

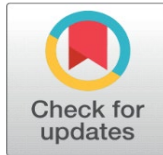
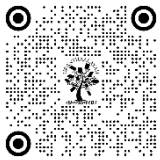


STRUGGLING METAL CRAFTS PRACTICE IN DARJEELING AND KALIMPONG DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

In the scenario of emerging Indian economy, Crafts - this unorganized sector becomes very important owing to its large number of employment generation potentiality and significant contribution towards export business. In the scenario of Darjeeling and Kalimpong district, this Sub Himalayan region is the home of many metal crafts artisans who are struggling because of gradual increasing pressure of modern machine-made products which decay and change metal crafts ecology. These make these exquisite master pieces vulnerable. From the very long period of times, metal crafts artisans were the main source to fulfill the demand of rural economy in these two districts but now the product is rarely present in the market. Due to changing consumer interest, low-cost machine-made products, foreign products, lack of innovation towards new design trends, lack of awareness of market and support this heritage practice is standing at its critical end. This study delves into metal crafts artisans who call themselves as Vishwakarma in Darjeeling and Kalimpong district. This study tries to understand their present condition, crafts products, production procedure, scope of survival and development through the qualitative study, using survey and interview of the artisans and other stakeholders. Findings from artist/producer, Retailers, Customers and Important Officials persons are exhibited. The identified issues and development areas toward survival and future growth of this crafts such as, upgradation of tools and technology, intervention initiatives and supports, welfare and marketing support, entrepreneurship and branding have been discussed. Data were collected from selected Blocks in Darjeeling and Kalimpong district in the two phases.

Keywords: Crafts, Metal Crafts, Vulnerable, Artisans, Heritage, Qualitative Study, Interview, Employment, Awareness, Consumer, Marketing, Survival, Development, Machine-Made, Branding

1. INTRODUCTION

“The industries of the imagination, content, knowledge, innovation and creation clearly are the industries of the future... they are also important contributory factors to employment and economic growth (UNESCO, 1999)” (Liebl & Roy, 2004). All the traditional crafts are associated with the special skills and knowledge, developed with the natural evolution of the society for a long period of time and represent the excellence of intrinsic beauty, values and culture. It is an important segment of the Indian economy owing to its tremendous potentiality to generate the mass level employment and the contribution substantially for flourishing Indian economic activity. Unfortunately, this informal sector has been suffering because of “its unorganized nature along with additional constraints like lack of education, capital, and poor exposure to new technologies, absence of market intelligence and poor institutional framework” (Ministry of Textiles, 2021). Among all crafts practices, metal crafts in Darjeeling and Kalimpong district is more distressed and has been fading from its glory.

Before 2017, present Darjeeling and Kalimpong district were only one district, named Darjeeling district in West Bengal state. These districts are famous since the British period in India for its climate, natural beauty, tea and cinchona; now these places are well known destination for tourists. Both the districts share some common physiographic feature, both are hilly areas but present Darjeeling district shares some part with Terai or Tarai (Siliguri) in North Bengal part of West Bengal.

Undivided Darjeeling district in hills was developed in transcultural settings. This place (undivided Darjeeling) became strategically very important – it is located in the borderland of the Himalayas, connecting Sikkim state to the north, Bhutan and Bangladesh to the east, Bihar state to the south and Nepal to the west. For this position it became a migrant-prone zone. Afterwards the British rulers encouraged immigration of people for the development of this region (Das, 2020). Migration from Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and other parts of west Bengal made this place a cosmopolitan centre. Gradually Darjeeling and Kalimpong became an export and import trading centre of Himalayan commodities by Marwari, Bengalis, Sikkimese, Kashmiri, Tibetan, Nepali and Chinese traders. People from different religion and culture like Hindu, Buddhist, Muslims, Christian lived together. Crafts practices also came here with migrated people with their all skills and art treasure and gradually made a unique crafts tradition which display the different culture of different ethnic groups (Sharma, 2016).

Among those different crafts practices in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, metal crafts became very famous in Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and other places in India among the Buddhist monasteries, Buddhist and Hindu people. Gradually Darjeeling sadar (main city) in Darjeeling district and Kalimpong 1 in Kalimpong district became the main center for copper-brass and silver crafts business. Metal crafts artisans were not only fulfilling the local demands for Utensils and religious items but also fulfilling the demands of nearby states and countries. The artisans from Darjeeling and Kalimpong district were hired for their delicate metal art and crafts skills, particularly religious copper-brass and silver crafts items for monasteries. Unfortunately, at present this metal crafts are rarely seen in the market.

