

Empowering Kandhamal “Black Dhokra” Artisan Community of Barakhama Village in Odisha through Self-Help-Group- A Tested Get Way

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Abstract

In India the labour force is consist men and women belongs to the rural area. Odisha is a land of enchanting beauty with wide variety of exquisite handicraft products since its origin. Despite the industrial revolution the State is observing highest demand for its handicraft products not only in the nation but also in abroad. This handicraft industry has huge potentiality for economic and social development in rural areas of all social strata through income generation by engaging huge number of people. These artisans could not elevate their standard of living due to several constraints. To enhance the income level and purchasing power of these poorer communities, the concept of Self-Help-Group (SHG) is introduced and become the get way to overcome socio-economic backwardness. This concept helps to augment the income level of indigenous people like Khond community of Barakhama village of Baliguda community development block immensely. This study aims to find out the socio-economic conditions of this indigenous people who maintain the traditional practice of making dhokra art pieces. This study finds out the problems faced by these artisans and tries to provide some clues to overcome all hurdles. Their socio-economic condition along with the importance of SHG in their life had been evaluated through this research work. To fulfil these objectives, primary and secondary data have been collected through focus group discussions, interview and question-answer session with the help of a structured questionnaire. Data so collected have been analysed and interpreted with suitable cartographic technique. The State Government articulated Handicraft Policy in 2014 with the mission and vision for creating an independent handicraft industry to widen up the income of the artisans as well as their standard of living. Creating employment opportunities, preserving the cultural heritage and unique identity of the indigenous people of State are prioritizing here. The ground reality is speaking something differently which has been examined through this analytical research work. A well-built administrative unit should form to support the Handicrafts sectors of economy so that the poor marginalised people can be shower with the benefits of all the Government schemes in future.

Keywords: *indigenous people, dhokra art, empowerment, Self-Help-Group, development policies*

Introduction

The State Odisha, formally known as “Utkal” is a land of art and culture which grown here to its highest degree. The State has a rich tradition of art and sculpture, temple architecture, dance, and music along with traditional and unique handicraft products. The artisans of the State possess ancient technical perfection and excellent craftsmanship in making inimitable pieces of art. Most of the districts of this State have their own signature artefacts and rich cultural heritage behind their uniqueness. The handicraft industry of the State not only contributes to the State’s GDP but also plays a significant role to generate employment in rural and urban areas. Craftsmen affianced in such activities could not earn their endurance due to inadequate financial assistance and poor marketing, therefore; few of them are there now to run this sector. But this promising handicraft sector is badly affected by the malfunction of co-operative which was created to serve this industry mainly. Apart from that, this sector of economy faces declining trend due to inadequate infrastructure, poor network for marketing, unavailability of credits support system, lack of entrepreneurship.

Objectives

The present study focuses on the following objectives:

1. to give an account of socio-economic conditions of Khond community dhokra artisans
2. to discuss the importance of SHG for augmenting their standard of living
3. to identify the problems faced by these artisans and provide some clues to overcome them.

Literature Review

Samanta, R.K. (2015) in his study pointed out that dhokra worker of Bikna village of West Bengal faces problems like lack of capital investment, meagre loan opportunities, and problem of storage are the main reason for occupational shifting of the artisans.

Guha, et. al. (2020) in their research work “Empowering the Dhokra Artisans through the accessibility of financial resources for the survival of their indigenous technology- a study of West Bengal, India” pointed out that the dhokra workers are entrapped by the vicious debt loop to meet their financial requirements at a very high-interest rate. Poor work environment, engagement of child labour, and lack of marketing facility make a big question on the survival of these artisans.

Chakraborty, R. et. al. (2021) in their analytical study highlighted the present socio-demographic condition through the lens of dhokra work where they have discussed the origin and migration route of the dhokra workers and the problems faced by them in their life journey.

Reddy and Reddy (2012) in their research unveil that the economic development of any society is depending upon resource utilization, and techno-managerial expertise through the promotion of SHGs. They have also focused on the socio-economic importance of SHGs apart from their excellence and sustainability.

Database and Methodology

This paper is based on the information collected from the field survey with the help of a structured questionnaire administered to the artisan families. Secondary information has been collected from books, journals and different electronic media. Data thus collected has been tabulated, analysed and represented by various cartographic techniques.

