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SOCIO - ECONOMIC CONDITION OF HANDICRAFT WORKERS IN SIKKIM



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Abstract:-Handicraft industry is unique in terms of design, cost and quality of products and thus provides a competitive advantage on other national and international players of handicrafts market. In spite of the various advantages, the industry still needs to explore and identify various opportunities and challenges ahead by the handicraft workers. The artisan who had better socio-economic status in the society is currently under needy socio-economic situation. Their economic status is adversely affected by factors that are challenging progress of the indigenous technology by disrupting artisans' rural market. Thus the present research makes an effort to study about the socio-economic condition of handicraft worker in Sikkim. The paper also focuses on the challenges faced by the handicraft sector in the state of Sikkim.

Keywords:social, economic, handicraft, problem.

INTRODUCTION

The Handicrafts sector, the second largest employer after agriculture, has also been the fastest export growth sector since liberalization. It is a documented source of deep innovation and creativity. Handicraft products are mostly defined as items made often with the use of simple tools, and are artistic or traditional in nature (Yojana, 2006). Handicrafts represent a treasure trove of skills that can be readapted to ethnic produce as well as to modern sectors such as precision engineering. One essential step toward such recognition is reliable data on the scale and contribution of handicrafts and artisans to the Indian economy. This is needed to stimulate the fresh attitudes and investments which together can help India to optimize the contribution possible by hand production and by the communities that have created "hand producing" goods for the Indian market through millennia, underlying their relationship with national wellbeing. Handicraft is a sector that has slipped through the cracks in India's development planning over many decades. This may in part be on account of a pre-occupation with its cultural importance at the cost of a corresponding awareness of economic, social and political dimensions. The case for the handicrafts sector rests on a conviction that despite enormous challenges the hand sector sits on the verge of an explosive growth due to a convergence of incremental inputs over the decades and new market opportunities. Handicrafts are products having values that are aesthetic, artistic, economic, utilitarian, creative, religious, social, decorative and cultural. Recent developments might include adoption of old skills to new materials or products, adoption of traditional skills by new communities, incorporation of traditional knowledge or skills into modern products, or completely new creative hand skills applied on contemporary material, and also creation of products by mixed means – partly industrial and partly by hand. An

artisan is a person with special hand skills, often handed down traditionally across generations, and often linked to a complex traditional knowledge system encompassing the material, technology and / or design aspects. They are typically self-employed at the individual or cottage production level or work in small production groups or teams. Traditional work formats usually employ family members and/or hired labour to participate in several pre and post-production processes, not all of which may require high skills. The prevalence of widespread handicraft works in which artisan were playing vital role, the fact that currently the technologies owned by them are under great challenges that in turn are affecting artisan socio-economy and the rising need to identify the major bottlenecks hindering progress of the local technologies. Thus the research focuses on the socio-economic status of handicraft workers in Sikkim. Attempts are also made to identification the major challenges faced by the artisans in the study region.

HANDICRAFT IN SIKKIM

Sikkim, a small and beautiful state nested in the Himalayas is a landlocked state bounded on three sides by the international border Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal in the North-East, East and West respectively and south by the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The predominant communities are the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese mostly found in rural areas. In the urban areas Marwaries, Biharis, Bengalis, South Indians, and Punjabis have also settled who are mostly engaged in business and Central Government services. In Sikkim, ancient customs and traditions keep alive decades-old styles and forms of craftsmanship. There are over sixty monasteries in the state that preserve the ancient religious rituals, and are repositories of the traditional art and crafts. Among the best known works of

