

Intangible Heritage of Bamboo and Cane Crafts is in Stake: A Study of Selective Blocks of Malda

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Abstract

India is famous for its cultural legacy. The Indian state of West Bengal also has a rich traditional and artistic heritage. Malda has also its intangible cultural legacy with artistic styles and techniques. The blocks mainly Gajole, Bamongola and Habibpur of Malda district represent the backward classes. Basically the tribal backward classes specially the Mahali community earn their livelihood by making handicrafts from canes and bamboos. Lack of interest for upgradation of their situations, unawareness, lack of co-operation are certain drawbacks. Therefore, Government's co-operation making traditional hubs, spreading of knowledge for upliftment of the skill are some of the major strokes to protect over the primitively cultural legacy.

Keywords: Heritage, Handicraft, Deep-rooted elements, Village festivals, Craft hubs

Introduction

Handicraft, the oldest and progressive tradition of Indian culture is an intangible heritage from the Indus(3000-1700 B.C) civilization. The excellence of potteries, paintings, jewellerys, sculptures of stones are the remarkable example of crafts. From the Vedas to the Mauryan period or the medieval or modern period, handicrafts have been influencing from one generation to the next.

Malda, the entrepot of the northern part of West Bengal is also very rich in handcrafts. The C. D blocks of Bamongola, Gajole, Habibpur are famous with artistic styles and techniques. Cane and bamboo crafts are a very old and indigenous tradition of this region. Different types of baskets, hand held fan, sieves, brooms, eco-friendly decorative items like lanterns, flower vases, wall hangings, jewellerys are made and painted with auspicious symbols for using in marriage or any other ceremony.

Methodology

The following study has both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The primary data has been collected from the field. With proper interrogations from series of questions to access the various types of crafts, social-cultural life, economic conditions, present positions; primary data has been collected.

The secondary sources include various publications, websites and the census data of the Government of 2011. The both primary and secondary data help to study the cultural legacy of Malda.

Objectives

The general objective of this study is to know the intrinsicity of the handcrafts.

The specific objectives are as following:

- 1) To learn about the various arts and crafts of the following region.
- 2) To study the techniques of manufacturing such arts.
- 3) To analyze the socio-cultural-economic life of the arisans and craftsmen.
- 4) To find out the various problems dealt by the artisans and craftsmen.

Study Area

Malda, the entrepot of northern Bengal, is located at a distance of 347 km from Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal. It is beside of the northern part of the Ganga river. Geographically it lies between 24°40'20" to 25°32'08" Northern latitudes and 87°45'50" to 88°28'10" Eastern longitudes. It comprises of 15 Community Development Blocks including Gajole(25°21'09"N and 88°19'24"E), Habibpur(23°16'98"N and 88°51'60"E) and Bamongola(25°16'56"N and 88°33'67"E) which are the study area (Figure 1).

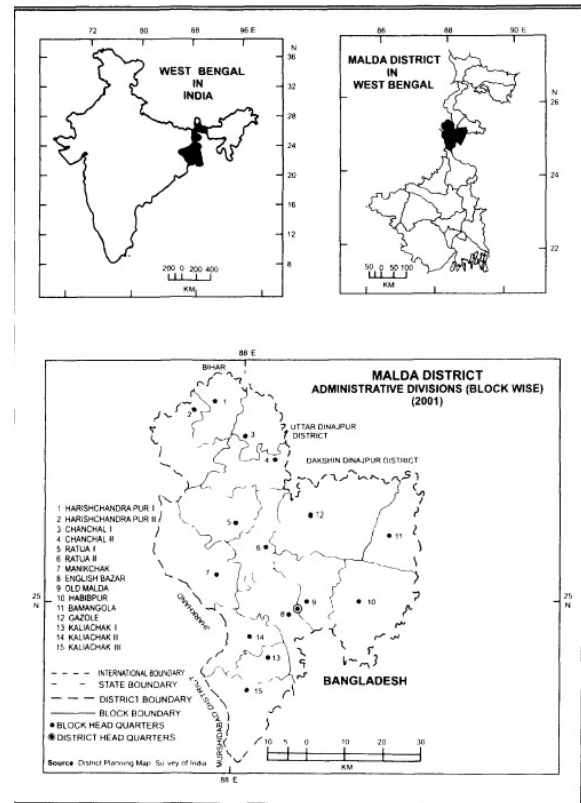


Figure 1

Present Situation

The artisans and the craftmen are the most valuable person. They carry the designs, styles and techniques from one generation to the others. But their personal livelihood are not remarkable as of their crafts. Here, the necessities and needs of the craftsmen are described thoroughly.