Study Area

Barakhama village is located in Baliguda Community Development Block of Kandhamal district of Odisha. This village has been selected for the study to address some issues faced by the Khond community Dhokra artisans for their day to day survival. How the SHG activities help them to live a nominal life is the main concern of this research work.

4. Results and Discussions:

Barakhama village of Baliguda C.D. Block is one of a kind where the “Black Dhokra” craftsmanship is practised by the Khondh tribal community. 60 km away from Daringbari (a popular tourist destination) and 15 km away from Baliguda town, Rajendra Nayak, Radhi Nayak, Rutuna Nayak, Tumuru Nayak, Saraswati Nayak, Chhahan Nayak, Banu Nayak, Kasti Nayak, Indhu Nayak, Lachhman Nayak, Tripura Nayak, Padmini Nayak settled in Barakhama village and showcases their age-old traditional metal craftsmanship to the modern world. These marginalised people have received many awards from the State Government but could not earn their bread and butter from their expertise. This craftsmanship is facing a declining trend or is on the verge of extinction because of the gradually occupational shifting of these artists. But few of them have received some assistance from Tata Trust N.G.O group and settled in Barakhama. The SHG encourages its members to unravel their common difficulties through mutual assistance and to save a tiny amount of money deposited at a bank. This concept helps to pave a better opportunity path for this marginal community.

Socio-economic Conditions of “Dhokra Craftsman”

In Barakhama village, 15 tribal families belonging to Khond tribal Community settled in a semi-pucca house dedicated to them by the Tata Trust N.G.O. group. They can showcase and sell their handmade products to the visitors from an exhibition hall constructed exclusively for selling purposes. This small Khond-artisan’s nest is the prime attraction among the tourists as they are the only one who maintains the legacy of making “Black Dhokra” art pieces. The village Barakhama is more often frequented by tourists from Daringbari, Baliguda, Phulbani and other nearby locations in Odisha as a weekend destination. Close to several tourist spots, it is indeed very surprising to find the Khond village where tourists can observe the Dokhra art.

Population Characteristics

From the primary survey, it is observed that only 15 artisan families are living here in this village with about 65 populations in total comprising 30 males and 35 females (Fig. no. 1). The houses have been constructed by the Tata trust N.G.O. and the artisans need not pay any rent for this purpose. All the houses are single-storied in nature and constructed of brick asbestos.