craft from this region are handlooms, woolen carpet weaving, cane and bamboo craft, mask making, metal craft, wood carving, multi crafts and Thangka paintings. The three most prominent ethnic tribal communities, Lepchas, Sherpas and Bhutias, are the chief practitioners of these crafts. Over all the handicraft products which provide employment opportunities to the local artists. Wood carving is an ancient art form of Sikkim. The walls of the ancient monasteries, museums and other monuments which are adorned with the beautiful wood carvings prove the legacy of this beautiful traditional art form. Cane and bamboo are the two most commonly-used materials in daily life in Sikkim. Products ranging from household implements to construction of dwelling houses to weaving accessories to musical instruments are made in bamboo. Carpet weaving is an important among the tribal's communities where the contribution of women is more in numbers. In recent time, the multi crafts like toys making, decorative flowers making etc were highly flourished in the state.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The handicrafts industry being composed of small units with little capital required, is seen by many policy makers as a potential source of employment for at least some of the millions of unemployed rural workers and one major reason advanced for the desirability of labor intensive handicraft 'outworking' is that it minimizes rural-urban migration. Hence there are some previous studies which throw the light about the handicraft sectors. According to Vincent Cable and Ann Weston (1892), the present handicrafts production is quite concentrated both regionally and within regions. According to one estimate six northern states account for over 65% of handicrafts exports (excluding gems and jewelry and handlooms) and 75% of productions aggregating Uttar Pradesh's 40%; Rajasthan's 10%; Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi, Haryana and Punjab each around 5%. Over 75% of handloom fabric destined for export originates in the southern part of Indian subcontinent. According to Fung (2002), participation is the active involvement of the community, particularly the disadvantaged groups such as women, children, elderly, disabled and the poorest of the poor, in the decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of their own development activities. According to a Report of Development Commissioner Handicraft Board, (2001) the term handicraft refers to the handmade articles which are produced by the craftsmen with or without the tools, simple instruments or implements operated directed by craftsman mainly by hand. Within the category of hand made goods, some such as handicraft products often have an additional identifying feature such as; the traditional or artistic feature, deriving from the geographical region or country of production, the production by craftsmen, working generally on a cottage industry basis. Sikkim has not been able to attract investments from private sector and remained an industrially backward state due to its unique economic obstacles arising out of remoteness and poor connectivity, hilly and often unfriendly terrain, weak resource base, poor infrastructure, sparse population density, petty markets etc. Nevertheless, many small and medium scale industries have

come up basically in the traditional sectors along with some new areas like food processing, agro-based units and metallic and non-metallic products. However, natural factors are more conducive for handicrafts, village and small scale industries. Besides that the handicraft industries also improve the socio-economic condition of the local artisans. Attempts were made to identify the importance of village crafts in the socio-economic development of rural communities to whom the production of this industry belongs. Metha (1958) observed that these artisanal units are the integral part of rural economy which generates employment for several rural youths. Opposing the binding up of modern industries, the contribution of rural industries to economic and social sector was also propagated by Bedi (1958), Roston (1963), Rava (1965), Myrdal (1968), Rao (1970), Peter (1971), Jaya Prakash (1972), Deshpande (1984), Streefkerk (1985) and Rao (1986). Handicrafts have a special socio-economic significance in Sikkim. Keeping in view the vast potential in handicrafts for economic activities like the generation of employment and revenue, the state government has launched various measures to encourage the growth of the handicrafts industry.

OBJECTIVES

To analyze the socio-economic condition of handicraft workers in Sikkim.
To analyze the challenges faced by the handicraft workers.

METHODOLOGY

The present work is based on empirical study. Respondents have been selected from different parts of the block. The scope of the study extends to the handicraft sector of India where a case of Sikkim State has been taken into consideration. The major motive behind the present study is the eminent socio-economic conditions of handicraft workers and the prospects of Sikkim's handicraft sector in contributing towards economic development of the state. The data for the present study has been collected from primary and secondary sources. The data analysis has been done through using various statistical tools like simple percentage method has been adopted. The secondary source of the data includes books, journals, newspapers, various search engines, etc. The study mainly focus on the handicraft industry in west district of Sikkim selected depends on growth of handicraft industry has been phenomenal. The selected district has good numbers of handicraft workers. The scope of the study encompasses socio-economic condition of handicraft workers in west District and the problems faced by the artisans who are engaged in these sectors. The study is limited only to the handicraft industry in west District. Handicraft artisans who are the main source of primary data are collected from the handicraft industry through a well structured questionnaire. To identify the right respondents which are also very essential for the collection of primary data the following process has been adopted scientifically. Finally 60 respondents were selected; they were engaged in handicraft activities in various handicraft industries in west district of Sikkim.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

