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BRASS METAL INDUSTRY IN ASSAM: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract: The paper is a result of a field study on the brass and bell metal industries of Assam, particularly Sarthebari area. Paper contains an analytical study of this indigenous industry from different points of view. The paper presents an inclusive study and findings about the raw materials, workers, owners, marketing strategies and their contribution in the socio-economic condition of the society. The method in the study was field investigation and the data are primary as well secondary.

Keyword: Brass, Bell, Raw Materials, Economic Condition, Problem of Market.

1.0 Introduction: Brass metal industry in Assam is one of the leading industries among all the handcrafted industries. India is one of top country producing brass metal things and different places of Assam play a very significant role in this context. Brass is an important cottage industry, with highest concentration in Hajo (Assam), while sarthebari is well known for its bell metal craft (Mridula sahay). The industry of brass metal in India as well Assam is very old in nature. Metal manufacturing in India is a notable work which contributes a lot in terms of economy and provides good amount of employment in a very grass root level. The most important and significant point is to do work in this industry people do not require educational qualification hence most illiterate person can easily engage with this industry. To establish this industry, there is no need to setup separately; most of the owners establish it in front of their homes. In every brass metal industry, there are seven to eight people working together. The tools used by the workers are very traditional and old, even in today's modern time and rise of the science and technology the workers are not able to use modern technology due to many reasons. The workers are in favor to use traditional tools because they are well known of these tools and they are skilled to use these tools, the owners are not so rich to buy modern tools and so on. The brass metal industry of sarukshetri revenue circle is known as "sarai silpa". The artisans of the sarukshetri revenue circle do not belong to any specific religion or community. Sarukshetri brass metal cluster is situated in south-eastern side of the Barpeta district. Various places are baniyakuchi, haladhibari, lachima, kamarpara, singra, byaskuchi villages where brass metal industries are established.

Therefore, for the growth of these industries, there need some proper planning in various stages like in exporting, production, skilled workers and so on.²

The overall trends of cottage industries including this one in India indicates slowdown from the last two or three decades (Dutta 2002, cited by Deblina Ghosal). Workers and artisans, who were associated with this occupation for long, are now leaving this job for uncertain better option (Kalita and Prasad 2016, cited by Deblina Ghosal).

1.2 Subject Matter: Brass metal is one alloy of Copper and Zinc mixed of ratio of 70:30 I.C 70 percent Copper and 30percent Zinc. Zinc is included in the class of traditional metal. They are hard, shiny, strong and easy to shape can easily be bended to give shape to the articles. Brass is looking yellow and similar to gold also. In this industry different products are made like toll (cooking utensil), kharahi (container with dense but small haes on its body to pass water), karia (container used to draw milk), banda (water pot with a pipe, used by muslims), gilasa (glass of brass metal), tray (flat receptacle utensils).

The metalworkers of Assam usually follow method in manufacturing products. The more popular is the hammering method, popularly called heating and beating method. This method entailed beating out the lamp or plates into design shapes with the help of hammer. After heating in furnace, the second method entailed into specific method (Goswami 2009).

¹ Mridula sahay, Turnaround Strategy for Brass and Bell Metal Industry in Assam,India(Tamilnadu, International Journal of Innovation and Applied Studies, 2015(vol-11))

² Kabita Kalita, Skill Development of Manpower-A study on the Traditional Brass Metal Industry of Assam(Karimganj, Pratidhwani the Echo, 2016, vol-5))

³ Deblina Ghosal, Present Scenario of the Traditional Brass and Bell Metal Industry of Khagra, Muostshidabad, West Bengal(West Bengal, International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews, 2018,(Vol-5 Issue-3))



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Supply of raw materials to the production units of brass metal also revealed the overall domination of local traders and mahajans. However, hawkers and buyers also contribute with a very little share and raw materials supply. The study reveals that the supply of raw materials has directly controlled by mahajans and local trades, is more two third of the brass metal production units.

The production units of brass and bell metal industries have also faced some problems in the procurement of raw materials. The responses of the artisans in this regard have studies to explore the dimension of the problem. The study reveals that irregular and insufficient supply of raw materials, shortage of working capital to buy raw materials, low quality of raw materials and control of traders are the problems face by the owner and artisans of brass metal industry. Lack of sufficient supply of raw materials is one the main problem faced by the industry. Along with that collecting of raw material may sometime lengthy process.

The management system of brass metal industry is different from bell metal industries in many ways. In production units of Sarthebari cluster, the smithy owner from their capital procures raw materials and the partners or the workers are engaging in the basis of daily or monthly wages system. In Hajo, the majority of units of raw materials receives from Guwahati based mahajon and returns the final products adding the final price.