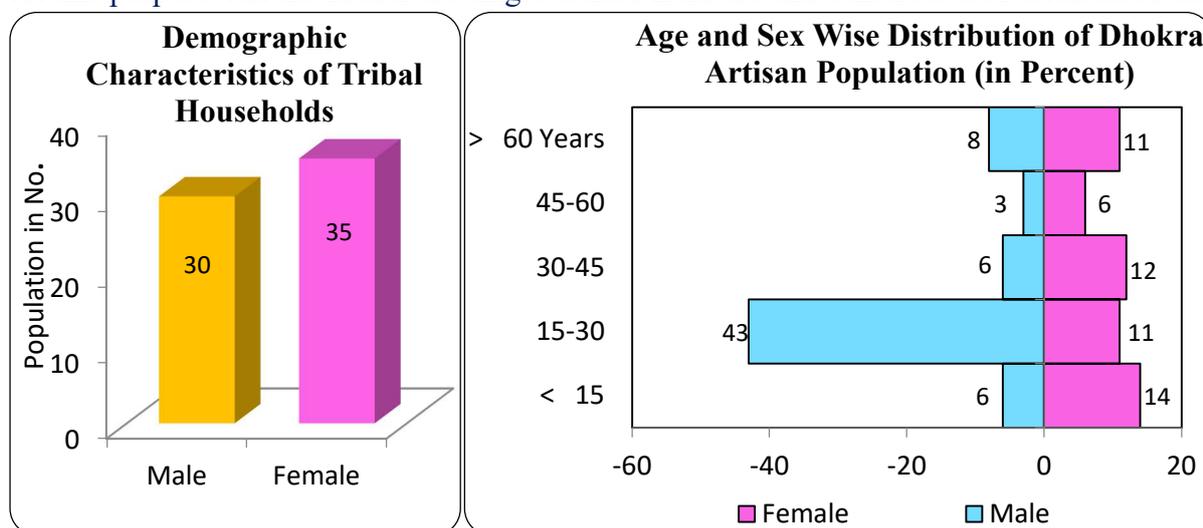


Fig: 1

Source: Primary Data, January, 2020

Fig: 2

An age-sex pyramid depicts a clear picture of the age and sex-wise composition of the population of the artisan families under different groups. It reveals that the male population share is maximum than the female one. Population under the age group of 15-30 years happen to be the largest among males and the dependency ratio under the age groups of < 15 years and > 60 years are also higher in both the sexes. The notable fact is that 15 families have a very minimum spread of their family members as they are aware of the fact of population growth

Status of Education

Education characteristics are also enquired among the inhabitants which shows the level of education among dhokra artisans is not up to the mark. In these households, the total number of literate people is very less than the illiterate one in both the sexes. Based on their responses, it is seen that only 15 per cent of the male and only 8 per cent female population have come under class 4 level of educational standard (Fig no. 3).

Working Status

Figure number 4 depicts the worker and non-worker ratio of dhokra artisan families. Out of the total of 65 members, only 8 members are engaged differently in other economic activities i.e. agricultural labourer, housemates and hospitality management workers at Baliguda. Apart from them, all the family members including children have devoted themselves to this dhokra craftsmanship as a skilled artisans or an apprentice. Children belonging to the age group of fewer than 15 years are indirectly helping their parents to earn a handful for survival.

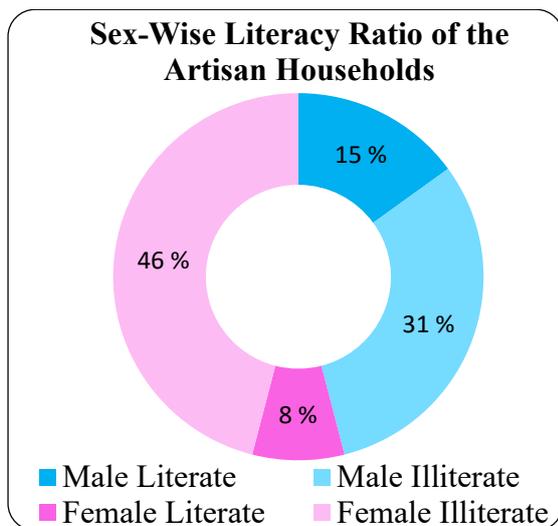


Fig: 3

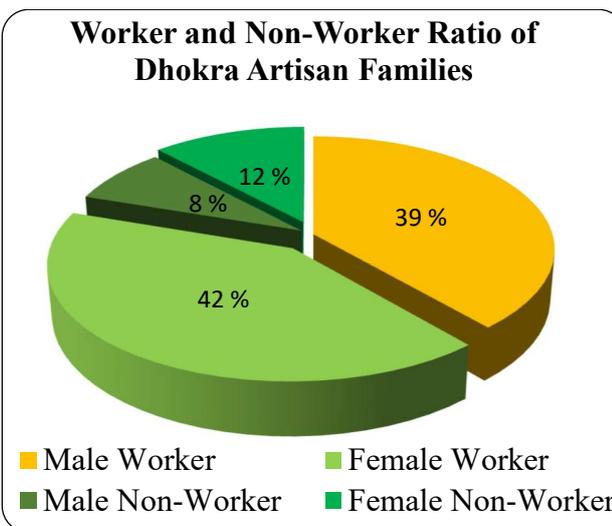


Fig: 4

Source: Primary Data, January, 2020

Income and Investments Attitude

More than 50 Percent households earn Rs. 2000-5000 per month where as very few families (7 %) manage to earn less than 2000 rupees per month for their endurance (Fig no. 5). Inspection on their saving and banking habit shows that many of them having savings account in bank (80 %) and 13 percent of them keep money in both in bank and post office (Fig no. 6).