Besides the tourism, the high-altitude Darjeeling and Kalimpong is driven by rural economy. Poverty and unemployment are common issues in this district. On the other hand, globalization, industrial development and massive economic development program expose rural economy which is gradually changing rural ecology (Chhetri, 2013, p. 11) of this region. This brings negative impact on metal crafts tradition in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, as a result, artisans are showing interest more to the other profession for survival.

For these reasons, there is an urgent need to revitalize and protect this heritage crafts tradition. This study tries to explore and identify the hidden issues behind this declining situation so that this age-old heritage practice will find the ways to survive.

2. OBJECTIVES

Objectives of this study are:

- 1) To find out the present condition of metal crafts in Darjeeling and Kalimpong district of west Bengal.
- 2) To identify the factors which are the causes of declining the metal crafts practiced in this region.
- 3) To identify the potential factors for survival of metal crafts practice in Darjeeling and Kalimpong district of West Bengal.

3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology adopted for this study is the qualitative research method. The data were collected during the period through various secondary data sources like books, online (digital) and printed journals, websites etc. and primary data sources like observations, interviews, photographs, and recordings with the artisans.

This study was conducted in two phases.

In the first phase, data was collected through descriptive survey method. Sample size was 86 covering three respondent groups that were Artist/Producer, Retailers and Customers from 1. Darjeeling Pulbazar Block, 2. Jorbanglo Sukhia Block, 3. Rangli Rangloit Block, 4. Kurseong Block, and 5. Mirik Block from Darjeeling District and 6. Kalimpong 1 Block, 7. Kalimpong 2 Block from Kalimpong District. 46 participants were enquired into from Artist/Producer group, 10 participants were from the Retailer group and 30 participants from the customer group. In total 86 participants were

interviewed in the first phase. In this phase, respondents covered from Artist/Producer group were Black Smiths (Khukhri/Tibetan Knife/Servicing) – 10, Copper-Brass-White Metal Musical Instrument makers – 6, Copper-Brass-White Metal-Silver Religious Object makers– 20, Copper-Brass-Utensil makers – 10

In this phase structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The aim was to find out the present condition of metal crafts practice in Darjeeling and Kalimpong district of West Bengal.

The second phase of this study was conducted for holistic and in-depth exploration of metal crafts practice in Darjeeling and Kalimpong District. The aim was to explore more deeply about idiosyncratic complexity of metal crafts practice and to identify the factors for its survival in Darjeeling and Kalimpong District. For this purpose, case study method was used. Tools were interview and observation for this phase. Open ended interview questionnaire was used for data collection. The respondents were selected for this phase from the first phase participants from Artisans/Producer and Retailer groups. Sample selection process was purposive sampling technique. An additional sample was added in this phase i.e. Important Persons and Officials for understanding their views in this regard which will further help the researcher to fulfil the said objectives. Therefore, the case study was done on 32 respondents in total – i.e. 24 Artisans/Producers, 4 Retailers and 4 Important Persons/Officials from the Darjeeling Pulbazar Block, Kurseong Block and Kalimpong 1 Block of Darjeeling and Kalimpong district in West Bengal.

Darjeeling Pulbazar Block and Kurseong Block flourished as metal crafts producing center since the formation of Darjeeling municipality (1850) and Kurseong municipality (1879), and Kalimpong 1 was also famous as crafts producing center since 1954 when the Kalimpong municipality was formed. Concentration of art and crafts practices is more dense than other places of these two districts. Number of metal crafts artisan's family are living here and practicing these traditional crafts from generation to generation.

4. METAL CRAFTS IN GENERAL CONCEPT

Harita Kapur quoted Professor M. P. Ranjan's word in Design Intervention & Craft Revival article to describe that Crafts can be defined as "those activities that deal with the conversion of specific materials into products, using primarily hand skills with simple tools and employing the local traditional wisdom of craft processes. Such activities usually form the core economic activity of a community of people called 'craftsmen'" (Kapur & Mittar, 2014)

According to Venkatesan (2009) the word 'craft' is originated in Britain in 18th Century and used to describe three different activities – politics of work, the decorative arts and the vernacular. In this context the words artisan and craftsperson are used interchangeably (Venkatesan, 2009). "Some refer to 'handicrafts', or to 'cottage industries', or 'household industries', or 'traditional industries'" (Liebl & Roy, 2004).