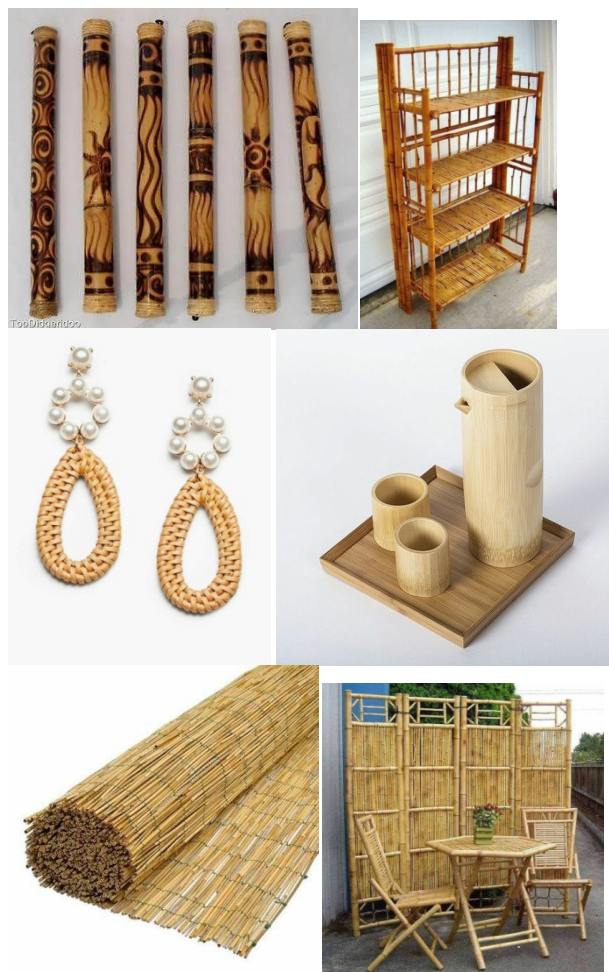


Table 1: Decadal growth of total population (2001-2011)

C.D BLOCK	2001	2011
Gajole	294715	343830
Bamongola	127252	143906
Habibpur	187650	210699

Source: Census, 2011

It is clear that the growth of population as far as the backward classes in the following C.D block is increasing in nature. According to the census, the S.C population under these 3 C.D blocks are as following 128464, 71176, 105386 and the S.T population are 6854, 28990, 61337 respectively.

Table 2: Approx income per month

Less than 3000 Rs (per month)	3000-6000 (per month)
35	53

Source: Primary data, 2019

It is observed that out of 100 respondents of the following C.D blocks 35 person have an income of less than 3000 Rs per month. The moderate numbers are in the income group of 3000-6000 Rs. Only 12 persons are having an income of above 6000 per month.

Table 3: Occupational structure

Government Job	Non Government Job	Unorganised Sector	Daily Wage Earning Sector
12	29	37	22

Source: Primary data, 2019

It is clear that the backward classes are the sufferer one. The following table shows that the backward classes maintain their livelihood through unorganised or daily wage earning sectors. The survey shows only 12 people enjoy Government services.

Table 4: Use of Consumer Goods

Television	Refrigerator	Mobile Phone	Computer and other gadgets
26	5	67	2

Source: Primary data, 2019

The effect of modernity also touches these C.D blocks. 67 respondents have mobile phones, where 26 persons have Television. Only 5 respondents have fridge and only 2 have computer for educational purpose.

