

The Role Of Artifacts Made Of Bamboo And Cane In Barpeta District Of Assam In Terms Of Economy And Self-Employment

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Abstract

Art is a remarkable component of human civilization and culture. The work through which people's sense of beauty, creative talents, imagination, intelligence and skills are expressed is called art. Art also has traditionally been created and developed in rural simple folk life. Such artifacts that are based on the rural folk life are called 'folk art'. Bamboo and cane artifacts have special significance among the diverse folk art forms built and developed in the folk life of Assam. The folk life of Barpeta district as a part of the culture of Assam is no exception. In Barpeta, there have been celebrated many folk festivals such as Sonweri, Deul etc. with the belief of bamboo. Various folk artifacts related to traditional house-building, agriculture, fishing, weaving etc. are made of bamboo and cane. Moreover, various tools, masks, 'japi', musical instruments required for households are made from bamboo and cane. In terms of cooking and food the use of bamboo and cane is also remarkable. On the other hand, the current era is all about science and technology. In the context of innovations of science and technology, globalization in the world market and economic sector has threatened the existence of the contents of folk life. In view of the importance and significance of the artifacts made of bamboo and cane in the folk life of Assam as well as Barpeta and the challenges and changes brought about by globalization on contrary, our study presents a comprehensive study of the artifacts made of bamboo and cane in Barpeta district in the context of globalization. This study, which is based mainly on the data collected through field studies, deals with the subject in an analytical manner. This study can be expected to reveal much of the overall identity of

the artifacts made of bamboo and cane in Assam as well as Barpeta district as well as its present and future status.

Key words: folk culture, folk art, artifacts, globalization, bamboo and cane, folk life, folk art.

1.0 Introduction

Art and craft are significant components of human civilization and culture. Art is the creative work that expresses a person's sense of beauty, creativity, imagination, intelligence and skills, whether tangible or abstract. The creation and development of art and craft have been traditionally practiced in the lives of simple rural peasants too. The art and craft based on rural folk life are called folk art and craft. In terms of folk art and craft, bamboo and cane occupy an important place in the folk life of Assam. There are many folk festivals like Bhatheli, Sunweri, Deul etc. traditionally celebrated in different parts of Assam with bamboo. Most of the handicrafts traditionally used in folk life of Assam are made from bamboo.

As a part of folk culture of Assam, bamboo and cane are used to make various handicrafts related to house building, agriculture, fishing, weaving etc. In addition, various household items like masks, 'japi', various musical instruments are made from bamboo and cane. They are also used in cooking and food. On the other hand, the present era is science and technology based era. Globalization in the world markets and economies has threatened the survival of the resources of the folk lives in the view of the innovative advances in information and technology. It has also opened up a new context for the promotion and preservation of these resources. This discussion provides an introduction to the bamboo and cane industry in Barpeta district of Assam in the context of globalization and analyses the role of these industries in economic and self-employment. The cultural significance of the artifacts and their present and future status are also analyzed.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

- Introduction to the bamboo and cane handicrafts of Barpeta district of Assam.
- To analyze the cultural relevance and significance of bamboo and cane handicrafts in folk society.

- Discuss the role of bamboo and cane handicrafts in the economy and self-employment.
- To analyze the current and future status of bamboo and cane handicrafts in the context of globalization.

1.2 Methodology

The data related to the subject from the primary source has been collected mainly with the help of the field study method. In this case, the data obtained through the method of observation and interview. In addition, necessary information has also been collected from secondary sources such as the relevant books, thesis, research articles etc.

On the other hand analytical methods have been used mainly for the analysis of the subject. With the help of this method, the analysis of the subject is presented on the basis of the specific theoretical concepts.

