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) & Common Fund for Commodities, 2009.
2. Coomarswamy A. *Indian Society presents to us no more fascinating picture that that of the craftsman as an organic element in the natioal life*. Delhi, 1909.
3. Das AG. An assessment of the dependency of farmers on Bamboo resources for Rural Livelihood in lalitpur Districts, Nepal, 2008.
4. Frith O. mainstreaming Pro-poor Livelihood Opportunities with Bamboo. *International Network for bamboo and rattan (INBAR), Beijing, China, 2008.*

**Annexure I
Old Traditional Tools**



New Improvised Tools