"Craft is often used to refer to only those materials having some sort of artistic quality" (Gayen et al., 2017). Some "include any occupation that involves manual labor" (Liebl & Roy, 2004). Definition given in a report in 1989 by the Development Commissioner of Handicrafts, India as "Items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools, and generally artistic and traditional in nature. They include objects of utility and objects of decoration" (Office of The Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), 1989). In the concept of Indian crafts, the word means two genre of practice one is Handicrafts and another is Handloom. From the sectoral point of view, it has been seen that Handicrafts have often been misleading with Village and Small Industries. Handicrafts is very smaller unit than what is meant by small industries and not necessarily always village based. It is more appropriate with the term Cottage Industries which is largely separated with Handlooms, Khadi and Village Industries, and Handicrafts. Handicrafts is illustrated by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India, it is based on medium, skills and product, that are Metal, Stone, Wood, Cane and Bamboo, Straw grass fibers, Textile includes yarns of cotton, wool, jute, Leather, Ivory, Bones, Horns, Shells, Clay and Ceramic, and Miscellaneous like Paper Mache, zari, solapith etc. (Office of The Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), 1989).

In Metal crafts category, skills are identified as casting, engraving, etching, inlay, embossing, repousse, enameling etc. and products category identified are brass and copper artware, bronze caste items, icons, decorative items, kitchen and tableware, furniture and jewelry etc.

Crafts refers to special skill involved with hand making objects, it is traditional and artistic in nature, and used for either decorative or domestic purpose. Metal crafts practice is divided in to two main activities, one is production activity and another is servicing activity, based on the use of the articles. Production activity is also divided into two types, one is Decorative item and Utilitarian objects. Decorative items are those articles which are used for decoration purpose such

as copper and brass crafts, different black smithy products, silver crafts as ornaments and silver decorative items. Utilitarian metal crafts Objects are mainly produced by Black smith such as objects used in agriculture, cutlery, household accessories made in iron or steel, copper and brass. Servicing activity is mainly servicing and repairing work of different black smithy product that are various tools used in agriculture, domestic and construction works, various utensil products also render servicing activity.

5. ARTISANS IN DARJEELING AND KALIMPONG DISTRICT: ORIGIN, MIGRATION, CULTURE

Undivided Darjeeling (Darjeeling and Kalimpong) is the home of diverse ethnic groups from ancient time. Original inhabitants in hills parts were the Lepchas, Limbus, Bhutias, Tibetans and various Nepalese castes and in the plains parts of Darjeeling district were lived by Mache, Koch, Rajbangshi, Dhimal and others (Directorate of Census Operations, 2011). During the late seventeen centuries, part of the Darjeeling was under Sikkim and present Kalimpong were under domination of Bhutan. From 1780, conflicts between King of Sikkim and Gurkhas of Nepal occurred about the possession of the territory of western part of present Darjeeling and in 1790 the Gurkhas of Nepal captured the land up to the river Tista in Darjeeling. Later from 1814 to 1816, British ruler engaged in the war with Nepalese army and finally they became victorious. As a result, the hilly areas of Darjeeling along with Sikkim become a 'Buffer State' under British territory between Kingdom of Nepal and Bhutan by the sign of the 'Treaty of Sugauli' in 1816 and the 'Treaty of Titalya' in 1817 (Directorate of Census Operations, 2011). Immediately British rulers realized its strategical importance owing to its position and climatic condition. The British ruler decided to develop this area as 'Sanitarium' and later they made this place as recruitment center of 'Gurkha' in the army. By 1866, after 'Anglo-Bhutan' war, the entire Bhutan Dooars along with present 'Kalimpong' came under the control of British East India Company (Directorate of Census Operations, 2011, p. 9).

British administration started by developing infrastructure and networking systems; they made roads, railways, towns, schools, for the settlers. In this time tea and cinchona cultivation flourished and controlled Darjeeling economy. This growth attracted many migrant people mostly from Nepal and Bhutan who came for better life. British administration was recruiting them for army, labor for road, infrastructure developments and tea and cinchona cultivation. In this way the population became from 100 to 10000 within the period from 1839 to 1849, in 2011 it was 1846823 (Directorate of Census Operations, 2011). The scope of agriculture, tea plantation, job opportunities greatly influenced to increase population, at the same time it was improving the prospects of trade and commerce.