Table 5: Type of vehicles (owned)

Cycle	Van	Motor Van	Byke
39	16	26	19

Source: Primary data, 2019

The poorer section often depends on buses, motor vans to communicate. The report shows 39 respondents have their own cycle where 16 respondents have van, 26 have motor van and 19 persons have their owned byke.

Table 6: Frequency of intake Protein food

Everyday	Alternate day	Thrice a week	Once a week
21	39	29	11

Source: Primary data, 2019

The backward classes struggles a lot to earn meagre amount of meal for them. So it is a dream to intake protein food regularly. The report shows 21 respondents take protein food everyday. 29 respondents consume protein thrice a week where 11 respondents consume the protein foods once a week.

Table 7: Educational Qualification

Upto class 4	Class 5-8	Above 8 and others
37	52	11

Source: Primary data, 2019

The state Government announces various schemes like Sikshasree, Kanyasree, Yuvasree to lessen the number of drop-outs. But all those schemes could not upgrade the qualification status of these blocks. The report shows 52 respondents are in a group of class 5-8. 11 respondents have qualification of higher educations. 37 persons are having a degree of class 4.

Problems

- 1) There are significant losses and damages of raw bamboo products due to inappropriate management and storage of harvested bamboo. This creates the deterioration of the finished products.
- 2) The craftsmen and the artisans are unaware of their potentialities. Therefore, they often sell their excellent designs in return of low costs.
- 3) The commercial banks are not interested to give loans to this sector. Therefore, for earning livelihood or to buy the necessary ingredients to make the crafts, they take loan from the Middle man under high rate of interests.
- 4) Lack of knowledge or skill in this sector diminishes the emergence of this sector.
- 5) The tradition passing from one to another is decreasing due to the diversification in other sectors or under 100 days of work participation.
- 6) The direct impact of demonetisation and added GST value make a dull representation of this unorganised sector.
- 7) There is no brand value for promotion of the eco-friendly sustainable products.
- 8) The craftsmen and the artisans are also responsible for their present situations as they don't want to communicate or to state of their problems.

Adaptative Strategy

Bamboo, the fastest growing plant species has also a high productivity of biomass. Hence the following strategies should be needed to bring back the cultural legacy:

- 1) To promote the bio-degradable eco-friendly intrinsic crafts of cane and bamboo, a policy should be needed from both of the state and country. The G.I value should be a good initiative to protect over the rich legacy.
- 2) There is the necessity of storage of harvested bamboo. So proper storage systems are needed. There are some storage centers at Gajole and Bamongola. But the numbers are few.
- 3) The Government should help the poor craftsmen by lending money or giving necessary equipments.
- 4) The Government should educate the craftsmen and the artisans to upgrade their skills, designs and technologies.
- 5) There should be a policy to import this eco-friendly sustainable products.
- 6) Rural crafts hub or village fair are needed.
- 7) To ensure the socio-economic inclusion of the cratsmen and artisans, the aspects of this sector should be re-defined. Old age pensions, the medical facilities are needed.
- 8) To ensure the artisans and craftsmen to join to the various hubs or fairs. T.A D.A or carrying cost should be borne by state to otimise their earnings.

Future Prospects

West Bengal Khadi And Village Industries Board (WBKVIB) is providing the necessary hardware support including equipments, skill developments. Various Resource Centres and Common Facility Centres are established under this board. It has set up a project to ensure the socio-economic inclusion of the rural craftsmen and artisans. Various exhibitions and fairs in various states of India and also in Yangan, Bahrain, Paris, Houston etc. are faciliated to. Participation in exposure,

resulting in improvement of self –esteem, better understanding of demands of the tribal folks. The tribal folks are now equipped with brochures, catalogues etc.

Conclusion

Today, the cane and bamboo industry in Malda as well as in India is vastly growing with many more opportunities and challenges ahead. In order to acheive the goal, tight scheduled planning with evaluations are needed. Collaboration among all the stake holders under Government entities is needed. A vision with strategic process with set up of bench marks and targets is also desire to optimise the value of this sustainable eco-friendly industry.

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