1.3 Location: The study is confined to the area of Sarukshetri Development Block falls under Sarthebari sub-division of Barpeta district (Assam). The main focused location for the study³ covers sarthebari, baniyakuchi and byaskuchi villages under the saruksheteri development block of Barpeta district.

1.4 Nature and Scope of the Study

The brass and bell metal industries are playing a very significant role in the socio-economic status of the Assamese society. It has a huge contribution to create many jobs among the uneducated villagers. Many artisans are depending on these small industries for fulfill their daily needs. Therefore, the industry playing a very significant role in the economic sector of the state. The products of these industries are made by traditional tools which are made by the workers rather than use any advanced technology.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

- To find out how the brass and bell metal industries are running
- To study how the products are to be made
- To study about the workers and their day-to-day life
- To study what is the role of these industries in the socio-economic condition of the society.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Method

The study is primarily based on field investigation. The obtained data are analyzed of questioner method.

3.2 Data

3:2:1: Primary data: The primary data are collected thorough interview method by asking different questions in the time of field survey. Questions are asked in assamese language.

3:2:2: Secondary data: Secondary data are collected from different books, articles, local publication, newspaper and journals.

3.3 Sample: Total 30 samples are collected from three main areas like Sarthebari, Baniyakichi and Byaskuchi. The respondents are basically artisans, owners and local people of that particular area.

3.4 Procedure: Respondents are informed earlier and fix a date to visit their place. The interview conducted on the fixed date at their working place.

4.0 Limitation of the study

The study is confined in the area of sarthebari, baniyakuchi and byaskuchi which are falls under sarukshetri development block of Barpeta district. The main focus of the paper is on a holistic study about the brass and bell metal industries of these particular areas.



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5.0 Result and Discussion

5.1 Contribution to state industrial sector

Small industries are playing a very significant role to its state economy. Development of a society based on its industries which can fulfill of its workers' basic needs by providing employment in these industries. The socio-economic status of people determines by their income. According to census report 2011, 69 percent people of Assam are engaging with agriculture and the economy of Assam depends on agricultural activities. The small industries of Assam play an important role to its economy. The brass metal industries of village area of Assam can provide employment to most illiterate people of that area, the industries not required any educational qualification therefore the uneducated people get an opportunity to do work in these industries. Village and cottage industries have great importance in an agrarian economy like Assam. Rural agricultural families of the state are getting subsidiary occupation from these industries. As these industries require minimum working capital, simple tools and implements, rural families can easily run these industries. The village and cottage industries include handloom weaving, carpentry, sericulture, rope making, bell and brass metal, cane and bamboo work, gold and silver work etc. The workers of brass metal industries have been working with very old and traditional tools given by their ancestors. The workers of these industries are basically involved in different stages like process of production, supplying raw materials, collection and distribution of products. The industrial units of this sector are quick yielding with relatively short gestation period, which is very essential in a developing economy characterized with a high inflationary tendency. There is a need for the planners and the policy makers to put emphasis on these industries as a tool for economic growth of the state.

5.2 Problem of the production

The industries of brass and bell metal suffering from various problems such as supply of raw materials, financial, market, cost and so on. Irregularity of raw metal supply and the problem of finance are the major problem of brass and bell metal industries. Due to lack of good quality of raw materials all the brass metal industries have to encounter with the problem of insufficient supply. Therefore, the workers are using raw material available in the local market which may not be good quality. The owners of the Garshals (place where work run) are facing difficulty for irregular and insufficient supply of good quality raw materials and energy. Due to this reason workers face problem of having no work for some days which rise temporary unemployment in that particular place. In the changing time hike price of the material also create a big problem for the owner.

Finance is another major problem of production units of the brass metal industry. Lack of working capital is a common problem of production units faced by the artisans while producing articles except a very few numbers of unit those who buy raw materials from own capital. The artisans of these industries are financially weak and they depend on village money lenders.

Marketing is another major aspect to be considered for any production system. The workers of the production units are not yet designed any strategy to understand the nature of demand of their products. Therefore, they are producing articles according to their idea without considering the market potentially and changing priority of the alienate. For this reason, the traditional products gradually failed to cater the demand of the potential market both inside and outside the state.

Lack of trained or skilled manpower equipped with modern production known how is standing as obstacle in the process of production of brass metal industries. Therefore, artisans still follow traditional method of production. The artisans failed to maintain the standard for the want of proper tools and equipment and even some of them are not fit for applying advance method of production for their lower level of literacy. Again, the promotional agencies have not taken from different angles have failed to induce momentum to modernize both the sector of state to compete with the machine-made products coming from outside of state.