However, among this large-scale migration, the majority of the migrant people came from Nepal. Another reason of this large-scale migration was very rigid caste systems; the rise of higher caste Hindu and the Hindu monarchy of Nepal in the 2nd half of 18th century made socio-economic tension between higher caste and lower caste Hindu and non-Hindu Nepalis. A "series of repressive measures in order to ensure domination of the high caste Hindu Nepalis over the Buddhist and other non-Hindu Nepali tribes and communities" (Dasgupta, 1999) forced the repressed to migrate to India.

A large number of landless Nepali people, particularly the Rais, the Limbus, the Gurungs and the Tamangs who are considered as downgraded in Nepali Hindu society and other low caste Nepali started to migrate to avoid the punishment systems 'Panchakhat' which included "confiscation of property, banishment, mutilation, enslavement and even death" (Dasgupta, 1999, p. 53). Later high caste Hindu Nepalis also migrated and settled in Darjeeling. Within the lower caste in the caste system, Kami, Damai and Sarki were considered as the lowest status, the Kami belong to the Vishwakarma community as Blacksmith, Goldsmith, Silversmith – the most creative profession (Shankar, 2017, p. 15). During migration many artisans came and settled in undivided Darjeeling as well as in present Darjeeling and Kalimpong. This migrated workforce brought their artistic skills and tradition, they belong to the 'Aryans', speak Nepali and use Devnagari script (Datta, 2002).

6. CRAFTS PRACTICE

For flooding of migration and settlement many artisan groups are working today. Among them the 'Art metal ware' artisans produce metal crafts products, they belong to Black Smith category particularly Vishwakarma community. Based on the activity of the metal crafts artisans, it has been divided into Production Activity and Servicing Activity. Metal crafts production activity is also divided based on characteristics of the articles or purpose, which are Decorative articles and Utilitarian Objects. Decorative metal crafts items are mainly copper-brass products, silver crafts products and iron-based products. Significantly for survival, smiths are changing their product's characteristics such as khukri [Figure 1], different

types of pots, [Figure 2] are actually utilitarian objects but due to demand it becomes a gift as decorative item, another important transformation has been observed in black smithy profession, that is, next level elevation of craftsmanship, the example is Toy Train model [Figure 3]. During the British rule, many black smiths were appointed for servicing for toy train parts, after independence few of them are still working for repair-service related work; among them one family is identified to be engaged in making toy train model and after three generations this gift item represents the culture and history of Darjeeling. Another item is Gyling, a type of Tibetan musical instruments used in Buddhist monastery which has become a decorative item. Other than this, some other religious metal articles such as metal dragon – a religious object, Maney - Buddhist religious wheel, Dio - lamp, used for ritualistic performance, different ornamental objects used in Buddhist temple for decoration. Utilitarian objects are mainly agricultural tools, cutlery and household accessories, copper and brass utensils. Metal craft is an uncertain profession, to survive and for supplementary income artisans do engage with repair and servicing activity particularly in slack season.



Figure 1: Khukri and Tibetan Knife

Source: Collected and photograph taken by researcher during field work, 2022.



Figure 2: Different copper and brass utensils

Source: Collected and photograph taken by researcher during field work, 2022.



Figure 3: Toy Train as souvenir.

Source: Collected and photograph taken by researcher during field work, 2022.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

7.1. THE CURRENT STATE OF TRADITIONAL METAL CRAFT PRODUCTION IN DARJEELING AND KALIMPONG:

Before the interviews, every participant from the artisan's groups, wanted to know 'what they would get benefits from this interview and after the end of interview almost everyone eagerly appealed to me to do something for them. In the context of current status of this profession, the common responses were 'I am struggling', 'all expenditure is very high today', 'customer's taste became changed', 'Order is declining day by day', 'earning is not increased in comparison of expenditure for living', 'I don't know what happen if I fall in sick or become old because my children are not interested in this work'. Every statement is indicating the unreliability or lack of confidence in this profession but all participants agreed that situation was not like this when they had started.

