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## **An Overview Of Conchshell Industry Of Bishnupur, Bankura District –after Sumatra Tsunami (2004)**

**Riya Banerjee**

Department of Geography, The University of Burdwan

### **Abstract:**

*Handicrafts are the art of creating products using raw and indigenous materials. Bengal is well known all over the world for its expertise in arts and craft. It's skill in architectural splendours to its excellent works on wood work, terracotta, painting textiles, crafts of conch shell etc. Conch is the common name that is applied to a number of different medium to large-sized sea snails or their shells. The term generally applies to large sea snails that have a high spire and a siphoned canal (come to a point at both ends of shell). The conch shell curving is the traditional art of Bishnupur. Traditional artisans mostly belongs to Sankha Banik Caste partake in conch shell curving at sankhari Bazaar (Bishnupur, Malleswar, Kadakuli). This paper attempt to explore the problems and prospects of conch shell industry recent times in the Bishnupur of Bankura District.*

### **KEYWORD:**

Handicrafts ,Conchshell, Bishnupur.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Bishnupur (distance from Kolkata is 132Km) now the headquarter of the subdivision of the name in Bankura District is a seat of craft and culture. Nature has decorated Bishnupur with her own hands there are old brown hills, gleaming rivers, several ancient temples and monuments which are repositories of thought, culture and tradition of Bishnupur.

Bishnupur town is located in Bankura district of West Bengal. This area is located at 23°4' N latitude and 87°19'E longitude. It has an average elevation of 59 metres (194 feet). Once the capital of the Mallabhum Raj has now become the Bishnupur Municipality with an area of 22.01 sq. km with population of 61946 persons (Census 2001). This town is accessible from all parts of the state by railways and roadways. Except Conch Industry, it is also popular due to Baluchari sarees, terracotta temple and lantern making.

### **OBJECTIVES:-**

To identify the processing of Conches from shell conch in Bishnupur,  
To probe into the impacts of conch industry on the economy of the town,  
To analyze the effects of conch industry in the rural function,  
To investigate the problems related to conch system (increasing price of conch shell after Tsunami).  
To find out the root causes of such problems, and  
To explore the possible ways to abate such problems

### **SOURCES OF INFORMATION:-**

Primary Data has been collected from interviewing the people related to conch industry through structured questionnaire schedule. Secondary Data collected from various books, journals, records,

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reports, newspaper and other documents collected from a number of Government and Non-Governmental agencies. There are other web searches like,  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handicraft>,  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bankura>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishnupur\\_Bankura](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishnupur_Bankura)  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conch>

**LIMITATION: -**

The data base faces some limitations which are briefly as follow:

1. In case of Primary data collection, some of labourers of Conch industry were not co-operating in a normal way as they were afraid of media and forecasting.
2. It is difficult to trace the whole nature under a few sample surveys.

**METHODOLOGY:-**

The following methodologies have been adopted for preparing field report:

**A. Pre-Field Session:-**

At first, Bishnupur was chosen for the study. The area is mainly dominated by cottage industry and small scale industries, among which Conch Industry is versatile and unique in its aspect- so it is chosen for our study. The important source of income of the most of the people at Bishnupur is Conch Industry, which is very interesting, since the demand of Conch Shell goods are on a rapid decline. The main purpose of selection of this area is to study the socio-economic condition of the few traditional families of Bishnupur who practices Conch Shell curving as a source for their livelihood. A guide book was collected for the overall view of Bishnupur P. S., Bankura district, West Bengal. Secondly, a questionnaire was prepared in order to collect some data on the basis of the response of the local people. Thirdly, we collected a map of Bishnupur and information about Bishnupur Police Station from PCA, 2001.