5.3 Buyers view on brass metal industry

Contemporary market and the products are depending on buyers' need and want, so a try has been made to understand the perception of buyers towards brass metal production available in the market. Generally, customers prefer less costly product made of brass metal. Therefore, durability quality and beauty of products and their cultural association health and hygienic issues and house hold usability found to be the significant consideration in buying concern about house hold use, decorative of the products. Other reason such love to indigenous products price increase of scrape offer prizes to others decorative uses and purchase and compulsion are not very effective reason in the process of purchasing. Through love for indigenous products may be a strong reason belied buying brass metal products.

Customers concern and the choice of different items of bell and brass metal products they have to choose kahi, bati, chariya, sarai, lota and kalah have able to score of the choice from 100 to around 60 percent of buyers as these are regarded as the common house hold items used in Assamese society.



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All the market place of the state is linked with sales network of brass metal products. Such sales centers are located at towns and cities. Local traders have identified as the main source of purchase with around 89 percent customers response followed by the hawkers with a score of around 67 percent.

Apart from this, the customers close to production centre have taken chance to buy products directly from garhal. Mahajans (owner) have direct relation with the retail sellers. They are supplying products to retail sellers within our state and some of them have business relation with the local traders of outside and abroad. Trade fair or exhibition is another event for customers to purchase brass metal products and sometimes such fair is organized in collaboration of government’s department.

5.4 Problems of Production

The product of brass metal industries is part of life of Assamese people and their culture. Every family tries to maintain those articles as marks of their cultural identity. They are mostly used in religious rituals and marriage ceremonies.

As a traditional form of craft, it still involves low level of technology in the process of production; it depends on peoples’ hand work not in any advanced technology. The artisans of these industries work hard to run the tradition as well as to sustain their livelihood in the changing socio-economic context of the society. The low literacy level, non-availability of sufficient agricultural land, lack of working capital among the artisans also some other negative factors influencing the growth and development of the state. Due to lack of proper marketing strategy, export of brass metal articles to other states of our country is almost absent. Only some amounts of products are to be export to Nepal, Bhutan, China and Myanmar (deka and saikia, 2009). On the other hand, comparatively high finished and low-priced hand and machine-made bell and brass articles from Moradbad, Kolkata, Punjab, Haryana etc. are gradually capturing market.

6.0 Major Findings of the Study

Cottage industrial sector is more important for its employment potentiality than medium and large industrial sector. They generate more direct jobs against per unit of investment than other sectors.

Study of the cottage form of bell and brass metal industries of Assam unfolded some new findings of special importance:

1. Hajo and Sarthebari are the major centers of bell and brass metal industries in Assam. The artisans engaged in bell metal industry able to convey glory to sarthebari area for their finest quality of products.
2. In pre-colonial period, the sole control of the production process was in the hand of kanhars. However, the role of kanhar was subsequently degraded during the British rule as well as post-independent period as traders’ community began to play the major role in the bell and brass metal trade.
3. The supply of raw materials to the production units of bell and brass metals showed the domination of local traders and mahajans.
4. Level of education among the artisans found to be low. Most of the brass and bell metal workers are educated below the High School level.
5. The heating and beating is the more popular method of producing brass metal articles. Cutting method is used to product some item like lota, glass etc.
6. The profit of a particular garhsal is solely depends on the professional attitude of the kanhar and will power and manual labour of the bhaigas.

7.0 Conclusion: Over the years the bell and brass metal industries are suffering from various internal, external and operational problems. In the raw materials and energy fronts, insufficient and irregular supply of it, low quality of raw materials, control of traders over supply of raw materials and shortage of finance are found to be the basic problems of both the industries concern. Apart from it, fluctuating price of raw materials and energy, time consuming material collect process and poor transportation facilities are some other problems as cited by stakeholders of the bell and brass metal industries.

The tools and implements used by the artisans engaged in bell and brass metal industries are traditional. The workers of bell and brass metal industries are not belonging to a special class or community. Rather, they are occupational class. Anybody, who are willing to do he may engage.

Contribution of these industries to the industrial sector of the state cannot be certainly determined as it is yet operating as an unorganized sector and proper account keeping is not a part of practice. The operational problems faced by the industries are found to



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be associated with insufficient supply of good quality raw materials and energy. This is the serious problem faced by these industries for smooth conduct of their respective product units.

Working environment of garhsal is also found to be unhygienic and congestive. It is found that, they are not conscious about the necessary precaution measures to be taken in production process.

The production units who are in a position to buy raw materials from their own sources have able to develop direct connection with the management committees are found to have achieved little experience of joining trade fair, exhibition, sobha mahotsav etc. for which the greater exposure of bell and brass metal products is not yet possible, specially outside the state.

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