2.0 Concept of Art

Different scholars have different definitions and opinions about art and craft. These definitions have helped to express the views and attitudes of those concerned with art and craft and to establish the theoretical concept of it. According to Kalyan Kumar Gangopadhyay, "In folk societies, people use words, melodies, lines, colours etc. to create beauty. The form that is expressed through all these media, mutually builds human attention. There are many ways in which you can create art. Songs, musical instruments, poems are created in the effort to perform sound and form. On the other hand, paintings, sculptures, architecture and craftsmanship have been created in order to create colour and shape. As a result of this effort, art is born." (Nayak: 2010) The definition reveals the source and motivation for the creation of art, the medium of expression and accordingly the context of the different forms of art.

According to Jivesh Nayak, "The creation of an art form is nothing more than imitation of images. Images are the imitation of objects and thoughts. This imitated form is known as art in human society." (Nayak: 2010) That is to say, the definition reveals that art has traditionally been created in peoples' society by imitating things and thoughts.

According to Pradip Nath, “When people create something in a restrained manner to express the feelings of the mind for the sake of mental satisfaction, it is art. There is no such thing that art has to be material things seen by the eyes or can be touched by hands. Non-physical subjects like song, dance and acting also fall into art.” (Nath: 2022) This definition also expresses his opinion on art as well as ideas about the vast scope of art.

On the whole, art is created as a result of the traditional intelligence, power of action, beauty, imagination and creative talent inherent in the human mind and the social context, it inevitably increases and expands the value of civilization and culture.

3.0 Concept of folk art and craft

Folk art is the creation of folk life. Folk art forms based on rural life and rural society are called folk art. According to Tushar Chattopadhyay, “folk art is the traditional artistic expression of collective consciousness according to the customs of the unborn folk society and basically according to the tradition”. (Chattopadhyay:1985) According to Nabin Ch. Sarma, “folk art is the work created in the hands of the illiterate rural people.” (Sarma: 2009) On the basis of the above definitions, it can be assumed that every element of folk art is created in a completely geographical-natural environment based on the folk life, religion, karma, worships, beliefs etc. of the illiterate or under-educated people.

4.0 The artifacts made of bamboo and cane and their cultural value

In addition to the artifacts associated with agriculture, fishing, weaving, etc., many of the handicrafts used on a daily basis have been made by the folk artists of Barpeta from Bamboo-cane. Apart from these, there are various handicrafts associated with instruments, recipes etc. These are as follows:

Various tools made of bamboo associated with agriculture are built in folk society of Barpeta. They are: ‘dila’ (the shaft of a plough), ‘junwali’ (a yoke), ‘sholmari’ (the pin of an ox yoke), ‘moi’ (a harrow), ‘dolibari’ (a long handled mallet used in breaking clods), ‘echari’ (a switch), ‘lahoni’ (a triangular basket with a handle used for boiling water), ‘banka’ (a coil of cane used as support for

earthen pot), 'japi' (a wicker hat serving as an umbrella), 'okhon' (a bamboo hook for gathering grains in straw), 'biriya' (a piece of split bamboo used in carrying bundles of paddy on the shoulder), 'Tomal' (a strip of green bamboo used as a string), 'jabaka' (a rake), 'mokhora' (a muzzle for oxen), 'a bamboo made implement like a hoe used in gathering grain in the threshing floor), 'bindha' (an instrument for thinning out ahu rice plant), 'tom' (a wicker work basket used for holding grain), 'pachi' (a basket for keeping corn), 'duli' (a large basket in which grain is stored), 'don' (a basket holding five seers of grain), 'dola' (a bamboo tray or platter), 'kula' (a winnowing fan), 'chaloni' (a riddle), 'jeura' (a thin and low bamboo railing), 'kharahi' (a small bamboo basket used for various purposes), 'kontora' (the post of a pedal used in cleaning rice), 'barhani mari' (a rod used in pushing paddy under the pestle of a rice cleaning pedal), 'japana' (the door made of bamboo in gateway) etc. These agricultural folk handicrafts are used as per special purposes from the beginning of agricultural activities to harvesting paddy, digging and extracting rice.