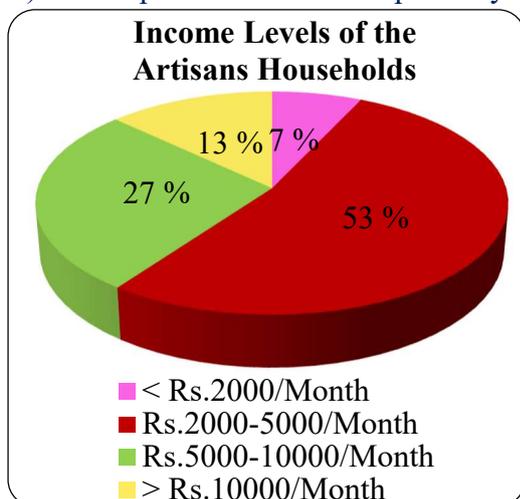


Fig: 5

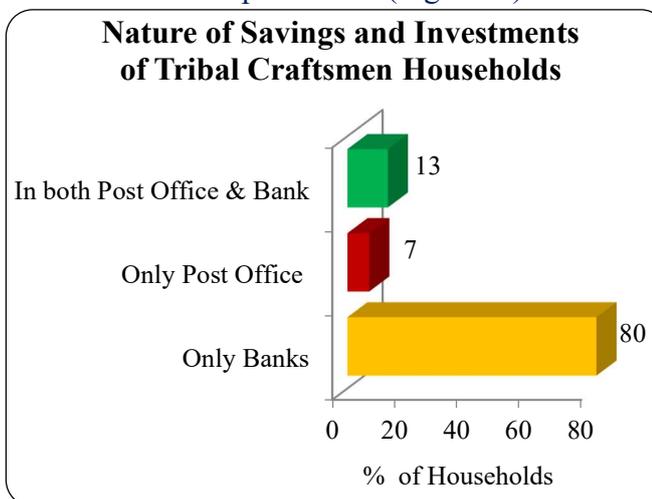


Fig: 6

Source: Primary Data, January, 2020

Importance of SHG in Khond's life

Kandhamal dhokra work is very famous for its uniqueness and rear artistic beauty. Khond community tribal people are great patrons of dhokra art. Pristine environment of their surrounding reflects in their artefacts as these people make dhokra for living and carried out with great famous. The Nayaks run an entire art village and have earned many national honours

by bringing innovation in dhokra art. The khonds of Khandamal region take great pride in their hardworking attitude towards life.

Being a member of the Self-Help Group monitored by Tata Trust N.G.O. is a blessing for them. This non-government organisation helps them to accumulate themselves from the scratch. Based on the traditional knowledge these artisans could not compete with the commercial market. For this reason, the Khonds are gradually changing by adopting mainstream culture in their life. The cultural diffusion may definitely transform their economy in the long run. The tribal through SHG and other networks are changing their present standard of economy. They have understood the importance of being united in their life and mentally welcoming new opportunities in their life and earn living.

A Khond community person produces small scale dhokra artefacts and faces some challenges like- high production costs due to age-old production techniques, lack of capital, the nonexistence of marketing outlets, and impenetrability to urban marketing etc. But now a day they somehow overcome these problems as they become part of SHG.

In the Odisha Handicraft Policy, 2014, the importance of the handicraft industry was articulated as the State government realized that this industry generates employment for such artisans especially the rural artisans who suffered from the financial crisis and other socio-economical constraints. As this sector of the economy has the potential to capture the domestic and international market with its unique products, boost the income level of the artisans through employment generation and also help to preserve the cultural heritage of unique people, the State government prioritise marketing and financial assistance for the development of handicraft industry in this policy.

By following the Society Registration Act 1962 a handicraft co-operative society has been formed as a craft village consisting of 15 traditional artisans practising in the same crafts- Dhokra or crust metalwork which was a good initiative on the part of the State government. The broad vision of this noble initiative is to improve the income level by creating employment opportunities and the standard of living of the artisans by preserving the cultural heritage of the state (Odisha Handicrafts Policy, 2014).

But it is very unfortunate that these marginalised people could not get the minimum benefits of such schemes articulated by the State government. Respondents from these ancient craftsmanship communities pointed out that all the schemes are just eyewash and ground truth reality is different. They also uttered that if they did not get the financial support from NGOs then they might have changed their occupation.

