



## Role of income and literacy in the deterioration of the Pottery industry: A study of Tufanganj I block of West Bengal, India

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**Abstract:** Handicrafts and cottage industry constitute an important segment of economy in the backward most and in accessible areas of our country in general and West Bengal in particular. Among various key sectors of handicrafts, pottery is the oldest and most important traditional practice which can contribute towards a faster pace of sustainable rural industrialisation through the proper utilisation of local resources and skills, its increased production and marketing. It creates more employment opportunity for the rural mass as it is labour intensive work. But, now-a-days the globalisation along with some other causes is putting this sector in a vulnerable position. The present paper attempts to assess the disappearing nature of this environment friendly activity from the society and its association with poverty and illiteracy of the people who belong to the Kumbhakar community in Tufanganj I block of West Bengal. Among all the potter families residing in the study area, about 57% are still producing the pottery crafts and level of income & education has the worst impact on this type of village industry.

**Keywords:** Handicrafts, cottage industry, sustainable rural industrialisation, globalisation, pottery.

### **I.Introduction:**

The cottage industries are artisan based and traditional industries of rural and semi-urban areas where local resources are utilised to sell the product in local market (Chatterjee, Anup).The cottage and handicrafts industry constitute an important segment of the country's rural economy. Recently the central as well as the state Govt. is emphasising more on the handicraft sector in order to strengthen the livelihood of the rural artisans. As per the result of the Six Economic Census-2013, WB accounts for more than 11% of the total no. of MSME (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprise) Establishments (Annual Report 2016-17, MSME,GOI). WB state Govt. (MSME) created a meaningful project entitled as "Biswa Bangla" for promoting Bengal's unique heritage and benefitting the rural artisans. Taking the help from UNESCO the MSME has set up 10 Rural Craft Hubs (RCHs) among which for terracotta at Bankura and clay dolls at Nadia are the most important initiatives in pottery industry (The Times of India, July, 2015). These aim at capacity-building for the artisans and providing direct linkages to them. The handicraft sector especially the pottery is very much important to generate employment opportunities and thereby

reduce the out-migration of unemployed rural youths in the rural areas of Bengal where poverty, illiteracy and unemployment still prevail. The present paper focuses on the association of illiteracy and poverty with the pottery industry in the study area.

**II.Objectives:**

- i) To find out the income, poverty and educational level of the artisans,
- ii) To find out the position of the women artisans in the potter’s society,
- iii) To analyze the relationship of poverty and illiteracy with the pottery

**III.Hypothesis:**

- ❖ There is a direct relationship of income and literacy with the giving up of pottery activities in the families of kumbhakar community.

**IV.Data and Methodology:**

The study is mainly based on primary data. For the collection of primary data, field survey with well structured schedule was conducted at two GPs(Andaranfulbari I & Balarampur I) where about 35% households (belong to Kumbhakar) were selected as samples through systematic random sampling during the month Jan,2018. Besides, the secondary data was collected from websites of WB Govt., journals, news paper, and previous work of scholars. Statistical methods such as Arithmetic Mean and Chi-square test have also been applied for explanation.

$$\text{Chi-square } (X^2) = \sum (O - E)^2 / E$$

Where, O = Observed frequencies.

E = Expected frequencies.

**V.Study area:**

Tufanganj I, the eastern most community development block of Cooch Behar district, is mostly a non industrial block that consists of 14 GPs. Besides agriculture, some cottage industries are worth mentioning here, e.g. bidi, handloom, bamboo art crafts etc. However, pottery is found more or less at all GPs except Balabhut and Dhalpal II. More than 1000 Families of kumbhakar community reside in this block. This is surrounded by Assam in the East, Tufanganj II in North East, Dinhata II and Bangladesh to the South, Cooch Behar in the West and Alipurduar district in the north.

**Table No 1:** Number of Potter’s Households in Tufanganj – I Block.

Sl No.	Name of the Gram Panchayats	No. of Households	Sl No.	Name of the Gram Panchayats	No. of Households
1	A. Fulbari I	136	8	Balarampur I	65
2	A. Fulbari II	144	9	Balarampur II	125
3	Maruganj	202	10	Chilakhana I	350
4	Nakkatigachh	6	11	Chilakhana II	10
5	Natabari I	2	12	Deocharai	32
6	Natabari II	69	13	Dhalpal I	1
7	Balabhut	-	14	Dhalpal II	-

Source : Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Govt. of WB. & Field Survey.