Apart from bamboo and cane agricultural handicrafts, various fishing tools are also used in the folk society of Barpeta district. They are: 'jakoi' (a kind of bamboo scoop used in catching fish), 'khaloi' (a small basket used for keeping fish in), 'polo' (a kind of basket for catching fish), 'chepa' (a kind of fishing device), 'dingara' (a kind of drum-shaped bamboo fish trap), 'thuha' (a kind of fish trap), 'ban' (a fence raised across a stream to catch fish), 'poncha' (a pronged instrument used for spearing fish), 'baraxi' (a support for a fishing line), 'ghagara' (a kind of bamboo fish trap), 'Ghoni' (a bamboo fish trap), 'hukuma' (the air bladder of a fish) etc. With the help of such techniques, the tradition of fishing has been going on in the folk society of Barpeta, but recently the construction of many equipment has come down.

Various tools associated with the traditional folk weaving industry are also made by the weavers of Barpeta or weavers of the rural society from bamboo and cane. Some of these tools are: 'ranch' (the reed of an Assamese loom), 'ugha' (a kind of reel for winding thread on), 'chereki' (a contrivance for winding thread), 'letai' (a kind of bamboo reel), 'chiri' (a flat bamboo strip), 'kathi' (a thin piece of bamboo used to create design in weaving), 'xali' (a thin, long and round slip of bamboo), 'ba-chunga' (a weaver's implement), 'garaka' (the treadles of a loom), 'nachani mari' (a bar

used to keep up the loom), 'mohura' (a piece of reed with thread wound on it for weaving) etc. The use of each of the tools mentioned can be seen in the handlooms of the rural society of Barpeta.

The folk artists of Barpeta also make various musical instruments out of bamboo. Among these instruments are: flute, 'toka' (a bamboo clapper), 'gogona' (a small wind instrument made of bamboo), 'chiphung' (a type of flute used by Bodo-Kachari: a tribal community of Assam) etc. are ultimately notable. In addition, the beats that are used to play drums, 'doba' (a large kettle drum) etc. are also made for bamboo.

Many of the art items that are used on a daily basis have been made by the folk artists of Barpeta from bamboo and cane. In this case, the cooking, household furniture, decorative items, ornaments etc. can be mentioned. The artifacts associated with cooking are: 'dhonwa chang' (a frame made of bamboo, over a fireplace on which foodstuff, fire-wood etc. are kept for drying by smoke), 'chungu' (a joint of bamboo used to ignite the fire with a blow to the mouth), 'kharika' (a roasting spit made of bamboo), 'chepena' (an instrument made of bamboo to squeezes something) etc. The household furniture made of bamboo and cane are: 'murha' (a circular device that can seat on), 'chang' (a raised bamboo platform), 'dhari' (a bamboo mat), 'jopa' (a covered bamboo basket), 'barhani mari' (a broom made of bamboo), 'bisoni' (one kind of fan made of bamboo and cane) etc. In addition to these, bamboo and cane are nowadays used in a variety of modern furniture and many artifacts that can be used for domestic purposes. Among them are tray, 'xarai' (a platter mounted on a leg), chair, sofa, dining table, 'alna' (a cloth stand), 'phuldani' (a stand of flower vase), tea cup, pen stand, stool, light box, dustbin, flower tub, 'dhupdani' (a censer) etc. Various ornaments worn by women can also be seen to be made from bamboo and cane. Among them are: earring, necklace, clips used for hair styles, bracelet etc.

Apart from all the above mentioned artifacts, there are many other tools made by folk artists from bamboo and cane in Barpeta district. In particular, Barpeta district is the main centre of the 'Sankari' culture, various weapons like, arrows, sticks etc. used in 'bhaona' theatre festivals held in the districts are made by the

artists from bamboo and cane. In addition, in rural society, various tools for construction hut are made from bamboo and cane.