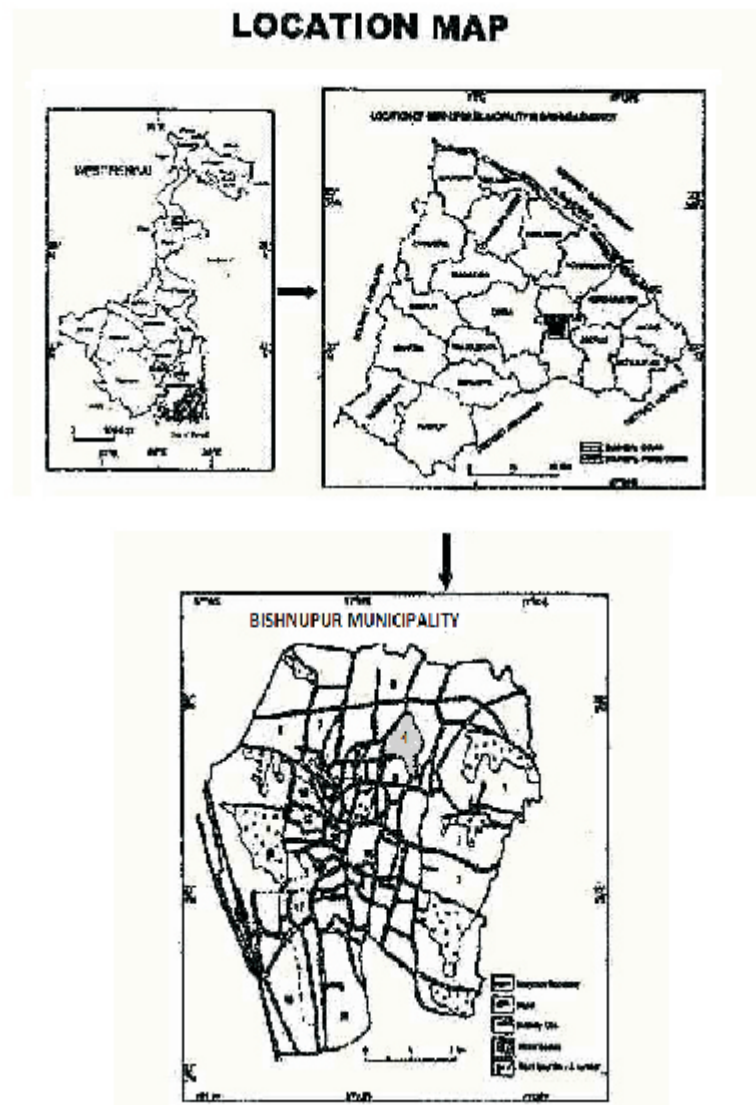
B. Field Survey:-Firstly, we had selected Ward No. 4 for our survey. With the help of the local inhabitants of Sankhari Para, we marked the traditional system of Conch Industry and others. We also made a socio-economic and cultural study on the basis of a door-to-door survey of the people living there.

C. Post-Field Session:-As a part of Post-field activity, we prepared a location map and a route map. Several representative diagrams were prepared based on classification and analysis of data obtained from primary and secondary sources. This was followed by interpretation of the diagrams. And finally, conclusion was drawn and written

**Brief profile of the study area:-**

The area under review is located in the ward no-4 in Bishnupur Municipality. This area is locally called Sankhari Bazaar. Geographically the area is situated at 2304'37"N to 2304'56"N latitude and 87019'8"E to 87019'22"E longitude. The most part of the area is a flat alluvial plain presenting the appearance of the ordinary paddy fields in Bengal, but in somewhere, the land is undulating, the soil is lateritic and the surface is covered with low scrub jungle. The principal rivers of this area are the Dhalkisor, Birai and Sali. The climate of Bishnupur Sub-Division is much drier than that of eastern Bengal. From the middle of March to beginning of June hot westerly winds prevail and heat during day time is oppressive. North-wasters however are frequent during the time and help in mitigating the temperature. During the rainy season which sets in month of June to mid September, the climate is comparatively pleasant. In the winter season, the temperature even falls to 80C. Average rainfall ranges from 1300 to 1400 mm.

The total population of Bishnupur Sub-Division is 9.96 laces. It appears Bishnupur Sub-Division shares 31.20 percent of total population of Bankura district in 27.17 percent of its area. Bishnupur Municipality is most populous followed by Sonamukhi. It has total population of about 61947 in which 31223 are male and 30724 are female population. The population composition includes Hindu, Muslims and christens population.



#### CONCH SHELL INDUSTRY:-

Bishnupur owes its origin to the famous Handicraft industry like Conch industry. The processing of it from collection of conch shell to the marketing of its final products is a long and tedious process. Stages:-

##### a. Collection of conch shell

Although the industry is entirely dependent upon its raw material –conch shell, these have to be brought from places like Chennai and Sri Lanka by waterways. The raw material then reaches Bishnupur by train.