## VI. Discussion:

Pottery in the said study area is one of the traditional village industries which provides employment to the rural mass and in which the family itself is the production unit. This is one of the most unorganised sectors in manufacturing. Although this industrial activity accelerates the use of local resource, skills and thereby sustainable rural industrialisation, it suffers from many problems such as high cost of raw materials, poverty and low investment, diminishing demand, lack of spaces, very low rate of technological up gradation etc. As a result of which, for most of the families in the study area the pottery has become the source of supplementary income with agricultural and some tertiary activities. The artisans in pottery belong to the kumbhakar community and fall in the OBC category. Their surname is Paul and they are often called by the local people as “Paul Mashai”.

About 200 families of this community are residing here in Andaranfulbari I and Balarampur I GPs of Tufanganj I. Like any other areas, the pottery of this area is also characterised by its culture. The artisans generally follow the ceremonial and red clay pottery where they produce puja equipments (e.g. dhoop stand, lamp, water pots etc.), utensils and vessels (e.g. flower pots, nursery pots, bowls of different sizes etc.) and images of goddesses. These are produced from alluvial soil and sticky clay. They generally follow two methods regarding the mode of production such as production through the use of wheel turned by the men and manually production of the clay items mainly by the women. Handcrafted clay items are produced by joining one part with another.



Fig. Manually production of the clay items by the woman (Photo captured by the Author).

The study says that about 8% families are engaged with the making of images of goddesses where the rest concentrates towards either the production of puja equipments or the utensils and vessels throughout the year. Winter is the peak season when almost all the members have to involve in the craft production throughout the day. Like our country where about 27% of the people are living below poverty line (2004-05, Sethi), in the study area the level of income in pottery is very less which is difficult for the survival and to sustain the livelihood for the families who are practicing the clay craft as a whole time profession. As a result, out of 72 families

surveyed only 57% families are at present engaged either fully or partly in pottery industry and the remain 43% households gave up this traditional practices completely. Again, of 31 households about 60% has given up the activity before 15 to 25 years and the rest 5 to 15 years ago although most of them used to pursue the craft production fully about 25 years ago when they came into this region as forced migrants from Bangladesh. Though the Govt. of India is giving advice to the people to use the eco friendly earthen lamps to encourage the sustainable development, the process of globalisation is putting this sector in a vulnerable position in this block. This is gradually disappearing from our society.

. **Table No 2:** Average size of landholdings.

Size of landholdings (in acres)	Household (in %)
<0.1	58.3
0.1 – 0.2	19.4
>0.2	22.2

In most of the cases, only the poor and illiterate families are still engaged in the production of craft items. For the sake of precise analysis all the households have been divided into three categories such as,

Source: Field Survey

❖ **Table No 3:** Time of giving up the craft production.

Time of giving up the practice (Years ago)	Households (in %)
<5	25.8
5 – 15	16.1
15 – 25	45.2
>25	12.9

- A. Category-1 (The households engaged with only pottery),
- B. Category-2 (The households engaged with pottery and others as supplement), and
- C. Category-3 (The households engaged with other than pottery)

Source: Field Survey

❖ **Table No 4:** Level of income of families.

Income level (in Rs./month)	No of families engaged with the activities (in %)		
	Only pottery	Pottery & others	Other than pottery
<6500	81.3	32	32.3
6500 - 8000	12.5	40	35.5
>8000	6.3	28	32.3

Source: Field Survey

The study reveals that the average income of the said three categories are about 5000/-, 6500/-, and 7500/- per month respectively. Again, for the C-1 (Category-1) about 80% households have the income less than 6500/- per month where for the C-2(Category-2) and C-3 (Category-3) it is 32%. Contrary to this , only about 6% families in C-1 are earning more than 8000/-per month where it stands 28% and 32% for the rest two categories respectively. The Chi-square Test which has been applied to test the hypothesis also proves that most of the families that are engaged with

pottery has low income and any other activities rather than pottery in the study area is more profitable, So, the income level of poor non potter households has gone up significantly and for them wages from agriculture & agricultural labourer, weaving, bidi making, cattle rearing, shop and others are the predominant sources of livelihood. For instance, about 39% of c-3 households earn for their survival by attending to shop. Another notable thing is that only about 20% are somehow engaged with agriculture and the rest with the service sector which indicates the general trend of rapid transition from agriculture to service sector bypassing the manufacturing sector in India (Biradar, R. R).