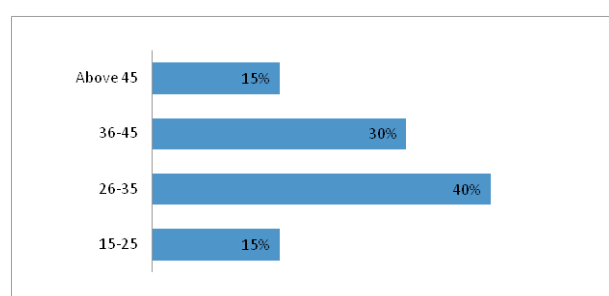
The attempt has been made above to elucidate, since recent time the economic status and its analogous social status of the artisans are deteriorating promptly because of a number of interacting factors. Similar experience is seen in West district of Sikkim. In west district, there is no single modern manufacturing industry, modern industrial products and over-flowing remotest rural markets. The socio-economic have the diverse factors effecting the value orientation of the respondents. Age, family structure, caste, religion, educational status, income, economic status of the family etc are the major factor to analysis the socio-economic condition of the respondents. Age is an important demographic variable which not only determines an individual's physical mental maturity but also depicts one's life experiences. By classifying the workers and their family members into four main classes on the basis of age-groups, the dominant age group of working population is found to be 26-35 years (40%), which is followed by the age group of 35-45 respondent (30%) because the most of young and skilled workers comes under this category. Remaining age group between 15-25 years and above 45 aged respondent shares the equal percentage i.e. 15% to 15% respectively.

Table 1 shows the age wise distribution of the respondent

Age group	Percentage
15 -25	15
26 -35	40
36 -45	30
Above 45	15
Total	100

Source: Computed

Diagram 1 shows the age wise distribution of the respondent



Source: Computed

Education is considered an important variable not only for widening mental horizon of the industrial but also it helps a person to make use of rational and scientific approach to different problems. The literate person can make different effort to boost his/her skilled. Thus the study reveals a high percentage of literacy rate come of the respondents which has greatly helped them to raise their standard of living in the

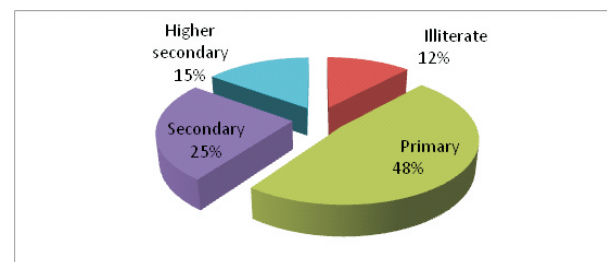
society. It also indicates the growing awareness and consciousness that exists among them. Around 48 % of the respondent acquired primary education. Around 25% of the respondents have secondary level of education and about 15% of the respondents have completed higher secondary level of education. But there is lack of interest among the young men and women with college degrees taking up handicrafts activity seriously as an occupation.

Table 2: shows the educational qualification status of respondent

Educational qualification	Percentage
Illiterate	12
Primary	48
Secondary	25
Higher secondary	15
Graduate	-
Total	100

Source: Computed

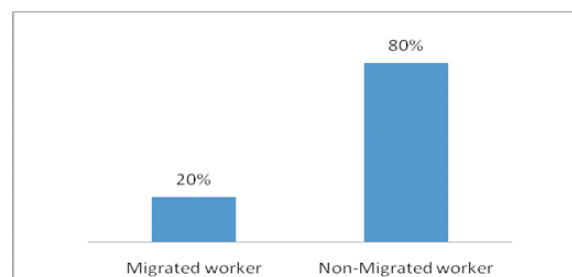
Diagram 2 shows the Educational qualification status of respondent



Source: Computed

Around 80 percent of the households in the study area are non-migrants; just 20 per cent are migrants. These migrant people have come in search of work or after marriage from the neighboring districts like East and South districts of Sikkim. These districts provide good employment opportunities because most of the medium scale industries are located here.