Thus the need for bamboo and cane is immense in the folk society of Barpeta. Like the people of other parts of Assam, the folk society of Barpeta has also been using artifacts made from bamboo and cane as a natural material. It is worth mentioning that the traditional art objects of bamboo and cane are constructed by folk artists based on their daily needs. On the other hand, modern artifacts of bamboo and cane such as sofas, comfortable chairs, dining table and chair, light stand, picture frame as well as various decorative items of home decorations have been made by the folk artists in their respective industries. These are associated with the commercial aspect. The commercial aspect is not directly related to the field of traditional art objects. Daily practical utility is the main purpose of the construction of these artifacts.

5.0 The role of bamboo and cane artifacts in terms of economy and self-employment

Bamboo and cane industries of Assam as well as Barpeta district have also been able to play a role in rural economic and self-employment sectors. In the past bamboo and cane industrial products were manufactured only by folk artists in view of the needs of daily life. Recently some of the artisans made from bamboo and cane have been able to get commercial status. Of course, it is important to mention that not all the products of bamboo and cane have attained commercial importance. The agricultural products traditionally used in the folk society of Barpeta as well as the fishing equipment do not show commercial utility. There has been a shift in traditional farming in rural folk society. In parallel, the use of traditional fishing aids is also decreasing. The creation and use of these tools in the district is gradually declined. Also the commercial demand of these tools is not very much seen. Given the daily needs of two or three agricultural artifacts such as baskets, 'kula', 'dola', 'chalon' etc., their creation and utility are still intact. These items are available at the outlets located in Barpeta town, Howly, Sarbhog, Barpeta Road, Pathsala, Bahari, Sarupeta etc. of Barpeta district. Consumers also buy these items at a fixed rate. Similarly, the economic aspects does not seem to be directly associated with bamboo and cane artifacts with cooking, weaving etc. In rural

environment, folk artists make these artifacts at home for their own needs.

Among the bamboo and cane artifacts, some modern-made furniture, some of the decorative objects etc. have been able to get special demand in the modern market system. Among these artifacts, especially chairs, sofas, 'arami' chairs, modern-style palanquins, flower tubs; vases etc. have been able to attract the attention of the customers. Customers have also been buying these artifacts at a reasonable rate. It is worth mentioning that the price of a pair of sofa sets is also attractive. According to the standards there are different types of bamboo and cane. The price of sofa set made of excellent bamboo and cane and attractive designs is more than sixty thousand today. With the help of ready-made bamboo and cane, two folk artists can make a pair of sofas in a week to fifteen days. Of course, according to the design, there may be sometimes a variation in time. So through the sales, the artists get a total price and a special aspect of self-employment is associated with it. Similarly, there is a lot of demand for other artifacts mentioned in the market.

The economic role of the 'japi' made from bamboo and cane is significant across Assam along with Barpeta. In addition to its traditional uses in the field of agricultural work, 'japi' is often used by people to decorate a drawing room or formally felicitate guests or special persons. The demand for 'japi' increases every year during Bohag Bihu in Assam. As a result the folk artists can also be said to have met the economic demand as well as paved the way for self-employment. The price of 'japis' is also different according to their size.

The demand for the 'dhari' (the bamboo mat) made from bamboo and cane in Barpeta is worth nothing. The Kayakuchi area of Barpeta is known as 'Dhari Nagari'. Of these, the main occupation of 80-90% of the people of Kuhira Village known as 'Bagurapara' is the dhari-industry. Especially the people of the Muslim community are involved in this industry. At present, the 'dhari' business has been running with the help of self-help groups to overcome of unemployment. Due to financial constraints everyone from their children to the elderly have become involved in this industry. Commercially too the industry has been taking over the local markets and managing businesses through direct contact with Siliguri in West Bengal, Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh,