❖ **Table No 5:** Sources of income of the families-

Sources		No. of families	Percentage of families
1. Only pottery		<b>16</b>	<b>22.2</b>
2. Partly pottery		<b>25</b>	<b>34.7</b>
Partly pottery with	Agriculture or agricultural labour	10	40
	Carpentry	06	24
	Weaving	03	12
	Attending to shop	03	12
	Driving	02	8
	Others	01	4
3. Others		<b>31</b>	<b>43.1</b>
Others than pottery	Attending to shop	12	38.7
	Agriculture or agricultural labour	06	19.4
	Agriculture with cattle rearing	05	16.1
	Weaving	04	13
	Attending to shop with bidi making	03	9.7
	Others	01	3.2

Source: Field Survey

In spite of relatively higher work participation rates in the study area than the national average the level of income and thereby the standard of living of the respondents is very less. Because most of the people work as marginal worker and the artisans do not familiar with the recent technical up gradation and modern form of earthen materials. Although very recently a parts of women have started to earn through the participation in Self Help Groups and in some other cottage industries (e.g. bidi making), most of them are compelled to perform the domestic work which is not recognised either by the family or by the society.

Besides this, like our country illiteracy still prevails here. Pottery industry of Cooch Behar district is characterised by wide prevalence of illiteracy

(Kasemi, N.). Literacy rate for the population age 7 years and above for the Study area as a whole stands at 67.2% which is less than the block average i.e.73.64% (Census 2011).

❖ **Table No 6:** Literacy rate and level of education among the artisans-

Category of Artisans		Engaged fully with pottery	Engaged partly with pottery	Engaged with other activities than pottery
Educational attainment				
Illiterate persons (in %)		<b>40.3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>
Literate persons (in %)		<b>59.7</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>87</b>
Level of education among the literates (in%)	Primary	38.2	29.8	25.7
	Secondary	55.9	57.4	48.6
	H S	5.9	8.5	8.6
	Graduation	-	4.3	11.4
	PG/Others	-	-	5.7

Source: Field Survey

Again, the same for the above three categories is about 60%, 87% and 87% respectively. So, the no. of illiterate population is highest in the families engaged fully with pottery. In term of educational attainment the high level of enrolment is observed in the secondary section followed by the primary and HS section for the all categories of households. It is worth mentioning that not a single person from the C-1 has passed the graduation. On the other hand, about 6% population from the C-3 households could obtain the PG course. The well educated people are not interested to continue the work of craft production as it is more laborious and less profitable. So it is only the illiterate and so called elder people who only somehow would like to continue this industrial activity.

**VII.Conclusion:**

So it is very clear that the people who are illiterate, poor, landless or having very small sized landholdings are still pursuing the production of earthen items. Although the Govt. of India and West Bengal have taken some initiatives in this ground through various five year plans to rejuvenate the pottery industry ( Terracotta of Bankura and clay models of Nadia are the burning examples), the study area is neglected and did not get any benefits on behalf of the Govt. But at the modern age of changing lifestyle, there is great demand for contemporary craft products such as flower vessels, gift items, home decorative items etc. So, there is an urgent need to revive and preserve the practice of pottery especially for the removal of poverty and

unemployment. The growth of pottery as rural non agricultural sector should become an important aspect of the rural development paradigm of our country in this regard as this is labour intensive industry. Lastly, keeping the sustainable nature of this practice in mind the Govt. should not take the initiatives only but to implement necessary steps to (i) increase the production, (ii) improve and secure it's marketing and (iii) aware the general people about the eco-friendly nature of the craft items.

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