Diagram 3 shows the migration status of respondent



Source: computed

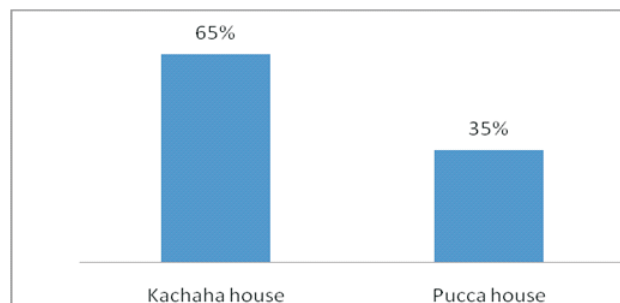
Houses of the respondent basically are of two type Kachaha and Pucca houses. The study shows the majority of the respondent were Kachaha houses (65%), rest of the (35%) having a Pucca houses in study area.

Table 3 shows the types of houses of the respondent

Type of house	Percentage
Kachaha house	65
Pucca house	35
Total	100

Source: Computed

Diagram 4 shows the type of house of the respondent



Source: Computed

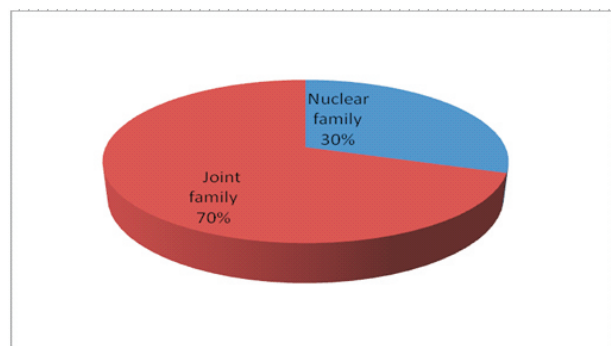
The study results reveal that majority of the respondent are staying as joint family (70%) most of the rural people prefer to stay together for the support of the family work burden and to share income and rest of respondent is having a nuclear family (30%).

Table 4 shows the type of families of the respondent

Type of family	Percentage
Nuclear family	30
Joint family	70
Total	100

Source: Computed

Diagram 5 shows the type of family of the respondent



Source: Computed

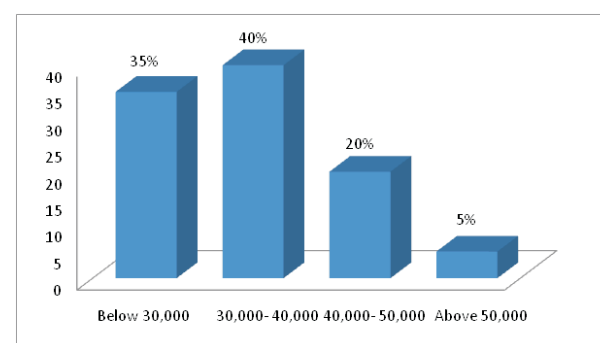
The handicraft workers are earning their breads by very hard labor. Low income and poverty are the perennial features of the craft workers' households which are responsible for the low level of motivation among the workers. The average household income of the workers comes to be around ₹ 3000 to ₹ 5000 per month. Although this does place the workers above the poverty line as predetermined by the Government, yet it does not free them from the shackles of absolute poverty. Due to the presence of large-sized families, the dependency load is more, thereby resulting in the persistent problem of unemployment. The study shows that 35% of respondents were earn below ₹.30,000 per annum, 40% of respondent earn ₹ 30,000-40,000 per annum, 20% of respondent earn ₹ 40,000 per annum and 5% of respondents earn more than ₹ 50,000 per annum.