Problems faced by the Khond Artisan Community

This community people cannot earn their living properly from this craftsmanship. Lack of financial assistance is the main problem among various types of problems they have faced to continue with this dhokra craftsmanship. The National Award winner artist Lakhman Nayak could not get financial assistance for opening up sales outlets. The artist also does not gets support from the State government for marketing his products in the different exhibitions. This

community artisan does not even receive any financial support for printing product catalogues or brochures.

Margin Money Assistance Scheme shall be provided to the poorer artisan community for availing bank finance for the establishment of handicraft enterprise. The State Government should facilitate the sanction and disbursement of loans to the entrepreneurs by minimizing the paper works but in reality, the artisans never offered such facilities. They do not even know the incentive scheme under “Silpi Unnati Yojana” (SUY) which provides 20 % of the Project Cost (Maximum Rs. 20,000/-) as Margin Money Assistance under SUY scheme.

Well-being and social security of the artisans should be the main priority for the continuance of this traditional craft sector. A prominent welfare scheme is there in the policy but never practised in reality. As per the Handicraft Policy, the government should smooth the progress of identifying the needy artisans and providing them with the “Prime Minister Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana”, “Prime Minister Suraksha Bima Yojana” and “Aam Admi Bima Yojana” schemes as life and health insurance. The artists never get the contribution of full premium by the State government which is mentioned in the Handicraft Policy. One solar lantern shall be provided to each handicraft artisan family to minimize the stress on their eyes so that they can work for more time to increase productivity but this minimum basic requirement is also not fulfilled.

The old Age Pension Scheme namely “Dharmapada Pension Scheme” has never been offered to the old dependent population of this artisan village.

Scholarship for Children of artisans has never been offered to them for pursuing higher studies. Financial assistance from the State government for the construction of housing-cum-work sheds has never been provided to the Barakhama village dhokra artisans who belong below the poverty line. Apart from that these artisans are not included in the Artisan Welfare Fund scheme from which they may get several benefits such as premium for insurance coverage, old age pension, scholarship for higher studies, and medical treatment for critical illnesses e.g. cancer, heart disease, lungs disease etc.

Suggestions and Conclusion

Government should strengthen the Directorate of Handicrafts and Cottage Industries so that the marginal people can get the benefits from several government-sponsored schemes. Forceful implementations of government policies are advisable for the development of artisans. There should be a monitoring committee for proper coordination among different development agencies. This committee should work to formulate action plans, monitor and implementation of programmes, formulation of policy, mobilization of funds, and prepare guidelines along with joining similar types of schemes. A member of the artisan community must be taken as their representative in all State level and district level committees to raise their problems before the authority. A State Level Artisan Grievance Redressal Forum should be formed to address different social and economic issues with a dedicated helpline number. Lack of infrastructure is a major bottleneck behind the backwardness of these craftsmen. So, proper infrastructure

should be created in cluster form by the government to facilitate the marginalised people. The PPP model should also be taken into consideration so that the private entrepreneurs may intervene in the matter and try their level best to make the path easy for the poorer section of the society. Facilities such as common work shed, go-down, processing of raw material, finishing of products and packaging with all sorts of quality control measures should be taken into consideration while marketing dhokra artefacts by the State government. Basic amenities like toilets and drinking water facilities shall also be provided to the families of the artisans in a very dignified way. Electrification and sanitation works should be done in the artisan households under the “Swachha Bharat Mission” programme on a priority basis. Initiatives should be taken to establish Handicraft Mall, Urban Haats, Craft Centre or Souvenir Shops at important tourist places or in and around the marketplace so that the artisans may directly sell their finished products without any middleman. The establishment of Handicraft Park is also needed to sell and promotes black dhokra art pieces by the State government. Government should ensure the availability of raw materials required by artisans at a reasonable price. A Census of artisans should be initiated to form a database for the artisans with proper mapping of their villages. Issue of Photo Identity Cards to all the artisans of the State is necessary for better management of social issues.

The pristine environment of Barakhama village has a huge potential to attract tourists who may witness the entire process of making black dhokra art pieces. Assistance from government and non-government organisations may help to aimed raise the life and standard of living of these Khond tribal community people and certainly going to bring development to the region.

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