Apart from this it is found from phase 1 survey that 78% Artists' net income per month is below 15000 Rupees which is not enough for living a decent life in Hill where cost of living is higher than the plain part of the district. It was found from the interview that the salary of an artist who is working under master artist or producer is 8000, 10000 and 12000 rupees per month according to the experience and skill. Only 4% artisans age are from 20 to 30 years, 18% are from 31 to 40 years and 65% are from 41 to 50 years of age group, but there is no apprentice artist found, it shows that the supply of new generation artist is in critical condition. All the participants from Artist/Producer group agreed that unavailability of raw materials and high cost are major issues now. It is found from the interviewed in phase 2 that 20-30 years ago and even before, metal (copper, brass, silver, white metal) was available in low price at Kalimpong market. But now situation is different because of restriction in border particularly Nepal and Bhutan border. For this transportation cost has become high. Present source of raw material is Siliguri market. The raw materials including scrap metal, metal sheets and fuel (coal and charcoal) cost high. For this reason, crafts business is downward. The most of the metal crafts artisans are willing to change their profession but they do not know what type of alternative profession they are fit for.

Overall these situations show that metal crafts tradition in Darjeeling and Kalimpong is in critical condition.

7.2. INTERNAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE METAL CRAFT PROFESSION:

7.2.1. PRODUCTION AND TECHNOLOGY:

From the first phase data it is found that 65% participants from artist/producer group think that limitation of traditional tools and technique is constrain of the development of this business. 90% participants from retailer group think that using traditional tools and technique led low productivity of the articles. Low supply not only decrease artist's business but also encourage the retailers to fill the supply gap with machine made products.

During interview and observation, it is found that the key identified reasons for this condition is i) Artisans using year old traditional hand bitten technique to make articles, ii) lack of technological adaptation led backward in global level competition, iii) high raw material cost, lack of modern tools and equipment forces to compromise in terms of product quantities, design trends and production capacity. Darjeeling hills environment is very harsh in nature, weather is very cold and humid almost throughout the year, which makes complex metalcrafts process more challenging here. Traditionally coal is used as fuel in forge, but unavailability and costing both become high, alternative fuel is charcoal also not enough owing to use of gas for cooking in village. Using gas commercially in forge is also very expensive and require technological assistance and equipment.

7.2.2. LOCATION, PLACE, AND FACILITIES

From the first phase data it is found that, 66% workshop are located in village, 30% in town, 2% in city and 2% near tourist centre. Similarly, 10% retailer shops are located in village, 30% in town, 40% in city, 20% in tourist centre. It shows that supply of the products from workshop to retailer is not smooth. 80% respondents from retailer group think that their shop position is not ideal for this business, 92% respondents from Artisans/Producer group think that position of their workshop is very important towards the development and growth when the competition with the machine-made products is very high. Both groups think that distance between workshop and retail shop is a hindrance towards the growth.

In this context it is found from the interview and observation in the second phase that most of the artisans are living in remote villages in both hills, workshops are adjoint with the house but far from the main road and market. Main business and tourist centre are far from workshop, at least 3 to 5 hours in a car to reach the centre. Sometimes few artisans have their own shop but that does not fulfil the ideal business location. For this reason, artisans are losing benefits of tourism or scope of access of the tourist as consumer directly.

7.2.3. SKILLED WORKFORCE AND FUTURE GENERATIONS:

From the survey in first phase, it is found that 90% respondents from Retailer group think that low productivity is an important reason for declining of this craft tradition. Customers have very limited option to choose and collect desired one. To fulfil this gap, retailers consider alternative options which is machine made metal items. It is also found that 94% respondents from Artist/Producer group agreed that gradual decreasing skilled workforce is affecting productivity. This inter connected hidden relations reveals more clearly in next phase investigation from interview and observation.

From the interview and observation, it is found that increasing enthusiasm towards tourism related business, like car driving, food stall, garments business, construction, and impact of globalization is a cause of decreasing skilled workforce, at the same time, poverty and less opportunities in this region forced many artisans to become migrant labour, other reasons for demotivating new generations are low wages, hard work and low social status. Many young members are showing interest on delivery job like food delivery, goods or parcel delivery under e-commers company or online food company. Most of the young members from the artisan's family are graduate, they speak Nepali, Hindi and English (colonial impact) which add advantage to get other jobs. Culturally dance, music and instruments are normal phenomena among the present Indian Nepali culture in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Many young members have their own performance group or are the members of the performance group, other than that many are interested to join in 'Indian military services' (Darjeeling have the tradition from colonial period). This changing social psychology is blocking supply chain of skilled workforce and lead these family-oriented handicrafts tradition towards vulnerability.