Table 5 shows the income status of the respondent

Annual Income	Percentage
Below 30,000	35
30,000 - 40,000	40
40,000 - 50,000	20
Above 50,000	5
Total	100

Source: Computed

Diagram 6 shows the income level of the respondent



Source: Computed

As attempts have been made above to elucidate, since recent time the economic status and its comparable social status of the artisans are deteriorating promptly because of a number of interacting factors. Thus the studies have been conducted on socio-economic lives of artisans in the region. This is in spite of the fact that handicraft industries in the region have produced various goods both for own consumption and for local market. Beyond that handicrafts sector is a "home-based" industry, which involves less expenses, infrastructure or training to establish. It uses existing skills and locally available resources. Thus, inputs required in the works can easily be provided. Furthermore, income generation through craft is very

important in a rural society, as it does not disturb the socio-cultural balance of either the home or the community. Although somehow the better socio-economic conditions of workers in region, but they have too been struggling to overcome few problems that are hindrances in their living. The artisans were receiving support from state Government support so far. In spite this artisan were faced some problems like low grade of raw materials, improper finance, small market, nastiest transportation, existing of middleman, lack of co-ordination among artisans, unorganized working condition, using old technique, low wages etc. These are the major challenges faced by the artisans in the region.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Around 40% of the respondents are belonging to age group between 26-35 years, 30% of the respondents are between the age group of 36-45 years, and 15% respondents were come to 15-25 years and above 45 years respectively. Almost half of the total respondents are primary level of education i.e. 48%. Around 25% of the respondents are secondary level, 15% of respondents were higher secondary level of education. The ratio of illiterate respondents are very low i.e. 12%. But the youth having graduate level of education were not involved in this traditional sector. Level of migrant respondents are very low i.e. 20%, remaining 80% respondents are non-migrant from the rural areas.

At around 65% of respondents have Kachaha houses, only 35% of respondents having Pucca houses. Most of the respondents are living in joint family i.e. 70% and rest of the respondents are live in nuclear family type. Around 40% of the respondents are earn ₹ 30,000 to 40,000 per annum, 35% of the respondents are earn below ₹ 30,000 per year, around 20% of respondents having a income level of ₹ 40,000 to 50,000 per annum and only few respondents are earn above ₹ 50,000 per annum i.e. 5%.

SUGGESTION

Artisans should work in organize manner, so that they can earn more income to support their family income. Educated youth should come forward to support their family traditional enterprise, so that they conserve their ancient art and culture for the coming generations. Government should provide more facilities like proper raw material, set up more financial agencies, better transportation facilities etc. Government should encourage the new generation towards crafts industries providing training facilities especially rural youths. Government should give more emphasis on marketing, open marketing centre in rural areas, it encourage the local artisans and develop the village tourism sector.

CONCLUSION

In general artisans are producers of indoor and outdoor implements that rural communities are depending on. The craft sector opens job opportunity for many and it is also a potential source of cultural and ecotourism. Handicraft sector provide good opportunities to rural artisans to improve their socio-economic conditions. From the social point of

view it is mostly preferred sector after agriculture because of suitable conditions in terms of topography of the region and improves the standard of living, it helps the artisan to meet social requirement of a sustainable life. Economic point of view it generates the income and provides good employment opportunity to support the artist in rural area. A part the handicraft sector is most important for improvement of socio-economic condition in rural area. Most of the people were live in rural areas in Sikkim where these sectors play an important role to improve socio-economic condition of the artisans. The works of artisan reduces pressure on land and hence alleviate environmental degradation and utilized the natural resources properly. In spite these artisans were faced other difficulties like finance, transportation, raw materials and marketing of their finished products. The institutions which are emphasizing on agriculture in rural areas need to broaden their range and include non-farm rural sectors like handicraft works in their area. Appropriate fund need to be made available on improvement handicraft works. This helps to alleviate two fundamental problems. Firstly, it limits unnecessary rural-urban movement and its associated social problems. Secondly, it encourages livelihood diversification that reduces scale of environmental degradation caused by activities linked to agriculture. This contributes toward the attainment of sustainable development. Craft sector benefit not only artisans but also a broad range of community members. As we come to conclude that the handicraft workers led their livelihood in a harsh manner in rural areas. Thus, there is a special need to attention towards the socio-economic condition of the handicraft workers in the region, so that the artisans were improving their standard of living.

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