##### b. Processing of conch shell

Different members of the family are involved in different stages of processing:

I. On arrival of the conch shell the apex, pip and edges are first cut-off with the hammer and the inner dust is cleaned.

II.Next, tightly wedges between two bamboo sticks, the shell are placed between the right shell and the left toe of the artisans. Then with the help of a saw, the base is cut and from the remaining portion the ring shape sliced by a curved saw.

Industry	Old Machine	Modern Machine
Conch shell	Sil,Dara,Batali,File,Bhamara	Cutting Machine, Grinder Machine

III.For finishing, holes are sealed with wax. The products are put in Nitric Acid solution, and then vigorously rubbed to make the shells smooth, and finally polished with dry clothes.

IV.The pieces are joined together to make them into various items like bangles, bracelets, lockets, costume jewellery decorative utensiles, armllets and various decorative items. The pieces are usually tied together by an extremely thin tin coil and then coloured.

Change of nature of product produce during last 10 years (1991-2001)

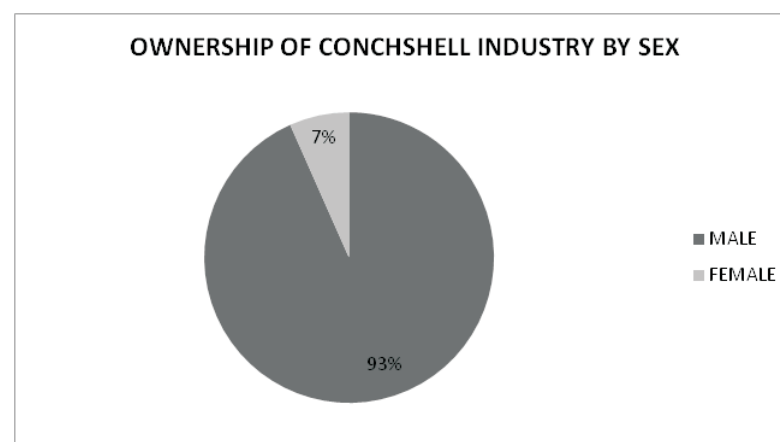
Industry	Traditional Items	Modern Items
Conch shell	Bangles,Sankha,Finger Ring	Ring, watch by shell structure

V.Finally, intricate designs are curved on these items and then packed and sent for marketing.

Both women and men work equally hard to carry out the functioning of the conch shell industry.