7.2.4. LOGISTICS, SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Logistics and supply chain management is one of the essential components in any industry. It is found from the survey that 95% respondents from Artist/Producer group and 90% respondents from Retailer group agreed that poor logistics and supply chain management is pushing backward this metal crafts practices in the competition to survive.

From the observation it is found that most of the workshops are in remote location, products are delivered to the retailers in the city or main market like Darjeeling sadar, Kurseong main market, Sonada, Kalimpong Main Bazar and Siliguri. Siliguri is the main business centre where raw materials are generally purchased and distributed. Toy train models, musical instruments (Gyline) are mostly delivered directly from producer to the customers by the middleman or customer himself may come and collect. On the other hand, for the utensils and religious metal crafts items – producers himself collect raw materials or deliver products to the retailers. For this, an additional cost is being added for this business transaction, which include logistics, food and room rent expenses. The distance between market/retail shop and workshop is very long, producers are not able to deliver within a day, they have to stay in the market for completing the delivery or purchase process and return next day. This poor logistics and supply chain management is another reason for declining of this creative profession. All the participant cannot maintain detail expenditure sheets, they do as total, not include everyday calculation. For lack of data management artisans are unable to find the gap and solution for improvement of business. Distance and transportation from workshop to business centre is the major issue for the artisans, 95% participants from Artist/Producer group and 90% respondents from Retailer group raise the concern of the communication systems, they think, poor communication (transport systems) make this tradition weaker gradually. It is found that public car service (Bolero, Tata Sumo are used for public transportation in hills for long distance) is available between village car stand and main market place only in the morning and in the afternoon (not after 3pm) from both sides which consume a full man-day or business day to deliver the products or any business transactions.

7.2.5. MARKET AND COMPETITION

It is found from the first phase of investigation (survey) that 89% respondents from Artist/Producer group and 100% respondents from Retailer group think that domination of machine-made metal products is one of the reasons for gradual decreasing demands. Other reasons intimated by the retailers are that 70% think that customer's interest has changed, 90% think that domination of Chinese and Nepali metal crafts products in the local market is decreasing demand. 60% respondents from the retailer and 63% from customers think that demand is decreasing because product price is very high.

It is found from the second phase that all the participants from artisans' group raised the issues of low-price rate quoted by the retailers and they have very less choices for sale in alternative way, the impact of margin profit faces difficulties because price is controlled by the retailers and middleman, this situation is reducing the scope of expanding capacity. Also, the rate is different in different business centre, like market in the plains (city or town in Siliguri), village market in the hills (Darjeeling and Kalimpong) and main tourist centre like Darjeeling main city, Kurseong main city and Kalimpong main city.

Geographical location is always an important factor for any business. Position of Siliguri corridor at present Darjeeling district is called chicken neck, strategically this place is geo-politically and geo-economically very important, it is connecting the eight states in North East India and Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Imported crafts like Chinese, Korean, Nepali and other machine-made crafts from north east states, Kolkata, and other parts of India are available in the local market at very low price. These crafts are trendy and align with modern functionalities, which impact very badly in crafts ecology. Slow productions and sales are also pushing this metal crafts practice backward in the competition with the fast-growing market of machine-made products.

As a result, these years old crafts practices are struggling hard to stay in the competition.

7.2.6. DESIGN AND FUNCTION

It is found from the interview and observation in the second phase that consumer taste is turned towards contemporary design, functionalities and attractive package design. Traditional metal crafts of these hills are continuing the same design and functionalities which are normal phenomena for any tradition, and at the same time create

monotony; customers appreciate but prefer to machine-made modern articles for household uses. The purpose of the utensils or religious articles is changing for some customers. Some of the customers buy these articles either for decoration or as a status symbol. This changing taste of the consumers leads the producers to add more traditional looks in the design, ignoring the functioning aspects of the objects. Retailers also encourage this tendency. As a result, it meets neither the traditional aesthetics quality nor the modern trends which is reducing customers circle, concentrating on those customers who buy decorative items. Poor packaging also a big issue for this industry. It is found from the survey that 87% customers think that poor packaging is decreasing its attraction. Products are generally delivered to the customers only by wrapping with old newspaper and covering with transparent plastic, this is not only looking bad but also difficult to carry – ignorance of proper product packaging leads to decreasing its glory.