Gujarat, Mumbai, Pune etc. Occasional training programmes are also held for the creation of 'dhari' at Kayakuchi. Along with an organization called 'Dhriti', 'Kayakuchi-Kuhira-Baguwadharma Shilpi Samiti' has been playing an important role in the promotion of this art. It is not that the present art form is limited only to them, along with other villages of Kayakuchi, Goalpara district and Barpeta have also expanded to artists from other places. With the decline in raw material in the Kayakuchi area of Barpeta district, its present day folk artists have to bring bamboo from Shimla in Pathsala, Kenduguri, Muguria and from Baksa district of Assam. With the recent advent of science and technology, the folk industry has to compete with other materials alternative to 'dhari'. Of course, it is also worth mentioning that the role of this folk industry in making the larger population of Kayakuchi economically self-reliant is immense. There is also possibility that future generations can pave the way for self-employment through this art form. Below is a list of the current market value of some bamboo and cane artifacts in Barpeta district of Assam:

Sl. No.	Name of the artifacts	Size	Present market value
1	'Dola'	--	200/- INR
2	'Kula'	--	200/- INR
3	'Dhari' (a kind of bamboo mat)	--	300/- INR
4	Comfortable Chair	Big (for elders)	2,500/- INR
5	Comfortable Chair	Big (for children)	1500/- INR
6	'Murha' (one kind of sitting tool)	--	400/- INR
7	'Bisoni' (one kind of fan)	--	150/- INR
8	Pen stand	--	80/- INR
9	Hair Clip	--	50/- INR
10	'Xarai' made of Bamboo	--	120/- INR
11	Modern designable baskets	--	500/- INR
12	Light Frame	--	300/- INR
13	Glass Frame	--	300/- INR

14	Tea Cup	--	90/- INR per piece
15	Stand for vases	Small	200/- INR
16	Stand for vases	Big	350/- INR
17	Tray	--	200/- INR
18	Mask	--	300/- INR
19	Paper stand	--	500/- INR
20	Sofa set made of cane	--	20,000/- to 60,000/- INR (as per design)
21	Sofa set made of bamboo	--	20,000/- to 60,000/- INR (as per design)
22	Bed	As per size	20,000/- to 70,000/- INR
23	Water bottle	Big	600/- INR
24	Water bottle	Small	400/- INR
25	Decorative 'Japi'	Big	1,000/- to 3,000/- INR
26	Decorative 'Japi'	Medium	600/- to 1,000/- INR
27	Decorative 'Japi'	Small	200/- to 500/- INR

6.0 Current and future potential status of bamboo and cane artifacts in Barpeta district of Assam

Bamboo and cane artifacts have been used in folk culture of Barpeta district since ancient times as part of the folk culture of Assam. Of course, the practical needs for some artifacts have gradually decreased in the current context at the pace of change in society and culture. With the change in the economic status of the people, there has been a wave of change in the way of life of the people. Instead of the agricultural lifestyle, today's people have started to manage the family by earning through business, commerce, government-private job etc. It should be mentioned here that most of the bamboo and cane artifacts of Barpeta as well as the whole of Assam are associated with rural life and agriculture. So in parallel with the change in the way of life of the people, the practical need for the traditional artifacts of bamboo and cane is also decreasing. In addition to the tools associated with

agriculture in this case, such a condition can be seen in the field of fishing, traditional weaving and house building artifacts.