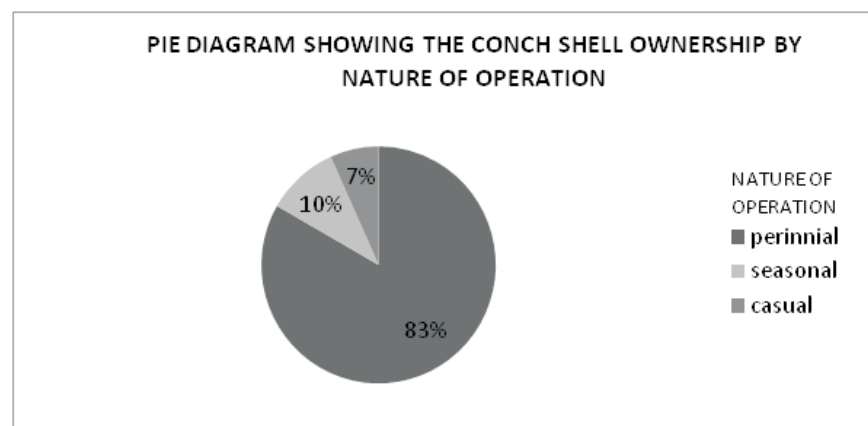
INDUSTRY	OWNERSHIP	
	MALE	FEMALE
CONCHSHELL INDUSTRY	28	2

Source- Field Survey



INDUSTRY	OWNERSHIP BY NATURE OF OPERATION		
CONCHSHELL	PERINNIAL	SEASONAL	CASUAL
INDUSTRY	25	3	2

Source – Field Survey



**PRODUCTION STAGES OF CONCH SHELL WORK**

PRODUCTION	MACHINES AND TOOLS USED	NATURE OF WORK	TYPES OF LABOUR	MODE OF PAYMENT
CUTTING	POWER OPERATED CUTTING MACHINE	CUTTING RAW CONCH SHELL	MALE HOUSEHOLD /HIRED LABOUR	DAILY RATE
RUBBING-I	POWER OPERATED GRINDING MACHINE OR TRADITIONAL TOOLS	RUBBING THE OUTER LAYER OF CONCH SHELL	MALE /FEMALE HOUSEHOLD /HIRED LABOUR	PIECE RATE
PASTING	RESIN,HARDNER,ZINC,OXIDE WAX	PASTING THE RUBBED CONCH SHELL	MALE /FEMALE HOUSEHOLD /HIRED LABOUR	PIECE RATE
RUBBING-II OR POLISHING	POWER OPERATED GRINDING MACHINE OR TRADITIONAL TOOLS	POLISHING THE PASTED AREA	MALE /FEMALE HOUSEHOLD /HIRED LABOUR	PIECE RATE
DESIGNING	GRINDING MACHINE AND SAW,PLANE	DESIGNING THE CONCHSHELL RING ARTISTICALLY	MALE /FEMALE HOUSEHOLD /HIRED LABOUR	PIECE RATE

Source- Field Survey

**PROBLEMS RELATED TO CONCH SHELL INDUSTRY:-**

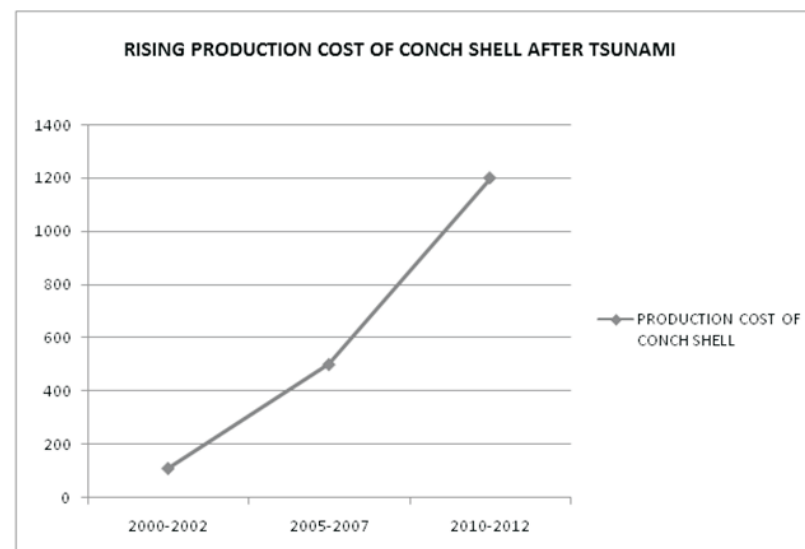
In recent times the conch shell industry is suffering from many problems like-

I. Recently the demands of conch shell items are on rapid decline except in the festive season especially during Durgapuja and the season of marriage. As the cost of conch increased after Tsunami. The numbers of conches found at the coast are decreased by changing the global ocean system after Tsunami; thus making

the income of the artisan's very meager. So, many of the artisans are in the way of changing their profession to support their family.

Year	Production Cost('000Rs/-)
2000	110
2005	500
2010	1200

Source- Field survey



II. Some of the labourer buys the raw materials from the Mahajans and even sells the finished product to the Mahajans. In performing all these tasks, no such remuneration is achieved.

III. Since designs on conch industry are very costly; therefore, the artisans are shifting to coconut shell curving to find markets.

IV. There is no government help or subsidy is received.

V. Since, the labourer depends on Mahajans; the changing scenario of the market is still unknown to them.

VI. Different types of diseases like Stomach ache, eye irritation are common.

#### PROSPECTS OF CONCH SHELL INDUSTRY:-

I. New products which meet urban trends and fashion should be produced. The new product range could be ring, watch by shell structure, decorative structure etc.

II. The craftsmen should be aware of current market trends so that they can accustom themselves to the present scenario.

III. It is important to give an identity to these products, which can be given by labeling them. The tags should have information about the craftsmen and the production. This can be very well used as an effective promotion strategy.

IV. In spite of several steps taken the help of Government and NGO's must be needed.

#### CONCLUSION:-

From the above study, we can conclude that although this traditional 'conch industry' is facing a lot of problems; still its popularity is worth noticing. In India and even abroad, this industry has great market. Their product owes great demand. Still the government does not take proper steps to flourish this industry. If the government does not take proper measure, this industry becomes a dying industry. It is our responsibility to preserve the conch industry, so that it can flourish in future.



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