7.2.7. EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND FUTURE PLAN

High quality craftsmanship is the assets of any traditional craft practice, it involves refined skills, delicate care in detailing and passion for creation. A traditional artist becomes a master through the long years of practice. It is found from the survey that the 13% respondent artist/Producer are above 40 years of experience, 61% from 31 to 40 Years of experience, 22% from 21 to 30 years of experience and only 4% are below 5 years of experience. This is denoting the expertise level of the artist and at the same time also shows the lack of supply of new skilled workforce.

In this context it is found from the interview and observation that all the artists start as apprentice since their childhood at their own workshop. Father and grandfather are their teacher. Traditionally, knowledge is transferred in this way with the all the details and secret of tools and technique which have developed from yearlong creative practice and it passes with new additions through generation to generation and makes products unique. It is found from the survey in first phase that educational level is different with new generation, 22% have completed primary level, 46% have completed Madhyamik level (10th standard) and 30% have completed HS level (12th standard). It is revealed in the second phase of investigation that graduate family members are not involved in this profession. They prefer more decent job like clerical, teaching or any government job even military service. Advantages of ODL (Open and Distance Learning) and improved regular mode of learning systems may increase educational level in this marginalized group but it decreases the interest on their family tradition. 93% participants said that this family practice will stop after them. It may continue by their apprentice but they are uncertain and not directly related with their family.

It is found from the survey in the first phase on promotion and marketing from the artist/producer group that 13% respondents said that they have specific business plan to grow, 8% took initiative for advertisement. All have heard about government schemes and financial assistance but they do not know any of this scheme's name, benefits and how to avail.

It is found from the interview and observation that all the artisans claimed that they tried to grow this business but it is not expanding due to financial constrain. It is clear that without specific business plan they are trying to grow business; the most of the artisans follow the pattern of their ancestors. Government aid and financial assistance is not very clear to them, they think it will occur more burden than benefit.

7.3. EXTERNAL FACTORS INVOLVEMENT IN THE METALCRAFTS TRADITION IN DARJEELING AND KALIMPONG:

It is found from the survey in the first phase investigation that selling characteristics of metal items throughout the year from the retail shops is that 80% low cost machine-made utensil and religious items (brass items) and 20% traditional handmade items are sold. These traditional handmade items consist of copper-brass-white metal and silver items which are utensil, religious and decorative items.

Low cost, multifunction, mass production are the key characteristics of modern industry. Imported metal products, machine-made metal articles and plastic products are more acceptable to the consumers. It is observed that new design and functionalities are more satisfactory and attractive to the customers. At the same time there are some dedicated customers for traditional metal crafts items.

Use of technological advancement is the key for the development of any industry, 94% participants from artist/producer group agreed that they need technological upgradation but they are more comfortable with their traditional tools and technology which they master in the context of skills. It is observed that owing to lack of expansion of updated knowledge about technology, visual design and market, the expansion circle of innovation is extending very

slowly. On the other hand, artisans are more interested to preserve their traditional knowledge and craftsmanship rather than adopting new technology.

7.4. POTENTIALITY, DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE OF METAL CRAFTS PRACTICE:

At the end of the year no product remains in workshops – this shows that these products have some dedicated market. It is found from interview and observation that customers of this crafts are from local village and town, Buddhist monasteries from Darjeeling, Kalimpong, other places in India and even abroad. It is found from survey in the first phase that 77% customer prefer these crafts because it has made in traditional technique with reflecting the traditional values and aesthetics. Exquisiteness and traditional value still attract the customers.

It is found from survey in the first phase that 91% artisans participated in training conducted by the District Industries Centre (Government of West Bengal) in the last 5 years, this training was on design skill development. It is revealed from the interview that 96% artisans said that trainer was from them only, so they have not any scope to learn new. Because most of the trainee have 20 to 25 years' experience. Skilled workforce is the asset of this profession. To secure supply chain, it needs to conduct training, awareness and knowledge transfer program to the new generation which is absent in presently initiated different development program led by the government and private agencies. MSME office, they conduct development programs for artisans but it is not effective toward the development, it requires need base training and awareness program module. It is found from survey in the first phase that 82% participants from artist/producer group think that they need training on product design and application technique. 90% want training on awareness about modern tools and technique from the industrial trainer which will help to do specific crafts work more efficiently and help to produce production in mass level.