Change is a common phenomenon in the field of society and culture. No one can stop the changes brought about the time. In developing countries like India such changes are increasing at a rapid pace. This change has come especially due to innovative discoveries in the field of science and technology. The impact of the development of science and technology is not limited to urban areas but also to rural areas. Especially due to the rapid changes in communication system, the whole world has become like a small village all over the world. The internet system connected to computers, laptops, smartphones, etc. has made immediate contact with anywhere in the world possible. In view of this, in the context of globalization in the field of trade, economy, society etc. of the world, there has been a great change in the field of language, culture, which is living on a small scale. The use of modern technology is also increasing in the villages run by traditional agricultural lifestyle. Due to the use of tractor, power tillers etc. instead of ploughing oxen, the use of a large number of bamboo and cane tools such as traditional ploughs, yokes etc. has disappeared. That is to say, changes in various fields such as agriculture, fishing method, traditional housing etc. are accelerating. Such rapid changes in rural society and culture have naturally threatened and existence and use of such artifacts in Barpeta as well Assam. Instead, the demand for decorative items and other modern artifacts made from bamboo and cane has not decreased; rather it has increased. The artifacts like sofas, chairs, 'arami' chairs, modern-style palanquins, flower tubs, vases, dining table, bookshelf, almirah, water bottle, cup, tray, designable various musk, modern designable baskets, light frame, pen stand, sports items for children, ornaments or jewelries, 'japis', momentums etc. are notable in this field. The increased demand for the mentioned artifacts can be seen in the trade fairs held in different parts of Assam.

Just as globalization threatens traditional art forms on the one hand, on the other hand, the opportunities for their promotion are also associated with this system. Interested, willing and enthusiastic folk artists can make bamboo and cane as well as any art form and spread the message among the wider masses though any internet connected medium like Facebook, WhatsApp,

YouTube, Facebook Pages etc. Such propaganda not only introduces art objects to the masses but can also open up an open market. It also has the scope to open the way for the employment and earning of folk artists.

In the context of the current changing socio-cultural aspects, it is true that the practical utility of traditional art forms of bamboo and cane in Assam and Barpeta has been shrinking. But if the folk artists take up the work of promoting the artifacts that are in demand among the masses by mastering modern communication systems, then there is a possibility of building a large field of online marketing through it. It is also necessary duty to promote artifacts by not confining everything to their own construction sites to suit the era. In this way, only if such artifacts move forward, they will be able to keep pace with the artifacts elsewhere. In addition, the younger generation will also have to take initiative to keep them alive for the future by giving them training in the manufacture of these artifacts. Otherwise, these traditional artifacts are likely to be lost in the course of time.

7.0 Conclusion

- Bamboo and cane have a very close relationship with the life of the Assamese people. The villagers make various tools of house-building from bamboo and cane as well as many traditional furniture used on daily basis. Bamboo and cane are associated even with Assamese food habits. The importance of bamboo and cane in Barpeta district as a part of the larger Assamese folk culture is immense.
- The historical mask art of Barpeta is also associated with bamboo and cane. The art of masks has been able to reveal the artistic minds of the folk artists of Barpeta. These masks are associated with the traditional performing arts of Assam and are also used today as a symbol of beautification of the drawing room.
- Instead of the decline in demand and requirement of traditional artifacts made of bamboo and cane at present, the demand for some modern artifacts has seen an increase in the market. In this context, along with modern style furniture as well as various art objects can be mentioned. Due to direct involvement of these artifacts, it has also had a positive impact on the economy of Assam as well as self-employment.

- At present there has been a change in the livelihood of the people along with the rural culture. In parallel to the change in the traditional methods of farming, today's people have become more engaged in other occupational activities besides agriculture. In this context, changes have started in the way of life of the rural society as well as in the field of rural economy. Due to such changes in rural culture, the vast tract of folk culture associated with bamboo and cane in Assam as well as Barpeta is gradually shrinking. Such a situation can be seen in the fields of fishing, traditional weaving, house building, in addition to the tools associated with agriculture in particular. Moreover, due to lack of proper market value, the upcoming generation is not interested in making traditional bamboo and cane artifacts, nor has the elders been interested.
- Although the practical utility of the traditional art works made of bamboo and cane has shrunk under the influence of the current changing society and culture, with the modern communication system, folk artists can popularize these art objects among the masses. Through this, there is a possibility of creating a field of online marketing. Only if these artifacts can be made popular through proper propaganda to suit the era, they can survive in the near future. Moreover, the younger generation will have to take up the responsibility to keeping them alive for the future by giving them training in the manufacture of these artifacts. Otherwise these artifacts are likely to be lost forever.

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