All the participants think that after him what will happen to this family business because new generations are demotivated, but they still hope that if the proper help, guidance and technological assistance will be provided, this industry will fulfil the customer's demand and rise again. It is found from the survey in the first phase of investigation on buying preferences among those customers who are buying traditional metal crafts; 40% consider only aesthetic and decorative values, 60% consider traditional and functional value, 47% buy utensil, 47% buy religious item, 6% buy as a gift item but at the same time also consider decorative value. All of the participant from the customer group think that authentic, handmade and cultural heritage is the strength of this crafts. 90% respondent from the customer think that traditional metal utensil products have ample scope to increase its demand, these products are strong and durable. Only it needs more refinement in terms of product design and functionalities which they found in machine-made metal products.

In pre-Industrial era, Crafts was essentially and necessarily a localized phenomenon. Different groups of artisans make utilitarian products in unique design which are consumed by local people – Darjeeling and Kalimpong are no exception.

Looking deeply, artisans were traditionally an essential part of the village economy, technological boom increasing urbanization of market for crafts which has changed artisan – consumer relationship that is largely replaced by traders. This has rendered the artisans to make crafts an unsustainable source of livelihood. Today's market characteristic is that it is very fast growing. The main demand of a product has changed in all aspects like style, design, colour, and function which are great threats to the traditional crafts producers. On the other side, "delayed response can push those deep rooted traditional handmade products out, replacing them with mass, factory made, machine crafts" (Kapur & Mittar, 2014)

West Bengal Government and Central government have initiated lots of policies and frameworks, but skilled artisans are still not benefitted, the reasons are middleman's appearance, lack of infrastructure to implement policies, lack of understanding about market demand, lack of knowledge of "new method and materials, lack of awareness on benefit schemes, lack of awareness on new design trends" (R. Sharma, 2017).

Innovation is the most important key factor in any art and crafts, when it stops – everything stops, in that context, machine made products are low in price, visually presentable, and align with modern design trends and demands. In that context artisans are adapting very slowly or they do not accept any change that leads to losing competition.

8. CONCLUSION

Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills are witness of many historical events, such as 'Treaty of Sugauli', 'Treaty of Titalya', 'Anglo-Bhutan' war and British rule. These places became the shelter for the persecuted migrant peoples from Nepal, traders and fortune seekers. Traditional metal crafts practice developed and flourished simultaneously with the development of these hilly places and established its signature identity.

It is found from the first phase investigation that low income, demotivated new generation, decreasing demand, high material costs, poor logistics and supply chain managements along with lack of affective support from the Governments have made this heritage practice critical. It is found from the second phase that artisans are struggling with finance related issues, technology related issues and market related issues including lack of comprehensive strategies for business. Overall actual status of this traditional practice is in a struggling position to survive.

But this tradition also has some potentialities which help to stay in the competition. This tradition needs some assistance and care that will help to motivate this marginalized groups to continue and expand their art and crafts skills and knowledge and will strengthen the Indian economy.

It is found from the second phase that the potential areas are: these crafts have some dedicated customers with the scope to increase in numbers, it is traditional and handmade in nature, some of religious items are visually exquisite. These crafts are visually unique in style and design which can be easily identified as product of this region. Artisans are ready to accept to learn new although they are already master in their work. Most of the artisans have their own workshop with necessary space and electric connection. Capacity of the workshop is 15 to 20 workers. And at the end increasing popularity of traditional crafts products, increasing tourism, and transfiguration of this crafts from functional purpose to decoration and gift items give a light of hope for revitalization and revival of the glory.

This economically deprived and excluded group as well as tradition need assistance in the area of i) Industrial Training – product design, tools and technique, ii) Financial assistance and dedicated policies for technological upgradation and entrepreneurship, iii) Awareness and advertisement for values and importance, iv) Training on Data management. Industrial training can be provided by those only who have expertise and experience to work with artisans. In that context NGOs, Government or Government funded Institutions like NID, DIPP (the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion) can be fit for such assistance. The State or Central Government will provide financial assistance in flexible condition which build artisan confident for repay and to eliminate middleman issues. Private organizations like corporate agencies and the Government specialized department like the Ministry of Commerce and Industry need to take initiatives to conduct awareness and promotion of this crafts products. The District Industrial Office under MSME can provide training on data management. Branding is the key identity in any industry, present condition of Darjeeling metal crafts product is changing, evolving and modifying forms from its original identity, now it is more local in terms of visual appearance and quality. Lack of awareness about its intrinsic values, low education, socially ignorance and lack of confidence have made this profession vulnerable. To disseminate knowledge about the craft among the young generation, the training will help them to get benefit and create the scope to obtain higher wages. But at first they need protection and revitalization.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None .

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